

Two more terrorists killed
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Two terrorists were sent to hell by security forces in two separte operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. An intelligence based operation was conducted in Khyber district. During the conduct of operation, after an intense exchange of fire, Terrorist ring leader Shamrooz @ Sheenay, was sent to hell by the security forces.



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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing parliamentarians at a banquet.

Allies back Zardari for presidential election

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: All allied parties — including Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) — part of the coalition government in the Centre have agreed to support the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) nominee Asif Ali Zardari in the presidential election scheduled for March 9 (Saturday).

The development came during a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at his official residence in Islamabad for the representatives belonging to the allied parties. The Istehkam-e-Pakistan (IPP), and other smaller parties are also part of the coalition government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

"Asif Zardari is the joint candidate for the slot of president. All allies will jointly make efforts to find out solutions to the crisis

[facing the country]," said PM Shehbaz while addressing the participants during the gathering. The premier said Zardari will be elected as the president of the country in the next two to three days. PM Shehbaz said PML-N along with allied parties has secured a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, noting that he respected the mandate of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed independent candidates in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is our own province. We will try to move forward together," the PM said adding that the allied parties have a majority in Senate, National and provincial assemblies. "But having a majority does not mean that we should not seek votes [from other parties]." "The heart testifies that when Asif Zardari becomes the president,

there will be coordination to achieve the objectives," PM Shehbaz remarked while addressing the allies.

Speaking on the occasion, Zardari said like renowned physicist Albert Einstein, PM Shehbaz will also not be afraid of challenges. "There are difficulties indeed but nothing is impossible, we will develop the country together," the PPP co-chairperson pledged.

Concurring with PM Shehbaz on crucial challenges facing the country, Zardari said he would lend his support whenever it is required. For his part, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto likened Zardari to the Queen of England, suggesting that the upcoming president will be a ceremonial head of the state. All allies have previously announced supporting Zardari in the presidential election except the MQM-Pakistan.

CJCSC calls on Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamsah Mirza Thursday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

The CJCSC congratulated the prime minister on assuming his office and expressed best wishes for him. During the meeting, the professional and security matters of the armed forces also came under discussion.

Meanwhile, the former caretaker foreign minister Jalil Abbas Jilani called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, and briefed him on the progress made in the foreign affairs during the caretaker government.

PM Shehbaz appreciated the services of Jalil Abbas Jilani as the caretaker foreign minister. Senator Ishaq Dar and Syed Tariq Fatimi were also present in the meeting.

Arrest warrants of Nawaz's sons suspended

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court on Thursday suspended the arrest warrants of Hasan Nawaz and Hussain Nawaz — sons of Pakistan PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif — in the Al-Azizia, Flagship and Avenfield cases.

The decision was announced by accountability court judge Nasir Javed Rana in a verdict he reserved earlier today. The warrants have been suspended till March 14, as per the verdict. The warrants of the brothers were issued seven years ago when the court had declared them absconders.

In today's hearing, both brothers were represented in the case by their lawyer Qazi Misbah, while National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecutors Sardar Muzaffar, Usman Masood and Sohail Arif also appeared in the court. The plea seeking suspension of the warrants were filed as both brothers are planning to return to Pakistan on March 12.

Their lawyer, Misbah, revealed the development during the hearing of the Toshakhana reference filed against Nawaz, Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari and former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani wherein the politicians are accused of having kept various vehicles in violation of the Toshakhana rules. Misbah, while presenting his arguments, said that both brothers were declared absconders in the case, while perpetual warrants were also issued against them.

He told the court that all the other accused were acquitted in these three references. The lawyer added that both Hasan and Hussain want to return to Pakistan this month and request the court to suspend their perpetual warrants. "There were five accused in the Avenfield [reference], three were convicted by the accountability court. Islamabad High Court acquitted three accused," he maintained. Arif, an NAB prosecutor, said that the accused should appear in court, as per the law. "[They] will have to appear. [as] without it the warrant of arrest cannot be suspended." He added that the purpose of the warrant is to bring the accused to court, insisting that both brothers should be given a chance to appear before the accountability court.

called Attorney General for yesterday (on Thursday) while Justice Ijaz Anwar remarked that it will impact presidential election.

During the hearing, the counsel claimed that PTI's elected members joined with the SIC for the allocation of reserve seats in proportion to general seats in the upcoming elections. Responding to the Election Commission's claim that the Sunni Ittehad Council failed to provide a candidate list, PHC extended restraining order until 13th March, directing the Election Commission and other parties to provide responses.

PHC five members larger bench comprising of Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice SM Attique Shah, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Syed Arshad Ali prohibited newly elected Assembly members, particularly women and minority representatives, from taking oath until 13th March.

(PPP) Rehman Khattak and ECP representative Mohsin Kamran Sadiq appeared before the court.

SIC lawyers argued that ECP had deprived a party secured 90 general seats for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly from reserved seats and distributed among other parties as gift like two special lawmakers allocated for winning one general seat for provincial assembly.

The counsel Qazi Jawad advocate argued for vacating status quo as women have also the right to be present in the assembly on reserved seats because PHC will decide fate of the plea after conclusion of arguments. He added that it is necessary as Presidential election is scheduled on 9th March.

Additional Attorney General Sana Ullah argued for adjournment due to busy schedule of Attorney General of Pakistan in Supreme Court, however, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim observed that PHC had

KP govt restores Sehat Card plus initiative

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has decided to restore free health care services under Sehat Card plus initiative, from 1st Ramazan, for the cent percent population of the province.

The decision was made in a meeting held here on Thursday with the Chief Minister in the chair. Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, Additional Chief Secretary Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, Principal Secretary to CM Amjad Ali Khan, Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam, and high ups of State Life Insurance Corporation also attended the meeting.

The participants were told that five billion rupees have been released to state life, on the instructions of the chief minister for the restoration of free health care services. The meeting also decided in principle to release Rs. Five billion on monthly basis for the payment of arrears to state Life.

The Chief Minister has

termed the public welfare as an important priority area of his government, and said that Sehat Card Plus was a project of public importance which would be continued at all costs. He said that funds for the payment of arrears to state Life, would be provided on priority basis. This is the matter of public health, and there would be no compromise on it " he remarked and made it clear that necessary reforms would also be introduced in order to ensure transparency in Sehat Card Plus scheme.

Meanwhile, an important meeting to control the prices of daily commodities and give maximum relief to people during the holy month of Ramazan, was held here at Chief Minister's House with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chuahry, Inspector General Police Akhter Hayat Khan Gandapur, Additional Chief Secretary Home Muhammad Abid Majeed, Principal Secretary to CM Amjad Ali Khan and

Divisional and Deputy Commissioners attended the meeting.

The participants of the meeting were briefed in details about the proposed Price Control Mechanism for providing relief to people during the blessed month and were told that district administrations across the province have been directed to ensure implementation of that mechanism without any delay, adding that control rooms have also been established at district level for this purpose. The authorities told that mobile teams would be deployed in all the districts in addition to establishing monitoring desks in the markets so as to ensure that people are provided with edible items as per the rates fixed by the provincial government.

The Chief Minister on this occasion, directed the quarters concerned to go all out for providing maximum relief to the people during the month of Holy Ramazan adding that the prices of essential food items must be on lower side in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as compared to other federating units.

PHC extends injunction on ECP's decision till 13th

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A five members larger bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice SM Attique Shah, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Syed Arshad Ali extended injunction on the Election Commission's decision regarding the allotment of reserved seats while hearing a plea against the exclusion of reserve seats for the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) and striped the nominated lawmakers from oath till 13th March and reissued notices to the respondents, on Thursday.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawyers including Babar Awan and Qazi Muhammad Anwar advocates appeared on behalf of SIC while Additional Attorney General Sana Ullah represented the federation, Asma Alamgir's counsel Qazi Jawad, Pakistan People's Party

called Attorney General for yesterday (on Thursday) while Justice Ijaz Anwar remarked that it will impact presidential election.

During the hearing, the counsel claimed that PTI's elected members joined with the SIC for the allocation of reserve seats in proportion to general seats in the upcoming elections. Responding to the Election Commission's claim that the Sunni Ittehad Council failed to provide a candidate list, PHC extended restraining order until 13th March, directing the Election Commission and other parties to provide responses.

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The Frontier Post

2 traffic officials martyred
F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Two traffic police personnel were martyred in firing of unidentified gunmen here on Thursday. Unknown armed men riding motorcycle sprayed bullets at traffic police officials performing routine duty at Tank Mor of Dara Pezu Bazaar in Lakki Marwat. As a result of firing, Hafizullah was martyred while Constable Zaram Khan sustained critical injuries.

PM announces Rs7.5b Ramazan relief package

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday announced a historic subsidy based Ramazan relief package 2024 of Rs 7.5 billion for the poor and middle classes. He was chairing a high level meeting on Prime Minister's Ramazan Relief Package and Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

Senator Ishaq Dar, Ahad Cheema, Shiza Fatima Khawaja, Romina Khursheed Alam and high ranking officials attended the meeting. The PM was given a detailed briefing on the Ramazan relief package. During Ramazan ul Mubarak, under the package more than 39.6 million families will be provided edible goods on lower rates.

Under the Benazir Income Support Programme, 88 percent of the eligible families will be given 19 edible items including flour, rice, pulses, ghee, cooking oil, sugar, sherbet and milk on lower than market rates. The rate of subsidy on these goods would be 30 percent which was more than the inflation rate. Subsidy of Rs 77 per kilo would be given on the 20 kilogramme flour bag and Rs 70 subsidy on every kilogramme of ghee.

The Prime Minister's Ramazan relief package would be distributed among the needy families through 4775 utility stores across the country and the supply would continue till the end of Ramazan. Those who would face any difficulty in registration for the Ramazan relief programme, would be facilitated and registered at the spot and their complaints would be resolved.

The prime minister said it was priority of the government to distribute edible items to the poor and low income class on lower than market rates. He said no compromise would be made on the quality of the edible items being provided under the relief package.

The quality of the eatables would

PM for removing hurdles to expedite privatisation process

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday stressed for expediting the privatisation process of those State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), causing constant dent to the national exchequer, to stabilize the national economy and provide maximum relief to the common man. "Obstacles in the process of privatisation be removed at the earliest so that the country and the nation can get rid of losses of billions of rupees and improve the economic condition," he said while chairing a high level meeting on privatisation. The prime minister also directed to take immediate steps for enhancing the capacity of departments linked with the privatisation process.

Reviewing the complete list and progress report of all the institutions involved in the privatisation process, the prime minister directed to submit the detail of actions and goals with a clear determination of time frame. He also directed the Privatization Commission and the Ministry to present pending issues related to the privatization to the cabinet soon after its formation for timely decisions as there was no room for further delay.

Shehbaz Sharif, on the proposal of handing over the power distribution companies to the provinces, directed to constitute a review committee, which would submit its recommendations to the prime minister. He made it clear that the responsibility of the privatisation process lied totally upon the Privatisation Commission and the Ministry. He also directed to remove all the bottlenecks in the process.

be strictly monitored, he added. The prime minister said it would be ensured that the people should not face any difficulty while availing the Ramazan package. He directed to increase the counters for distribution of Ramazan package especially cheap flour besides mobile units.

He said strict action would be taken against those who were resorting to artificial price hikes and hoarding during the holy month of Ramazan. The PM instructed that the deserving people should be properly guided through an awareness campaign across the country about the relief package so that they could avail the facility and should not face any difficulty in getting the edible items.

He said the system for resolving complaints of people coming to get the relief package, should be more

effectively coordinated, adding no negligence or laxity would be tolerated. He resolved that the government would not leave alone the poor and middle classes who were worried about the price hikes in the month of Ramazan.

As per the prime minister's instruction, under Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) the quarterly installment for poor people was increased to Rs 10,500 which would be distributed during the holy month. Besides the BISP's quarterly installment, the prime minister also directed the distribution of additional Rs 2,000 among needy people in Balochistan. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed gratitude to the world leaders for extending felicitations and prayers for him on the assumption of office.

Justice Naqvi guilty of misconduct: SJC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) Thursday held that controversial Supreme Court Justice (retd) Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi was guilty of misconduct, suggesting that he should have been fired before his resignation.

In a short statement on Thursday, the top judicial body opined that the ex-judge — facing several allegations — was guilty of misconduct and "should have been removed from the office of Judge". In a surprise move in February this year, Justice (retd) Naqvi had stepped down from his post following misconduct allegations — and within a day, Justice (retd) Ijazul Ahsan also resigned, raising questions over their untimely departure.

In his resignation letter, the former judge had said: "[...] in the circumstances which are a matter of public knowledge and to some extent public record, it is no longer possible for me to continue to serve as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Considerations of due process also compel so." The SJC Friday reserved its opinion after completing the misconduct proceedings against its former judge Mazahar Ali Akbar Naqvi.

The council, headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Chief Justice Balochistan High



Court Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan, and Chief Justice Lahore High Court Justice Amir Bhatti, conducted the proceedings. In the statement today, the top judicial forum said SJC considered six different complaints, in chronological order, and in respect of five the opinions expressed by the members to whom it was referred, recommended that there was no substance therein, with which the SJC concurred.

"However, in respect of complaints submitted against a Judge of the High Court of Balochistan the SJC issued notice to submit his reply /explanation within fourteen days," it added. Regarding Navi, the SJC rendered its opinion in respect of the nine complaints against the former judge under Article 209(6) of the Constitution and "opined that he was guilty of misconduct and should have been removed from the office of Judge".

The development comes following the Supreme Court's last month's verdict that the proceedings against a judge by the SJC will not stop even after his resignation or retirement. The SJC said it also approved amendments to Article V of

the SJC that deals with the code of conduct of the judges, as per the statement. In the SJC's meetings on February 29 and March 1st, the council members opined that if a judge responds to allegations or issues clarification it does not violate the body's Article V.

"Allegations are levelled against Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts and the same are publicized A number of Judges have expressed concern that if they respond to such allegations the same may be construed as misconduct because the Code of Conduct, dated 2 September 2009 issued by the Supreme Judicial Council, in its Article V states that a Judge should not seek publicity," read the SJC statement. The top judicial forum deliberated upon the matter and was of the opinion that if a reply or clarification is issued by or on behalf of a Judge it does not violate Article V, it added.

However, the SJC said since concerns have been expressed by judges it was agreed to amend Article V to add that if an allegation is publicised against a judge he may respond to it. The amended Article V reads as: "[...] functioning as he does in full view of the public, a Judge gets thereby all the publicity that is good for him. He should not seek more. In particular, he should not engage in any public controversy, least of all on a political question, notwithstanding that it involves a question of law."

KP CM designates portfolios to cabinet members

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Thursday allocated portfolios to the cabinet members. According to a media announcement, Arshad Ayub has been appointed to the Local Government portfolio, Shakeel Ahmed to the Communications and Construction, and Fazal Hakeem Khan to the Forests, Environment, and Wildlife portfolios.

Adnan Qadri has been appointed Minister for Religious Affairs and Endowment, Aqibullah Khan for Irrigation, Muhammad Sajjad for Agriculture, and Meena Khan for Higher Education.

Similarly, Fazl Shakur Mehnat has been appointed Minister of Finance, Pakhtun Yarkhan for Public Health, Aftab Alam for Law, Khalique Rehman for Excise Taxation, and Syed Qasim Ali Shah as Health Minister. Faisal Khan Turkai has been assigned the portfolio of Primary and Secondary Education, while Zahir Shah has been designated Minister of Food.

Muzamil Aslam, Syed Fakhr Khan, and Mishaal Azam have been appointed CM Advisors for Finance, Sports and Youth, and Ushr and Zakat, respectively. Khalid Latif, Sher Afzal Marwat's brother, has been appointed as the Chief Minister's Special Assistant for Science and Technology. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has nominated Barrister Saif as its spokesperson.

Earlier on Wednesday, The 15-member cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) took oath at a ceremony held in the Governor House in KP. Following the oath-taking ceremony of the Punjab cabinet, the 15-member cabinet of KP took oath today in the Governor's house of the province. The KP Governor Haji Ghulam Ali administered oath to the newly appointed ministers of the provincial government led by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

Pakistan calls for ceasefire in Gaza

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza as the Islamic holy month of Ramazan is likely to begin at the weekend.

During the weekly press briefing here, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that Islamabad strong-

ly condemns the massacre of civilians in Gaza by Israeli military. She called for provision of aid and medical facilities to the victims of war immediately. Ms Baloch said Israeli forces are committing serious violations of human rights in Gaza, we demand an immediate ceasefire during the fast-ing month in Gaza.

Regarding Indian-occupied Kashmir, the FO spokesperson said that Kashmiris are being martyred in staged encounters. India is involved in human rights violations in Occupied Kashmir, she said. The FO spokesperson urged the international community to take notice of the atrocities in Occupied Kashmir.



Azma terms propaganda related to Sargodha Institute of Cardiology as baseless

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari said on Thursday that propaganda of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf regarding Sargodha Institute of Cardiology was completely baseless. In a press statement, she said that letter on X (Twitter) related to Sargodha Institute of Cardiology was just a negative agenda.

She said that if Sargodha Institute of Cardiology was approved in Standing Committee of Cabinet on Finance and Development then why it had not been established. Azma Bukhari said that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and her team would ensure best service delivery in coming five years.

She further said the PTI was in habit of taking credit of works carried out by others and added that now people could not be deceived through lies.

LDA, MCL team demolishes illegal structures

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Development Authority (LDA) and Metropolitan Corporation Lahore team, during its ongoing crackdown on illegal constructions and encroachments, demolished and sealed several structures and properties besides shifting the live-stock the corporation sheds, here on Thursday.

The team took action in LDA Avenue-1 and Jubilee Town and illegal encroachments and sheds for buffaloes were removed while dozens of cattle-heads were shifted to the corporation sheds. The operation was supervised by Director Avenue Asadullah Cheema.

According to a spokesman for the LDA, a comprehensive operation against illegal constructions/encroachments was under way throughout the city while Commissioner Lahore and DG LDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa were overseeing the operation.

Hindu pilgrims from India reach Katas Raj Mandir

LAHORE (APP): Hindu pilgrims from India reached Katas Raj Mandir in Chakwal by special buses on Thursday, amidst tight security, to participate in Shivratri celebrations.

Addressing the media, delegation leader, Vishwa Nath Bajaj, praised the accommodation and transportation arrangements, made by the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) for the pilgrims. He expressed gratitude to the ETPB chairman and the Government of Pakistan. Other members of the delegation also lauded the arrangements.

According to the board spokesperson, the central ceremony of the Maha Shivratri would be held on Friday at the historic Katas Raj Mandir in Chakwal, in which various political, social, and religious leaders will participate. In accordance with their religious customs, the pilgrims will perform rituals such as 'Devi Mala' and other ceremonies on March 9 before returning to Lahore on March 10.

PCMD to hold seminar

KARACHI (PPI): Dr Panjwani Center for Molecular Medicine and Drug Research (PCMD), University of Karachi (UoK) will organize a public awareness lecture on "Ramadan and Health" in the lecture hall of the LEJ National Science Information Center on Friday (March 8, at 3:00 pm).

According to the spokesman of the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS), University of Karachi here on Thursday, the public awareness lecture is being jointly organized by the Dr. Panjwani Center and Sindh Innovation Research, and Education Network (SIREN). Prof Dr Rehan Umer, the Head of the Department of Cardiology at the Patel Hospital, Karachi, will deliver the public awareness lecture. Health professionals, students, research scholars, and staff will attend the program.

Maryam meets ASP Shehrbano, praises her bravery

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz met ASP Shehrbano Naqvi here on Thursday and said protection of vulnerable sections of society was among her priorities.

The woman ASP briefed the chief minister about the Ichhra incident and how she rescued a woman who had been confined in a shop by a mob due to her shirt having a print in Arabic language. She also briefed the CM about the initiatives for the minority communities, transgenders, and animal rescue centres in Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi.

CM Maryam Nawaz praised ASP Shehrbano Naqvi for showing courage, saying the woman police officer had set an example of bravery and courage for the young officers. Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, IGP Punjab, CCPO Lahore and SSP Law & Order also attended the event.

CM Maryam reviews higher education scholarships, iPad scheme: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz

chaired a high level meeting in Lahore to review the higher education scholarships and iPad scheme. On this occasion, the Chief Minister expressed displeasure at the incomplete briefing and sought a comprehensive plan for the PEEF Scholarships scheme. She ordered a student survey for iPad and laptop schemes across the province. She vowed to develop higher education and other institutions on modern lines. Maryam also directed the PEF to review and organize the scholarship scheme. She also directed it to conduct a student survey for the iPad and Laptop scheme. CM Maryam said that decisions regarding provision of laptops and iPads would be made after assessing the students' needs. "The involvement of students in the Laptop and iPad schemes is crucial, and the education sector should not be aimless and directionless," she said. She stressed that modernization of various institutions, including Higher Education, would be ensured.

Mujtaba assumes office of Punjab Finance Minister

LAHORE (APP): Mujtaba Shuja-ur-Rehman assumed charge of the office of Finance Minister Punjab on Thursday.

The minister commenced his tenure by visiting the Punjab Civil Secretariat, where he was

warmly received by Secretary Finance Mujahid Sher Dil, special secretary Finance and additional secretary. During the introductory meeting, the Secretary Finance briefed the minister about the financial conditions, providing detailed

insights into the ongoing financial year's expenditures and projections for future expenditures.

Furthermore, the minister was updated on the progress made so far in the preparation of the provincial budget.

Karachi medal with cash reward to be given to those rendered significant services for Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Karachi Metropolitan Corporation - KMC's General Council in a meeting on Thursday unanimously endorsed a resolution to honor those who have rendered significant services for Karachi with "Karachi medal with cash reward". The general meeting of the council of KMC was held in the council hall of the KMC head office under the chairmanship of Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab.

Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad also participated in the meeting. During the meeting a total of four different resolutions were approved while one resolution presented was deferred till the next meeting.

The resolutions which were passed unanimously include the awarding of "Karachi medal with cash reward" to those who have rendered significant services for Karachi, renovation of the KMC parks and the installation of solar system and

the tribute to the services of former member of Sindh Assembly Shaheed Abdullah Murad with praying for his forgiveness.

A resolution passed by majority vote in the meeting included the approval to collect tax/fee on animals brought for sale in all cattle markets held in Karachi on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha 2024, while resolution about KMC hospitals up-gradation under public private partnership was deferred till the next meeting of the Council. Barrister Murtaza Wahab announced on this occasion that before the next meeting of the City Council, a meeting will be held with the representatives of all parties to decide the future course of action He said that our aim is to serve the people of Karachi and to formulate policies in this regard, for which the process of consultation with the representatives of all parties in the city council will continue, during the meeting on March 8, International Women's Day.

Three DPOs changed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Omer Khan has been posted as DPO Haripur, He has previously served as District Police Officer Nowshera, District Police Officer Haripur, SP City Islamabad, SP Traffic Islamabad, SP Sadar Islamabad and other important posts. Omer Khan is considered as an honest and courageous officer Omer Khan was earlier the DPO Haripur He has performed his duties diligently and honestly in Nowshera. On Wednesday, IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa transferred District Police

Officer Kohat Farhan Khan from Kohat and posted him as AIG Establishment KP Police. DPO Shangla Sajjad Khan was transferred from Shangla to SSP Investigation Peshawar while Ashfaq Khan was also removed from the post. SP Rural Zafar Khan has also transferred, so far no one has been posted as DPO Haripur and Shangla. According to reliable sources, there is a possibility of more transfers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, including Regional Police Officers and District Police Officers.




