

Ruet body to meet on 11th
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The meeting of Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee for the Ramazan Moon sighting 1445 Hijri will be held in Peshawar on Monday corresponding to 29th Shaban after Asr prayer. Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Maulana Syed Muhammad Abdul Khabir Azad will chair the meeting. Meetings of other zonal and district Ruet-e-Hilal Committees will be held.



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Govt committed to steer country out of economic crisis: PM

F.P. Report

MUZAFARABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday reiterated the government's resolve to steer the country out of the challenge of economic crisis by bringing structural reforms in the economic sector to provide maximum facilities to the people of the country.

He said that the government was fully committed to increase tax to GDP ratio, tap the huge potential of natural and agriculture resources, stop smuggling, power theft, and losses of the State Owned Entities. Addressing a cheque distribution ceremony among the affected people by torrential rains and snowfall in the area, the prime minister called for setting aside all the differences in the larger national interest to work as a nation to ensure that the country was developing at a faster pace.

Currently, he said the country's tax collection target for the current fiscal year was 1.2 trillion which was not up to the true potential due to tax evasion by certain sections. He said tax evasion was one of the biggest challenge that would be to resolve to increase the country's resources. "If we have no resources, how we will build the infrastructure of health, education and other important sectors," he maintained. He said even the salaries of the federal employees were being paid with the borrowed money. Therefore, he said this was the right time to take tough and important decisions to resolve all the key challenges, the country was facing.

As regards the losses of SOEs, the prime minister informed that the SOEs were incurring losses of hundreds of billions rupees as the loss of only Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was around Rs 825 billion. Similarly, he said the country lost Rs 500 billion every year to power theft. Talking about the losses and damages occurred due to recent rains, snowfalls and land sliding in AJ&K, the prime minister expressed his grief and sorrow over the loss of eight pre-

Shehbaz holds an aerial view of snow affected areas of AJK

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: The newly Elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif held aerial view of rain and snow affected areas of Azad Kashmir and held meeting with AJK Prime Minister Ch. Anwarul Haque at PM Secretariat Muzaffarabad here on Friday.

The AJK PM Anwarul Haque felicitated to Prime Minister of Pakistan Mian Shehbaz Sharif on assuming office and expressed his good wishes. The PM Pakistan while talking to AJK PM extended his unconditional support and assured his full cooperation to his government. He also expressed his commitment for Kashmiri people who are engaged in freedom struggle against Indian occupation and pledged that his government and people of Pakistan will continue their support morally, diplomatically and on the political front till achieving their right to self-determination as per their wishes and UN resolutions. The AJK PM talking to PM Pakistan also paid his gratitude for visiting Azad Kashmir soon after assuming his office and holding Meeting with snow and rain affected people of Azad Kashmir and distributing cheques among them, that sensed encouragement to affected people and it is evident from his visit to AJK that the hearts of Pakistani people are thumping along with their Kashmiri brothers and sisters. Prior, the AJK PM along with his cabinet warmly welcomed and received PM Pakistan Shahbaz Sharif at Helipad near PM Secretariat.

cious lives and prayed for the grant of eternal peace to the departed soul and early recovery of those injured in the incidents.

He said that the government of Pakistan always stood with its Kashmiri brothers and sisters in the hour of need. On the occasion, he also distributed cheques among the affected people.

He said Rs 2 million each would be distributed among the families of the deceased and Rs 500,000 each to those injured in the recent incidents. Similarly, Rs 700,000 each would be given to those whom houses were completely damaged while Rs 350,000 would given to those whom houses were partly damaged.

He directed the Prime Minister AJ&K to complete the survey as soon as possible so that the funds be distributed by March 13. On the request of the AJ&K prime minister, PM Shehbaz also announced to keep a helicopter of NDMA available for the region in case of emergencies to immediately reach out to the affected

people in the hilly areas.

He said Jammu and Kashmir was the jugular vein of Pakistan and it would not leave alone the people of Kashmir in this hour of difficulty. PM Shehbaz maintained that almost over 20 million children were out of school across the country. He said mosques would be utilized to provide education to such children.

On the occasion, Fatiha was also recited for those who passed away in the recent rains and snowfall in the area. Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir Chaudhry Anwaar-ul-Haq thanked Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for his support in this hour of difficulty. He informed that during the recent rains, snowfall and landsliding in AJ&K, eight people were died while 88 houses were completely damaged. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with his counterpart of Azad Jammu and Kashmir wherein he reiterated Pakistan's support to the people of Kashmir for their right to self-determination.



MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif interacting with families of deceased and injured in wake of recent torrential rains and heavy snowfall.

Achakzai asks ECP to delay presidential election

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Mehmood Khan Achakzai — the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) backed presidential candidate — on Friday asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to postpone the election as the electoral college is "incomplete".

In a letter to the chief election commissioner on Friday, Achakzai said that stated that electoral college for a presidential election was "still incomplete". "As yet no one was elected on those reserved seats and without nominations and proper election on these seats, if the presidential election is conducted as per the schedule that would be denial of their votes, which otherwise is against the fundamental rights, law and constitution," stated the letter.

"Under the above circumstances, it is submitted that the proposed election to the office of the President of Pakistan is clearly impossible, therefore the same may kindly be postponed or delayed till completion of electoral college accordingly in the best interest of justice, fair play and equity." Achakzai said that the Sunni Ittehad Council has already filed a petition in the court regarding reserved seats and an injunctive order has been issued.

He added that till the seats are not fulfilled the presidential polls would be "illegal, unlawful and against the spirit of Constitution". Achakzai's letter comes a day before the election is set to be held across the five assemblies. Polling is scheduled to take place from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on March 9 at Parliament House in Islamabad and the provincial Assembly buildings in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta.

Alvi given farewell guard of honour

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi was presented with a farewell guard of honour on Friday, marking the culmination of his term as the 13th head of state, while Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari is poised to become the new president with the support of the allied parties in today's election.

Alvi was sworn in on September 9, 2018, as the president and his term ended last year but due to the absence of the electoral college for the election of president, he continued to serve in the presidency. Today, a smartly turned-out contingent of the armed forces presented a guard of honour to the outgoing president. The national anthem was played as the president stood at the saluting dais.

Zardari to take care of you as he does of me: Bilawal

Maryam Nawaz assures of support for PPP candidate in today's presidential poll

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a bid to woo Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) parliamentarians ahead of the presidential poll, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has assured that his father Asif Ali Zardari, who is poised to become the next president of Pakistan, will take care of Punjab's lawmakers as he does of him.

With the ruling coalition on the same page regarding Zardari as the joint candidate, the presidential election is set to take place in the assemblies today (Saturday). Speaking to the members of the PML-N-dominated Punjab Assembly, Bilawal said that he was there to ask the parliamentarians to vote for his father in the March 9 presidential election.

"Asif Zardari will take care of you as he takes care of me," he said while heaping praise on the seasoned politician, who will serve the president's post for the second time if he wins. Bilawal, the former foreign minister, said that Zardari "meets everyone like he meets his own party's representatives".