بورڈ آف انٹرمیڈیٹ اینڈ سیکنڈری ایجوکیشن ملائکہ ٹیٹ چکدرہ

نیلام عام

عوام الناس کو مطلع کیا جاتا ہے کہ بورڈ آف انٹرمیڈیٹ اینڈ سیکنڈری ایجوکیشن ملائکہ ٹیٹ چکدرہ درپا میں مختلف استعمال شدہ اشیاء (دوبلہ کاندہ، اخبار، گتہ، لفافہ، بلاک، اشیاء، خالی نوٹرز، ناکارہ ناگز اور گزائیں مختلف ناکارہ پرزہ جات، دیگرہ) کی فلوگرام وزن کے حساب سے نیلام کرنا چاہتی ہے۔ نیلام مورخہ **28/03/2024** روز جمعرات بوقت **11:30 بجے** پورے درپا میں منعقد کیا جائے گی۔

شرائط نیلام

- 1) نیلام قارم انعاموں/2000/- روپے (تا قابل واپسی) ملائکہ ٹیٹ بورڈ کے دائرہ اختیار میں واقع ABL و HBL کی شاخوں میں جمع کر کے سٹوریشن سے مورخہ **28/03/2024** بوقت **10:30 بجے** تک مکمل کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ یا دوسرے کے نیلام قارم قابل انتقال ہے اور جس سے Deposit Slip جمع کیا گیا وہی نام سے نیلام میں حصہ لینے منظور ہوگا۔
- 2) نیلام قارم میں مطلوبہ معلومات مکمل لکھنا لازمی ہیں۔
- 3) تمام پولی دہندگان لفافے کھولنے سے پہلے بورڈ کے کیشیئر کے پاس جمع **500000/-** (پانچ لاکھ روپے) بطور ضمانت جمع کرنے کے پابند ہونگے۔ بصورت دیگر پولی میں حصہ لینے کے اہل نہیں ہونگے۔ پولی فتح ہونے کے بعد کام پولی دہندہ کو ضمانت واپس کیا جائے گا۔ جبکہ کامیاب پولی دہندہ کی ضمانت پولی کی رقم میں الیڈ جسٹ کیا جائے گا۔
- 4) کامیاب پولی دہندہ اگر سامان اٹھانے سے انکار کرے یا تین دن کے اندر سامان اٹھانے میں ناکام رہے یا تو ضمانت کی رقم **KPPRA** رولز 2014 کی شق 35 (4) کے تحت ضبط کیا جائے گی۔
- 5) سامان کا معاوضہ مورخہ **28/03/2024** بوقت **10:30 بجے** تک معتمدی اوقات کار میں زیر رجسٹریشن سے اجازت سے لکر پورے درپا میں کیا جاسکتا ہے۔
- 6) کامیاب پولی دہندہ مال اٹھانے وقت مکمل ادائیگی کرے گا۔
- 7) تمام سربراہان برسرہ رول یا دہندہ کی ڈاک کے ذریعے معقول شدہ لفافے مختلف شراکاء یا مجاز نمائندوں کے سامنے مکمل نیلام مورخہ **28/03/2024** بوقت **11:30 بجے** تک مکمل کیے اور رجسٹریشن اعلان کے جائز ہونگے۔
- 8) شراکاء نیلام کے معاوضہ کی دوسرے ذرائع کے نیلام میں پیشگی قطعاً اجازت نہیں ہوگی۔
- 9) کامیاب پولی دہندہ اپنے خرچ پر ضرورت میں مال اٹھانے پابند ہوگا۔
- 10) آفر کی پیشکش بروڈ کی مجاز ذمہ داری کے تحت منطوری سے شرط ہوگی۔
- 11) کامیاب پولی دہندہ تمام کمیسر (آرکائیو ہوں) کی کوٹنی کیا پابند ہوگا۔
- 12) پولی کے لفافے کو برسرہ رول یا دہندہ کی ڈاک کی صورت میں قابل قبول ہوں گے۔
- 13) **KPPRA** رولز 2014 کے شق 47 کے تحت زیر رجسٹریشن کو اختیار ہوگا کہ کوئی بھی یا تمام آفٹرسٹر درے۔
- 14) تمام نیلام کا عمل **KPPRA** رولز کے مطابق کیا جائے گا۔
- 15) تمام کامیاب **KPPRA** کی ویب سائٹ **www.kppra.gov.pk** اور ملائکہ ٹیٹ بورڈ کی ویب سائٹ **www.bisemkd.edu.pk** پر درج کیا جائے گا۔

پروفیسر ڈاکٹر سعید احمد ثانی، ہیڈ کوارٹر ملائکہ ٹیٹ بورڈ نوٹن: 0945-7033224 INF(P)#461/24



ISLAMABAD: NDMA holds consultation session on Pakistan School Safety Framework at a local hotel.

‘Pakistan needs to address education challenges on war footing’

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad successfully hosted a pivotal seminar titled 'Paving the Way for Educational Excellence in Pakistan: Policy, Curriculum, Access.'

The seminar brought together esteemed speakers including Dr Faisal Bari, Dean, LUMS School of Education at the Lahore University of Management Sciences; Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui, CEO International Foundation for Education, Empowerment and Learning (iFEEL); and Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani, Chairperson Department of International Relations at Fatima Jinnah Women University. The proceedings were moderated by Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne (Retd), Director Non-Traditional Security at CASS, with a vote of thanks and concluding remarks delivered by Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President of CASS.

The seminar addressed key issues including the quality of education and challenges in higher education; out-of-school children and regional disparities and curriculum development. It also offered a platform to discuss the effects of the 18th Amendment on education policies, the viability of a unified syllabus, and the practicality of maintaining distinct educational streams in Pakistan's diverse landscape.

Introducing the seminar, Air Vice Marshal Nasser ul Haq Wyne emphasised the cumulative impact of neglecting education, noting Pakistan's significant lag in achieving primary and secondary education targets and the challenges facing the higher education sector, including political interference and insufficient resources; obstructing the nation's pursuit of developing a comprehensive, skilled workforce and significantly limiting the educational sector's contribution to national development.

In his address, Dr Faisal Bari highlighted critical issues within Pakistan's education system, pointing out the nation's significant struggle to foster critical thinking skills, such as thoughtfulness, judiciousness, the ability to embrace ambiguity, and the capacity for evidence-based reasoning.



Discussing the transformative role of technology in higher education, particularly in the context of a new wave of automation, he warned of the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to automate and eliminate numerous jobs, underscoring the urgency for educational reform. He further argued that the future of Pakistan hinges on its education system. Dr Bari stressed the need for substantial improvements at the school level, specifically in pedagogy and curriculum development and called for holistic strategies to incentivize and regulate universities, ensuring they are aligned with the evolving demands of the workforce and the broader society.

Speaking on the subject of 'Out-of-School Children and Regional Disparities', Ms Mahrin Iqbal Siddiqui shared that the existing educational infrastructure in Pakistan was insufficient to support the inclusion of its 26 million out-of-school children.

Ms Siddiqui stressed the urgent need to launch an education campaign with the same intensity and urgency as the response to the COVID crisis, highlighting the potential of community mosques to play a significant role in raising awareness and sensitizing the populace about the importance of education. She advocated for educational organisations to form partnerships with leading universities across Pakistan, suggesting that such collaborations could signifi-

cantly enhance children's opportunities for higher education. Additionally, Ms. Siddiqui pointed out the necessity to bridge the gaps between formal, informal, and hybrid modes of education, ensuring a more cohesive and accessible learning environment for all. She proposed a simple yet effective approach of 'one room-one subject-one teacher' to address complex educational challenges.

In addressing the controversies surrounding curriculum content, Dr Saima Ashraf Kayani highlighted the necessity of removing political biases from the curriculum development process to better meet the changing needs of a dynamic society. She underscored the importance of implementing measures to ensure the curriculum is inclusive, relevant, and fosters critical thinking, while also respecting Pakistan's diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. In her final remarks, Dr Kayani advocated for a strategic revision of the education system, aiming to make it more reflective of and responsive to the country's complex identity and future needs.

In his concluding remarks, President CASS Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan underscored the profound impact of education on national security, spanning both traditional and non-traditional realms. 'If we want to ensure our security, it is imperative to bring our out-of-school children into the educational fold,' he stated.




NADRA REGIONAL HEAD OFFICE PESHAWAR

TENDER NOTICE

File# Security-Guard-Uniform/2023-24/17

Supply/Provision of Uniforms for Security Guard of NADRA Field Offices of RHO Peshawar for FY 2023-24

1. Sealed bids are invited as per **Single Stage Two Envelopes procedure** from Authorized Distributors and Suppliers/ Resellers registered with Sales Tax/ Income Tax /Professional Tax Departments who are on Active Tax Payers List of Federal Board of Revenue for supply/ provision of Security Guard Uniforms (Complete Package) in Peshawar District for **FY 2023-24**. The Details are as under: -

Detail of Work	Supply/ Provision of Security Guard Uniform for 350x Personnel (Complete Set including cloth, stitching, caps, shoes, socks, jerseys, badges, etc.)
Contact Officer	Assistant Director (Procurement) Ph: 091-9217840
Closing Time, Date & Place of receiving of Bids	Up to 11:00 AM, 22nd March, 2024, NADRA RHO Peshawar.
Time & Place of opening of qualification documents	11:30 AM, 22nd March, 2024, NADRA RHO Peshawar.

2. Bidding documents containing detailed terms & conditions can be purchased by the interested parties from **8th March, 2024 to 21st March, 2024** upon a written request on official letter head addressed to the Procurement Section, **NADRA Regional Head Office, Peshawar** at given address from **08:30 to 16:30 (Monday to Friday)** & upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Rs.2000/- before closing date.
3. The Technical Bids prepared in accordance with the instructions of the bidding documents must reach at below mentioned address on or before **11:00 hours 22nd March, 2024**. Same will be opened on the same day at **11:30 hours**.
4. This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.org.pk.
5. NADRA reserves the right to accept or reject all the bids as per Rule 33 of PPRA Rules, 2004.

(RIZWAN SHAMIM)
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PROCUREMENT)
Regional Head Office, NADRA
Plot # 31-B, EOBI Building Phase V,
Hayatabad, Peshawar. Phone: 091-9217840

PID(05)357/23



Governor greets students for academic success



PESHAWAR (INP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali commending the academic success of students of the University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Peshawar has greeted the parents and the faculty members.

Addressing the Annual Convocation-2024 of the UET here on Thursday, he said that the engineering education should be compatible with domestic and international industry and engineering and technology has made society faster, more integrated and made

human life easier.

Haji Ghulam Ali urged the youth to keep their access to modern sciences including engineering, technology and to deal with the challenges of the present era, there was a need for practical research in engineering, technology and other modern sciences.

Modern research in all fields can lead to progress, he said adding that all educated youth, including the engineering department, were the bright future of the nation.

The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali said that our youth were not less capable in any field than the youth of other countries.

At the end convocation, Haji Ghulam Ali also held a meeting with the students in joy and appreciated them for their academic success.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur chairing a meeting regarding price control of essential commodities during holy month of Ramadan.

Housing Societies' victims: PHC fixes 9th April for final hearing

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) to decided pleas of housing societies' victims on 9th April while clipped cases of Al Masa and Professor Model Towns' sufferers with identical petitions for final arguments, on Thursday.

PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Waqar Ahmad adjourned hearing on pleas filed Malik Shahbaz Khan advocate on behalf of Dr. Shahid and Sherin Fatima along with others.

The petitioners had purchased plot at Al Masa Model Town from its own Dr. Hameed Jan but latterly

the project was hand over to Professor Model Town operation Dr. Nauman, the petition stated. However, Dr. Nauman denied possession of plot to petitioners when they approached the premises with the claim that Dr Hameed had obtained payment in this regard.

The counsel Malik Shahbaz advocate stated in the plea that applicants are public servants and the victims number reaches to hundreds. He added that Dr. Hameed Jan had approached High Court in writ plea seeking withdrawal of his name from Exit Control List (ECL) and restoration of bank's accounts.

Chief Justice visit blood donation camp

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Justice Peshawar High Court Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan inaugurated the blood camp here on Thursday during his visit to the blood donation camp organized by Hamza Foundation.

The Chief Justice also met the lawyers who donated blood. "I myself will donate blood and will come again after a while," Chief Justice Peshawar High Court Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan said.

A camp has been set up in the High Court for blood donation for thalassemia-affected children wherein a large number of lawyers visited. Hamza Foundation has set up a camp in the Peshawar High Court.

FBL partnered with SBP for Financial Literacy Week

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Faysal Bank Limited (FBL), a leading Islamic financial institution of Pakistan, has partnered with State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for 'Pakistan Financial Literacy Week 2024'. Committed to fostering financial education and inclusivity, FBL further its pledge to complement the SBP efforts for this resourceful initiative of empowerment.

Expressing his views on the occasion, Yousaf Hussain, President & CEO, Faysal Bank said, "Financial literacy is the steppingstone to financial inclusion especially amongst the vulnerable communities. We are also cognizant of nurturing sustainable development through our expansion strategy. At Faysal Bank, we stand resolutely committed to the cause of financial education especially Riba-free Islamic Banking and will continue to complement the Government and Regulator's focus on deepening financial inclusion."

During the Pakistan Financial Literacy Week 2024, Faysal Bank teams will be conducting educational camps across five districts of Pakistan, including Abbottabad, Bahawalnagar, Mirpur, Okara and Gilgit, for three consecutive days, starting 5 March 2024.

To further the impact of the Pakistan Financial Literacy Week volunteers from the Bank will also be conducting sessions with the children from underprivileged schools on how to save money as well as highlighting the digital future of financial institutions. Through the National Financial Literacy Programme, the Bank empowers its employees with enhanced financial knowledge via an internal platform, Faysal Academy, offering convenient access to educational resources, fostering continuous learning. Further details about Faysal Bank's contribution to NFLP can be found at NFLP@faysalbank.

Anti-Polio campaign continued

PESHAWAR (APP): Thursday is the fifth and last day of anti-polio campaign in most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Peshawar, an official of the Health Department said here.

In the five-day anti-polio campaign, more than 7.4 million children are targeted to be given polio drops, the Health Department official said here.

Anti-polio campaigns continued in all districts of Peshawar, Mardan, Kohot, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan, the official of the Health Department said.

To complete the target, polio workers are busy going door to door to administer drops to children. Polio campaign will continue till March 9 in districts with heavy snowfall and more than 35000 teams will be formed for polio campaign, the Health Department official disclosed.

He said for this strict security arrangements were made during the polio campaign and more than 55,000 police personnel were deployed during the anti-polio campaign.



PESHAWAR: General Secretary All KP Goods Transport Alhaj Sikandar Khan addressing a press conference. — F.P. photo by Ghulam Murtaza

FAO organizes IPC workshop

PESHAWAR (APP): The Food and Agriculture Organization here jointly organized a nine-day training workshop on Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to enhance capabilities of domestic stakeholders in food security analysis.

The workshop was attended by over 70 participants from federal and provincial government department, NGOs and UN partners including the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and UNWOMEN. Secretary Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Department, Inayatullah Wasim attended the event as a chief guest of the workshop.

This initiative was planned to empower participants with enhanced skills and knowledge analysis providing a comprehensive understanding of the food security landscape.

IPC is a collaborative initiative designed to improve food security and nutrition analysis. Various stakeholders collaborate to assess the severity and scale of acute food insecurity using internationally accepted scientific standards.

The primary goal is to provide decision-makers with a thorough, evidence-based analysis of food insecurity situations to guide emergency responses as well as medium and long-term policy and programming.

During event, FAO Representative in Pakistan, Florence Rolle, Country Director WFP, Coco Ushiyama, FAO Head KP, Farrukh Toirov and Asghar Jamali of PDMA Balochistan underscored the importance of workshop and termed it an

opportunity to exchange knowledge, build networks and work towards a more resilient and secure future for communities.

The speakers emphasized significance of workshop in strengthening domestic capacities for food security analysis and highlighted its role in identifying most vulnerable populations across three provinces of Pakistan and addressing acute food insecurity challenges along with fortifying food security strategies in Pakistan.

The IPC for 2024 would cover 47 districts, specifically those prone to climate shocks and affected by floods in Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This strategic approach aims for a more focused and targeted response to needs of food-insecure population in these vulnerable districts.

National consultation workshop organized

PESHAWAR (INP): A national consultation workshop titled "Updates on Current Status of Water Accounting in Four Provinces of Pakistan and Developing National Level Water Accounting Guidelines" was organized by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Pakistan here on Thursday.

Organized under the UK Aid-funded Water Resource Accountability in Pakistan (WRAP) Programme, the workshop was aimed to support the implementation of the National Water Policy (NWP).

Director for Water, Food, and Ecosystems and Team Leader for the WRAP Programme Component 1: CRS-IWaG, Dr. Mohsin Hafeez briefed the meeting on the provincial consultations for the Water Accounting Journey.

He informed that IWMI Pakistan had initiated work on Water Accounting Resources Assessment at the federal level under the programme.

Dr. Mohsin Hafeez further stated that developing a National Water Accounting Framework would enable the government to make informed decisions and resolve disputes between the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, KP, and Balochistan.

He added that the authorities have information on surface water for the Indus Basin, but groundwater data is unavailable, which hinders accurate decision-making for water management.

While giving an overview of the WRAP Programme Component 1, Dr. Hafeez said that IWMI Pakistan had developed a water accounting framework at the federal level in Punjab's Okara district.

In addition, Eddy Covariance flux towers were installed in Okara, Chakwal, Rahim Yar Khan, and Sheikhupura, which will provide data on water and carbon emissions in agriculture and contribute to agro ecological zoning.

Dr. Hafeez also mentioned that IWMI Pakistan organized four consultation workshops at the provincial level.

The workshops brought together all key stakeholders, including federal and provincial government officials, policymakers, water experts, and practitioners from across the country, to discuss and deliberate on the importance of Water Accounting and its implications for sustainable water management in Pakistan, he informed.

Speaking on the occasion chief guest and Federal

Secretary Ministry of Water Resources, Syed Ali Murtaza, shared insightful perspectives on the government's commitment to addressing the complex interplay of water, food, and climate challenges.

He expressed concern over the lack of a water framework in Pakistan for 70 years and highlighted the groundwater depletion situation in Multan and Lahore.

Chairman Federal Flood Commission (MoWR), Engr. Ahmad Kamal presented an overview of challenges and opportunities in the Indus Basin regarding water accounting and management.

He said that Pakistan is the eighth most vulnerable country to climate change, and over the last 30 years, they have been ranked amongst the top 10 climate-vulnerable countries. There is no groundwater regulatory framework, and anyone can abstract as much groundwater as they want, leading to fast depletion of groundwater sources across Pakistan, he added.

Participants were divided into five groups belonging to Punjab, KPK, Sindh, and Baluchistan which discussed the Development of National Water Accounting Guidelines and the way forward.

Rs 30m each for Upper Dir, Chitral released

PESHAWAR (INP): Director General Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) on Thursday informed that an amount of Rs 30 million each has been released for calamity affected areas of Upper Dir and Upper Chitral.

He said the relief fund was provided under the directive of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur. The amount has been released for relief and rehabilitation activities in these calamity affected areas.

He said the chief minister had pledged that every possible assistance will be provided to the affected people of Upper Chitral and Upper Dir.

FIA arrest two foreigners

PESHAWAR (INP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle Peshawar has arrested two foreigners involved in online financial fraud. Nigerian nationals Adogi Handsome Tchukwu and Akokuwu Chanaza Godwin were taken into custody from Lahore during a raid, an FIA official said on Thursday.

He said that the accused had defrauded the citizens of more than Rs 46 million. They used to trap the people by using female IDs on Facebook, and send them parcel deliveries, demanding hefty amounts on account of their price, shipment charges, customs fees etc., and in case of non-payment threatened them of consequences, he added.

Similarly, he said, the accused also lured the people of providing online jobs against payment of money.

The official said that the accused also enticed the citizens to open bank accounts under the guise of online employment and later they themselves misused the accounts for financial fraud.

PESCO holds facebook katchery

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) here Thursday holds a katchery on facebook to address problems of consumers living in remote areas.

The facebook katchery was conducted by Chief of Operation PESCO, Gul Nabi Syed. A large number of consumers of far flung areas registered their complaints and informed authorities about their concerns regarding PESCO.

Chief Operation PESCO directed concerned officials to timely address problems of consumers and work with professionalism and dedication for facilitation of people.

He also informed consumers about efforts of PESCO to end power pilferage and removal of illegal electricity connections.

He also urged consumers to use electricity judiciously and pay their bills to ensure uninterrupted power supply.

Tribute to prof Asfaq Ahmad Khan

Dr Tufail Muhammad Khan



Today, we bid farewell to a towering figure in the medical community, Prof. Asfaq Ahmad Khan, who passed away, leaving behind a legacy of dedication, innovation, commitment and compassion. Born in Pakhtunkhwa, he was not just a pediatrician but a visionary leader whose contributions transformed healthcare in Pakistan, especially in the field of Child Health.

Prof. Khan's impact was profound and far-reaching. As the first qualified pediatrician in Pakhtunkhwa, he laid the foundation for pediatric care in the region. His tireless efforts led to the establishment of pediatric units across the province, ensuring that children had access to specialized healthcare closer to home.

Beyond clinical practice, Prof. Khan's influence extended to academia and research. Recognizing the need for excellence in medical education, he intro-

duced the concept of entry tests, setting a new standard for medical schools nationwide. His advocacy for child health led to the recognition of Paediatrics as a separate examination subject by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council.

As the Principal of Khyber Medical College Peshawar, Prof. Khan demonstrated exceptional leadership, spearheading initiatives to elevate the quality of medical education. His tenure saw the rise of a new generation of medical professionals committed to excellence and compassion.

Prof. Khan's dedication to service extended beyond borders. As President of the Pakistan Pediatric Association and a member of the Executive Committee of the International Pediatric Association, he played a pivotal role in advancing pediatric care globally. His contributions will continue to inspire future generations of healthcare professionals.

In addition to his professional achievements, Prof. Khan was known for his philanthropy and generosity. He established Suhrah hospital for people of his native village Marghuz and adjoining areas. He quietly supported local charities and individuals in need, leaving a lasting impact on his community.

To his family, colleagues, students, and the people of KP, Prof. Asfaq Ahmad Khan was more than a physician; he was an inspirational leader, a mentor, a friend, and a guiding light.

Though he may no longer walk among us, his legacy will endure, a testament to a life well-lived in the service of others.

May his soul rest in eternal peace at *Janatul Firdaus*.

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PESHAWAR: People buying grocery on ahead of Ramazan ul Mubarak.



In brief

Two killed as wall collapses F.P. Report

THATTA: As many as two young girls were killed while a boy sustained critical injuries after wall of a house caved in ward No: 03 of Mirpur Sakro town of district Thatta on Thursday. The wall was in a ramshackle condition where three children were playing when it tumbled. Local residents removed the debris and transported injured to local hospital. The deceased minors identified as 4 years Reghani and 7 years Shabiran died during treatment while 8 years Ghulam Khaskeli was battling for life. Pale of gloom hung over the locality in the wake of the incident.

Dir youth get PhD degree F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A young scholar, Mufti Muhammad Saeed hailing from the Maidan area of Lower Dir, the younger brother of prominent educationist Principal Muhammad Wahab successfully defended his PhD thesis titled "critical study of the jurisprudence of Hadith according to Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal through his questions, narrated by his son Abdullah" from the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIU) under the supervision of Dr Sajjad Elahi. A simple but dignified ceremony in this regard was held at the university in Islamabad the other day. The scholar, his relatives, supervisors, faculty members and his examiners were in attendance on the occasion. Dr Abdul Samad Shaikh was his internal examiner while Dr Naveed Iqbal and Dr Shahid Muhammad Tirmizi were his external examiners. He completed his research work in the University of Usuluddin, Department of Hadith and Sciences. Talking to local journalists at Timergara the scholar Mufti Muhammad Saeed attributed his success to the prayers of his parents, the love of his teachers and his hard work. He expressed his determination to promote the religion of Islam and further make research in the future.

Media's role highlighted F.P. Report

BANNU: Commissioner Bannu Pervaiz Sabatkhel has asked the journalist community to promote constructive reporting and play an effective role in highlighting the genuine problems of people. He was speaking at a reception hosted in his honour at the press club building in Bannu city. Deputy commissioner Shah Saud, regional information officer Sarwar Mahmood Khattak, information officer Khalid Muhammad, traders' representative Shah Wazir and office bearers and members of the press club were also present. Press club's president Pir Niaz Ali Shah, general secretary Abdus Salam Baitab and patron in chief Abdul Manan Aadil received the division commissioner and other guests. Commissioner Sabatkhel acknowledged the positive role of journalists in the uplifting of the district and said that his administration would take concrete steps for the welfare of the journalist community. He promised to resolve problems faced by journalists and provide them with all sorts of facilities at the press club. "Special instructions with regard to the betterment and welfare of the journalist community will be issued to the heads of all line departments", he maintained. He appreciated local journalists for patching up their international differences and said that disunity always led to deprivations, therefore journalists should become a role model for others and promote unity and harmony in the society.