The young politician said that the position of the president is a representative of the Centre — the federal government. Speaking on the occasion, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz thanked Bilawal, saying that her party lawmakers would have voted for Zardari, who is the jointly agreed candidate of coalition partners, even if the PPP chairman hadn't asked for it.

Maryam, the first woman chief executive of the province, also said that the PML-N and the PPP were competitors in the general elections but serious parties put aside their differences for the betterment and interest of the country. "Asif Zardari is our presidential candidate. All of us will vote [for him] tomorrow," she added. The presidential elections are slated for March 9 with clear favourite Zardari facing off with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) candidate Mahmood Achakzai.

Besides the two key coalition partners — Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP),

National Party (NP), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) — have declared their support for Zardari. Meanwhile, PTI-backed SIC and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen have assured their support to Achakzai, who is the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) head. Members of the Senate and National Assembly would exercise their right to vote by secret ballot in the Parliament House while polling for the presidential elections would also be held in the four provincial assemblies.

As many as 325 members of the National Assembly, 91 senators, 354 members of the Punjab Assembly, 157 members of the Sindh Assembly, 117 members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly and 65 members of the Balochistan Assembly would cast their vote. Meanwhile, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Akhtar Mengal of Balochistan National Party (BNP-M) have announced they would abstain from voting in the presidential elections.

Reserved seat MNAs take oath amid SIC protest

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Newly notified members of the National Assembly who were declared winners reserved seats for women and minorities on Friday took oath amid protests from the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC).

According to details, the SIC members gathered in front of the Speaker's rostrum while the members were taking oath. Speaking on a point of order, SIC member Barrister Gohar Ali said that the Peshawar High Court (PHC) restrained the newly notified members from taking oath on reserved seats.

"The oath-taking of the members will be contempt of court as well as violation of the constitution," Barrister Gohar contended. Speaker Ayaz Sadiq said that the National Assembly has not received any order from the Peshawar High Court or the Election Commission of Pakistan.

"An opinion was sought from the Attorney General on the matter and according to him there would be no contempt of court if members elected on reserved seats take oath," the Speaker said. Ayaz Sadiq said that the order of the Peshawar High Court is restricted to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Separately, the National Assembly adopted a resolution paying glowing tribute

to Benazir Bhutto, the first elected Prime Minister in the Islamic world, for her 'unwavering' dedication to democracy, women empowerment, human rights, social justice and equitable society. The resolution moved by Sehar Kamran read, "Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was an icon of women's struggle, courage, and resilience in the face of challenges. Benazir Bhutto was a role model for women and mothers in general and women politicians and parliamentarians in particular."

The resolution also pledged to uphold her legacy by championing policies that empower women, ensure equitable opportunities, and eradicate gender discrimination. Recognizing the significant potential and contributions of women in all spheres of life, the resolution emphasized the importance of continued and sustained efforts to remove barriers and obstacles that hinder the realization of women's full potential. The National Assembly session is adjourned to Wednesday at 2:00 pm.

Taking strong exception to oath-taking of Members National Assembly (MNAs) on reserved seats, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed and Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) lawmaker Omer Ayub Khan Friday termed it "unconstitutional".

His statement came after a number of newly elected

lawmakers on reserved seats in the NA were sworn in. NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq administered the oath to the MNAs amid ruckus and sloganeering by the PTI-backed SIC lawmakers. Taking the floor, Ayub — Imran Khan's pick for the leader of the opposition — said: "Today's oath-taking of MNAs on reserved seats is illegal and has no [legal] standing."

Raising questions over the oathtaking, the PTI leader asked how will a country run without the rule of law. "The system cannot work like this." The reservations come as the Peshawar High Court (PHC) has extended the stay order on the oath-taking ceremony of lawmakers notified on reserved seats denied to the PTI-backed SIC till March 13.

For his part, PTI Chairman Gohar Ali Khan told the speaker that the PHC had issued a stay on oath-taking of reserved seats lawmakers. The oath cannot be administered to them until the decision of the case, he added. The PTI leader said that the reserved seats for his party could not be allocated to any other. Responding to him, the speaker remarked that the lower house of the parliament did not receive order from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) or the court regarding the oath-taking of MNAs on reserved seats.

Four terrorists killed
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Four terrorists were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the North Waziristan district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said Friday. In a statement, the military's media wing said that during the operation, an intense exchange of fire took place between the troops and the terrorists, as a result of which the terrorists were killed.

Mushahid calls for PTI founder's release

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed has called for ex-premier Imran Khan's release from jail and the allocation of reserved seats to the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) the new home of PTI-backed winning candidates.

Speaking on the floor of the Senate, Hussain recalled he had called for the release of ex-president Asif Ali Zardari, Yousuf Gilani and Javed Hashmi during late General Pervez Musharraf's rule, as well as of ex-premier Nawaz Sharif in 2018. "Even today, I have, first of all, demanded that Imran Khan be released. He is a political prisoner; and it should be across the board." Noting that there was now a "new chapter" after the Feb 8 elections, the seasoned politician said there was a need for a "healing touch". "Include everyone and give a general amnesty," Hussain said, claiming that a "general amnesty was even given to the TTP that killed our children".

"And the reserved seats that the PTI deserves, it is their right and they should get it; they should not be deprived of it," he added. Hussain further demanded that all missing persons across the country should be recovered. On the other hand Senate Deputy Chairman Mirza Muhammad Afridi has issued directives for the issuance of production orders for incarcerated PTI leader Ejaz Chaudhry.

Speaking in the Senate, PTI's Ali Zafar noted that the presidential election was due tomorrow and that it was Chaudhry's right to cast a vote. Zafar said that the jailed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader had been behind bars for months in cases pertaining to the May 9 riots that followed ex-premier Imran Khan's arrest. "Inclusion of Ejaz Chaudhry in the Senate session is necessary," Zafar said, adding that it would be "shameful" if the Upper House could not summon a senator for the presidential election.



AWARAN: Chief of Army Staff, General Asim Munir, giving cheque to a relative of Shuhada during visit to Balochistan.

COAS: Army to support people of Balochistan

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir on Friday promised the people of Balochistan that they will be supported by armed forces and law enforcement agencies for peace and prosperity in the province, said a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

"The success of Balochistan is the success of Pakistan. The people of Pakistan are proud of the brave people of Balochistan who have stood tall against all odds. Armed Forces of Pakistan and law enforcement agencies will continue to render their services in support of the people of Balochistan for peace and prosperity," said the army chief. The army chief made these comments during his visit to the Awaran district of Balochistan where he was briefed on the security situation of the province.

According to the military's media wing, the army chief was also informed about the efforts being taken by the

Pakistan Army in the socio-economic development and agriculture potential of Balochistan. During his visit to Awaran, COAS Munir interacted with the local elders, farmers and families of shuhada and assured them of the army's unstinting support for their security and welfare while paying rich tribute to the sacrifices rendered by the martyred.

While interacting with the notables and farmers of Awaran, the army chief emphasised the importance of agriculture and the army's commitment to the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI). "Farmers will be provided with all kinds of agricultural facilities, including the provision of easy agricultural loans, seeds, fertilisers, solar tube wells and guidance by agriculture experts so that they can cultivate their lands and become partners in the progress and development of Pakistan," said the COAS.

Later on, the army chief inaugurated Cadet College Awaran and interacted with faculty members and stu-

dents. He also appreciated the establishment of another Cadet College in Balochistan for the people of the area. He reiterated his commitment that the Pakistan Army will continue development and relief activities in Balochistan in collaboration with the concerned civil departments. Earlier on arrival, COAS was received by Balochistan's Corps Commander.

ATC grants bail to suspects

F.P. Report

LAHORE: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Friday granted bail to 42 suspects in the Jinnah House attack case. The hearing on the bail plea was taken up by ATC Judge Muhammad Naveed Iqbal, here today. The court granted bail to 42 suspects facing charges of attacking Jinnah House in Lahore against a surety bond of Rs100,000 each.

CM decides to reshuffle police dept, to review policy decisions of caretaker govt

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Friday announced a Rs 22.5 billion package for Ramzan, approved Rs 5.3 billion for the Safe City project, reviewed policy decisions taken by the Caretaker government, and pledged to form the Provincial Finance Commission (PFC) within a month.

Addressing a press conference held at the CM House, the CM flanked by Mayor of Karachi Murtaza Wahab and Mayor of Hyderabad Kashif Shoro, announced the Ramzan package and said that last year, the government provided a grant of Rs 2000 cash per family, and this year, during the Holy month of Ramzan, eligible families would receive a grant of Rs 5000 cash per family.

The grant would be given to 4,413,584 families, which constituted 60 percent of the province's population, he said and added the amount being distributed was Rs 22.5 billion. The chief minister said that simultaneously, an anti-hoarding operation had been launched which was being monitored by him. "The operation is in progress in which district administration, police and agriculture dept officers are participating," he said and added that a price control mechanism had also been evolved under which district administration would maintain the government notified process of the fruits, vegetables and other commodities.

To a question, the CM said that the Punjab government was not giving cash but they have decided to distribute ration bags (atta, ghee, sugar, basen, etc) and each bag cost Rs 3425. The KPK government has announced Rs10,000 cash each for 842,000 families and their total package comes to Rs 8.5 billion while the Sindh government has announced a Rs 22.5 billion package for over 4.4 million families, he added.

Replying to another question, the CM said that social protection packages for deserving families were being announced by governments all over the world. "In Islam, there is a proper Zakat system under which well-off people support the needy and deserving people financially," he said and added his government has established a separate department for Social Protection and it would be made properly functional in the larger interest of the eligible people shortly.

Speaking on law and order, he expressed dissatisfaction over the state of law and order. "I am not satisfied with the law and order situation in the city and even in the rural areas, particularly the Riverine belt," he said and added that he has decided to make a major reshuffle in the police department.

To a question, the CM said that he had approved Rs 5.3 billion to start the Safe City project under which Intelligence Video Surveillance (IVS) and Vehicle Management System (VMS) Cameras would be installed for technology-led policing in the city of Karachi in the first phase and then in other cities of the province. "The street crime in Karachi is on the rise and the kidnapping for ransom incidents have not been brought under control," he said and added that he had therefore, decided to reshuffle the police department so that the situation could be improved. Answering to a question, Murad Ali Shah said that the policy decisions taken by the caretaker government would be reviewed by his elected government. He added that the law was very clear that the main job of the caretaker government was to run day-to-day affairs. "But, we feel that some policy decisions were also taken, therefore the elected government would review all such decisions taken by the caretaker government".

To another question, the chief minister said that his government would approach Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif for the constitution of National Finance Commission (NFC). He said that he worked with Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif for six months and found him to be a hardworking, caring and accommodating person. "When the people of Sindh were faced with devastating floods, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif made several visits to the flood-affected areas and supported the affected people," he said and comparing Shahbaz Sharif with former PTI chief said he never bothered to meet with therein-affected people.

Murad Shah said that in the absence of the provincial assembly, the constitution of the Provincial Financial Commission (PFC) was not possible and now both the assembly and the local government were in place, therefore he would constitute PFC within a month and then announce the award within next six months.

Maryam Nawaz launches women safety App ‘Never Again’

LAHORE (PPI): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz today launched the women safety App 'Never Again' to ensure protection of women folk.

Addressing a special ceremony in connection with International Women's Day in Lahore, she also announced to increase job quota for women in Punjab Public Service Commission from 10 percent to 15 percent. She directed to fill the vacant women seats in every Provincial Department.

The Chief Minister said that funds of one billion rupees have been allocated to establish Day Care Centers at work places. She said working women hostels will also be built.

Maryam Nawaz said that women will be given fifty percent loans in online business. She said that transfer fee will not be charged on gifting property to sister and daughter.

She said that the Board of Revenue will transfer property to the inheritor family after deciding on the daughters' share.

Maryam launches tree plantation drive

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Friday launched a tree plantation campaign by plating a sapling in Dargai Gill Forest Park Sheikhpura.

According to official sources here, on occasion of the World Women day, Maryam Nawaz being the first woman Punjab CM planted a sapling of 'Banyan' known as 'Bargad'.

Speaking at the event, the CM said that tree plantation campaign would be helpful in dealing with the climate change.

She said that trees play a significant role in reducing environmental pollution besides playing major role to stop cutting of land and increasing land's fertility.

Maryam Nawaz was briefed that on Women Day, 600,000 saplings would be planted across the province. Tree plantation will be carried on banks of rivers as well. Overall more than 10 million trees would be planted during spring tree plantation campaign.

It is pertinent to mention that it is unique honour of planting 12,000 saplings at once on the Women Day.

Senior Punjab Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb also planted a sapling while MPA Sania Ashiq and others were also present.

Climate Resilience & Strategic Preparedness: Safeguarding Pakistan’s Security Interests

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a seminar titled 'Climate Resilience & Strategic Preparedness: Safeguarding Pakistan's Security Interests'. The event discussed the challenges that Pakistan faces in the wake of global climate change, which can potentially threaten state security and social cohesion.

The seminar commenced with opening remarks by Mr Ameer Abdullah Khan, Senior Researcher at CASS, Lahore, who spoke about the different aspects in which climate change is interrelated with the national security of Pakistan.

This was followed by a keynote address by Mr Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, member Loss & Damage Fund Board and World Bank Consultant, who spoke about strategic preparedness in the face of ecological uncertainty while outlining policies and priorities from global to domestic levels. Mr Ahmed Rafay Alam, an environmental lawyer, shed light on governance-related challenges, which augment climate-induced threats to Pakistan's security.

The last speaker, Ms Sarah Hayat, Climate Law and Policy Expert, discussed the need for climate adaptation and mitigation as a way forward to a secure future for Pakistan.

In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS Lahore, said that despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, Pakistan has endured the harsh realities of climate change.

He highlighted that the crisis does not stop at natural disasters, rather it extends to straining the economy, political stability, and social fabric of Pakistan, besides intensifying regional tensions.