QUETTA: Activists of Pashtunkhwa Students Organization holding education rally.

Govt commits welfare of public: Saira Afzal

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: While addressing the meeting of District Coordination Committee Hafizabad, Ex-Federal Minister and Coordinator Chief Minister of the Punjab, Saira Afzal Tarar and DC Sundas Irshad said that 'Suthra' Punjab and 'Neghaban' Rashan Programme of the Chief Minister's Punjab Maryam Nawaz are ideal and great Programmes of masses welfare while under 'Neghaban' Ramazan Programme hampers of edible items including flour ghee, sugar, gram flour is being provided to the masses at their door steps.

MPA Mian Shahid Hussain Bhatti, MPA Auon Itisar Bhatti, Sheikh Gulzar Ahmad and officers of different departments attended the meeting. Saira Afzal Tarar and Sundas Irshad said that quality of edibles would not be compromised and indolence in distribution of ration would not be tolerated at all.

They said that transparency in distribution of ration was being ensured and ration was being given away only to deserving people without any discrimination of party affiliation at their doorsteps for ensuring respect and hon-

our of the masses. They also said that a fair price shop would also be setup in model bazar where essential commodities would be available at 25 percent discount during the holy month of Ramazan.

They further said that in district Hafizabad, more than 64 thousand people would get ration under the 'Neghaban' Ration Programme and distribution process of Ramazan Package was being monitored strictly. Under the Suthra Punjab Programme of the Chief Minister of the Punjab, cleanliness work is in full swing in urban and rural areas under a comprehensive Programme where as 14 points agenda of people welfare is also being implemented in the district, they said and added that streets lights and water filtration plants were also being made functional as well as public parks were also being renovated.

It was also told in the meeting under the people friendly vision of the Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz, government school were being upgraded and all missing facilities were also provided in the schools for improving academic activities and other facilities in the schools.

Police recovers Rs78.4

million booty: District police have recovered booty of worth Rs. 78.4 million including Rs. 17.7 million cash, 234 cattle, gold ornaments, one tractor, one dumper, two cars, 99 motorcycles, one van, one ricksha, 105 mobile phones, four cows, 10 buffalo, 14, goats, 225 bags of rice etc. of worth Rs.78.4 million from possession of different criminals during last three months.

District Police Officer Faisal Gulzar handed over the recovered items and cash to their original owners in a ceremony held at police lines Hafizabad, on Tuesday. SP Investigation Farooq Ahmad Bhutta, President Press Club Hafizabad Rana Muhammad Arshad Anjum, Ex-Chairman Press Club Chaudhry Imtiaz Ahmad Taj, traders, civil society and owners of stolen items were also attended the function.

Later, DPO visited the home of citizen who could not attend the function due to illness and gave away his looted articles worth Rs. 2 lakh at his doorstep. The civil society said that DPO has set a new example of community policing which would be helpful to bridge gap between police and public.

Two suspects arrested in Kohat

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: On the instructions of Director Kohat Zone, Inamullah Gandapur, a crackdown is underway against the elements involved in hawala/handi and illegal currency exchange.

In the ongoing operations, 2 suspects involved in the hundi business were arrested, an official of the FIA Kohat Circle said here on Thursday. The accused are identified as Latifullah Khattak and Fazlur Rehman, the FIA official said.

Accused Latifullah was arrested from Kohat Main Bazaar while Fazlur Rahman was arrested from Bannu, he added. Fazlur Rehman was arrested red-handed from a private bank and a total Rs 22, 57000 was recovered from him, the official said.

Dastarbandi arranged: Kohat Development Authority (KDA) Kotal Township Sector 8 under the auspices of Madrasah Adara Al-Mowazi, the second annual Quran memorization competition was organized in which thirty-eight Quran memorizers from Kohat district participated.

The contests consisted of complete Quran and two parts of fifteen verses. The special guest was the President of Khatman Nabubat and Federation of Madrasahs Maulvi Mujahideen while the President of the Madrasah was Maulana Asad Madani. Hafiz Shahzeb won the first position, Muhammad Mehdi second and Abdul Samad the third position in the complete Quran competitions.

Rs. 15,000 cash prizes were awarded to the first position holders, Rs10,000 cash prizes to the second position holders and Rs 5,000 cash prizes to the third position holders.

Special children education vital

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Special children are the bright flowers of our society, their education, training, protection and maintenance is our main responsibility. These views were expressed by the head of Government Special Education School, Chah Shamoo-wala Kamalia, Bashir Ahmed Rabbani, in the general meeting of the School Management Council, on Thursday.

In the general meeting of the Special Education Department of Punjab, issued instructions under the title of "standard practical measures for the protection of special children and girls". Addressing the awareness session in Roshni did Chairman Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar presided while the affected students, parents and teachers attended the hearing in large numbers.

The head of the school further said that special children should be taught safety measures and be able to deal with them to avoid any untoward situation. In this regard, the teachers in the school and the parents in the homes should train the boys and girls. Children should be reminded of the identity of their parents, close relatives, home address, contact number, any famous, prominent place around and important identification information.

Writ of state to be established in Balochistan: Bugti

F.P. Report

QUETTA Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti said on Thursday said that writ of the state would be established at any cost to maintain law and order situation in the Balochistan province.

These views were expressed by him while chairing a meeting to review progress of overall law and order situation in Balochistan. He said that for maintaining law and order situation, Balochistan police, levies and Balochistan Constabulary would be modernised, adding that training courses would be introduced for capacity building of civil forces.

Praising the Assistant Commissioner Mach to have fought valiantly with terrorists in Mach, he announced that the highest civil award of the province would be conferred upon Assistant Commissioner Mach. The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief

Secretary (Home), Home and Tribal Affairs, Balochistan, Zahid Saleem, Inspector General of Police, Balochistan, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh, Inspector General of Police, Malak Shuja-ud-Kasi, Additional Inspector General of Police, Balochistan, Jawad Dogar, Director General, Balochistan Levies Force, Naseebullah Kakar and others.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Thursday said that 160,000 homes would be constructed in rain-affected districts of Balochistan under 400 million dollar project of the World Bank.

This was informed by him while chairing a progress review meeting of the Planning and Development Department at the Chief Minister's Secretariat. Expressing indignation over the delay in executing rehabilitation projects meant for 2022 rains-affected districts of Balochistan, he issued directions to the officials to

start executing the rehabilitation projects within 10 days besides initiating disciplinary proceedings against officers responsible for the delaying 400 million dollar foreign funded project.

Bugti said next PSDP would be finalised in view of the needs of the people of Balochistan instead of likes and dislikes. Secretary Planning Lal Jan Jaffar gave a briefing regarding rehabilitation projects in 2022 rain-hit districts of Balochistan.

The meeting was attended by MPs Mir Zahoor Ahmed Buledi, Mir Shoaib Noshervani, Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Balochistan, Additional Chief Secretary (Development), Planning and Development Department, Abdul Saboor Kakar, Secretary (Planning), Planning and Development Department, Lal Jan Jaffar, Secretary Finance Department, Babar Khan and others.

Social behavior change campaign launched

F.P. Report

MALAKAND: The Benazir Nashonuma Programme Khyber Pakhtunkhwa launched its awareness campaign in Malakand district by arranging an awareness seminar at the district headquarters hospital Batkhela under the social behaviour change campaign (SBCC).

A walk led by district health officer Malakand Dr Sadiq Shah was also held which was participated by lady health workers, lady health supervisors, nutrition assistants and people from other walks of life. The participants were carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans

regarding balanced diet and importance of breastfeeding for neonates.

Addressing the seminar, EPI coordinator Dr Najib Khan, Dr Saghirul Maani, coordinator Benazir Nashonuma programme Saddam Hussain, DDHO Dr Murad Khan and others shed light on balanced diet and breastfeeding for children.

The speakers said that a balanced diet and breastfeeding prevented new born children from many diseases and improved child immunity. They said the Benazir Nashonuma programme had started its services at three centers in Malakand district wherein hundreds of pregnant

women were being provided with dietary supplements. They said that mothers were also provided with Rs 4000 during birth delivery while the infants were provided with a balanced diet for two years.

They said the programme was aimed to help pregnant women by giving them medicines and helping them bear healthy babies. They said that pregnant women were treated under the programme. The speakers also urged ulema, media persons and area elders to play their active role in making the people aware about the programme so that more women could get its benefits.

Spring plantation drive kicks off in Mardan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan Shaukat Ali Yousafzai and Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Fayyaz Khan Sherpao along with officers of University Administration and Forest Department officially inaugurated spring plantation drive at Amir Muhammad Khan Research Farm of Agriculture University Mardan under Clean and Green Pakistan campaign.

On this occasion prayers were prayed for the safety of the country and the nation with the determination to make Mardan green. Amir Muhammad Khan Campus Director Muhammad Israr, Planning Officer Arshid Khan, DFO Mardan Rafiqullah, Plantation Program Coordinator Ilyas Khan, NCHD Lal Muhammad and other concerned officials were also present on the occasion.

Talking to the participants, Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai said that every citizen of the society

should contribute to make the Clean and Green Pakistan campaign success and reiterated that all available resources will be used to make it successful. He said that planting trees not only reduces air pollution but also has positive effects on the country's economy.

On this occasion Deputy Commissioner Fayyaz Khan Sherpao appealed to the people belonging to all walks of life to contribute in planting trees and play their full role in making the Green and Clean Pakistan campaign success.

Food Authority inspects edible items: On public complaints, the team of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority Mardan inspected various foodstuff shops at Takhtbhai Bazar, Syed Abad and Takkarr Road.

On this occasion samples of milk were taken from various milk shops and checked on the spot through mobile lab and along with this the quality and cleanliness of ghee used in kebabs and hotels were checked on the spot.

Three shopkeepers were fined heavily for mixing water in milk. On this occasion, licenses were also issued to the shopkeepers through e-licensing and instructions were also issued.

Meanwhile, district administration started crackdown against illegal encroachments. On the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan, Additional Assistant Commissioner Junaid Khalid took action against encroachments on Bank Road, Shamsi Road, College Chowk and Sheikh Maltoon Road, during which six accused were arrested while eliminating several temporary and permanent encroachments while a large amount of goods were confiscated.

DC Mardan Fayyaz Khan Sherpao has made it clear that the people will not tolerate any difficulties in transportation, so the business community and the public have been asked to avoid encroachment; otherwise the administration will take strong action against such elements.

DPO prioritizes improvement in police behavior

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: The newly appointed District Police Officer (DPO) Dera Ismail Khan, Nasir Mehmood on Thursday enlightened his ambitious agenda that prioritizes controlling street crime, resolving traffic issues, eradicating terrorism and most importantly improving police behavior with citizens.

In an introductory meeting with local journalists held here at his office, Nasir said the public-friendly policing would be promoted in the district by ensuring respect of citizens at police stations. "I have found traffic issue as one of serious concerns of the local people after assuming my charge as district police

chief," he mentioned. He said a committee led by DSP Traffic has been formed which would form a collective action plan for resolving traffic related issues in the district.

The DPO urged the journalists to play their role in highlighting the people's problems and also give their suggestions for resolution of that problems. In his commitment to controlling crime, the DPO expressed his plan to increase engagement with the local community and further activating role of District Reconciliation Committee (DRC). He said a good relation would be maintained with local people for controlling crime.

The DPO emphasized the detrimental impact of

drug trafficking on society, vowing to take decisive actions against not only drug dealers but also their accomplices and those who enable their activities. Replying to a question, he said the priorities of the police would vary for different areas as each locality has its own problem i.e. terrorism was the most serious issue of Kulachi Tehsil while street crime was the major issue of Paharpur Tehsil.

Poster competition held to financial literacy among citizens: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Dera Ismail Khan a poster competition titled "Imagine Award Without Cash" aimed to promote awareness among citizens about financial literacy.

KKKUK advances to promote Renewable Energy Education

F.P. Report

KARAK: The Renewable Energy Department at Khushal Khan Khattak University achieved a milestone as it conducted its first Board of Studies meeting to chart the course for the development of Associate Degree and BS programs in renewable energy.

The meeting, held the other day, was presided over by the Convener and Head of the Renewable Energy Department, Dr. Atta Ur Rehman. The other board members in attendance included Dr. Abdul Hakim Shah, Dr. Fida Rehman, Engr Faisal Nawab, Dr. Adnan Daud, Dr. Omer

Usman Marwat, and Dr. Tufail Ahmad Khan. They deliberated on the Scheme of Studies for the upcoming academic offerings in renewable energy.

During the session, the Board recommended a standing list of examiners for the selection boards of faculty members and examiners for thesis and exam evaluations. This strategic move aims to ensure the highest standards in faculty recruitment and academic assessment within the department.

Dr. Atta Ur Rehman's exemplary leadership was acknowledged, and the board members expressed their satisfaction with the direction set forth under his

guidance. The collaborative effort showcased a commitment to advancing education and research in the field of renewable energy at Khushal Khan Khattak University.

The members also appreciated the efforts of Engr Faisal Nawab, Secretary of the board who worked round the clock for preparing and presenting Scheme of Studies and Course contents of the academic program. As the Renewable Energy Department progresses in shaping the academic landscape, the institution remains dedicated to fostering innovation, sustainability, and excellence in the ever-evolving field of renewable energy.



Ukraine war: Eastern residents brace for Russian advance

KYIV (BBC): In eastern Ukraine, the tide of this war hasn't just changed - it's coming in fast. "We know what's coming," says Mariya as she packs up the TV in her flat in Kostyantynivka. She's having it delivered to Kyiv before making the journey there with her son. "We're tired all day [and suffer] moods and panic attacks. It's constantly depressing, and we're scared."

In February, Russia captured the strategic town of Avdiivka. Since then, the invaders have advanced further west, and taken several villages. Ukraine says its forces are "holding on". But Russian troops are now attacking in five areas along the 1,100km (700 mile) front line. And it's here in the eastern Donetsk region that Ukraine's defenders are being tested the most. People in cities like Pokrovsk, Kostyantynivka and Kramatorsk are now facing a fast-approaching front line, and even occupation. Mariya and her mother Tetyana are finding life increasingly difficult as the Russians advance closer.

Their city is littered with signs of the approaching threat 30km (19 miles) away. Almost every street has a damaged building. Workers replace gold panels on a church after they were blown off by a missile strike on the neighbouring train station, now destroyed. Anxiety fills the cold air in this town, once part of the industrial heartland of the former Soviet Union. Russia slowly destroys Ukraine's cities as it tries to take them. That's what is feared the most here. Mariya explains that her mother Tetyana is staying, but she's confident she'll follow her eventually. "I've already left twice, what's the point?" says a defiant Tetyana from her apartment around the corner. She gives us slippers to wear around her home, which explains why it's spotless. "It's scary everywhere. The whole country is on fire." Her eyes moisten. It's one thing to stay in your home for as long as you can, it's another to risk death or Russian occupation.

While the whole of Ukraine is a war zone, the Donetsk region - along with four others - is a battlefield. When you weave through its dense forest and expansive, rugged terrain, you always feel like you're approaching the coal face of this conflict. You can hear heavy fire from as far as 40 km away, so the distant sound of artillery is constant. From one vantage point you can see the erosion of Ukrainian territory. Plumes of smoke come from the directions of Avdiivka, a town Russia has recently taken, and



Horlivka, which it's controlled since 2014.

Russia is using its size, air superiority and deeper ammunition reserves to keep pushing, at a time when Western military aid to Ukraine is running low or being held up by domestic politics. Nearby lies a wide valley with several reservoirs. It's this natural landscape which Ukraine says will allow its forces to "stabilise" the front line. Perhaps after chaotic withdrawals in the past, Ukrainian generals are willing to temporarily concede territory in the hope it can be liberated in the long term. Across the front line there is a small minority of people labelled as "Zhdun" by the Ukrainians. It's a derogatory word which means "waiters", referring to those who are pro-Russian and waiting to be occupied. It doesn't apply to everyone who ignores offers of evacuation. Some just refuse to abandon their homes and have got used to the constant danger. Valeriy isn't one of them.

After his home in the village of Toretsk was almost shelled twice, he's taking his belongings and grandson Denys to a pickup point. With the Russians just 5km away, their neighbours wish them well but still refuse to leave. The pair then board an armoured police vehicle. "I've lived my life already," the 67-year-old tells us at the other end of his journey in Kostyantynivka. "But I need to save the little one." "I worked in the mine for 20 years so I'm not afraid of anything, but I'm worried for him," he adds.

Denys, who's 14, nods approvingly.

ly. "My last friend left three weeks ago," he says. Evacuation from front-line settlements is compulsory for families with children. Despite that 15 children still remain in Toretsk. Anton Pron from the White Angels police evacuation squad, who helps evacuate people away from front-line towns, tells us the situation is worsening every day. "There's constant shelling and artillery," he says. "The enemy's aviation is working all the time."

The Russians drop bombs only on residential houses." These days, the train station in the nearby city of Kramatorsk is the last stop for arriving troops and increasingly, departing civilians laden with bags. Distant rumbles of artillery serve either as a sobering welcome or a reason to leave. Couples hold long embraces on a platform flanked by freight trains which provide protection in case of a missile strike. At least 61 people were killed by one here in 2022. Shrapnel marks are still scorched onto the pavement. We meet Alla, who's waiting for her train to Kyiv. "A year ago, we thought we'd get help from the West and that our counter offensive would work, but not anymore," she says.

"People used to believe, but not now." Ukraine hopes its eastern lands will one day be somewhere safe to live again. Right now it's unclear what these departing passengers will be returning to. Should its Russian invaders gain more momentum in the Donetsk region, the question of where they will stop will be increasingly difficult to answer.

Red Cross concerned for Lebanon's hospitals

MARJAYOUN, Lebanon (Reuters): An escalation of fighting on Lebanon's southern border would further strain hospitals already struggling with a lack of money in a national financial crisis, the Middle East chief of The International Committee of the Red Cross said.

Lebanon's heavily armed Hezbollah party has been exchanging fire with Israel across the border over the last five months in parallel with the Gaza war. More than 50 civilians have been killed in Israeli shelling on Lebanon, along with more than 200 Hezbollah fighters, according to medical and security sources.

Israel says about a dozen of its soldiers and half as many civilians have been killed in shelling from Lebanon into the north of the country. Doctors in southern Lebanon have sounded the alarm, saying an influx of wounded has pushed the health sector to its limits. Speaking to Reuters outside Lebanon's Marjayoun Hospital near the border with Israel, Fabrizio Carboni said Lebanon did not have the needed resources to support its health facilities.

"Then you also have a lot of health personnel who left the country - so, yes, there is a concern," he said. "We know something will happen - and we hope the situation will not deteriorate - there will be a need for substantial medical support for the population in the south of Lebanon and all people affected by the conflict," Carboni said. Marjayoun Hospital has 14 emergency beds and struggles to operate because of a lack of staff and, crucially, fuel shortages, its director has told Reuters. It runs on its own electricity generators for 20 hours a day, paying up to \$20,000 a month for the fuel. Carboni urged warring parties on the Lebanon-Israel border to respect the protected status of medical staff and facilities, saying it was "very concerning, very worrying" to see cases of rescue workers being killed in shelling.

Seven rescue workers and paramedics have been killed in Israeli shelling over the last five months, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

4 migrants found dead

BARCELONA (AP): Four migrants were found dead and 64 were rescued when a boat from Mauritania reached Spain's Canary Islands after a dangerous Atlantic journey from West Africa, Spain's Maritime Rescue Service said.

The migrants arrived on the island of El Hierro, with the survivors including two women and nine minors, the service said. In poor health, two people were transferred by helicopter to a hospital on the island of Tenerife while 14 others were taken to a local hospital on El Hierro to be treated mainly for hypothermia and dehydration, according to a post on X, formerly Twitter, by a local emergency service. Nearly 12,000 migrants fleeing poverty, conflict and instability in West Africa have landed on the Spanish archipelago in the first two months of the year, according to Spain's interior ministry.

That's more than six times the number that made it to the islands last year. El Hierro, the westernmost of the Canary Islands, is bearing the brunt of arrivals. Most migrants have been departing from the coast of Mauritania on artisanal fishing boats known as pirogues and navigating for several days against strong winds and Atlantic currents.

While thousands have survived the risky journey, many die or disappear along the way with remains sometimes washing up on the other side of the Atlantic. At least 191 migrants have been reported dead or missing so far in 2024 trying to reach the Canary Islands, according to the International Organization for Migrations Missing Migrants Project. But that number is believed to be an undercount.

US denies pressuring Haiti PM Henry to resign

WASHINGTON: The United States says it is not pressuring Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry to step down amid a fresh wave of violence and soaring instability in the Caribbean nation, where powerful gang leaders are demanding Henry's resignation.

During a news conference, US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Washington is "not calling on him [Henry] or pushing for him to resign". However, Miller told reporters that the US is urging Henry "to expedite the transition to an empowered and inclusive governance structure that will move with urgency to help the country prepare for a multi-national security support mission".

That mission, which has the backing of the United Nations but has been stalled for months, will then "address the security situation and pave the way for free and fair elections" in Haiti, Miller said. His comments come after the Miami Herald reported that the State Department had asked Henry to agree to a new transitional government and resign amid the growing crisis in Haiti. A surge in gang violence that began at the weekend - and included attacks on police stations and raids on two prisons in the capital of Port-au-Prince - has displaced tens of thousands of people and effectively paralysed the city. A 74-year-old neurosurgeon, Henry was sworn in as Haiti's prime minister in July 2021, less than two weeks after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated. Moise had chosen Henry for the post shortly before he was killed.

The assassination worsened months of political instability in Haiti, and gang violence soared in the result-

ing power vacuum. Meanwhile, Henry - who long enjoyed the backing of the US and other Western powers, including the so-called Core Group of nations - faced a crisis of legitimacy from the very start of his tenure. Some Haitian civil society groups had urged him to hand power over to an inclusive, transitional government, a move they argued would help stem the gang violence and widespread insecurity plaguing the country. Henry rejected that demand, but said he was seeking unity and dialogue. He also repeatedly said that elections could not be held until it is safe to do so. But that angered many people across Haiti, including armed gang leaders who over the past few years have used pressure tactics - including fuel terminal blockades - in an effort to force him to resign. The situation escalated when Henry left Haiti last month to attend a four-day summit in the South American country of Guyana organised by a regional trade bloc known as the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). While Henry did not speak to the media, Caribbean leaders said that he promised to hold elections in mid-2025. A day later, coordinated gang attacks began in Haiti's capital and beyond.

Henry then departed Guyana for Kenya last week to meet with President William Ruto and to push for the UN-backed deployment of a Kenyan police force, which a court in the East African country ruled was unconstitutional. Officials never said when the prime minister was due back in Haiti following his Kenya trip, and his whereabouts were unknown for several days until he unexpectedly landed in Puerto

Rico. In the meantime, the Haitian government declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew as the country's already overwhelmed and ill-equipped police force tried to stem the surge in gang violence. Schools and shops have closed in Port-au-Prince - where gangs are believed to control about 80 percent of the city - and 15,000 Haitians have been forced to flee their homes in recent days, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The head of a powerful Haitian gang alliance known as G9, Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, also warned that "if Ariel Henry doesn't resign, if the international community continues to support him, we'll be heading straight for a civil war that will lead to genocide". The UN Security Council was scheduled to hold a closed-door meeting on Haiti "to discuss the alarming escalation of gang violence", a spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters.