The President acknowledged Pakistan's initiatives to combat climate change, however, he stressed the need for international cooperation, considering this to be a shared endeavour.

The seminar highlighted various key points. The speakers pointed out how certain lapses in management in the past have contributed to the escalating severity of climate change threats. They also emphasised the need for inclusive climate-resilient strategies at the federal, provincial and local levels.

They further suggested to bridge the knowledge-policy gap pertaining to climate change. They also stressed the urgency of boosting efforts to enhance international climate finance inflows. The seminar concluded with a unanimous call for proactive decisions to safeguard Pakistan's national security interests.

SNGPL to provide uninterrupted gas supply during Sahr and Iftar in Ramazan

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Sui Northern Gas has decided to ensure uninterrupted gas supply during Sahr and Iftar in the holy month of Ramazan. According to Sui Northern's spokesperson, uninterrupted gas supply will be provided from 2:30 am to 8 am for Sahri and from 3 pm to 10 pm for Iftar. In addition to forming monitoring teams to resolve gas pressure issues, Sui Northern Gas has also established control rooms. The spokesperson also stated that consumers can call 1199 to lodge complaints regarding gas pressure or supply. Sui Northern Gas has also appealed to gas consumers to use gas wisely during Sahr and Iftar.

PEF releases over Rs 1.6b to partner schools

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) has disbursed Rs1.6 billion for January 2024 to more than 7,000 partner schools, covering the fees of over 2.6 million students.

The payments for January 2024 were delayed due to non-receipt of funds to the Punjab Education Foundation. Payments for February 2024 will be made to the partner schools as soon as the funds are received in the accounts of the Punjab Education Foundation, a spokesperson for PEF said here on Friday.

Highlighting the commitment of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif to education-friendly policies, the spokesperson emphasized PEF's dedication to enrolling more out-of-school children through the public-private partnership model.

Furthermore, PEF has released payments and cleared all arrears amounting to approximately 5.66 billion rupees to partner schools from December 2023 to date. PEF remains steadfast in its mission to promote education and empower partner schools, fostering an environment conducive to the holistic development of students across Punjab, he added.

Train's time changed for Ramazan

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Railways administration has decided to change the timings of the 125-Up Lasani Express (Lahore-Narawal-Sialkot) for the convenience of public.

According to the PR spokesperson on Friday, the new timings will only be applicable for the month of Ramazan.

Correction in Name

The correct name of my father is Felix Qazi, but mistakenly written in my educational documents as Qazi Fazal Hakeem. Please make necessary correction. Qazi Fazal Naem S/O Felix Qazi, R/O Landi Yarghjo, Qazi Khel, Haiderzai, Peshawar.

Gender equality is essential for Pakistan to progress

F.P. Report

KARACHI: To commemorate Pakistan's day and acknowledge role of women in the making and Progress of Pakistan, Directorate of Electronic Media and Production (DEMP), in collaboration with Quaid e Azam Mazar Management Board (QMMB) organized inter school art competition at Mazar e Quaid Karachi on 8th March 2024.

In the competition 140 students participated from schools all over Karachi. Speaking on the occasion, Chief guest of the event, Ms. Nargis Rehman, President All Pakistan Women's Foundation for peace, expressed her happiness that women has achieved significant progress in Pakistan but deplored that real change has yet to be achieved.

She opined that gender equality is essential for Pakistan to progress, therefore, every child especially girl needs to be educated.

She encouraged students who participated in the art competition about their creative thinking that reflected in their art and congratulated their parents and teachers who nurtured creative thinking in them.

Commenting in the event, Guest of Honor Ms Erum Tanveer, DGPR Karachi, felicitated the students, teachers and parents for such an impressive and thought provoking art work and lauded organisers for arranging such healthy activities.

Moreover, she congratulated all women on Women Day and said that women's role since the inception of Pakistan is undeniable. She termed women, an agent of change and progress in the society. In Addition, she said, women should be educated and encouraged to work so that they become financially independent and get due rights.

Mr. Abdul Aleem Shaikh-Co host, Resident Engineer QMMB, also spoke on the occasion and appreciated students for commemorating Pakistan day through painting rich history and culture of Pakistan. The host of the event, Ms Mehreen Iqbal, Deputy Director DEMP, highlighted the role of youth in the progress of Pakistan and termed them the hope of Pakistan. The event concluded with cash prizes for winners, appreciation certificates for participants and mementos for guests of honor.

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board**
Phase - V, Hayatabad Peshawar
Phone: 091-9217159-61 Fax: 091-9217163, Website: www.kptbh.gov.pk

تصحيح

مورخہ 27 فروری، 2024 کو روزنامہ "آج" میں شائع ہونے والی "نیلائی" بحوالہ INF(P)351/2024 سے متعلق پریس ریلیز میں درج ذیل ترمیم کی گئی ہے۔

- 1۔ نیٹیز فارم جمع کرانے کی تاریخ 12-03-2024 کے بجائے 27-03-2024 کر دی گئی ہے۔
- 2۔ دیگر شرائط و ضوابط دی رہیں گے۔

سکریٹری خلیفہ پختونخوا ٹیکسٹ بک بورڈ، حیات آباد، پشاور

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed Bids on the Basis of MRS-2022(b) are invited from reputed Companies/Firms which are registered with PEC for the Year 2023-24 and Enlisted with Directorate of works & implementation on the basis of "Single Stage-Two Envelope Procedure" through E-bidding system as per the following schedule.

S#	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	Required category of PEC	Bid Security	Time Period	Last date & time of submission of Technical & Financial Bids	Date & Time of opening of technical bid
1	Estbalishment of Play grounds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on need basis ADP No 1890-130061 (2022-23)		C-4 and above	2% of Estimated cost	As per Work Order	28-03-2024 at 11:00 AM	28-03-2024 at 11:30 AM
	Construction of Sports Complex at Batakra Topi Swabi	182.67 M					

Terms & Conditions

- The following documents must be attached with the Bid:
 - Bid security and entry/form fee 2% & 0.03% on Estimated cost must be provided along with the application form in shape of CDR before closing dale & time.
 - The financial bidding will be online through E-bidding system. Tender form & BOQ can be filled online & downloaded from the official web site of Directorate of works & implementation (www.stacytenders.kp.gov.pk) before last date/time of bid submission.
 - Electronic bids & original call deposits received through fax or by hand will not be acceptable. Sealed bids sent through registered mail/courier services should reach up to specified time and date as mentioned.
 - The detailed terms & conditions are available on KPRA website & E-bidding system.
- The contractors quoting their Bids up to a limit of 10% below Engineer estimate shall submit bid security up to 2% only of Engineer Estimate in favor of Deputy Director (works), Directorate of Works & Implementation.
- If a contractor quoting their bids more than 10% below on Engineer Estimate shall submit an 8% additional Bid security in addition to 2% bid security. If a bid is not accompanied with the required amount of bid security, then it will be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favor of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.
- In case a contractor quotes more than 20% below on Engineer Estimate shall submit with his bid an additional amount of estimated cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineer's estimate along with detailed rate analysis, in relation to any or all the items of bill of quantities, scope of work, allocation of risks and responsibilities and/or any other requirements of the bid solicitation document. The contract shall be awarded to die lowest evaluated bidder who has satisfied the procuring entity on rate analysis. However, if the procuring entity determines that the offered price is unviable, the matter shall be referred to the next higher authority for rejection of the bid on the basis of being financially unviable.
- The bidders are required to quote their rates above or below on BOQ/ MRS system on both MRS as well as non MRS items.
- Successful Bidders should sign the agreement with the department within Twenty-Eight (28) days after issuance of LOA.
- 10%Performance security in shape of insurance Guarantee from Schedule Bank or from insurance company AA rating will be acceptable only as per KPRA Rules.
- Call Deposit of Scheduled Banks shall be acceptable.
- If the evaluated bid Score of two or more than two bidders are equal then the successful bid will be declared through Draw.
- The Procuring Entity may reject all bids at anytime prior to the acceptance of Bid. The procuring Entity upon request communicates to any contractor who submitted a Bid, the ground of rejection of all bids.
- Bid security of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest evaluated bidders will be retained by the Department till approval of bids.
- All the Bidders are required to register their Firms with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) per Notification Para 37(A).
- All the Bidders are required to be on the Active Taxpayer's list ofthe Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority and regularly submits their monthly returns with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- Any addition made in terms & condition in the NIT advertised in the newspaper will be implemented as per KPRA rules.
- The Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bids.
- All federal and provincial duties/stamp duty/taxes including sales tax will be recoverable as per directives of the Government issued from time to time.
- All tests shall be carried out by the contractor at his own cost, when and where the procuring authority recommends for the purpose of insuring qualitative work.
- The person whose name exists in form H/ Partnership dead / Company will only be entities to sign the tender form, BOQ and all other contract documents, no other signatory 'shall be entitled as bidder.
- Any other information required can be obtained from the office of under sign.

INF(P)468/24

Deputy Director (Works)

Directorate of Works & Implementation, Qayyum Stadium Peshawar

International Women’s Day marked in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Blue Veins, local Non-Governmental Organization, in collaboration with the National Commission for Human Rights, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission, District Police Khyber and EVAW/G Alliance, successfully hosted a series of events to mark International Women’s Day 2024. These events, held at both community and district levels, brought together a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, including government and non-government actors, women and girls, CSOs, to demand financing for measures to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

The events, spanning across Districts Peshawar, Kohat, Charsadda, Khyber and Swabi, featured the active participation of women from various communities, civil society groups, and government departments. The interventions encompassing women assemblies, community dialogues, and district level seminars aimed to highlight pressing issues of women and girls, foster face-to-face interactions between women and decision-makers on strategic needs, and provide recommendations for gender-responsive policies and financing for gender equality.

PHC CJ opens blood donation camp

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan said that it is responsibility of every citizen to play their role for controlling and elimination of Thalessemia from Pakistan, on Friday.

This he said while addressing blood donation camp arranged by Hamza Foundation at PHC in which 62 lawyers donated blood for thalassemia patients registered with the welfare hospital.

Senior Pusine Judge PHC Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim along with Registrar Inam Ullah Wazir, Additional Registrar Hidayatullah Khan, Rameez Khan and senior lawyer Ishaq Ali Qazi advocate were present in the blood donation camp.

As many as 62 lawyers donated blood for thalassemia patients after screening tests in this regard. Hamza Foundation representative Atique ur Rehman briefed Chief Justice PHC Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan along with lawyers regarding blood diseases especially thalassemia.

The representative claimed that the camp was arranged Ramadan to ensure smooth transfusion blood to the thalassemia patients during the holy. He paid thanks to PHC’s judges and lawyers for donating blood to serve humanity.

Chief Justice PHC Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan and Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim appreciated Hamza Foundation efforts for serving humanity especially children facing thalassemia disease.

Hamza Foundation founder Ijaz Ali Khan said that 1487 patients are registered with the welfare hospital which is established in 2006. He paid thanks Chief Justice Muhammad Ibrahim Khan and PHC administration for facilitation of blood donation camp.

Sana Ahmad, Program Coordinator at Blue Veins, expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts, stating, "International Women’s Day serves as a reminder that our collective efforts are indispensable in fostering an environment where women can thrive. Through these events, we aim to empower women, encourage dialogue, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equal society."

Rizwan Khan, Provincial Coordinator of the National Commission for Human Rights, highlighted the importance of such initiatives, saying, "The collaboration among various stakeholders exemplifies the commitment to human rights. We believe that by working together, we can address systemic challenges, advocate for gender-responsive policies, and ensure the protection of women's rights at every level."

Ijaz Khan, Acting Chief of the Child Protection and Welfare Commission, said, "Our shared commitment to child protection aligns seamlessly with the broader cause of empowering women. Our collaborative efforts are crucial in creating a protective environment for the well-being of women and children in our society."

Sahar Khan, Project Director Bolo Helpline from Social Welfare Department, expressed her support,

stating, "Empowering women goes hand in hand with eliminating gender-based violence. Through concerted efforts, we can create a safer space for women and work towards a society free from all forms of violence and discrimination."

Shazia Tehmas, a prominent politician from the Pakistan People’s Party, commended the joint efforts, stating, "Political will and community engagement are vital for achieving meaningful change. I applaud the collaboration between NGOs and government bodies to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women."

The events marked significant contribution towards creating synergy for collective efforts and reinforcing commitments towards investing in essential aspects of women's lives and key areas such as health, education, ending gender-based violence, and economic well-being.

In a combined statement, the EVAW/G Alliance members from Kohat and Khyber stated, "As members of the EVAW/G Alliance, we stand united in our commitment to eliminating violence against women and promoting gender equality. These events are a testament to the collective strength of our alliance, working towards a society where women can live free from fear and discrimination."



PESHAWAR: A member of Hamza Foundation presenting shield to Honourable Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and Senior Pusune Judge, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim.

Workshop on countering violent extremism concluded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Over 15 Speakers address the Conference, Researchers Nationwide Presented Recommendations to Combat Extremism, as 3 days international workshop on countering violent extremism concluded.

The recently concluded conference witnessed over 15 speakers delivering insightful addresses on various aspects of extremism, bringing together researchers from across the country engaged in the field of counter-extremism.

An open forum discussion took place at the 3rd day of the conference to explore strategies for countering violent extremism. Researchers and academia presented their recommendations, covering a broad spectrum of topics. The conference hosted experts in education, psychology, law enforcement officials, and social workers.

The concluding ceremony was graced by the special presence of Ms. Humera Ahmad, Federal Secretary, National Heritage and

Culture Division. Her insights added a significant dimension to the event. Highlighting the socio-cultural harmony of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it was emphasized that the role of women in countering extremism should not be overlooked, especially in the context of the International Women's Day celebration.

The conclusion of the conference saw the formulation of various approaches to eradicate extremism in the country. Working groups have been established to collaborate with the Center of Excellence to contribute to the formalization of policies in a structured manner. Discussions also unfolded on social media and fifth-generation warfare. Working groups presented more than 30 recommendations, which will be further examined and compiled into a comprehensive report.