"The situation in Port-au-Prince remains extremely fragile as sporadic attacks have continued and all flights in and out of Haiti remain cancelled," Stephane Dujarric said. Speaking at UN headquarters in New York earlier in the day, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield echoed Miller at the State Department when she was asked if Washington had urged Henry to step down. "What we've asked the Haitian prime minister to do is move forward on a political process that will lead to the establishment of a presidential transitional council" to allow for elections, Thomas-Greenfield told reporters. — Aljazeera

Climate change pushes Malaysia's coastal fishermen away from the sea

GELANG PATAH: On an overcast morning six years ago, Mohammad Ridhwan Mohd Yazid was on his way back to Malaysia's southern Johor coast when his small fishing boat was caught in a sudden storm. In a matter of minutes, the calm southerly March winds transformed into gales whipping up high seas that slammed into his boat, knocking both him and the day's catch into the air.

Alone and about a kilometre (about half a mile) from Singapore's north-western shore, Ridhwan landed back on the boat near its engine and turned quickly for land. "I didn't care that I lost half of what I caught that day. I just wanted to go home," the 30-year-old told Al Jazeera in an interview at the coastal jetty in Pendas, a fishing village in Malaysia's southern state of Johor. Ridhwan's tale is not an isolated one, but shared by many traditional Malaysian fishermen who have found themselves increasingly affected by the climate crisis, which is changing weather patterns

that have long governed when and where they can fish. Such fishermen are estimated to make up about 65 percent of Malaysia's total fishing community, and are small-scale operators from seaside or river communities and ply waters close to shore or along the river for fish, clams, crabs and other marine animals to meet local demand. They typically use single-engine boats about seven metres (23 feet) long, casting their nets in an area up to five nautical miles (9.3km) from the shore along the country's more than 4,600km (2,858 miles) of coastline. But erratic weather, warming seas and declining fish stocks caused by climate change are slowly pushing them away from the seas they and generations before them once depended on. "In the past, we didn't have to go far to get a good catch. We could just go near the shore," said Mohd Hafiza Abu Talib. Now, he said, winds could shift direction without warning, treacherous for those who usually work alone or fish at night. "The

winds can suddenly change and bring us somewhere else. It's even worse when we fish in the dark, and we don't have GPS," the man in his late 40s added. Studies by the United Nations have shown that oceans absorb 25 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions and capture 90 percent of the heat generated by these emissions trapped in the Earth's atmosphere. The US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration showed a daily sea surface temperature of 21 degrees Celsius (69.8 Fahrenheit) from early January, one degree more than during the same period 30 years ago. Man-made emissions have pushed the average temperature of oceans higher, leading to the melting of polar ice, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, marine heatwaves and more fiercely unpredictable weather. Mangroves have also been damaged, and coral reefs, where fish breed, have bleached. Professor Mohd Fadzil Mohd Akhir, an oceanographer with Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, said marine

animals, sensitive to sea temperatures, had been found to migrate to cooler waters as oceans warmed. "It doesn't mean that when the climate gets warmer, that fish is not available anywhere," he said. "Most marine organisms in tropical areas will move to cooler areas when these areas get warmer." A 2022 University of British Columbia study found that climate change would force 45 percent of fish that cross through two or more exclusive economic zones to move away from their natural habitats by the end of the century. An exclusive economic zone (EEZ) refers to an area of ocean or sea that extends some 200 nautical miles (370km) beyond a country's territorial waters. The prospect of a further decline in an already falling harvest is a huge blow for Malaysia's coastal fishermen who have invested thousands in a back-breaking trade with often poor returns. A single boat can cost about 14,000 Malaysian ringgit (\$2,928) with thousands more needed for nets, engines and fuel. — Aljazeera

UN watchdog's head in Russia

MOSCOW (AP): The UN's atomic watchdog agency chief is visiting Russia amid concern about a Ukrainian nuclear power plant caught in the crossfire since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022 and seized the facility shortly after.

IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi arrived at the Black Sea resort of Sochi, according to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti for talks on nuclear safety in Ukraine. Grossi announced the trip, the first day of a regular meeting of the agency's 35-nation board of governors in Vienna. The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly expressed alarm about the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest, amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, but it still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling sys-

tems and other safety features. Grossi told Russia Today that he discussed with Putin Get info without leaving the page. the possibility of restarting the plant - and whether it will be necessary to do so. "I would say that apart from these technicalities, it is important that the leaders of the two belligerents listen to the Director General of the IAEA. For the moment, this is the case," he told the state-controlled international television channel. He added that his conversation with Putin was "professional and frank" and that he was able to express his opinion, in particular concerning the situation at Zaporizhzhia. "The situation continues to be enormously fluid and precarious, as I have said several times." In an earlier news conference, Grossi told reporters in Sochi that he had a "very intensive and exhaustive working session" with Russian officials, including from Russia's state nuclear energy agency

Rosatom and the foreign and defense ministries.

"This gave me, and gave us, I think, an opportunity to evaluate the situation at the nuclear power plant," he said. Grossi later met with Russian Vladimir Putin and said on X, formerly Twitter, that they had an "important exchange" about the plant and nuclear non-proliferation issues. The IAEA chief last met with Putin in October 2022. He visited Ukraine in February and crossed the front line to visit the Russian-held plant as part of the IAEA's efforts to prevent a nuclear disaster amid ongoing hostilities. He also held a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Before heading to Russia, Grossi told reporters in Vienna that he considered it important to maintain a dialogue with both sides and added that the situation with the Zaporizhzhia plant "continues to be very fragile." He said that he expected to dis-

cuss "technical issues" related to "the future operational status of the plant" in Moscow. He also said if the plant is to be restarted, he would need to discuss "what kind of safety evaluation" would be needed and that he planned to discuss the issue of external power supply lines.

The plant has suffered eight losses of off-site power since the seizure, forcing it to rely on emergency diesel generators temporarily, and it continues to face challenges related to staffing. Ukraine's Energoatom, which operates all of the country's nuclear power plants, has repeatedly said Russia restricted qualified Ukrainian staffers from accessing the Zaporizhzhia plant after they refused Russian citizenship and to sign a contract with Rosatom. Nearly 5,200 workers left the plant since Russia took over in March 2022, according to Petro Kotin, Energoatom's Acting Board Chairman.

Protesting use pickup truck to batter down doors

MEXICO CITY (AP): Protesters commandeered a pickup truck and used it to ram down the wooden doors of Mexico City's National Palace. They battered down the doors and entered the colonial-era palace, where the president lives and hold his daily press briefings, before they were driven off by security agents. The palace is a historic structure dating back to the 1700s, and was built on the site of the Aztec emperors' palace.

The demonstration, like many others over the years, was called to protest the abduction and murder of 43 students a decade ago. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called the protest a provocation, and claimed the demonstrators had sledgehammers and blowtorches. "This is a movement against us," López Obrador said. "The

plan is to create a provocation." But the president also attempted to downplay the seriousness of the protest, saying "The door will be fixed, it's nothing." For years, the victims' families and students at government rural teachers' colleges have protested the 2014 disappearances. The mass disappearance remains one of Mexico's most infamous human rights cases.

With López Obrador's term ending next year, family members face the prospect of a tenth year of not knowing what happened to their sons but fears that the next administration will start the error-plagued investigation over from scratch yet again. In 2014, a group of students were attacked by municipal police in the southern city of Iguala, Guerrero, who handed them over to a local drug gang that apparently

killed them and burned their bodies. Since the Sept. 26 attack, only three of their remains have been identified. After an initial coverup, last year a government truth commission concluded that local, state and federal authorities colluded with the gang to murder the students in what it called a "state crime." López Obrador has complained about the involvement of human rights groups, who he claimed have prevented him from speaking directly to the parents of the missing students. The under-funded radical rural teachers' colleges in Mexico have a decades-long tradition of violent protests. In fact, when they were abducted, the students themselves had been hijacking passenger buses which they were going to use to travel to another protest.

Sudan's conflict risks creating hunger crisis: UN

CAIRO (AP): A ruinous conflict raging for about a year between rival generals in Sudan risks creating the world's largest hunger crisis, the top UN food official warned as global attention has been focused on the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Cindy McCain, head of the World Food Program, said the fighting in Sudan, which pits the country's military against a violent paramilitary group, has shattered the lives of millions across the northeastern African nation. "The war in Sudan risks triggering the world's largest hunger crisis," McCain said as she wrapped up a trip to neighboring South Sudan, where hundreds of thousands of Sudanese have fled the fighting in their home country.

The UN food agency said some 18 million people across Sudan face acute hunger, with the most desperate trapped behind the front lines. They include 5 million who face starvation, it said. Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April when clashes erupted in the cap-

ital, Khartoum, between the country's military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary group known as Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. The fighting quickly spread across the nation, especially urban areas but also the restive western Darfur region. Thousands of people have been killed, including between 10,000 and 15,000 people, when paramilitary forces and allied Arab militias rampaged through a Darfur town last year.

Two decades ago, Darfur became synonymous with genocide and war crimes, particularly by the notorious Janjaweed Arab militias, against populations that identify as Central or East African. It seems that legacy has returned, with the International Criminal Court's prosecutor Karim Khan saying in late January there are grounds to believe both sides are committing possible war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide in

Darfur. "Twenty years ago, Darfur was the world's largest hunger crisis and the world rallied to respond. But today, the people of Sudan have been forgotten," McCain said. The conflict has uprooted more than 10 million people either to safer areas inside Sudan or to neighboring countries, according to UN agencies. South Sudan received 600,000 people who fled the fighting in Sudan. Once in South Sudan, "one in five children in border transit centers suffers from malnutrition," WFP said. McCain called for the warring parties to stop fighting and allow humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving assistance. Aid has been further disrupted after authorities' revoked permits for cross-border truck convoys, WFP said. That forced the suspension of operations from Chad to Darfur. "The consequences of inaction go far beyond a mother unable to feed her child and will shape the region for years to come," she said.

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Plight of Lasses and International Women's Day

THE Pakistani nation and the broader global Community are all set to commemorate the 49th International Women's Day to acknowledge the importance, and rights of women along with hailing their pivotal role in shaping modern society and the present day Universe. The theme for International Women's Day 2024 is to invest in women and accelerate progress. Today, nations across the globe will reaffirm their commitments to women's empowerment, preservation of women's rights, and the greater role of females in the world.

Fundamentally, women are the backbone of families as well as communities in all countries across the world. They provide care, support, and nurture their families while playing a vital role in the development and character-building of their children. Women have always proved their worth in all roles including mother, daughter, wife, and sister along with undertaking leadership roles as mentors, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and community builders in today's world. Despite the importance of women in society, the Bint-e-Hawa always faced numerous challenges such as Gender discrimination and injustices in domestic life, the workplace, politics, and the social arena that not only hindered their ability to contribute toward society but limited their access to resources and opportunities including education, healthcare, employment, sports, recreation and other civic activities in society.

Unfortunately, no country in the world offers women the same opportunities as men in the workforce which found the global gender gap was far wider than previously thought. According to the World Bank Group report, closing the gap could raise global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by more than 20%, giving an unimaginable boost to international as well as domestic growth. The report found that although 95 countries enacted laws on equal pay, only 35 had measures in place to ensure the pay gap was addressed. Globally, women earned just 77 cents of each dollar earned by a man. Many Asian, Latin American, and sub-Saharan African countries have seen rapid progress in the reform of laws in recent years, but the largest gap between legislation and implementation still exists. In 81 countries, a woman's pension benefits do not account for periods of work absences related to childcare. The report revealed that 151 countries had laws against sexual harassment in the workplace, and only 40 nations had laws that covered abuse in public areas or on public transport, meaning women were not protected on their way to work. Historically, discriminatory laws and practices prevent women from working or starting businesses on an equal footing with men all over the world. Certain legal and administrative measures to fill gender-based discrimination in the Global financial market could double the global growth rate over the next decade but the pace of reforms is slow to a crawl.

In fact, a progressive and inclusive society could not be possible without empowering women in every sector of life. It is the responsibility of every individual to ensure a conducive environment for girls and women to provide proper education and training, enabling them to live a life with dignity and respect. In Pakistan, the women's literacy rate is much lower as compared to the men and they don't have financial independence, access to better healthcare, higher education, equal employment opportunities, property and heirloom rights, and freedom to exercise vote in certain areas in the country. Presently, Pakistan stands at 142 positions out of 147 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, which presents a meek picture of human rights and women's condition in our nation. Women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality are essential for the development of a just and equitable society. Empowering women leads to improved health outcomes, increased economic growth, and poverty reduction. However, women continue to face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to contribute fully to society. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from individuals, communities, and governments. On this day, we must promise to work together to create a more just and equitable world not only for women but every member of society. That is the common goal of every welfare state and pro-public government, civic organization, and patriotic citizen in the world.

PILDAT's report on general election

THE Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), the country's sole non-governmental election watchdog, has released its assessment report on the recently held General Election in the country. According to the PILDAT, the General Election 2024 recorded the lowest fairness score since 2013, indicating irregularities and growing public distrust in the electoral process. It said the overall fairness of the 2024 elections in Pakistan received a score of 49% which is three percentage points lower than the score received for the 2018 General Election.

Pakistan Electoral System had been a topic of discussion and debates not among the masses at Hujras and Ottak but serious discussions on election procedures, legal and administrative flaws, and alleged rigging and manipulation of the election results by the Electoral watchdog, the sitting governments and bureaucracy have been discussed by the media, intellectual circles and political groups throughout the past. The most commonly used electoral system worldwide, including in Pakistan, is the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. In this method, voters receive a ballot paper listing all candidates from their constituency, mark their preferred candidate, and the person with the most votes wins the seat. There are several other methods of electing one or more public representatives in a specific district but a majority of them have some degree of controversies and confusion in dealing with sensitive governmental affairs. However, there have been nationwide debate on Internet voting, non party election system and segregation of administrative powers from legislators in the centre and the provinces to improve governance and transparency, but no accord had been reached so far.

The fairness assessment scores for the 2013 and 2018 elections stood at 57% and 52%, respectively. A steady decline in this regard is surely emblematic of the weakening of the democratic processes in that Country. That merits an urgent action from the relevant authorities. In fact, there is a need for wide ranging consensus among all stakeholders including the government and the civic groups regarding rules and procedures of the elections, along with the deliberations on several contentious issues such as the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), Internet Voting and the Overseas Pakistanis' right to vote in the future elections in the country. Hence, all political parties, Election Regulator and the government must sit together and formulate such a mechanism that full fills national demands and have full confidence and backing from across the political spectrum. So, the nation comes out of the unceasing political dogfight and blame game of the leaders, and moves toward political stability and economic revival.



China does not have leverage to end Red Sea crisis; US does

William Figueroa

IN the beginning of Israel's devastating war on Gaza, China appeared to be on the same page with its regional partners, Saudi Arabia and Iran, when it came to the big questions. All three condemned the Israeli aggression, called for a negotiated settlement addressing Palestinian grievances and held conferences and summits together to express their collective opposition to the conflict.

But the Houthi attacks on shipping routes in the Red Sea have upset this consensus. As Iran officially denies any direct involvement despite its unquestionably close relationship with the Houthis and Saudi Arabia remains strategically quiet after the end of its protracted and costly conflict with the armed group, Beijing finds itself in an awkward position.

China has a great deal at stake and has made no secret of its opposition to the attacks. As the world's largest exporter of goods and one of the top players in the global shipping industry, it has a tremendous economic stake in maintaining the security of shipping lanes. In this context, the United States has tried to cajole China into bringing its influence to bear on Iran to stop the attacks, but there has been no major movement from Chinese diplomats in that direction. This reflects the reality that Beijing has only limited sway over Tehran and the US itself is much more capable at bringing the Red Sea crisis to an end by simply using its leverage over Israel.

The importance of the Red Sea shipping lanes for China cannot be overstated. The majority of Chinese exports to Europe pass through the Suez Canal, and Chinese companies have just recently signed \$8bn worth of investment deals in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. Although the Houthis have pledged not to attack Chinese ships (as long as they are not bound for Israel), China has still suffered substantial economic damage from the crisis. Shipping and manufacturing have been impacted across the country with many businesses at all levels of the supply chain complaining of devastating losses.

China has been reluctant to directly condemn the

Houthis or publicly link them to Iran, but it has repeatedly voiced its disapproval, calling on all parties to respect the freedom of navigation and "stop attacking and disturbing civilian ships". In January, the Chinese media outlet Global Times reported that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had said, "China has been making active efforts to ease the tension in the Red Sea."

Then a Reuters article claimed that China had communicated a vague but threatening statement to the Iranians: If Chinese vessels or economic interests were to be impacted by the Houthi attacks, it could

China has sent more than 150 warships to the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and the three ships were dispatched to relieve a group of six that had sailed to the Red Sea in October, representing a downgrade of Chinese forces in the region. These developments raise an important question: Just how much influence does China have over Iran? At a first glance, the answer seems to be quite a lot.

harm Sino-Iranian business relations. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied the report, but Islamic Republican, an official Iranian newspaper, published an article criticising the "selfish demand" of the Chinese, claiming that China showed a willingness to "help the Zionist regime" and advised it not to "extend your legs beyond your own carpet". (In other words, stay out of it.)

A US official told the Financial Times that there were "some signs" that China is exerting pressure but that its impact is unclear. Then in February, media reports emerged of Beijing sending three warships to the Red Sea. However, few reported the fact that such missions are routine. China has sent more than 150 warships to the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and the three ships were dispatched to relieve a group of six that had sailed to the Red Sea in October, representing a downgrade of Chinese forces in the region.

These developments raise an important question: Just how much influence does China have over Iran? At a first glance, the answer seems to be quite a lot. China purchases the majority of Iranian oil and is also a key supplier of weapons and high-tech surveillance equipment to the Iranian security forces. It is also Iran's top trade partner and is committed to a variety of proposed projects to enhance trade, investment and other forms of bilateral cooperation over the next 25 years. However, a closer look reveals a more complicated picture. While China does purchase the majority of Iranian oil, most is

in the Red Sea. The subject was raised during a series of meetings between US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Wang in Bangkok in late January. Washington seems convinced that Beijing is unwilling to place any meaningful leverage on Iran. One senior official told reporters, "Beijing says they are raising this with the Iranians, ... but we're certainly going to wait before we comment further on how effectively we think they're actually raising it."

As the US has conducted most Britons take for granted, the government is taking unprecedented steps to criminalize peaceful protest on behalf of the beleaguered population of Gaza. Tens of thousands of people appalled by Israel's disproportionate military response to the Hamas attack in October last year have marched repeatedly in cities across Europe, including Paris, Geneva, Berlin, Lisbon and, of course, London. Germany, a country burdened with the moral guilt of the Holocaust and always quick to virtue-signal its unconditional support for Israel, was the first to restrict pro-Palestine marches. Other nations, including Austria and Switzerland, have followed suit.

But Britain is now going even further. In a bid to stamp out pro-Palestinian protests, the government has announced plans to broaden the definition of "extremism" to include groups that "undermine British values." Quite what those values are has yet to be spelled out - but, clearly, freedom of speech is no longer one of them. To suggest that Israel wields disproportionate influence in the Western world is, of course, to be accused of peddling an antisemitic trope - the by-now standard dismissal by Israel and its supporters around the world of any criticism of Israel's behavior.

But how else to explain the extraordinary events unfolding in Britain? For example, a member of Parliament was suspended by his party for merely referring to the phrase "from the river to the sea" in a call for "peaceful liberty" for Israelis and Palestinians alike; the former chairman of the Conservative Party

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Aljazeera

Free speech under attack in the UK

Jonathan Gornall

AS any tourist to London who has stumbled upon the quintessentially British piece of street theater in Hyde Park known as Speakers' Corner will attest, the UK has long had an enviable reputation as a bastion of free speech. In the northeast corner of the capital's great royal park, the precious right of freedom of speech is exercised daily, as it has been ever since 1872, when the area was designated by an act of Parliament as a place where anyone can stand up and freely speak their mind. Those who have done so include Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and the writer George Orwell.

Audiences for speeches on subjects from the eccentric to the epoch-making can range from one man and his dog to vast crowds. In June 1908, for example, a quarter of a million people gathered to hear suffragettes demand votes for women. And in February 2003, as many as 2 million people rallied at the spot to condemn the imminent invasion of Iraq.

Likewise, over the decades, London has played host to countless marches in the capital, mass protests against everything from wars and nuclear weapons to climate change and unpopular taxes. All, including the march staged in November by the Campaign Against Antisemitism, have been officially tolerated. Now, however, in an extraordinary betrayal of a freedom most Britons take for granted, the government is taking unprecedented steps to criminalize peaceful protest on behalf of the beleaguered population of Gaza.

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But how else to explain the extraordinary events unfolding in Britain? For example, a member of Parliament was suspended by his party for merely referring to the phrase "from the river to the sea" in a call for "peaceful liberty" for Israelis and Palestinians alike; the former chairman of the Conservative Party

accused London Mayor Sadiq Khan of being controlled by Islamists; and the prime minister described mass pro-Palestinian protests calling for a ceasefire in Gaza as "intimidatory" and "unacceptable," while backing the police to take firmer action. Last week, the BBC's flagship radio news program, "Today," covered that story but, instead of interviewing someone from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, it chose instead to give a platform only to a spokesman of the Community Security Trust, the UK Jewish community's own private, uniformed security force.

One of the greatest achievements of the state of Israel has been to bully Western governments and societies into accepting the patent falsehood that any criticism of Israel is tantamount to antisemitism. Of course, this is nonsense, but such is the feeble fear of the charge that none in public life in the UK now dares say so. Britain has, it seems, not only conveniently forgotten its role as the architect of the suffering of the Palestinian people, but is also doubling down on its support for the colonialist state of Israel, which, 76 years after its creation against the wishes of the majority Muslim population, continues to perpetuate that suffering.

In exchange for the support of Arab forces during the First World War, Britain promised post-Ottoman independence to the region. Unfortunately, in a successful bid to win influential Jewish support in America for its war aims (yes, another of those pesky tropes), it had already promised the Zionist movement that it would support "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." All five of the "Class A" mandates entrusted to Britain and France after the war by the League of Nations - Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq - were supposed to culminate in the creation of independent states. Four did. Only Palestine, given away instead to Zionist colonists, did not.

It was the infamous Balfour Declaration - the draft text of which was submitted for the approval of 10 leading Jewish figures in Britain in 1917, including Chaim Weizmann, leader of the Zionist movement and the future first president of Israel - that sealed the fate of the Palestinians. The second half of the document, in which the British government added that its support for "Zionist aspirations" was offered on condition that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," was quickly forgotten - and apparently remains so.

Britain, once considered a bastion of free speech, is now in the throes of delegitimizing peaceful pro-Palestinian protest, silencing the voices of tens of thousands of people for whom the spectacle of carnage and destruction in Gaza is a visceral affront to human decency.

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as "anti-Palestinianism." If there were, the current British government would be guilty of it.

Arab News

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Five months of pain will not stop Palestinians demanding their rights

Daoud Kuttab

IN the fall of 2023, Israel appeared to be on the cusp of widening its effort to bypass Palestinian rights by means of expanding its normalization process with Arab countries. It had an overwhelming political, financial and military advantage over the entire region. The balance of force seemed to be in its favor, many of the world's most powerful countries and their media appeared to be in its pocket and its ideological Jewish superiority appeared to be taking center stage at little or no political cost. Five months ago, all this changed.

The brutal genocidal revenge war on Palestinians after the Oct. 7 "Al-Aqsa Tsunami" operation by the Islamist Hamas movement has devastated Palestine life, especially in Gaza. An entire community has been devastated, hundreds of Palestinian families have been wiped out and an entire press corps, medical staff,

artists, writers, women and children have lost their lives. In addition to 30,000 deaths, almost triple that number have been maimed, millions have been forced into internal exile, leaving their now mostly demolished homes to live in tents awaiting a pause or ceasefire to start restoring what is left of their lives. Palestinian cultural and religious structures have been demolished and what little there was of the Gazan economy has been totally devastated.

Palestinians in the West Bank and even in Israel have also suffered from Israeli brutality and vengeance. Prisoners have become the easy target of racist Israeli police ministers and daily life for all Palestinians has been the target of systematic, racist acts of revenge.

The high cost that Palestinians have paid as a result of the Israeli war of revenge has triggered an unprecedented international response. More people know and support the Palestinian

cause than ever before, an ad hoc boycott movement has been launched against companies and countries that support the Israeli aggression and a schism has appeared between Israel and its once ironclad Western support.