The recommendations include enhancing service delivery in tribal areas, improving access to affordable and timely justice, consulting religious groups to

counter extremism, safeguarding basic human rights, regulating formal and informal media, responsible reporting, high-level enforcement of the law, promoting research in the field of extremism, ensuring employment opportunities, and other critical areas. The working groups are committed to collaborate on these recommendations to develop comprehensive strategies for countering extremism, contributing to a more secure and tolerant society.

Excise Police crackdown on drug smugglers continues

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Excise Police crackdown on drug smugglers continued, Secretary Excise Syed Fayaz Ali Shah told here on Friday.

Talking to media men, Secretary Excise Department said that successful operation of police station Excise Peshawar Region continued and due to timely action, an attempt to smuggle large quantities of drugs to Punjab failed. The vehicle was seized after a lot of resistance on Ring Road New Shuba Mor wherein 8400 grams of hashish recovered from vehicle number RA 859 during search, he added.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur interacting with officials during his visit to Information Department.

Bank Alfalah on Ring Road inaugurated

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and industry president Fuad Ishaq on Friday inaugurated a new branch of Bank Alfalah on Ring Road, Hayatabad here.

During the inauguration ceremony, the SCCI executive members Hamza Ibrahim Butt, Hafaf Ali Khan, Secretary General Sajjad Aziz, members of the business community, along with the Bank Alfalah Regional Head Jamil Ahmad Sauval, Area Manager Muhammad Adil, Branch Manager Taniya Khan, Regional Coordinator Asadur Rehman and others were present.

Talking on the occasion, the SCCI chief praised the Bank Alfalah services and facilitation to the business community. He said the Bank Alfalah business-friendly policies become fruitful for the traders and asked other commercial banks to adopt such pro-business policies and facilitate the community.

Fuad Ishaq said opening of a new branch of the Bank Alfalah on Ring Road, Hayatabad is welcoming, as the area is hub of multiple businesses and with support of the bank, commercial and trade activities will be further boosted up in the area.

The chamber president urged the State Bank of Pakistan to review the current interest rate and bring it down to single digit, hoping that the initiative would promote business and trade activities and stabilize the national economy.

Another series of rains, strong wings from 10th

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Another series of rains, strong winds and snowfall in upper districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is likely to start from the evening of March 10, the official of the Meteorological Department said here Friday.

PDMA has issued a new notification to all district administrations to stay alert, DG PDMA Muhammad Qaiser Khan said. In view of the rains and snowfall, the district administration has been directed to take precautionary measures, DG, PDMA Muhammad Qaiser Khan warned.

Landslides in upper districts due to snowfall and rains, PDMA officials said. DG PDMA said that they

had already issued directives to district administration to ensure availability of small and heavy machinery. In the event of a storm, people should stay away from power lines, dilapidated buildings and structures, sign boards and billboards.

Tourists and local population in sensitive upper areas are instructed to be aware of weather conditions and take precautionary measures, DG PDMA Muhammad Qaiser Khan said. In sensitive districts, messages to the district administration should be conveyed to the local population in local languages, he said. In any emergency situation, all concerned organizations should be vigilant in maintaining road

links and provide alternative routes for traffic in case of road closure. Passengers should be warned in advance on provincial and national highways in sensitive areas, he said.

He said, ensure the availability of emergency services personnel during this time and tourists should be informed about the weather situation. Rain and snowfall are likely to continue intermittently till March 14. Tourists should take special precautions while traveling and availability of heavy machinery should be ensured in case of emergency besides provision of medicines should also be ensured in hospitals.

PDMA, UNFPA observes International Women’s Day

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in collaboration with UNFPA commemorated International Women's Day and inaugurated Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (GBVIE) framework.

Director General PDMA, Muhammad Qaiser Khan appreciated the collaboration with UNFPA and emphasized the importance of prioritizing gender

equality in disaster response efforts. He stated, "On the day, we recognize the urgent need to address the critical issues of gender-based violence, particularly in emergency situations."

"The GBVIE framework is a crucial step forward in our collective efforts to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of all individuals, especially women and girls, in emergency settings. By integrating gender considerations into our disaster

preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, we can better protect and support the most vulnerable members of our communities", he said.

Secretary Relief Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Inayat Ullah Wasim, said that International Women's Day serves as a reminder of the invaluable contributions of women make to our society and the ongoing struggle for gender parity and women's empowerment.



PESHAWAR: President of Provincial Doctors Association Dr. Amir Taj addressing a press conference at Press Club.

KP women signifcantly contributed in country’s development process

PESHAWAR (APP): Busy like a honeybee in tailoring of women suits, Nishat Bibi (50), a seamstress of Pabbi, Nowshera district with scattered unstitched clothes, scissor and spools around her sewing machine was working against the clock to meet the set declines’ orders placed by the customers in the wake of wedding, engagements and academics’ results season.

Unaware of International Women's Day being observed in world including Pakistan here on Friday, Nishat Bibi, who inherited the pain-sticking tailoring profession from her mother, was busy in measurement of ladies and children suits with measuring tape before its cutting to help his husband in meeting the household expenses in the wake of high inflation and price-hike in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Enjoying ‘Dil Dil Pakistan’ national song playing in the background at her room’s window by the radio along with her daughter and son, the motivated lady tailor told APP that she had entered the pain-sticking profession after untimely death of her mother few years ago and had been associated with it for the last 28 years.

"I learnt the art from my mother, who started sewing clothes for

brides, children and relatives during occasions of marriages, engagements, Eid and birthday parties from a very young age," Nishat, wearing eyes’ glasses , told APP with a smiling face. Feeling proud of her family’s profession, she said, "presently I prefer to work on fancy suits of brides due to high profit margin as compare to normal stitching of ladies suits," she said, adding she stitches three suits a day and in case of no electricity load-shedding, she could easily sew about six to eight suits per day.

"Presently, I am charging Rs500 for a normal suit and Rs1,000 for a designers’ suits against the prevailing market rate of Rs1,200 for normal and Rs2,00 designers suits," she said, adding the cost of stitching material have increased manifold in the wake of high inflation and price-hike in the country.

Nishat said she was very happy in carrying forward the legacy of her mother as due to this profession she managed to educate her daughter and a son up to post graduation levels from University of Peshawar, arranged their marriages and also performed Umrah and was now planning to expand her business to Peshawar.

"Apart from the government jobs,

a woman can also prove her abilities in private profession and by starting her own business, which she said is more lucrative then the low paid jobs in public sector," she reiterated. She complained that the eight to 10 hours power loadshedding in her home town were hindering her work and because of that the tailors’ community also faces economic losses, adding that she could earn more if the issue gets resolved. Nishat said, "Pakistan had given us everything and now is the time that we can return for its progress and economic prosperity,". Like Nishat, hundreds of thousands of women of Pakistan were playing a key role in the country’s development.

The most inspirational women that made Pakistani nation proud including great political leader and sister of father of the nation, Mohatma Fitama Jinnah, political stalwart, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, first women prime minister of the muslim world Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, first youngest Nobel Peace Award winner 2014, Malala Yousafzai, labour right activist and recipient of Clinton global citizen award 2015, Syeda Ghulam Fatima, first lady pilot officer Shaheed Marium Mukhtar, first female goodwill ambassador by the United Nations entity for gender

equality and empowerment of women, Muniba Mazari, first Pakistani to win two Oscar awards Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy besides first CM Woman in Punjab Maryam Nawaz and many others were shined in the country and world’s horizons making our head high.

Najam Sahar, Director, Zamung Kor (our own house”) government Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was also among one of hundreds of thousands of talented working women of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who was successfully supervising the project started to create an equitable and conducive environment to the disenfranchised, destitute and vulnerable children.

Taking to APP, she said under Zamong Kor model school system, different facilities including free education, accommodation and sports were being provided to disenfranchised and poor children of the province. "Zamung Kor school was established in July 2016 with the capacity to hold about 1000 students with facilities of free books, uniform, bags and stationeries besides quality faculty and psychologists services."

Besides legislation for protection against harassment of women at workplace, enforcement of women’s properties rights and establishment of women empowerment cell, the KP

commission on the status of women (KPCWS) was formed to examine the policies, programs, implementation and other measures taken by the government for their development and ensuring gender equality.

Similarly, eight women shelter homes/darul aman, 235 industrial training centres, women hostels and a girls cadet college in Mardan were set up besides launching first-ever KP women empowerment policy to protect rights of women and ensure their active participation in decision-making and development of Pakistan.

The federal government, under Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was providing the much needed assistance to each deserving registered woman under Benazir Kafalat Program (BKP), thus benefiting about millions of poor families. BISP’s Naushonuma (growth) and education Kafalat program were launched to counter stunting in women and children besides providing quality education to poor students irrespective of gender discrimination.

Under the Prime Minister’s youth business and agriculture loans schemes, the federal government has already announced interest free loan upto Rs5 lac, above Rs 0.5 million up to Rs 1.5 million on five percent markup in second category and

above Rs 1.5 million upto Rs 7.5 million in seven percent markup rate in third category for financial and economic empowerment of youth including girls and women.

Thd spokesman of KP Information Commission said that his has ensured the equal participation of women imperative for a transparent and good governance system and provision of speedy information to them when and whenever required. "The commission focuses on women's active participation in its upcoming working plans of awareness on right to information law in the province and quick disposal of information upon request under the law for resolution of their issues," he reiterated.

Meanwhile, the international women's day was observed with great enthusiasm at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amid seminars, talk shows, debate competition in education institutions and schools. Rallies were also held in different districts where speakers highlighted achievements and problems of women. The speakers highlighted the role of Pakistani women in the country's development process on this occasion and demanded an increase in government and professional colleges quota for their education and employment.



In brief

Uncle kills niece, lover

KHANEWAL (INP): Man killed his niece along with his fiancé after inviting them his home on pretext of arranging their marriage. DPO Umar Farooq took report over the heinous murder incident was surfaced late at night yesterday in Moza Chirg Bella in limits of Nawan Sher Sultan Police Station. According to Irshad, father of the slain, Mubasher Irshad, the accused named Riaz, uncle of Rabia Batool, 18, called his niece along with his fiancé, Mubasher Irshad, 25, at his home. He said, Riaz assured his niece and her lover of arranging marriage that was otherwise facing hindrance in the family circle. When the duo, boy and girl reached out the home, Riaz opened fire and killed them on the spot in what to be termed as honour killing. Police said evidences were being collected by forensic teams with the bodies shifted to civil hospital for autopsy.

ZAB judicially murdered: PPP F.P. Report

KARAK: Pakistan People's Party Women's Wing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Secretary of Information and newly elected Provincial Assembly Member Maher Sultana Advocate has said that history has finally proved that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was judicially murdered on the instructions of global colonialist forces. The leader of the Muslim Ummah, the pride of Asia, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was separated from the country and the nation, which is now impossible to recover. It is the fault of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to gather the Muslim Ummah on one platform, making the country an impregnable fortress and the right of the nation. It was to end the monopoly of land-lords and capitalists. If Bhutto had not been judicially murdered, not only Pakistan, but Pakistan would have been a super power country in the world, even the people would have been prosperous, but what is happening in Gaza and Palestine would not have happened. History has finally proved that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was judicially murdered, those who destroyed the philosophy and ideology of the people's leader were destroyed, while the leader of the people, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was an epoch-making personality who became immortal even when he died and will remain immortal for as long as he lives.

Plantation campaign starts F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Vice Chancellor University of Malakand (UoM) Professor Dr Rashid Ahmad has said that planting a tree is 'Sadqa-e-Jaria' as narrated in Sahih Muslim and we are aware of the ravages of climate change and desertification and its implications for life on the planet. Pakistan is faced with serious challenges of climate change and unpredictable weather patterns and the only solution to address this issue is to plant as many trees as possible. Addressing the plantation campaign here he said Islam has laid great emphasis on the importance of planting trees as there are innumerable benefits associated with it for the benefit of people and environment. To effectively combat climate change and global warming, tree plantation is vital. The Vice Chancellor lauded the efforts of Directorate of Administration and Green Youth Movement Club for their efforts of planting over 3,000 saplings in the recent plantation drive.

Women role in rural economy lauded

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Speakers at a function held here on Friday said that women played a vital role in rural economy and local development but they lacked access to growth and progress. The Frontier Corps 11 Corps and headquarters Dir Scouts arranged the function at the Frontier Corps (FC) Public School Balambat to mark the International Women Day. Women from different walks of life, female teachers and students attended the function.

Prominent social activist and winner of the International woman of courage award, United States in 2012, Ms Shad Begum was chief guest on the occasion. The event was also addressed by winner of the US International woman of courage award 2008 and founder of the Tribal Women Association Begum Jan Muhammad (Tamgha Intiaz), assistant commissioner Timergara Dr Nida Iqbal and others. The speakers lauded the role of women in rural economy and demanded the government to provide them adequate opportunities for their role in progress and development. They highlighted the importance of International Women Day.

They informed the par-

ticipants about the struggle of Pakistani women and their sacrifices for winning women rights in the country. The speakers said that women were regarded inferior to men in Pakistan but due to rights' activists and their untiring efforts the folk now occupied a key status in the country. The speakers said that March 8 was observed globally as the International Women's Day to remind the world the importance and social status of women.

Ms Shad Begum said that 'invest in women, accelerate progress' was the theme of the day this year, which meant that investment in women ensured investment in future generations. She said the government and the concerned institutions should also focus on rural women as they were faced with many social and economical challenges. She said that women played a vital role in progress. She said that state institutions and the private sector should provide women with accessible opportunities in education, health, agriculture, livestock and technology.