Some countries in the EU have refused to adhere to the fake solidarity that has built up over the years and have come out in solid support of the rights of Palestinians and in opposition to the genocidal war that South Africa has succeeded in litigating in front of the world court.

The huge double standard between the West's opposition to the Russian war on Ukraine versus its response to the Israeli war on Palestine became the subject of both political and even comical responses around the world.

The Western media, which once boasted of its neutrality, fact-checking and objectivity, became embar-

rassed at being forced to repeatedly apologize and faced demonstrators shaking this former icon of public service as being just as influenced by government pressure as the other state-run media outlets it used to accuse. The sham of the BBC failing to cover the first day of the South African genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice while broadcasting the Israeli rebuttal and the bias that was exposed at CNN and The New York Times exposed the Western media, which was supposed to be the world's role model.

The cracks that have been exposed in Western countries and their institutions, including its institutions of faith, were exposed and all efforts to placate the protests of antisemitism have failed to take root. Many Jews in America and other countries not only refused the antisemitism claims, but heroically stood with

Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

However, all that has transpired has so far failed to dislodge some of the blind support for the occupiers and even the unwise actions of some Arab countries, which violated their own commitments not to normalize with Israel before it had withdrawn from the Occupied Territories.

Despite their pain and suffering, the proud Palestinian people and their supporters around the world will shake off the hurt, clean up the carnage left by the brutal occupiers and rise once again to demand freedom from oppression and insist on their right to dignity and equality. Palestinian self-determination is no longer a political slogan - it has become a worldwide demand that cannot simply be ignored or used as political fodder in the lip service of support for the two-state solution or other political jargon void of any genuine belief in it.

Five months ago, Gaza was not known by many people around the world and the goal of Palestinians liberating their land and living in freedom seemed far-fetched. Palestinians have paid a high price for their insistence on their inalienable right and there is no power on Earth today that will stop them from fulfilling their national aspiration to be free.

Israel is pillaging not just Gaza’s cities but also its waters

OVER the past few months, appalling videos have emerged from the conflict zone in Gaza of Israeli troops looting the properties of Palestinians who have fled their brutal aggression. Soldiers can be seen smiling to the camera and showing off watches, jewellery, cash, and even carpets and sports jerseys that they had stolen from Palestinian homes. Historical artefacts stolen from Gaza have even been put on display at the Knesset.

While similar acts of looting by Russian soldiers in Ukraine were well-documented and mocked, international media has hardly paid attention to the Israeli pillaging of Gaza. Some may find it hard to believe that the well-paid soldiers of a rich country would engage in such crimes, but to the people of Palestine, this is hardly surprising. The scenes in these videos are highly reminiscent of what Palestinians saw happen to their properties as they fled ethnic cleansing by Zionist forces in the 1948 Nakba.

As Israeli historian Adam Raz describes in his recent book, Looting of Arab Property in the War of Independence, Jewish fighters and civilians looted everything from jewellery, books, and embroidered gowns to food and livestock to furniture, kitchenware and even floor tiles. Once established, the state of Israel continued to steal on a greater scale from the Palestinians, taking their land and property. Palestinian natural resources, particularly water, have also been looted. Today, the war in Gaza is serving as a convenient cover for another theft on a grand scale; this time Israel is seeking to plunder the maritime offshore gas reserves that are the property of the state of Palestine.

In late October, the Israeli Ministry of Energy and

Infrastructure announced that it had awarded concessions for natural gas exploration to Israeli and foreign companies in zones that significantly overlap with the maritime borders of Gaza. Needless to say, Israel as an occupier has no right to award licences in areas that it does not hold sovereignty over under any circumstances. Palestine is a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and has declared its maritime boundaries in accordance with these principles.

Israel has not signed UNCLOS. It also does not recognise the state of Palestine and has recently doubled down on this position with a vote in the Knesset to "oppose a unilateral recognition of the Palestinian state" despite growing calls globally, including from the US, its main sponsor, for a two-state solution. The combination of these positions has given Israel the excuse for not recognising the maritime borders of Palestine and for expropriating the resources in these areas. These Israeli claims, of course, do not make its actions legal. One has to wonder why foreign companies, including Italian Eni, British BP and Dana Petroleum, a subsidiary of Korea National Oil Corporation, have decided to continue their participation in this deal, particularly amid the continuing Israeli campaign of what the International Court of Justice has identified as a plausible case of genocide. On February 8, four human rights organisations in Israel and Palestine - Adalah, Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights issued a joint news release regarding the awarded gas exploration licences in the occupied waters of Palestine.

They announced that they have sent a letter to the Israeli Ministry of

Energy and Infrastructure, demanding that the award and the related tender be cancelled. They also said they have sent legal notices to Eni, Dana Petroleum and Israeli Ratio Petroleum, asking them not to undertake any activities related to the licences. "You should be aware that the International Criminal Court currently has an active investigation open into international crimes committed in territory of the State of Palestine, and has jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute any individual(s) it finds responsible for committing war crimes, including pillage. Complicity in war crimes like pillage is also a serious criminal offence and corporate actors can be subject to individual criminal liability ... Complicity in violations of [international humanitarian law] can also expose companies like yours - and your managers and staff - to the risk of civil actions for damages," the notices warned. Apart from the illegality of the gas tender under international law, it is important to point out here the involvement of Eni, a European company.

Interestingly, the MoU omitted the territoriality clause that the EU is committed to include in order to protect Palestinian territories and waters from being exploited through illegal activity. Members of the European Parliament raised this question to the EU Commission a week after the signing of the MoU. The answer from the EU Commission dismissed the importance of the omission with a rather technical point - claiming that the MoU was of a non-binding nature and therefore "no territorial clause on the applicability is deemed necessary. Nevertheless ... the implementation of such Memorandum of Understanding will not apply in any form to the occupied

Palestinian territory, which entails that Israeli supplies of natural gas as per the implementation of the memorandum of understanding may not originate from resources appropriated from Palestinian territories occupied by Israel." In this context, there are two questions worth posing to the EU Commission: Did this omission encourage the violation of Palestinian rights by Israel and what will be the fate of Eni's involvement in the project? This development also comes at a critical time when EU countries have taken highly problematic stances on the war in Gaza, supporting the "right to self-defence" of an occupier against the occupied and sending weapons to the occupying forces.

Furthermore, EU states have suspended financial support for UNRWA, practically the only lifeline for people in Gaza who are experiencing famine. While the recent stance taken by the West against the violent, illegal settlers in the West Bank is a step in the right direction, failure to stem the blatant attempts by Israel to pillage Palestinian resources with the help of European companies will further entrench the growing cynicism in the Global South about the duplicity of the West when it comes to the application of the international law. The EU could right some of the wrongs it has committed by helping the Palestinians exploit their natural resources. Amid the rumblings on the post-conflict reconstruction of Gaza and who should foot the bill, it is important to consider the ample gas resources in Gazan waters as a significant financial resource that can be used to secure a prosperous future for the Palestinian people. The EU can play a key role in assisting the Palestinians in developing and benefiting from these resources, as is their sovereign right.

‘Birthright’ in a time of genocide

IN January, the Birthright Israel programme resumed operations following a brief suspension of activity. The hiatus was triggered by the October 7 Hamas attack and the ensuing Israeli-perpetrated genocide in the Gaza Strip, which has thus far killed well over 30,000 Palestinians.

Since 1999, Birthright has treated some 850,000 Jewish young adults from around the world to 10-day, all-expenses-paid trips to Israel, jointly funded by the Israeli government and private donors. Participants ride around on buses, see the sights, enjoy "hormonal encounters" with Israeli soldiers, and otherwise bond with stolen Palestinian land. Rather than being a coincidental byproduct of the whole experience, hormones in fact serve a calculated purpose in Birthright expeditions. Consider a 2013 Haaretz article on the frequency of romantic hookups and marriage resulting from Birthright trips, which quoted a 24-year-old Israeli soldier assigned to accompany one of the groups: "We come in uniform and they make a big deal out of us... [T]hese Jewish programmes are very well thought out. They really know what to do to get Americans emotional and excited."

And the more "emotional and excited" young American Jews get, to be sure, the better for the Zionist project, given the key role of the United States in abetting the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Of the more than 400 Birthright trippers who descended upon Israel in January 2024 - a drop in the bucket compared with the 23,000 individuals the programme had reportedly envisioned sending this year - the majority were from the United States. Obviously, Birthright Israel has always been heinous in its premise, endowing as it does anyone with one Jewish parent - and in some cases even converts to Judaism - with a "birthright" that is categorically denied to Palestinians, including those literally born on the land in question.

In light of the present genocide, however, the Birthright programme accrues even more horrify-

Belén Fernández

ingly sinister implications, as Israel denies Palestinians the very right to live - much less to be born in peace. With much of Gaza's medical infrastructure bombed to ruin and with hospitals continuously targeted, Palestinian mothers are now forced to give birth in tents and other improvised spaces. Having completed their gestation under relentless bombardment, these Palestinian newborns presumably enter the world already traumatised. Meanwhile, as Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, recently told the United Nations Security Council, the "psychological injuries" being inflicted on the Gaza Strip "have led children as young as five to tell us that they would prefer to die".

Genocidal panorama notwithstanding, a February article by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) proclaims that "Birthright trippers find visiting Israel during war is a unique and invigorating experience". The Birthright itinerary has been modified slightly for wartime, and now encompasses excursions to "Hostage Square" in Tel Aviv as well as Schneider Children's Medical Centre in the city of Petah Tikva, where, according to the JTA article, 23-year-old Alon Fishman of Rockland County, New York was moved by "seeing how much people cared and understanding that this is what Israel is about". Never mind that the mass slaughter and starvation of Palestinian children in Gaza is actually what Israel is currently "about". Anyway, the point of the Birthright programme has never been to convey reality but rather its exact opposite: a landscape free of any hints as to the fraudulent nature of the Jewish "birthright" narrative or the criminal behaviour of the state of Israel.

To that end, the resumption of Birthright tours not only constitutes a "powerful symbol of a potential return to normalcy for Israel", as The Times of Israel put it, but also helps to shift the focus away from genocide and onto other matters - such as an alleged surge in anti-Semitism on US university campuses. In a recent burst of anti-

Semitism-centric propaganda penned for The Jerusalem Post, Gidi Mark - the International CEO of Birthright Israel - cited a survey by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL) according to which, prior to October 7, 67 percent of Jewish college students in the US "felt physically safe on campus", while 66 percent "felt emotionally safe". After October 7, as per the survey results, the numbers dropped to 46 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

Try finding anyone in Gaza who feels physically or emotionally safe. Of course, "anti-Semitism" is a conveniently charged accusation that is often disingenuously deployed against, for example, folks merely opposed to Israel's genocidal policies. And, in Mark's view, it is also a good reason young Jews should go on Birthright - because "[r]esearch has shown for years that no other immersive, relatively short experience is as impactful as a group experience in Israel".

Mark concludes: "There is no better way to ensure Jewish students feel safer and more secure in their skin in hostile university environments than by visiting Israel". What he doesn't say is that the hormone-heavy Birthright curriculum is also a pretty good way to ensure continued support for Israeli military efforts to annihilate the Palestinians. Shortly after the onset of hostilities in October, journalist Alina Dizik took to the pages of Tablet Magazine to declare that "Birthright worked" - and to describe how her own Birthright trip nearly two decades earlier now enabled her to "feel connected" to the conflict in a way that would not have been possible if she had not "spent time on the bus".

In Dizik's words, she "suddenly realised what Birthright's founders knew all along: When a tragedy of this scale happens, the in-person connection to Israel is critical to preserving the country's existence". In the end, though, it is not Israel's existence that is at stake; instead, one people's usurped "birthright" has been weaponised into another people's death sentence. And that diabolical tradeoff should not be allowed to "work", at all.

Growth in China: The road ahead

CHINA'S economic development has been remarkable. Over the past 25 years, China's real GDP grew by more than 8 percent a year, living standards rose dramatically, and extreme poverty was eradicated. China is now the world's second-largest economy in US dollar terms. Developments in China, thus, have a big impact on the world. For example, last year China accounted for one-third of world growth.

China's success in achieving strong and sustainable growth is thus good for China and good for the global economy. This is especially true now, with the global economy having large scars from the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the recent International Monetary Fund report on China focused on securing strong and sustainable growth. In the near term, the main challenge is to secure the economic recovery. After growing 3.0 percent in 2022, the Chinese economy's growth rebounded to 5.2 percent in 2023. China, like the rest of the world, saw large output losses during the pandemic. By the end of 2023, real GDP was 4 percent below pre-pandemic forecasts. Unlike the rest of the world, however, China is also undergoing a huge adjustment in the property sector.

Rightsizing real estate is both welcome and necessary, with a key near-term challenge being to minimize the costs of adjustment. Coming into the pandemic, the real estate market was out of balance with supply exceeding underlying demand by a large amount. The real estate sector also accounted for a large share of the economy (20 percent of value added if related industries are included), and was a big source of local government revenue, the largest asset for most households, and, despite excess supply, expensive. IMF staff estimate that underlying demand is likely to fall over the next decade

Steven Barnett

by about 35-55 percent compared with the last decade. Starts and sales have already adjusted by about this much, but it will still take time to work through existing inventories and finish the adjustment.

Further policy actions would accelerate the real estate recovery. The authorities have taken welcome measures. This includes encouraging bank lending to complete unfinished housing, expanding eligibility for first-time homebuyer benefits, lowering down payments, and allowing refinancing of existing mortgages. More can be done. First, address stressed property developers by accelerating the exit of unviable developers and helping viable developers repair their balance sheets.

Second, solve the presale problem by reforming the model and providing more central government financing for housing completions. Third, ensure that prices can move enough to clear the market. And, fourth, expand access to housing, including through support for public and rental housing. Success in these areas would speed up and smooth the adjustment to a new equilibrium in real estate.

Macroeconomic policies can support the economy and help offset the drag from real estate. Fiscal policy can lift demand by rotating spending away from off-budget investment toward support to households, increasing aggregate demand. Meanwhile, monetary policy can also be more supportive. With inflation low and output below potential, more easing is warranted, preferably through further cuts in interest rates. The above referred to the near term, but it is just as important to achieve strong and sustained growth over the medium term. China, like much of the rest of the world, experienced a significant drop in total factor productivity following the global financial crisis - though China's decline was

sharper. Extrapolating these developments forward and accounting for demographics, our forecast is for China's growth to slow to 3.5 percent over the medium term, which is basically the average growth for countries at a similar income level. With comprehensive policy reforms, China could grow considerably faster. Our analysis shows that accelerated reforms to enhance the role of the market and boost total factor productivity could lift growth by 1 percentage point a year - translating to growth of 4.5 percent over the medium term. Pro-market reforms can give the market a more decisive role in the economy, including allowing greater enterprise entry and exit (improving business dynamism and fostering innovation) and reducing local protectionism.

Importantly, faster growth in China would also benefit other economies. Our research shows that a 1 percentage point increase in China's growth boosts GDP by 0.3 percentage point on average in other economies over the medium term. Lastly, and critically, it is necessary to secure growth that is environmentally sustainable. China has made welcome progress toward meeting its climate goals and is on track to peak its carbon emissions before 2030. It has the world's largest installed capacity of renewable energy and is set to over-achieve its Nationally Determined Contribution target of renewable capacity and raise non-fossil fuels' share in energy consumption by 2030. At the same time, China is still one of the largest emitters of CO2 and thus the speed of its decarbonization is crucial for addressing the global climate crisis. China's continued and growing leadership to address the global climate crisis is thus both welcome and vital. As with growth, China's success in greening the economy will be a win for China and a win for the world.

The China Daily

Britain is already too far down the road to serfdom to turn back now

HAD this Budget been delivered by a Labour Chancellor, the Tories would be crying blue murder. They would be railing against our dash down Hayek's Road to Serfdom, bemoaning the most egregious growth-sapping class warfare since Gordon Brown, and explaining why the tax cuts were in fact cancelled out by a stealth grab.

Yet this was a Tory Budget, in name if not philosophy. Britain's centre of political gravity has shifted Leftwards. Unlike in 1979, 1997 or even 2010, both main parties agree on almost everything when it comes to the economy. They offer no real choice, no clash of vision, no alternative to Britain's slow drift into social democratic irrelevance, no genuine solution to mending our broken public services. Hunt's most radical policy, so extreme that it had always been rejected previously, was stolen from Keir Starmer's Labour Party and will have severe consequences for growth and living standards. The abolition of non-dom status, the last big way in which an overtaxed, over-regulated and flattening Britain was able to attract foreign entrepreneurs, wasn't accompanied by any compensating measures to make our country more attractive.

It would have been great to have been able to retire the non-dom status because it was no longer needed - if, in a parallel universe, we had become so competitive after 14 years of libertarian policies that unfair special exemptions were no longer required - but doing it to

spare Rishi Sunak's blushes and to "outmanoeuvre" Labour (by entirely conceding the argument to the socialists) was an appalling case of putting party before country. It won't raise the billions the Tories now pretend it will, and is a milestone in the liquidation of London's Wimbledon-style entrepot economy.

The rest of the big picture wasn't great either. The Chancellor rightly said that low taxes are good for growth, but the overall tax burden will soon hit its highest level since 1948; GDP per capita will fall again this year; North Sea oil and gas will be hammered by an extension of the supposedly one-off "windfall" tax; immigration is rising even faster than predicted and the Government's great plan to cure collapsing productivity in the NHS and public sector is to spend a few billion more on AI, rather than usher in real structural reform. Even Hunt's combined 4p reduction to National Insurance Contributions (NICs) will be paid for largely by pushing many more people into the 20p, 40p and 45p income tax brackets, alongside other forms of fiscal drag. Hunt is to be congratulated for his principled move on NIC, but he's not a tax-cutting Chancellor in any true sense. He is rearranging a growing tax burden, lowering it on earnings from work between £12,570 and £50,270, which is good, while hammering higher earners, the sort of policy Labour traditionally follows. He is also hitting pensioners. He has done the same with corporation

Allister Heath

tax, increasing it overall while penalising service sector firms that don't invest much but rewarding industries that spend on machinery.

His defenders will insist he has no choice: even by keeping public spending growth at 1 per cent a year (and thus falling in per capita terms), he has no money left for net tax cuts in the absence of much faster growth. Generating much more GDP ought to be the answer, but this would require deregulation, drastically increasing housebuilding, dramatically reforming welfare and massive tax cuts on entrepreneurs and other wealth creators, none of which would be palatable to Sunak's Tory party.

But what is the path, the plan to do this? It would require cutting spending as a share of GDP below the 42.5 per cent implausibly predicted for 2028-9. How is this credible, given the demographic pressures, the refusal to move the NHS to an insurance model and the need to spend more on defence? The great problem today is that many voters will oppose the present cuts to NIC because they fear for our creaking infrastructure and failing NHS. The Tories still can't explain how they will fix potholes or ensure the trains run on time. Hunt is right to try to boost productivity growth in the public sector, but even if he succeeds there will be no room, within the current welfare state and with present economic non-growth policies, to slash employee national insurance by another 8 percentage points. The terrible truth is that

there is now almost no difference between the Sunak/Hunt managerialist approach to economics, and that of Rachel Reeves. The only remaining substantial difference between the two is Labour's dread-ful plan to slap VAT at 20 per cent on school fees, a disgusting policy.

Other than that, however, both camps subscribe to the neo-Brownite consensus that has gradually ruined the British economy since 1997 (seeking to extract as much cash as possible from the private sector to spend as much as possible on the state); both believe in endless tweaking and tinkering (squeezing landlords on the one hand, and trimming their capital gains tax on the other); both believe in net zero (though the Tories would get there more slowly); both believe in top-down solutions to growth (tax credits for filmmakers, or another green nudge), and both believe that it is in the gift of politicians or administrators to manage the NHS and the rest of the public sector as efficiently as the private sector. Hunt even claimed, absurdly, that "the NHS is rightly the reason most of us are proud to be British", which tells us everything we need to know about this supposedly conservative Government's political philosophy and sense of history. It's too late. Britain is a supertanker aiming straight for the rocks, and the Sunak government has failed to shift its trajectory. This latest Budget will neither fix the Tories' political problems nor cure any of the pathologies crippling Britain's economy and society.

The Telegraph

A new model for climate financing

Ranvir S. Nayar

PRACTICALLY nowhere in the world has escaped the effects of climate change and global warming. From the North Pole to Antarctica, Chile to China, every country has been on the receiving end of the immense damage caused by extreme weather events.

But of all regions, Asia-Pacific stands out in terms of the impact of changing weather and a warming world. According to many reports, it is the most vulnerable region in the world as far as the effects of climate change are concerned. Over the past 60 years, temperatures have been rising faster there than anywhere else. With extreme climate events becoming more frequent and intense, the region faces the risk of losing more than a third of its gross domestic product as a result of climate change.

Asia-Pacific is made up of more than 50 countries and accounts for about 30 percent of the world's land-mass. Almost 4.8 billion people live there, which is about 60 percent of the total global population. The rippling effects of climate change in the region are therefore felt around the world, not only because Asia-Pacific is the biggest region geographically but also because of the sheer number of people living there. In this sense, what happens in Asia-Pacific affects far more people than anything in any other part of the world.

Climate change threatens not only the long-term well-being of people in the region, but also the decades of progress made there in terms of tackling poverty, providing better nutrition and improving food security, as well as advancing overall human development. With little sign of the climate crisis easing, or even the prospect of an effective global agreement that could be successful in at least slowing global warming, Asia-

Pacific, like the rest of the world, is left with two options: adaptation and mitigation. Together, they could help cushion the impact of climate change and help to cope with the economic damage that is being inflicted on the region in terms of floods, forest fires, landslides and drought.

However, both adaptation and mitigation efforts require trillions of dollars of investment and, though the Asia-Pacific is certainly home to some of the richest countries in the world, including Japan, South Korea and Singapore, most of the people in the region are very poor. In terms of absolute numbers, it has the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. At the UN's COP28 climate change conference in Dubai last December, it was estimated that nearly \$6 trillion in climate financing will be needed by 2050. However, developed countries say the actual amount required will be much higher, because the effects of climate change are growing more intense, far-reaching and longer lasting, so the amount of money needed to cope with them has already gone far beyond the estimates. Some believe the true figure that will be needed by 2050 is closer to \$50 trillion.

Against this backdrop, a recent report by the World Economic Forum said that raising funds on such a scale will require money from all available sources, including philanthropy, and it called for the establishment of what it called a public-private-philanthropic partnership. Certainly, there is no disputing the fact that dealing with global issues such as climate change calls for a global action and funds to be raised from multiple sources, with contributions from all stakeholders, including corporations, governments, nongovernmental organizations, and

certainly the rich or well-to-do around the world.

A public-private-philanthropic partnership would therefore be a welcome move, provided it is set up in such a way to ensure that it adequately reflects the roles and responsibilities of each partner. So far, what we have seen is that almost all the sources of funds for climate finance have failed to deliver. The issue has been on the table since 2012, when developed countries agreed to pay \$100 billion every year to help the developing world prepare for climate change. Donor countries have fallen so far short of their promises that most observers believe it was more of a bluff than a genuine commitment. However, the need for money to address climate-related issues has not disappeared in the absence of the promised funding.

In the meantime, the situation has grown dramatically worse, the need for money to address it has risen sharply and, though several months have passed since COP28, there is still no clarity on how the financing should be organized, by whom, to what timescales and who will decide the disbursement of the funds. All of these questions are divisive issues and reaching a global consensus on any of them will be extremely difficult, unless the parties expected to pay up actually get on board and set the ball rolling by setting a strict, legally binding timetable for their contributions, so that an organization such as the UN can then decide where the money should go.

As far as the responsibility for funding the efforts to address climate change is concerned, it rests not only on the shoulders of the governments of wealthy countries, but equally on



Pakistan Stock Exchange's 100-index loses 53 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Thursday lost 53.53 points, a nominal negative change of 0.08 percent, closing at 65,603.09 points against 65,656.62 points the previous trading day.

A total of 354,153,110 shares valuing Rs14.435 billion were traded during the day as compared to 419,737,124 shares valuing Rs18.296 billion the last day.

Some 354 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 145 of them recorded gains and 187 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of

22 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak Elektron with 31,074,761 shares at Rs 23.24 per share, Telecaard Limited with 22,636,636 shares with 8.57 per share and PIAC(A) with 21,560,000 shares at Rs 15.60 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 400.00 per share price, closing at Rs 21,900.00, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with a Rs 111.12 rise in its per share price to Rs.9,000.00.

Nestle Pakistan Limited

witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 310.00 per share closing at Rs7,890.00, followed by Mehmood Textile Mills Limited with Rs 22.50 decline to close at Rs 378.50.

Rupee gains 07 paise against dollar

The Rupee on Thursday gained 07 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.28 against the previous day's closing of Rs 279.35.

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 and Rs 281.8,

respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 82 paise to close at Rs 304.22 against the last day's closing of Rs 303.40, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen gained 02 paise to close at Rs188, whereas an increase of 53 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 355.58 compared to the last closing of Rs 355.05.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 01 paise and 02 paise to close at Rs 76.04 and Rs 74.46 respectively.

Level playing field for all makers to encourage new investments

F.P. Report

KARACHI: By removing discriminatory gas pricing among fertilizer manufacturers, the government can facilitate new investments and promote efficiency to ensure sufficient urea availability for the farmers.

In a media workshop, Ali Rathore - Chief Financial Officer, Engro Fertilizers, briefed the participants about the importance of a robust indigenous fertilizer industry, its key challenges and opportunities, and recent steps taken by the Government to reform the fertilizer sector.

"The removal of subsidies for fertilizer manufacturers on SSGC and SNGPL network, which represents 60% of all fertilizer manufacturing capacity, is a step in the right direction. While gas prices for SSGC and SNGPL network have increased by around 200 percent, the manufacturers on Mari network (FFC and Fatima) are still receiving gas on the subsidized price of PKR

580/mmbtu. This discriminatory gas pricing in the industry has led to multiple prices in the market and will not help the government achieve its fiscal objectives," he highlighted.

The urea prices of FFBL, Engro Fertilizers and Fauji Fertilizer Company Ltd now stand at PKR 5,489 per bag, PKR 4,649 per bag and PKR 3,767 per bag, respectively. This price discrepancy has created an opportunity for the middlemen to profiteer by PKR 80 - 100 billion. A homogenous gas price will create a level-playing field for all fertilizer manufacturers in terms of input costs and help stabilize urea prices in the country.

Ali asserted that "Complete removal of subsidies and unification of gas prices for the entire industry can help the Government earn an additional PKR 80 - 100 billion, which can then be used for targeted initiatives that uplift the farmers." He also appreciated the incoming Government's resolve to

continue reforms in the fertilizer industry and provide direct subsidies to farmers.

The briefing underscored the need to introduce long-term policies for the domestic fertilizer industry so that it may support sustained economic growth and the envisaged goals of Green Initiative Pakistan. The domestic fertilizer industry is committed to ensure abundant and affordable urea supplies, and locally produced urea is still around 30 percent cheaper than imported urea. Further, the industry recently supported the Government by uplifting around 220,000 tons of urea at imported price. It is important to note that Engro has not increased the selling price of imported urea to facilitate the Government in providing support to farmers.

Ali pointed out that even though Pakistan has the fifth highest urea consumption in the world, it is not investing in capacity growth despite a rapid surge in population. To

encourage further capacity expansion by fertilizer manufacturers, there is a dire need to introduce a consistent and homogeneous policy for gas pricing for the industry.

According to him, "We must acknowledge that setting up a large scale, globally competitive fertilizer plant requires multibillion dollar investments. Removing anomalies in gas pricing will encourage manufacturers to undertake significant investments in plant modernization and expansion, while improving the efficiency to yield optimal utilization of allocated gas."

Meanwhile, Engro Fertilizers and other major fertilizer manufacturers are investing heavily in Gas Pressure Enhancement Facilities (PEF) project to sustain domestic urea production levels and safeguard the food security of Pakistan. The expected share of Engro Fertilizers' capital expenditure in this project is over USD 100 million.

PIMA joins hands with Cheezious for Every Order Counts initiative

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Cheezious, a proud Pakistani brand, has proudly partnered with PIMA in a collaborative effort to support families in Palestine. This strategic alliance adds substantial credibility to Cheezious' commitment to social impact, positioning the brand as a beacon of corporate responsibility. By aligning with key stakeholders, Cheezious invites a broader community to join hands in this noble cause.

This initiative is not just a partnership; it's a testament to Cheezious' dedication to making a meaningful impact beyond its culinary offerings.

The strategic collaboration with PIMA reflects Cheezious' earnest commitment to social responsibility and global welfare.

The campaign, rooted in a strategic communication approach, focuses on resonating with the audience by conveying a powerful core message: "Every Order Counts - Cheezious Donates Rs 50 to Families



in Palestine."

This initiative, are not merely placing orders for delicious meals; they are becoming integral contributors to a cause that transcends borders and brings hope to families in need.

"Head of Marketing at Cheezious Zohaib Hassan said, our partnership with PIMA is not just about making a difference; it's a

commitment to creating a positive impact on a global scale.

Through the 'Every Order Counts' campaign, we invite our customers to be active contributors to a cause that extends beyond delicious meals.

The collaboration with PIMA adds depth to our commitment to social impact and also the collective efforts that will make a

meaningful difference in the lives of families in Palestine."

This initiative is a testament of fostering positive change and making a lasting impact.

PIMA & Cheezious invites its customers, stakeholders, and the community to join hands in this noble cause, turning every order into a beacon of hope for families in Palestine.

CCP warns influencers, endorsers against deceptive marketing practices

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In light of recent trends and consumer behaviours, the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has issued a stern warning to the influencers, content creators, and advertisers regarding false and misleading endorsements that are being publicized by them while advertising different products or services across various platforms. Similarly, Consumers are encouraged to remain vigilant and report any instances of deceptive advertising to the Commission.

Influencer marketing has become an integral part of modern advertising strategies with social media platforms serving as key avenues for brands to reach their target audience. An influencer-driven market-

ing campaign is a promotional strategy that leverages the popularity, credibility, and reach of social media influencers to endorse or promote a brand, product, or service. Online endorsements by celebrities play an important role in helping consumers make their shopping decisions.

The endorsements are particularly helpful when consumers buy goods or services whose quality may be hard to assess before their utilization.

The information that endorsements provide may help consumers to make faster and more confident decisions. It has the potential to boost competition amongst businesses on their products' reliability or the quality of services they offer.

It can also make it easier for small businesses and

new entrants to enter a market or to expand.

However, with the proliferation of influencer-driven marketing campaigns, there has been a rise in deceptive marketing practices that pose serious risks to unwary consumers. The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has noticed that certain influencers and endorsers are making false and misleading endorsements to attract consumers.

It is, prima facie, a violation of Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010 being a deceptive marketing practice. The Commission has already issued comprehensive "Guidelines on Section 10: Deceptive Marketing Practices", wherein it has been clarified that false or misleading 'Endorsements/Testimonials' are prohibited.

An endorsement is false

or misleading if the endorser offering the testimonial has not disclosed his material connection with the product or service being endorsed. He is required to disclose whether he is a real user of the product or service or a paid performer or an employee of the company/brand or a recipient of a free product or service for offering the user testimonial or endorsement as an influencer; a celebrity or an opinion leader.

By working together with the stakeholders, the CCP can ensure free competition and protect the rights of consumers.

The CCP will take strict action against all those engaged in deceptive marketing practices under Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010. The Commission is fully committed to performing its duties optimally.



ISLAMABAD: MD & CEO PPL Imran Abbasy and Director General Frontier Works Organization Major General Abdul Sami signing MoU for EL 207 mining project situated in Eastern Chagai, Balochistan at Prime Minister's secretariat.

Gold rates up by Rs2,750

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of per tola 24 karat gold increased by Rs2,750 and was sold at Rs228,150 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs 225,400 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 2,358 to Rs195,602 from Rs 193,244 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs179,301 from Rs 177,140 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 \$2,174 as compared to the last day's \$2,148.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Six ships namely, Cap Andreas, MSC Spring-III, San Nicolas, Huang Shan-16, Cetus and Lusail, carrying Containers, Coal, Palm oil, Wheat, and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, HF Terminal, Liquid Terminal, Grain Terminal and Gasport Terminal respectively.

Meanwhile another edible oil carrier 'Ardmore Cherokee' also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on Tuesday.

A total of nine ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a Containers ship, Cap Andreas left the Port on today morning, while three more ships, MSC Spring-III, Blue Cecil and Torm Integrity are expected to sail on same day.

Cargo volume of 203,379 tonnes, comprising 153,058 tonnes imports cargo and 50,321 tonnes export cargo carried in 4,986 Containers (2,223 TEUs Imports and 2,763 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 07 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them, liquid carrier a Bitumen Kosei & another ship 'Seaspan Ganges' scheduled to load/offload Bitumen and Containers are expected to take berths at MW-2 and QICT respectively on Thursday.

Tokyo stocks end lower

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo shares trimmed early gains to end lower Thursday, as chip-linked shares lost momentum and investors were spooked by a stronger yen.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index dropped 1.23 percent, or 492.07 points, to 39,598.71, while the broader Topix index slid 0.44 percent, or 12.13 points, to 2,718.54.

The dollar fetched 148.60 yen, compared with 149.44 yen in New York.

The Tokyo market started trading higher following global rallies fuelled by hopes for long-awaited US Fed rate cuts.

Global shares staged a comeback as Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell said Wednesday that it would be "appropriate to begin dialling back policy restraint at some point this year", barring any unexpected events.

Strategic collaboration in mining sector:

PPL signs MoU with FWO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) has embarked on a significant milestone by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Frontier Works Organization (FWO) to foster strategic cooperation and collaboration for the EL 207 Project situated in Eastern Chagai, Balochistan.

This endeavor marks PPL's proactive diversification into the mining sector, aimed at expanding and fortifying its presence within Balochistan. The signing ceremony, held at the Prime Minister Secretariat on March 6, witnessed the participation of key stakeholders. Mr. Imran Abbasy, MD & CEO of PPL, and Major

General Abdul Sami, Director General of FWO, formally sealed the partnership by signing the MoU.

This collaborative effort between PPL and FWO is poised to revolutionize the mining landscape in Balochistan Province, fostering the exchange of technical expertise and paving the way for innovative exploration ventures.

Meezan Bank, PMN ink MoU for Islamic services

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Meezan Bank, Pakistan's leading Islamic Bank, has recently formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN) - the national association for retail players in the microfinance industry. Under this agreement, the Bank will provide financial and Shariah technical support to PMN member institutions for delivering Islamic finance to the under-privileged segments of the society.

The MoU was signed by Mr. Ahmed Ali Siddiqui - Group Head, Shariah Compliance at Meezan Bank, and Syed Mohsin Ahmed - CEO of PMN, at a

signing ceremony held at Avari Hotel, Lahore. Notable figures present at the event included Dr. Muhammad Imran Ashraf Usmani - Vice Chairman Shariah Board, Meezan Bank, Syed Tanveer Hussain - Group Executive Corporate, Commercial & Investment Banking Group, Meezan Bank, Murtaza Khokhar - Vice Chairman, PMN and Mr. Ali Basharat - Head of Operations, PMN along with their respective teams.

Expressing his thoughts on the collaboration, Dr. Muhammad Imran Ashraf Usmani said, "This collaboration will make a significant contribution towards expanding financial inclusion and facilitating access to finance as per the pre-

cepts of Shariah to the underserved sector of society, meeting their essential needs." He further emphasized the significance of leveraging technology to efficiently serve microfinance customers, outlining his vision to contribute to the sector's growth and wealth circulation within the economy.

Speaking at the occasion, Syed Mohsin Ahmed said, "The financial industry in Pakistan is at a crossroads as it transforms from conventional to Islamic finance. This partnership between Meezan Bank and PMN will be a catalyst in promoting Shariah-compliant financial services and will promote financial inclusion in the country."

FCCI chief shares issues with NIM delegation

FAISALABAD (APP): Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) President Dr Khurram Tariq shared the issues facing the textile and other industries currently, with a delegation comprising the 39th mid-career management course of the National Institute of Management (NIM), Lahore.

He told the visitors that the textile sector had always played a pivotal role in stabilising national economy, but now it was striving for its own survival due to un-conducive business environment.

He said the industrial sector was ready to bear the actual cost of electricity. The government might pay subsidised electricity to the low socioeconomic class, but it should not be recovered from the industrial

sector, he added.

Responding to a question, he said the authorities concerned had failed to decide even after 74 years that the country's industrial sector should focus on the value-added products or export raw material. Currently Pakistan had been converted into a net importing country despite a huge base of agricultural products, he regretted. "We have failed to reorganise the agriculture sector on modern scientific lines and we are forced to sell our surplus instead of consuming it for value addition through new technologies," he added.

Madam Adeela Younis, Additional Director Staff NIM Lahore, also addressed the meeting and underlined the importance of direct interaction of

under-training officers with the private sector.

Executive Member FCCI Muhammad Azhar Chaudhry said that the chamber had introduced some innovative steps to promote exports. "In this connection, foreign counselors and trade officers appointed abroad are invited to visit FCCI and we also arrange their B2B meetings with our members."

Later, Dr Khurram Tariq presented a shield to Madam Adeela Younis and Ms. Hina Khalid. Adeela Younis also gave away a memento of the NIM Lahore to Dr Khurram Tariq. She also recorded her impressions in the FCCI Visitor's Book.

Vice President FCCI Hajji Muhammad Aslam Bhalli was also present.

Stocks falter before ECB but gold shines after Powell

LONDONG (AFP/APP): Global stock markets struggled Thursday as investors awaited a eurozone monetary policy call, but gold hit a new record peak after Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell indicated US interest rates would start to come down this year.

The European Central Bank (ECB) is expected to freeze borrowing costs again as sticky eurozone inflation prevents a reduction, while investors are on tenterhooks on the eve of critical US non-farm payrolls data.

Gold spiked to a new all-time peak at \$2,161.48 per ounce to extend its record-breaking run and bitcoin

steadied after also scaling historic heights this week, but oil slid on profit-taking after strong gains Wednesday.

"Markets are taking a more cautious approach... with traders waiting patiently for the upcoming ECB and US jobs report uncertainty to clear," said Scope Markets analyst Joshua Mahony. "Despite a somewhat cautious approach, Powell's confidence that we will see monetary easing over the course of this year sparked a fresh move lower for the dollar."

"With the greenback coming under renewed pressure, we have seen commodities come back

into favour," Mahony added.

A weaker US currency makes dollar-denominated commodities cheaper for buyers using stronger unit, which tends to boost demand and support higher price levels. Focus is turning toward Friday's US jobs data following a positive set of figures showing the labour market remained healthy but appeared to be softening.

In closely watched testimony before lawmakers Wednesday, Powell flagged progress on bringing inflation towards the Fed's two percent goal and said borrowing costs could be lowered as a result.



In brief

Usman suspect bowling action

ISLAMABAD 07 (APP): Quetta Gladiators spinner Usman Tariq was reported for a suspect bowling action during the HBL PSL 9 fixture between Quetta Gladiators and Karachi Kings on 6 March at the Pindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi. The Quetta Gladiators team management has requested the PCB to allow Usman to undergo the bowling action test which would take place at a PCB-approved facility in due course.

YouTuber to face Tyson

NEW YORK (BBC): YouTuber Jake Paul will face former world champion Mike Tyson in a boxing match on 20 July. It is unclear if it will be an official fight or an exhibition bout, but it will be staged in Texas and broadcast live on streaming platform Netflix. Paul, 27, beat Ryan Bourland in his 10th professional fight last Saturday. Tyson, whose professional career ended in 2005, had his most recent exhibition bout in 2020 and will turn 58 three weeks before facing Paul.

Umpire Marais to retire after Test

LONDON (BBC): Veteran South African umpire Marais Erasmus will walk out to officiate his final international cricket match when New Zealand take on Australia in the second Test in Christchurch. He will finish his time on the ICC's elite panel of umpires, having stood as the on-field official in 82 men's Tests, 124 men's ODIs, 43 men's T20Is and 18 women's T20Is. He has also been the TV umpire in 131 international games. CSA will determine the matches he works from now on. Erasmus has had a storied career, officiating in four men's Cricket World Cups (2011, 2015, 2019, 2023), seven men's T20 World Cups (2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2021 and 2022) and three women's T20 World Cups (2010, 2012, 2014) aside from two men's Champions Trophy tournaments in 2013 and 2017. He was one of the two on-field umpires for the dramatic final of 2019 World Cup between England and New Zealand and, last year, he was the umpire who upheld an appeal that made Angelo Mathews the first batter to be timed out in international cricket.

PSB, ACP organize Eco Hike

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Sports Board in collaboration with Islamabad Alpine Association and Alpine Club of Pakistan organized an Eco Hike here at Trail on Thursday. Hundreds of participants featured in the hike that was aimed at creating awareness for keeping environment clean and promoting healthy activities among youth. The participants also cleaned the trek at the trial and received shields and certificates at the closing ceremony of the activity.

O'Neil set for new Wolves deal talks

MANCHESTER (BBC): Wolves are set to open talks on a new contract for manager Gary O'Neil at the end of the season. The 40-year-old was appointed only five days before Wolves' opening game at Manchester United after Julien Lopetegui left Molineux in frustration at the recruitment policy. Ex-Bournemouth boss O'Neil has taken Wolves into the top half of the table and the FA Cup quarter-finals.

Islamabad United beat Karachi Kings by five wickets

RAWALPINDI: Islamabad United beat Karachi Kings by five wickets in the 24th Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 9 match at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Thursday. Chasing a below-par 151-run victory target, United crossed the finishing line for the loss of five wickets with eight balls to spare. Skipper Shadab Khan was the highest scorer with 34 runs followed by Salman Ali Agha who made 33 runs. Haider Ali scored 26 runs, Alex Hales 18 and Faheem Ashraf 12 runs. Mir Hamza bagged three wickets while Zahid

Mehmood and Blessing Muzarabani took one wicket each. Faheem Ashraf was named player of the match for his all-round performance.

After being asked to bat first, Kings skipper Shan Masood (10) and Tim Seifert (26) provided a solid start with a 34-run partnership. But Kings lost the initiative by losing four wickets with the addition of just 15 runs. James Vince (29) and Kieron Pollard (39) steadied the ship by stitching a 58-run partnership for the fifth wicket. Steady death bowling helped restrict the Kings to 150/7 in the allotted 20

overs. Tymal Mills bagged three wickets and Faheem Ashraf two while Hunain Shah and Imad Wasim took one wicket each.

Islamabad United Playing XI: Alex Hales, Colin Munro, Salman Ali Agha, Shadab Khan (c), Azam Khan (wk), Haider Ali, Imad Wasim, Faheem Ashraf, Matthew Forde, Hunain Shah, Tymal Mills Karachi Kings Playing XI: Shan Masood (c), Tim Seifert (wk), James Vince, Shoaib Malik, Kieron Pollard, Irfan Khan Niazi, Mohammad Nawaz, Hassan Ali, Zahid Mehmood, Mir Hamza, Blessing Muzarabani

The Queen's Club set to host pre-Wimbledon women's event for first time since 1973

LONDON (BBC): The Queen's Club is poised to stage a pre-Wimbledon tournament for women for the first time since 1973. If plans are approved, a WTA tournament will be held the week after the French Open in June, on grass courts which will be used by men the following week. Although no final decision has been made, the LTA and The All England Club are keen to bring a WTA event back to London after more than half a century.

The WTA will need to sanction the new tournament, which could start in 2025.

It is expected to replace Eastbourne as the sole WTA 500 event staged in the UK

in the run up to Wimbledon.

Eastbourne will remain in its traditional place, in the week before Wimbledon, but is likely to be downgraded to WTA 250 status. This means fewer ranking points will be awarded, and prize money could potentially fall.

The idea has stemmed from a year-long review of the grass court season, which has also been looking at new ways of maximising the impact of those summer weeks. If all parties can be persuaded, the new schedule should appear in the 2025 WTA calendar, which is expected to be published in April.

Aqeel earns victory in National Ranking Tennis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Top seed Aqeel Khan defeated Hamza Roman in men's official of 4th Chairman POF Board, National Ranking Tennis Tournament at POF Tennis Complex on Thursday.

On the fourth day of the tournament, in Men's Single Aqeel beat Hamza Roman with 6-0, 6-1.

Shoaib beat Barkat Ullah

with 6-3, 6-2. Yousaf Khalil beat Muzammil Murtaza with 6-2, 6-1 and Abid beat Abdullah Adnan with 6-1, 6-1.

In Boys under 18, Faizan defeated Ehsan Bari with 4-1, 4-1. Hamza Roman beat Salar with 6-4, 7-5.

In the girls Under 18, Soha Ali beat Sheeza Sajid with 0-6, 6-2, 6-4. Lalarukh Sajid defeated

Mahrukh Sajid with 6-4, 7-6(4).

The tournament was being organized under the auspices of POF Sports Control Board and Pakistan Tennis Federation.

Top-ranking male and female players are participating in contests during the tournament. The semifinals and finals would be played on March 8 and 9.

Yadav takes five as England collapse to 194-8 against India

D H A R A M S A L A (AFP/APP): India spinner Kuldeep Yadav took five wickets including Zak Crawley for 79 to leave England 194-8 at tea, in the fifth and final Test on Thursday.

The tourists collapsed from 175-3 after electing to bat in their bid for a consolation win at the picturesque Dharamsala stadium, overlooked by snow-capped Himalayan mountains.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Ben Foakes, on eight, and Shoaib Bashir, on five, were batting at the break after England lost five wickets for eight runs in seven overs. Yadav stood out with his left-arm wrist spin as he went past 50 Test wickets.

Crawley, who raised his fourth half-century of the series in the first session,

survived a few reprieves -- before being bowled by Yadav on a delivery that turned in sharply to hit the stumps. Jonny Bairstow joined Joe Root at the crease in his landmark 100th Test and looked solid after he smashed Yadav for two sixes.

Bairstow went past 6,000 Test runs before Yadav got him caught behind off a googly, which took the edge into the wicketkeeper's gloves, upheld on after a wasted England review.

Ravindra Jadeja struck four balls later in the next over to trap Root lbw for 26 and the former captain burned another review.

England's last review was lost after skipper Ben Stokes was given out lbw off Yadav, with the confirmation that the ball would hit leg stump giving him his

fifth wicket.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin sent back Tom Hartley and then had Mark Wood caught two balls later.

In the first session the openers had taken time to settle in, but Crawley soon found his groove, hitting 11 fours and a six.

He put on 64 runs with Ben Duckett, who made 27.

Yadav struck in his first over as Duckett's slog got a leading edge, with Shubman Gill running backwards to take a diving catch.

The same bowler then had Ollie Pope stumped for 11 on the stroke of lunch.

India, led by Rohit Sharma, lost the opening Test but hit back to take an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the five-match series.



RAWALPINDI: Karachi Kings batter, Kieron Pollard plays shot during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 cricket match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Noor Ali Zadran retires from int'l cricket

KABUL (CRICINFO): Veteran Afghanistan batter Noor Ali Zadran has announced his retirement from international cricket.

He ends his career after two Tests, 51 ODIs and 23 T20Is, having first represented his country back in 2009. Noor Ali's final appearance for Afghanistan was the one-off Test against Ireland earlier this month, which ended in a defeat for his team. Noor Ali scored 1216 runs at an average of 24.81 in ODIs, and 597 runs at 27.13 in T20Is. Both his Tests came in a one-month span - he played Sri Lanka in Colombo in early February before the game against Ireland in Abu Dhabi later in the month; he scored 117 runs across four innings.

Top-order batter @NoorAliZadran decided to call time on his international cricket. He has represented #AfghanAtalan in 2 Tests, 51 ODIs and 23 T20Is and has scored 1930 runs with 11 fifties and a hundred to his name.#AFGVIRE pic.twitter.com/8UGGNjvBM0

He was recalled into the Afghanistan side for the T20Is at the Asian Games in October 2023, after having last turned out for them in the 2019 ODI World Cup. At the Asian Games, he hit 51 and 39 against Sri Lanka and Pakistan respectively, as Afghanistan beat both teams on their way to the final against India - it ended in a no-result because of rain, and India were awarded the gold medal for being the higher-ranked team.

Noor Ali was a part of the side which played Afghanistan's first official ODI in April 2009, against Scotland in Benoni. On that occasion, Noor Ali, opening the batting, scored a 28-ball 45 in an 89-run win for his team. Noor's first T20I, in February 2010, was Afghanistan's second game in the format.

One of his career highlights was hitting a half-century against India at the T20 World Cup in 2010, which was Afghanistan's first World Cup appearance. He was also part of the side that defeated Zimbabwe in the first round of the T20 World Cup in 2016.

‘Sad’ Nadal abandons latest comeback with Indian Wells withdrawal

INDIAN WELLS

(AFP/APP): Rafael Nadal abandoned his planned ATP Tour comeback at the Indian Wells Masters on Wednesday, saying he was not ready for the demands of tournament tennis on the eve of his opening match in California.

The Spanish icon's bombshell decision came four days after the 37-year-old lost a Las Vegas exhibition to compatriot and world number two Carlos Alcaraz.

Nadal missed almost all of the 2023 season with abdominal and other injuries and has played only the Brisbane International this season, where he suffered a flare-

up of a hip injury.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion had been due to open at Indian Wells on Thursday against Canada's former Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic.

"It is with great sadness that I have to withdraw from this amazing tournament at Indian Wells," Nadal said in a statement. "I have been working hard ... but I don't find myself ready to play at the highest level at such an important event."

"It is not an easy decision, it's a tough one as a matter of fact but I can't lie to myself and lie to the thousands of fans."

"I will miss you all and I am sure the tournament

will be a great success."

Indian Wells tournament director Tommy Haas expressed disappointment at Nadal's withdrawal.

"We wish him continued healing and hope he can be back in action again soon," Haas said. "He is one of the all-time fan favorites here, and we hope to see him back in Indian Wells again in the future."

On Sunday, Nadal had given an encouraging performance in his Las Vegas clash with Alcaraz.

After suffering a muscle tear in Brisbane in January, Nadal withdrew from the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the season.

Week-long annual sports gala concludes at RWU

RAWALPINDI (APP): A vibrant closing ceremony here on Thursday marked the conclusion of week-long annual sports gala at Rawalpindi Women University.

The Sports Gala also highlighted the skills of the students in aerobics and martial arts, adding an extra dimension to the celebration. During the event, the Vice Chancellor, RWU, Prof. Dr. Anila Kamal emphasized the significance of sports not only as an integral part of education and training but also

for maintaining physical and mental well-being.

She expressed pride in providing platforms for female students to showcase their skills and talents.

She also commended Assistant Director Sports, Sadaf Parveen, for successfully organizing the event and lauded the enthusiastic participation of both students and staff. Prizes were awarded to the winners and runner-ups among the students, faculty, and administration who excelled in various competitions.

PAF, Army win matches in National Kabaddi C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Air Force and Pakistan Army earned victories in the National Kabaddi Championship at Jinnah Stadium of Pakistan Sports Complex on Thursday.

In the first match, Pakistan Army defeated Higher Education Commission by 50-32.

In the second match,

Pakistan Air Force beat Pakistan Wapda 42-40 after a tough competition.

The final match of the championship would be played between Wapda and Pakistan Air Force, while the teams of Pakistan Army and Higher Education Commission will compete for the third place.

Four teams of Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Army, Wapda and Higher Education Commission participated in the championship.

Secretary General of Pakistan Kabaddi Federation, Rana Muhammad Sarwar, and a large number of spectators were also present on this occasion.

Australia men's tour of Ireland could be postponed due to financial, venue pressures

LONDON (Cricinfo): Ireland are contemplating postponing their first ever men's bilateral series against Australia due to financial and logistical pressures.

Under the Future Tours Programme, Australia are scheduled to tour Ireland for three ODIs and a one-off T20I in August and September before journeying to England for further white-ball series. But the likely strains of a hectic home summer ahead for Ireland has forced a reconsideration of the Australia fixtures and whether they can feasibly go ahead. Australia have previously played one-off ODIs in Ireland around tours to England.

Pakistan and South Africa are set to tour for white-ball series, while Ireland will also host a T20 tri-series with the Netherlands and Scotland. Ireland, who just recently won their first ever Test match against Afghanistan, are set to play Zimbabwe in a one-off Test and white-ball cricket. Ireland have not hosted a Test match since their debut against Pakistan in 2018.

England, Sri Lanka and the

Netherlands are also earmarked to tour Ireland in women's cricket. Ireland's home schedule is expected to be announced within a fortnight.

"What we had in the FTP as a whole... it's a real challenge to deliver all of it. We've got almost too much cricket for the amount of venues that we've got," Cricket Ireland high performance director Richard Holdsworth told ESPNcricinfo.

"Costs of putting on games in Ireland have gone up considerably since Covid. Hotel prices, putting up temporary infrastructure for grounds have gone up astronomically."

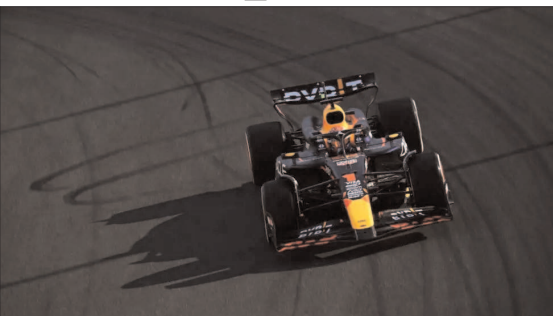
Holdsworth said the Australia white-ball series would not be shifted to England, where Ireland have previously hosted matches in Chelmsford and Bristol. After this year, Australia are not set to tour the UK until the 2027 Ashes.

"England have a really heavy schedule around that time, and we certainly wouldn't be considering playing the likes of Australia at a very small county ground," he said. "We're still

looking at all options in terms of whether or not we can host [Australia] this summer or whether we move [them] into a different part of the FTP," Holdsworth said delivering the entire international schedule would have been easier if Ireland had access to its full allocation of ICC funds from the new distribution model.

Some of the funds allocated to members in the distribution model will go into a retained surplus fund, which will be invested and distributed back to members at a later time. Around US\$3 million of their \$18 million a year allocation is earmarked for the surplus fund. "It has meant that our budget is not as great as we thought it would be," Holdsworth said. "If we had more revenues coming in this year, there's no question that we could have been able to deliver more."

Holdsworth said Ireland, along with Afghanistan and Zimbabwe, may be able to reduce the withholding of funding by a small percentage with discussions over the issue set for next week's ICC meetings in Dubai.



calendar after Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps.

The session was held in daylight, while qualifying and the race are after dark, a day earlier than usual on Friday and Saturday to ensure the race weekend is over before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

And the session took place under the shadow of the latest development in

the ongoing saga over allegations involving Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. Red Bull have suspended the employee who made the initial complaint against Horner, who has already denied the allegations. Following an internal inquiry, Red Bull's board dismissed the complaint against their F1 team principal and chief executive officer.



In brief

Crackdown against alms-seekers in ICT

ISLAMABAD (APP): Assistant Commissioners City, Farhan Ahmad led by teams of district administration on Thursday executed a targeted operation against professional beggars on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner and arrested 11 beggars from different areas of the city. The Assistant Commissioner City took swift action, nabbing 11 professional beggars from various areas. These individuals were promptly handed over to the police, while minor children found begging were safely relocated to the Edhi Center, said the ICT spokesman.

Dr Abdullah Tabassum. According to the details, under the supervision of Assistant Commissioners, the operation against beggars persists daily. The crackdown aims to curb the menace of organized begging in the capital, ensuring public spaces remain free from such activities. This concerted effort underscores the administration's commitment to maintaining law and order, as well as safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable individuals, particularly children, who are often exploited in this illicit trade.

Neighbour held for robbery

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawat police here on Thursday managed to net a dacoit allegedly involved in a dacoity and recovered a car, 11 tola gold ornaments, a costly watch and weapon used in the robbery. According to a police spokesman, a dacoity case was registered against unknown persons in Rawat police station. Police after initial inquiry, investigated the neighbour namely Saad Abrar, who revealed that he along with his accomplices were involved in the robbery. A car, 11 tola gold ornaments, a costly watch and weapons used in the dacoity were recovered from the arrested accused. The SHO Rawat said that the arrested accused have been shifted to jail for identification parade. Superintendent of Police, Saddar, Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar appreciated police performance and said that the lawbreakers could not escape from the grip of the law.

Seven drug peddlers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other lawbreakers here on Thursday arrested seven accused besides recovering charras, liquor, weapons and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Taxila police held Shehbaz for having 1200 grams charras. New Town police in their operation managed to net Abdul Hameed for having 600 grams charras and Saddam for carrying 140 grams charras. Jatli police rounded up Afaq with a liquor bottle while Dhamial police netted an accused namely Akhtar and recovered a liquor bottle. Chakri police conducted a raid and arrested Gulbuz for possessing a Kalashnikov. Gujar Khan police also netted an accused namely Tasawar with a 30 bore pistol. Separate cases have been registered against all accused while further investigations are underway. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi had directed the police officers to accelerate ongoing operations against drug peddlers, bootleggers and other lawbreakers, he added.



RAWALPINDI: Workers off-loading Prime Minister Ramadan Relief Package Flour Bags at a Utility Store on Eid Gah Road.

‘Unwavering commitment’ of Pakistani women commendable

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment at Workplace Fauzia Waqar on Thursday paying rich tribute to “unwavering commitment” of Pakistani women has expressed her firm believe that their success is integral to the progress of our nation. Interacting with a private news channel on the eve of International Women’s Day to be observed tomorrow (Friday), she said that we were proud of our talented and passionate Pakistani women and we will continue to provide a safest environment to women in society.

Fauzia Waqar said the government was ensuring

equal participation of women in all policy matters like human rights, climate change, social protection, education, health and social security.

She also reaffirmed the national and international commitments for the protection of women’s rights and ending violence against them.

The Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment at Workplace further stated, “We are immensely proud of our Pakistani women, who have consistently demonstrated their dedication, leadership and commitment to shaping a brighter future for our society.”

“We stand united in our efforts to empowering women and promote collaboration, as we believe that their success is integral to the progress of our nation,” she added.

Fauzia Waqar said, “Women Day serves as an opportunity to reflect on the contributions of talented women to the country’s development.”

Talking about social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women across the globe, including Pakistan, she said one must appreciate Pakistani women who continue to make a mark in various fields despite facing challenges.

‘Writers, painters two gifts of nature having best means of expressions’

RAWALPINDI (INP): Assistant Commissioner Coordination Rawalpindi Shabana Nazir has said that the writers and painters are two such gifts of nature who have the best means of expression.

She stated this while speaking as chief guest of the divisional level competitions of first Punjab Painting Competition 2024 held here at Arts Council in line with directions of Director General Punjab Arts Council Syed Bilal Haider. The Winners of district level painting competitions of Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Murree and Rawalpindi participated in the divisional competition.

Addressing the participants, Shabana Nazir said that the writer expresses by writing and he/she writes with his blood and emotions. But on the other hand, the painter has another means of expressing nature through colors. The painter reflects nature, emotions, reality of society with the help of different colors. She said that the painter was a personality that brings people closeness and becomes a source of

expression of nature. She also congratulated the position holder children.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Director Muhammad Shakoor said that the passion for creation is in human nature from eternity, due to which all these creations take place. Pakistani painters are full of qualities of confidence, conviction and awareness in their work, he added.

He said, “Our youth is transferring the themes of his surroundings to the canvas. This art is the medium of expression of our attitudes. The aim of the painting competition is to foster an atmosphere of creative growth among the youth. The platform of Punjab Arts Council is a means to expose the artists and the audience to the world of art.” Ahmed Habib, Saima Amir, Zarar Haider Babri, performed the duties of judges in the competition. Sara Hafeez, Abdul Hadi and Aymen Azmat Butt won the first, second and third position respectively in Rawalpindi division competitions.

Fauzia Waqar pays tribute to ‘unwavering commitment’ of Pakistani women

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Ombudsman for Protection against Harassment at Workplace Fauzia Waqar Thursday paid tribute to “unwavering commitment” of Pakistani women and expressed her firm believe that their success is integral to the progress of our nation.

On the eve of International Women’s day which is to be observed (Friday) tomorrow she while speaking to a private news channel said that we are proud of our talented and passionate Pakistani women and we will continue to provide a safest envi-

ronment to women in society. She said the government was ensuring equal participation of women in all policy matters like human rights, climate change, social protection, education, health and social security.

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united in our efforts to empowering women and promote collaboration, as we believe that their success is integral to the progress of our nation,” she added.

“Women day serves as an opportunity to reflect on the contributions of talented women to the country’s development”, she mentioned. Talking about social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women across the globe, including Pakistan, she said one must appreciate Pakistani women who continue to make a mark in various fields despite facing challenges.

AIOU organizes seminar on Women’s day

ISLAMABAD (APP): A seminar was organized here on Thursday at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) on account of International Women’s Day.

Social worker, gender expert and renowned writer Dr Fauzia Saeed was the keynote speaker and chief guest.

In-charge, Department of Gender and Women Studies, Dr. Atifa Nasir delivered the welcome speech and informed the participants about the history, aims and objectives of celebrating International Women’s Day.

Dr. Fauzia Saeed highlighted the various chapters from her book “Tapestry - Strands of Women’s Struggles Woven into the History of Pakistan” in the seminar. She said that the role of women in the history of Pakistan, efforts of freedom struggle and compilation of immortal stories in book form would be a torch for the new generation. Dr. Fauzia Saeed added that from 1940 to 2016, women associated with prominent political and social circles were included in the book to acknowledge their services. She added that this book contained enough material for researchers which would prove useful for them. Many faculty members, principal officers and students participated in the event.

Police bust dacoits gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a dacoits gang by arresting three of its active members allegedly involved in dacoities and other crimes and seized a stolen mehran car, three mobile phones, cash Rs 30,000, weapons, and other valuables from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Cantt police managed to bust a dacoits gang and arrested its three members namely Muhammad Raheem, Ijaz, and Abdullah.

He informed that police recovered a stolen car, three mobile phones, cash Rs 30,000, weapons and other items from their possession.

The spokesman said that the arrested accused were being shifted to jail for identification parade, adding, police were trying to arrest other members of the gangs.

Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nisar Nawaz directed police teams to accelerate operations against gangs and other lawbreakers, he added.

Outgoing Senators urge all political parties to work together for country’s development

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senators who are going to retire in their farewell speeches urged all political parties for adopting unanimous strategy for the socio-economic development and restoring true democracy in the country considering it vital for the peace and prosperity of future generations. Senator Molvi Faiz Muhammad (JUI-F) stressed to focus on foreign policy, lamenting the Islamic Countries’ over their silence on Kashmir and Palestine issues.

He also called for bringing true democracy in the country as per Islamic Laws and Values. Meanwhile, he also requested the newly established government to pay attention on the issues of the people of Balochistan and ask to take step to address their issues. Senator Mushtaq Ahmad (JI) in his farewell speech asked the Upper House to work for giving rights to provinces as per constitution. He lauded the role of 18th amendment for the development of provinces. He urged all the political parties to bring internal democracy, and promote leadership on merit bases. He also stressed the political parties to work for the development and launch projects for the development of the country.

Senator Mushtaq also called for a dialogue between all political parties to bring country out of current crises.

Senator Mushtaq also asked the incumbent government to take necessary measures to protect the natural beauty of Margalla hills for next generations.

Senator Shaheen Khalid Butt in his speech highlighted the issue of overseas Pakistanis and urged the government to resolve them as they are major asset of Pakistan. He said that PML-N leader Shabbaz Sharif in 2013 as a Chief Minister Punjab established an institution which resolved around 80,000 complaints of overseas in five years. He urged all provincial governments to establish such institutions in their provinces to facilitate the overseas Pakistanis. Senator Sana Jamali lauded the support of Shabbaz Sharif,

Bilawal Bhutto and Pakistan Army especially Shaheed General Sarfraz for uplifting the province of Balochistan.

She said that the women of Balochistan were enjoying the equal rights to other provinces, adding, “I got a chance to speak in Upper House of Pakistan and United Nation”. Sana Jamali said that all senior senators in the Senate provided full support to her during last five years. She also commended the support of foreign embassies for providing relief to Balochistan during flood.

She urged all political parties to respect the national institutions, and fully support them for the development of country.

Senator Seemee Ezdi said that being a member of Climate Change Committee, she together with other members work for the water reservation, pollution control, and other necessary steps.

Senator Bahramand Tangi bid farewell speech with heavy heart: Senator Bahramand Tangi on Thursday in his farewell speech said that he will cast his vote in favor of Asif Ali Zardari on March 9 and part his ways from Pakistan Peoples Party.

In his emotional speech, senator Tangi blamed Senator Sherry Rehman and Nayyar Ali Bukhari for hatching conspiracy against him and creating differences between him and party leadership.

He said that every senator should be given freedom for work for the strengthening of democratic and parliamentary system. “I am satisfied with my six years tenure as senator” said Tangi adding that after March 9, he will start a fresh political journey but will always respect the leadership of Pakistan Peoples Party who honored his 44 years political struggle and nominated him for senator ship. Senator Tangi appreciated Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjani and Deputy Chairman Senate Mirza Khan Afridi for conducting the house business in smooth ways.

Preservation & development work on historical Mai Qamro Mosque underway

ISLAMABAD (APP): Preservation and development work on historical Mai Qamro Mosque and Muqarab Khan Tomb are in full swing at ‘Bagh Jogian’ in the vicinity of Islamabad. Senior official of Department of Archaeology and Museum (DOAM) told APP that the historical heritage sites would be upgraded and revamped, giving a fresh look. The Mosque is believed to have been built by Mai Qamro, Hathi Khan Ghakkar’s wife, a Ghakkar dynasty scion in which

women occupied a prestigious and influential position. According to some architects, this Mosque was constructed in the early 16th century, a great specimen of Ghakkar architecture. It was built on a rectangular plan and crowned with three squat domes.

The southern dome of the mosque has caved in but the two others are in fairly good condition.

The central entrance is flanked by two recessed arches which lend an amazing beauty to the façade of the structure.

Above the arched entrance, one finds a beautiful cut-brick ornamentation. Such embellishments cannot be found elsewhere in Potohar.

Dressed stone has been used to construct the mosque. Formerly, it was plastered, traces of which are still visible on the façade of the mosque. Parts of the boundary wall of the mosque have survived the ravages of time. The northern boundary is still standing. The remains of the southern and eastern walls are also visible.

PAC organized divisional level painting competitions

RAWALPINDI (APP): Divisional level competitions of first “Punjab Painting Competition”, 2024 were held at the Punjab Arts Council(PAC)Rawalpindi here on Thursday.

The winners of district level painting competitions of Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Murree and Rawalpindi participated in the divisional competition.

Assistant Commissioner Coordination Rawalpindi Shabana Nazir was the chief guest of the prize distribution. Addressing the participants, Shabana Nazir said that writers and painters were the two gifts

of nature that were the best means of expression. The writer expresses by writing and pens with his blood and emotions while on the other hand, the painter expresses nature through colors.

“The painter reflects nature, emotions, and the reality of society with the help of different colors.”

Later, she also congratulated the children who got the position. Deputy Director Muhammad Shakoor on the occasion said that the passion for creation was in human nature from eternity due to which all these creations take place.

“Pakistani painters have the qualities of confidence,

conviction and awareness in their work,” adding “Our young man is transferring the themes of his surroundings to the canvas.”

The aim of the painting competition was to foster an atmosphere of creative growth among the youth.

Shakoor added that the PAC’s platform was a means to expose the artists and the audience to the world of art. Ahmed Habib, Saima Amir, Zarar Haider Babri, performed the duties of judges in the competition. Sara Hafeez, Abdul Hadi and Aymen Azmat Butt won the first, second and third position respectively in Rawalpindi division competitions.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers working on expansion of Chak Shahzad Road in the Federal Capital.

Excise staff sets up mobile van at Trail 3 for vehicle services

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory’s (ICT) Excise Department is offering convenient access to essential administrative tasks for vehicle owners through its mobile van which is stationed at Trail 3 on Thursday.

The excise staff will be on-site, offering a hassle-free experience for vehicle owners seeking registration, transfers, and token tax processing, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said.

He said this unprecedented initiative not only caters to vehicular paperwork but also introduces the ICT Doorstep Service. The citizens are encouraged to avail the opportunity to obtain the Domicile Certificate, Birth Certificate, Power of Attorney, International Driving Permit, Fuel Permit (Domestic/Commercial), or

Motor Vehicle Registration, all at one convenient location, he added.

He further emphasized that the Facilitation Center’s Doorstep ICT Vehicle will be present, providing a seamless and efficient solution for various administrative needs.

Whether a vehicle owner looking to sort out your paperwork or in need of essential documents, this event promises efficiency with a touch of convenience to the masses, he added. By bringing these services directly to the community at Trail 3 parking, residents can save time and effort in completing necessary bureaucratic procedures. This initiative underscores the government’s commitment to enhancing accessibility and efficiency in public service delivery.

Work on dam gets underway

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Water and Energy said on Thursday that work to install hydroelectric equipment at the Shah Wa Aros Dam has begun. Work started officially during a ceremony on Thursday. The project once complete will produce 1.2 megawatts of electricity and irrigate about 2,700 hectares of agricultural land. The dam has the capacity to hold 30 million cubic meters of water and the capacity to supply about 5 million cubic meters of potable water per year.

700m collected in revenue

HERAT (BNA): Traffic officials in Herat have reported that they have collected over 700 million Afghanis in revenue since the beginning of this solar year. Ghazi Zabihullah Akbari, the traffic chief of the province, informed the Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) that there have been 2,100 traffic accidents in the province this year, resulting in 136 fatalities and 700 injuries. Akbari noted that traffic accidents in the province have increased by 20 percent compared to the previous year.

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

UN envoy lauds IE crackdown on drugs, Daesh



KABUL (Pajhwok): The UN's top diplomat in Afghanistan has reiterated her call for the caretaker government to reverse the restrictions imposed on women and girls. The longer the curbs remained in place, the more damage they would result

in, warned Roza Otunbayeva, special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG). Briefing the UN Security Council on Wednesday, she slammed recent arrests of Afghan women for alleged Islamic dress code violations.

"The denial of women's and girls' access to education and work and their removal from many aspects of public life has caused immense harm to mental and physical health, and livelihoods," she commented.

Otunbayeva recalled the second meeting of national and regional special envoys for Afghanistan, held in Doha on February 18 and 19.

Although the interim government stayed away from the meeting, it welcomed the secretary-general's statement on the need for deeper consultations, the UN envoy said.

In a statement from the UN, Otunbayeva voiced concerns over "numerous negative trends" witnessed recently in Afghanistan.

She claimed UNAMA's monitoring and advocacy, including on human rights, had highlighted the denial of the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of the population. The UNAMA chief criticised public displays of violence, including corporal and capital punishment, a lack of inclusive governance and the marginalisation of minorities.

"It is true that day-to-day security has improved for millions of people since the Taliban takeover, but this has come at an enormous cost," she observed. Afghanistan remains a persistent challenge for the global fraternity, according to the diplomat, who referred to instability, terrorism and opium production in Afghanistan.

Otunbayeva acknowledged the current state of relative stability and commended efforts by the current government in cracking down on opium cultivation and battling Daesh. "But if the other issues I have mentioned are not addressed, these achievements will not be enough to assure long-term sustainability," she cautioned.

Following the political change in October 2021, the UN envoy said. Donors have provided nearly 8 billion dollars in funding for humanitarian needs and basic human services, ensuring vital assistance to 32 million Afghans so that they have sufficient food and water, adequate shelter, and income opportunities.

Donors have also responded to specific emergencies such as the earthquakes in Paktika in 2022, and in Herat in 2023 which directly impacted hundreds of thousands of people. More than 500,000 Afghans repatriated from Pakistan were helped to restart their lives, with the international community supporting an effective response strategy put in place by the de facto authorities.

The international community has enabled the continuation of most primary medical care. Since May 2022 collective donor support through the World Bank has enabled 7.5 million people to receive health and nutrition services. Regular UN cash shipments to support these vital humanitarian operations have continued. These shipments have, as a secondary effect, injected liquidity to the local economy that has in large part allowed the private sector to continue to function and averted a fiscal crisis. Support for printing and shipping banknotes has also helped with liquidity and supported the Afghani currency.

The Security Council adopted in December 2021 Resolution 2615 – the 'humanitarian exception' – in which it decided that 'humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan' are not a violation of the financial sanctions set out in the 1988 sanctions regime. This decision has enabled everything that I have described so far to take place. A number of countries have retained their diplomatic presences in Kabul, engaging regularly with the de facto authorities especially on economic issues, enhancing trade and investment.

The World Bank board on the 15 February approved an adjusted approach to Afghanistan that unlocks more funding for basic needs and restarts an important regional electricity supply project. We will maintain our engagement with the de facto authorities on respect for human rights and ways to increase consultations with local populations, as well as their participation in political decision-making, so that all of Afghanistan's available resources can be deployed for its own well-being. We will encourage donors to identify areas where they can provide longer-term sustainable assistance that directly benefits the Afghan people. These include measures to reduce the effects of climate change, to reduce the effects of the opium ban, and to support the ongoing demining of Afghanistan in cooperation with the de facto authorities.

We will advocate for support for more funding to be directed towards basic human needs to build more social and economic resilience. Assistance in basic services is a lifeline for the most vulnerable Afghans with the majority of the beneficiaries constituting women. We will promote measures to support economic stabilization as a foundation for poverty reduction, which will not be possible without the right enabling environment in the financial sector. Banking and microfinance are only two of the concrete areas that we need to strengthen. We will commence preparations for the next meeting in the Doha format. The next meeting should have a practical agenda and should involve the participation of the de facto authorities as well as other Afghan stakeholders.

UN report on security incidents untrue: IEA

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) on Thursday strongly rejected claims made in the latest United Nations report on the country, stating that the findings relating to security were "biased and untrue". The report, issued earlier this week, said there had been a 37 percent increase in security incidents this quarter, against the same time last year. However, the report states that a high percentage of incidents were related to the clampdown on narcotics.

In a statement issued by the office of the IEA's spokesman, the Islamic Emirate said: "Instead of praising the successful operation against drug dealers by the security forces of the Islamic Emirate, it has unfortunately been misinterpreted to portray Afghanistan as an unsafe and insecure country. "While the brave and courageous security forces of the Islamic Emirate are fighting against corruptors, robbers, kidnappers, smugglers and gangsters in different parts of the country every day, and compared to last year, there have been positive changes and the level of incidents decreased significantly. "Last year, due to the

rapid fight against drugs, about 14,000 smugglers were arrested and handed over to the courts, and more than 5,500 tons of drugs were destroyed. More than 1,200 drug factories have been destroyed and 15,300 hectares of land has been cleared of poppy cultivation," the statement read. "Considering the above, this clearly shows how the United Nations is diverting the mindset of our people by misinterpreting positives into negatives." In addition, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) said such actions were being carried out in a bid to put pressure on the Islamic Emirate.

Governor appeals for increased WFP aid

KABUL (BNA): Sheikh Mohammad Qasim Khalid, the Governor of Nimruz province, has called for increased humanitarian aid from the World Food Programme (WFP) to various regions of the province during a meeting with its representatives. According to a statement from the Nimruz Governor's office, the World Food Programme (WFP) representatives briefed Khalid on their activities over the past six months, highlighting their assistance to the people of Afghanistan in various areas. They noted that the process of aid delivery continues in different provinces of the country. With the rule of the Islamic Emirate, they affirmed that overall security in the country is ensured, enabling them to deliver humanitarian aid to all parts of Afghanistan. The Governor expressed his gratitude to the World Food Programme (WFP) representatives for their assistance to needy families in Afghanistan.

Khalid requested the WFP representatives to initiate the distribution of aid in the remote areas of Nimruz Province. He also addressed the issue of water scarcity in the province, urging the WFP officials to assist the people of Nimruz in this regard. The directorate said in a statement that before, the customs tariff on raw materials was from 1% to 2.5%, but after this, only a 1% customs tariff will be taken from industrialists. Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said: "One of the problems was the issue of tariffs, which was reduced from 2.5% to 1%, and exemptions are still being made. before, they [Directorate of Customs] had imposed fines and their issues remained unresolved." At the same time, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Investment (ACCI) said that currently, more than 6,000 factories

36,000 graduate from institutes in solar year 1402

KABUL (TOLONews): The Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVET) announced the graduation of 36,000 students from institutes related to this authority during the year 1402 (solar year). Ghulam Haidar Shahamat, acting head of TVET, in the program "Information Presentation about the Employment of Outstanding Graduates of the Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority" said that by the end of the current solar year, 1,000 new teachers will also be hired by the authority of Technical and Vocational Education. Shahamat said: "After the survey we conducted, 1,000 of our students who graduated from the first to the fifth rank classes will be employed as contractual teachers this year."



The acting head of TVET authority added that previously, the process of hiring teachers was based on their relationships, not their expertise; however, according to a new plan, from now on, the hiring process will be based on merit and fair competition. Shahamat added: "In some places, they were appointed due to tribal

Minister meets with Qatar's Emir

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of National Defense Mohammad Yaqub Mujahid and the country's Chief of Staff met for talks with the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Thursday. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for IE says that the strengthening of relations and various developments between the two countries were discussed during the meeting. The Emir considered Afghanistan as a friendly and brotherly country and expressed good intentions. Acting Minister of Defense thanked Qatar for its cooperation and assured him of Afghanistan's commitment to expanding relations. The Acting Minister once again expressed his gratitude for the cooperation and wise mediation of Qatar in obtaining freedom and ending the occupation of Afghanistan.

New sensor added to Meteorological Station



KABUL (Ariana News): Officials of the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation on Thursday inaugurated and put into operation a

weather sensor at the Kabul Meteorological Station. This device was built for the first time by the engineers of the Department of

Meteorology in the country, and it is used in the collection of seven types of natural parameters to predict weather.

Drug trafficking prevention needs joint cooperation

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate, in response to the statements of the head of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters, said that the fight against drug trafficking requires bilateral cooperation. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said that the fight against industrial drugs in the country is ongoing and that no active factories exist within the country. Mujahid said: "We are fighting very seriously against industrial drugs produced in Afghanistan, and we assure that this phenomenon will also disappear. Currently, there are no active factories remaining. If production is happening secretly somewhere, and some materials that could potentially turn into drugs are being intercepted, their import into Afghanistan is also banned, as is their production."

Earlier, the head of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters, in an interview with Iranian media, said that his country is witnessing an increase in the production and entry of industrial drugs from Afghanistan. Sardar Eskandar Momeni, Secretary General of the Drug Control Headquarters of Iran, said: "This year, based on ten-month statistics, we are witnessing a roughly 20% increase in the discovery of industrial drugs, especially methamphetamine and crystal meth." "It is necessary for the current caretaker government to take necessary actions in agreement with neighboring countries according to international treaties in the fight against the cultivation and trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan to various countries around the world, and even if needed, to benefit from the capabilities of Afghanistan's neighboring countries to eradicate the cultivation and trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan forever," Abdul Rahman Shamal, an international relations analyst said. "Iran's claim, sometimes about drugs from Afghanistan or about terrorist groups or Daesh, is often unsubstantiated and stems from their own competitions with Western countries, especially the United States," Ahmad Khan Andar, an international relations analyst said. The Ministry of Interior's Counter-Narcotics Directorate has reported that recently, more than 193 of land in four provinces have been cleared of opium poppy cultivation, and four individuals have been arrested in the provinces of Nimroz and Badakhshan in connection with the sale and trafficking of drugs.

Investor expresses interest

KABUL (BNA): A Russian businessman in a meeting with Sheikh Shahabuddin Dalawar, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, expressed interest in investing in lithium mines in the country. The Russian investor, known as the owner of the largest and most experienced lithium mining process factory in Russia, outlined plans to establish a facility for lithium extraction and processing in Afghanistan. During the meeting, the Russian investor emphasized the need for a modern and standardized facility that would utilize advanced technologies and adhere to international environmental and safety standards. For his part, Sheikh Shahabuddin Dalawar assured the Russian investor of the Islamic Emirate's cooperation and support in accordance with the country's legal framework. Afghanistan is known to possess vast untapped mineral resources, including significant lithium deposits. This expression of interest from a seasoned Russian businessman signals a potential boost for Afghanistan's mining industry and the country's economic development as a whole.

IE announces reduction in customs tariffs on raw materials

KABUL (TOLONews): The General Directorate of Customs has reduced the customs tariff on raw materials by 1.5% to support and develop the industry and to facilitate industrialists. The directorate said in a statement that before, the customs tariff on raw materials was from 1% to 2.5%, but after this, only a 1% customs tariff will be taken from industrialists. Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said: "One of the problems was the issue of tariffs, which was reduced from 2.5% to 1%, and exemptions are still being made. before, they [Directorate of Customs] had imposed fines and their issues remained unresolved." At the same time, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Investment (ACCI) said that currently, more than 6,000 factories

are active in the country and import most of their raw materials from other countries. Officials of the chamber emphasized that in addition to reducing tariffs, attention must also be paid to the challenges of factory owners in the electricity supply sector. "Industries play an important role in the prosperity of the country, so it is necessary to create facilities for the progress

of industries and to work on infrastructure projects for this purpose," Mohammad Yunus Momand, the first deputy of ACCI, said. Meanwhile, for the past more than two and a half years, officials of the Islamic Emirate have repeatedly committed to supporting domestic production and have also ordered government agencies to use domestic products.

3rd CDP-G Conference on Afghanistan in Turkey wraps up

KABUL (Khaama Press): The 3rd CDP-G National Dialogue Conference on Afghanistan concluded in Antalya, Turkey, drawing a diverse array of participants including political figures, activists, and journalists from both within and outside Afghanistan. Over two days, discussions delved into critical topics such as sovereignty, legitimacy, and the role of civil society in shaping the nation's future. Among the key outcomes was the consensus among representatives of 14 civil society institutions to establish the Afghanistan Civil Society Complex. This initiative aims to foster coordination and collaboration among civil actors, both domestically and internationally, to address pressing issues facing Afghanistan. Despite the overarching theme of peace, concerns were voiced regarding the simultaneous discussion of war-related matters during the conference. Political expert Ismail Gharni lamented this dual focus, advocating for a more singular emphasis on peace-building efforts. Women's rights activists



played a prominent role in the dialogue, highlighting the imperative of women's participation in political and social spheres. Adila Zamani, a leading advocate, emphasized the significance of authentic representation that accurately reflects the challenges faced by Afghan women. Despite the constructive engagement of various stakeholders, the Taliban dismissed the conference as "unofficial." This stance underscores ongoing tensions and divergent perspectives within Afghanistan's political landscape, posing challenges to inclusive dialogue and consensus-building efforts. Moving forward, the conference outcomes underscore the need for continued dialogue, inclusivity, and concerted efforts to address the multifaceted challenges confronting Afghanistan. Following the Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan, there has been widespread international and domestic pressure for the formation of an

inclusive government that encompasses all ethnicities, genders, and religious affiliations. Calls have been particularly strong for the protection of human rights, including women's rights to education and employment. However, despite mounting criticism, the Taliban leadership has yet to effectively address these persistent challenges, raising concerns about the group's commitment to fostering a truly inclusive and rights-respecting governance structure.



LARKANA: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah along with other PPP leaders offering fateha on the grave of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Sindh PA declare ZA Bhutto ‘National Democratic Hero’

E.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly on Thursday unanimously passed a resolution to declare the late former prime minister and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto a “National Democratic Hero”, following a landmark opinion of the Supreme Court on the late premier’s trial, sentence, and execution.

The provincial assembly, during a session today, unanimously welcomed the historical opinion of the top court in the presidential reference filed by former president Asif Ali Zardari, seeking to revisit the death sentence of the first elected prime minister of Pakistan — ZA Bhutto. A resolution was tabled by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah during today’s session which stated the Supreme Court’s opinion a “significant” move by acknowledging that “justice and a fair trial were not granted to Bhutto — who had been sentenced to death 45 years ago — in accordance with the constitution.

“This ruling highlights the importance of upholding the principles of justice and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their status, are entitled to a fair trial by the Constitution. It serves as a reminder of the need to address past injustices and uphold the rule of law in the pursuit of justice, and accountability,” it stated. The res-

Sindh CM visits Garhi Khuda Bux

E.P. Report

LARKANA: Following the Supreme Court decision regarding the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto presidential reference, the key leaders of the People’s Party Sindh, led by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, visited the shrine of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in Garhi Khuda Bux Bhutto. In Garhi Khuda Bux Bhutto, PPP leaders including Murad Ali Shah, Sharjeel Inam Memon, Nasir Shah, Nisar Khuhro, Sohail Anwar Siyal, and others paid their respects at the shrine of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and recited Fatiha. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and other PPP People’s Party leaders also placed wreaths at the shrines of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto.

olution also endorsed the “sacrifices of Begum Nusrat Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who sacrificed their lives to seek justice against the cold-blooded judicial murder of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.”

It also demanded the Sindh government to approach the Centre to declare ZA Bhutto a “National Democratic Hero” besides, “officially declaring Bhutto a Shaheed (martyr).” Subsequently, it also demanded the provincial government to award political workers, and activists “Nishan-e-Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto” for rendering sacrifices through their lives for democracy.

Speaking on the floor of the assembly, CM Shah stressed necessary amendments to the concerned laws to avoid such “atrocities” in the future after the top court also admit-

ted “flaws” in the Bhutto case which led to his death sentence. He reiterated the demand, as per the resolution he tabled, to declare the late PPP founder a national democratic hero.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Muhammad Farooq endorsed the resolution and emphasised that “democratic personalities should be given sentences on the basis of concrete evidence, not by force”. Hinting at Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan’s jail term, Farooq highlighted that another premier was present behind bars which should also be taken into consideration. He also stressed political stakeholders to block the passage of undemocratic moves with unity in the future.

Pak Navy joins Doha Int’l Maritime Defence exhibition

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship PNS TABUK and Submarine PNS/M KHALID visited Doha, Qatar to participate in Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition (DIMDEX-24). Upon arrival, Pakistan Navy Units were received by Defence Attaché of Pakistan at Doha and Senior Officials of Qatari Emiri Naval Force (QENF). The PN mission was led by Cdre Mazhar Bashir, commander submarines.

During the visit, Mission Commander called on high level dignitaries including Commander of Qatari Emiri Naval Forces, Maj Gen Abdullah Hassan Al Sulaiti. Various high level Military and Naval leadership including Commander-In-Chief of Russian Federation Navy, Admiral Nikolay Evmenov and Turkish Fleet Commander visited PNS TABUK. During the interactions, matters of mutual interests were discussed and enhancement of bilateral ties in all spheres was re-affirmed. Taking the opportunity, Mission Commander conveyed well wishes from Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf for the people of Qatar in general and Qatari Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) in particular.

Pakistan and Qatar enjoy close defence bilateral relations nurtured over the years through multitudes of naval collaborations and exercises. Visit of PN units to Doha provided an opportunity for both brotherly countries to further enhance the existing close diplomatic ties and cordial relations.

Asad Umar’s interim bail extended

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Thursday extended the interim bail of former federal minister Asad Umar in vandalism case at Lahore’s Shadman police station. As per details, the court also approved the former secretary-general of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) plea filed through his lawyer seeking exemption from court appearance.

Earlier, a court canceled the interim bail of former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Umar. Former federal minister’s interim bail in an arson case registered at Lahore’s Shadman police station was cancelled over a no-show. The orders were passed by the ATC Judge Muhammad Naveed Iqbal.

Later, a District and Session Court of Islamabad acquitted the PTI founder, Asad Umar, Faisal Javed and others in a separate protest and vandalism case. Protests were held across Pakistan after the PTI founder was arrested from the premises of the Islamabad High Court on May 9.

Sweden officially joins NATO alliance

WASHINGTON/STOCKHOLM (Reuters): Sweden joined NATO in Washington on Thursday, two years after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine forced it to rethink its national security policy and conclude that support for the alliance was the Scandinavian nation’s best guarantee of safety.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson handed over the final documentation to the US government on Thursday, the last step in a drawn-out process to secure the backing of all members to join the military alliance. “Good things come to those who wait,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said as he received Sweden’s accession documents from Kristersson.

Blinken said “everything changed” after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, citing polls showing a massive shift in Swedish public opinion on joining NATO. “Swedes realized something very profound: that if Putin was willing to try to erase one neighbor from the map, then he might well not stop there.” For NATO, the accessions of Sweden and Finland - which shares a 1,340 km border with Russia - are the most significant additions in decades. It is also a blow for Russian President Vladimir Putin who has sought prevent any

further strengthening of the alliance.

“Today is a truly historic day. Sweden is now a member of NATO,” Kristersson said. “We will defend freedom together with the countries closest to us — both in terms of geography, culture and values.” Sweden will benefit from the alliance’s common defence guarantee under which an attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all.

Hakan Yucel, 54, an IT worker in the Swedish capital said of the accession: “Before, we were outside and felt a little bit alone ... I think that the threat from Russia, it’s going to be much less now.” The Nordic country would add cutting-edge submarines and a sizable fleet of domestically produced Gripen fighter jets to NATO forces and be a crucial link between the Atlantic and Baltic.

Russia has threatened to take unspecified “political and military-technical counter-measures” in response to Sweden’s move. “Joining NATO is really like buying insurance, at least as long as the United States is actually willing to be the insurance provider,” said Barbara Kunz, a researcher at defence think tank SIPRI.

While Stockholm has been drawing ever closer to NATO over the last two

decades, membership marks a clear break with the past, when for more than 200 years, Sweden avoided military alliances and adopted a neutral stance in times of war. After World War Two, it built an international reputation as a champion of human rights, and since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, successive governments have pared back military spending.

As recently as 2021, its defence minister had rejected NATO membership, only for the then-Social Democrat government to apply, alongside neighbour Finland, just a few months later. “I guess [Sweden] had to take a stance really and I’m happy that we actually did and that we are safeguarded by NATO, because the tension with Russia has been growing for a couple of years,” said Carl Fredrik Aspegren, 28, a student in Stockholm.

While Finland joined the alliance last year, Sweden was kept waiting as Turkey and Hungary, which both have cordial relations with Russia, delayed ratifying Sweden’s accession. Turkey approved Sweden’s application in January. Hungary delayed its decision on Sweden’s accession until Kristersson made a goodwill visit to Budapest on Feb. 23, where the two countries agreed a fighter jet deal.

Alvi shares his best reads

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday shared his 10 best reads of 2023 encompassing varying subjects including politics, history, Sufism, artificial intelligence and astronomy while giving his intellectual analysis in the perspectives of the modern-day world.

The President, in a detailed video message, shared that the aim of his extensive study was motivated by his quest for exploration into Allah’s universe, Sufism, democracy, Pakistan, his passion for artificial intelligence and global peace and development. The president recommended the people to read “Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy” written by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson which gave a mathematical analysis of the revival of democracies in the world either consequent to any struggle or accidents.

It outlines the arduous journey of reclaiming people’s rights from dictators, spanning centuries of struggle as well as the resistance of the elite towards democracy. The book “Democracy and Islam in History” by SM Zafar delves into the democratic processes observed during the election of the four caliphs and how they established democratic and judicial institutions. It highlights the evolution and significance of consultative practices in Islamic history.

The book references a letter by Hazrat Umar (RA), advising one of his

judges to maintain accessibility to the masses, facilitate litigants, ensure the enforcement of decisions, and revise judgments if deemed against the spirit of justice. President Alvi also emphasized that while hearing the representations against the Ombudsmen’s decisions, he kept special care of the impoverished litigants and those from remote regions.

“The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament” by Wael B. Hallaq explores the historical evolution of legislative processes in Islamic history. It highlights that during the caliphates, rulers didn’t enact laws rather, Muftis interpreted them based on the Quran, Sunnah, and past precedents. President Alvi outlined the five fundamental principles of an Islamic state: protecting life and property, ensuring freedom of thought and religion for all, and fostering a free society.

The President also recommended Elif Shafak’s “The Forty Rules of Love: On Mawlana Rumi and Shams Tabrizi,” which explores Sufism and the profound friendship between Rumi and Tabrizi. Describing the Holy Quran as a guiding light for humanity, Rumi offered a distinctive perspective on love: “love yourself, love your family, love your neighbors, love your nation, love humanity, love everything created by Allah, love your prophet, and love Allah,” encouraging people to begin their journey of love from the most immediate to the

divine.

Among the president’s top reads was also “The God Equation: The Quest for a Theory of Everything” by Michio Kaku, which charts the evolution of our understanding of the universe over time, from the Aristotelian concept of four elemental components—earth, water, fire, and air—to modern scientific discoveries such as magnetic fields, radio waves, atoms, and nuclei. It tells that the universe visible to humans constitutes just 5% of its total size, with dark matter comprising 26% and dark energy 70%.

The President endorsed “On The Origin of Time” by Thomas Hertog, a student of Stephen Hawking, which delves into the anthropic principle of the universe’s creation. The book supports the Quranic concept that Allah crafted the universe for humanity and out of love for the Holy Prophet. Quoting Stephen Hawking, the president mentioned that while we currently perceive three to four dimensions, there exist an additional 10 dimensions and parallel universes inhabited by diverse, undiscovered beings.

The President also studied “Scary Smart: The Future of Artificial Intelligence and How You Can Save Our World” by Mo Gawdat which deliberated on the world’s increasing fear of artificial intelligence. The writer argues against the human expectations of controlling AI, claiming that by 2040-50, AI will be one billion times more powerful than humans.

SIC moves LHC against ECP’s decision

E.P. Report

LAHORE: The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) on Thursday challenged the Election Commission’s decision of not granting reserved seats to its members in the Lahore High Court.

The SIC Chairman Sahibzada Hamid Raza challenged the Election Commission’s decision. It is to be recalled that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed independents joined the SIC after the Feb 8 polls.

Hamid Raza filed the application through his counsel Ishtiaq A Khan. The Election Commission and others were made parties in the application. According to the petition, the Election Commission is neither a tribunal nor a court. It prayed the SIC should be given seats in proportion to the share in the assembly.

Hamas says ceasefire talks to resume next week

CAIRO (AP): Hamas said Thursday that its delegation has left Cairo and that talks on a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release will resume next week, making it extremely unlikely that mediators will broker a deal before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Egyptian officials had earlier said the negotiations reached an impasse over Hamas’ demand for a phased process culminating in an end to the war. But they did not rule out a deal before Ramadan, which is expected to begin on Sunday and has emerged as an informal deadline.

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha said Israel “refuses to commit to and give guarantees regarding the ceasefire, the return of the displaced, and withdrawal from the areas of its incursion.” But he said the talks were still ongoing and would resume

next week. There was no immediate comment from Israel. The US, Egypt and Qatar have been trying for weeks to broker an agreement on a six-week ceasefire and the release of 40 hostages held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

The Egyptian officials said Hamas has agreed on the main terms of such an agreement as a first stage, but wants commitments that it will lead to an eventual, more permanent ceasefire. Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages without a full Israeli withdrawal from the territory. Palestinian militants are believed to be holding around 100 hostages, and the remains of 30 others, captured during Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack into Israel that triggered the war.

Hamas is also demanding the release of a large number

of prisoners, including top militants serving life sentences, in exchange for the remaining hostages. Israel has publicly ruled out those demands, saying it intends to resume the offensive after any ceasefire with the goal of destroying Hamas. The Egyptian officials say Israel wants to confine the negotiations to the more limited agreement. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the negotiations with media. Both officials said mediators are still pressing the two parties to soften their positions. Ramadan, the month of dawn-to-dusk fasting, often sees Israeli-Palestinian tensions rise over access to a major holy site in Jerusalem. It is expected to begin on Sunday, but the start of the lunar month depends on the sighting of the moon.



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