She said that women had a great role in the rural economy but they lacked access to many things and their status was not recognized. She said that all tiers of government should take solid measures to ensure

women participation in decision making. Ms Shad said the skilled women should be provided with interest-free small loans for livestock and dairy development. She said that Pakistan was badly affected by the climate changes which adversely affected rural women directly, so the government should include rural women while devising any kind of strategy to cope with the climate changes.

Welcome party: Speakers at a function on Friday said that nurses played a key role in serving the ailing community and they were rightly termed as backbone in the sector of healthcare. The Bilal Institute of Nursing and Health Sciences Timergara arranged the function to welcome the fresh students of the institution.

The function was addressed by former principal of the postgraduate college Timergara Shaukat Ali, Principal Islamia Model College Timergara Farid-ullah, Principal of the nursing college Jalal Khan, Principal Salahud Din, tehsil chairman Mufti Irfanudin, district president Al-Khidmat Foundation Haf-ezullah Khaksar and others. The speakers said that nurses were respected across the globe for their role. They asked the students to focus on modern technology instead of getting degrees.

Shrine of Sheikh Salamat washed with milk

F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: The Shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Salamat alias Mugarbeen is situated around 30 kilometers away from Sujawal in the coastal town jati. It carries historical significance in the history of subcontinent following a unique ritual that is performed a week ahead of the annual Urs.

Every year before the commencement of the annual urs of Sheikh Salamat the domes of the shrine are washed with milk in continuation of the centuries-old ritual called "Dargah Jo Acho". The Ritual of Bathing the shrine with milk, as an expression of love and reverence. "Cattle-owning devotees donate milk in a huge quantity for the performance of this centuries-old ritual," said the custodian of the shrine. Sain Tufail Ahmed Qureshi.

He further said that; Tens of thousands of people from across the province converged at the shrine to witness the ritual being performed by devotees, who got them registered by pay-

ing a registration fee that was around 250 rupees per devotee to take part in the ritual. He claimed that; it was the only shrine of a Muslim saint in the subcontinent being washed with milk.

Sheikh Salamat who was known for his bravery and valor laid down his life while safeguarding the lives of Sayyed's in a war against Rai Kannauj. According to eminent historian Dr. Mohammad Ali Manjhi, Rai Kannauj was the ruler of the Kannauj state that included major parts of Gujarat, the state of present India.

There was no direct conflict between the two but the King became his enemy after he gave refuge to the family of Sayyed's that had fled the rage of Rai Kannauj who was at odds with them over a petty issue. Following the malevolence of the King Sayyed's had to leave their homes and hearths and come to jati where Sheikh Salamat Aka Mugarbeen, a renowned spiritual figurehead of the area gave refuge to them.

The King warned Sheikh

Salamat either to hand Sayyed's over to him or be ready for the war or the Sheikh opted for the war. The war led to the massacre of Sheikh Salamat, his devotees, and Sayyed's. This war is known as the war between Good and Evil and is celebrated by the devotees of Sheikh. The shrines of those Sayyed's are alongside the Shrine of Sheikh Salamat. This ritual is widely discussed every year by historians whether washing a shrine with milk is permissible in Islam or not. However local historians as well as the disciples of Sheikh Salamat defend it by saying that devotion knows no boundaries.

People from different sects and religions attend the annual Urs, particularly the ceremony of bathing the shrine with milk breaking the barriers of culture, color creed and promoting inter-faith harmony. The zeal and zest of devotees would be to the brim this year as the event could not be held last year following the pandemic. The 844th Urs would begin this week in the coastal town.



QUETTA: PkMAP central secretary for women wing, Sabiba Breach addressing during a ceremony.

Journalist is eye of society: KP Minister

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Provincial Minister for Auquf, Hajj and Religious Affairs Muhammad Adnan Qadri has said that the press club has a key role to portray a positive image of society and journalists are the eye of society who picture whatever happens around him.

He expressed the views while addressing on the occasion of the oath taking ceremony of the new cabinet of Landi Kotal press club, district Khyber last day. He said that the profession of Journalism had resemblance

with prophet hood because both were supposed to profess and preach truth.

Unveiling truth is promulgated on the media persons whether it is bitter, he added and said preference should be given to positive reporting to develop an encouraging picture of tribal society. He urged the journalist community that being eyes and ears of the tribal society, they should play their active role to convey miseries of the layman to the rulers.

The Minister assured them that he would assist them to build up a well-established district press club in

Landi Kotal. Earlier, the Provincial Minister administered oath to new office bearers of Landi Kotal press club, comprising Ahmad Nabi as President, Hiyat Ali Afridi Vice-President, Mehrab Afridi General Secretary, Aman Ali Finance Secretary, Mian Sajid as Press Secretary.

The newly elected President apprised the chief guest of the problems being faced by the local journalists. Scores of media persons, tribal elders and members of civil society attended the simple but impressive moot.



HYDERABAD: A large number of women participating in a rally on the eve of International Women's Day.

Youths asked to donate blood F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The district administration and the youth affairs department in collaboration with the Blood Hero Team organized a blood screening camp and an awareness walk at the Timergara campus of the Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan here the other day.

The campus coordinator Dr Minhajud Din, district youth officer Malik Shahzad Tariq, Dr Masood, chief minister of the Malakand Youth Assembly Sulman Khan, chairman Qazi Hanifullah and Blood Hero Team volunteers, male and female students and faculty members participated in the events. The blood of more than 200 volunteers was screened. The participants later held an awareness walk regarding the growing thalassemia, an inherited disease passed from parents to children through genes.

Speaking on the occasion Dr Masood Ahmad, district youth officer Malik Shahzad Tariq and others highlighted the importance and need of blood donation for saving human lives. They said the blood screening was aimed to collect data of blood donors in the area. The speakers asked the youths and students to donate their blood to saving the life of poor and innocent children.

They said that most of the people were not aware of the thalassemia disease. The speakers asked the participants to play their active role in making the people aware about thalassemia and its harms in society. They said that collective efforts were needed to end the disease. At the end of the ceremony, shields and certificates were distributed among the participants.

Woman beaten to death by in-laws

MURIDKE (INP): In a horrific incident, a woman was allegedly beaten to death by her in-laws in Hussain Town, Muridke. As per details, Punjab police registered an FIR on the complaint of the victim's father Maqsood.

He stated that the in-laws took a newborn son from her daughter and beaten her to death. The parents of the victim staged a protest at THQ hospital, demanding justice for her deceased daughter. Earlier, a woman was allegedly raped and beaten by a man in front of her children in Bahawalnagar city of Punjab.

According to details, the accused – identified as Arsalan – allegedly raped and beat a woman in front of her children in Khadimabad Colony of Bahawalnagar. Upon resistance, the accused brutally thrashed the woman. The accused fled from the spot when the condition of the woman deteriorated. The woman was shifted to the hospital in critical condition for medical treatment. Meanwhile, the police have registered the case against accused, Arsalan, on the complaint of victim's father.

In a separate horrific incident, a 33-year-old woman was badly tortured and allegedly burnt alive by her husband in Karachi's Gulshan-e-Iqbal area. According to police, the 33-year-old woman was found dead at a school located in Karachi's Gulshan-e-Iqbal Block No 4.

Heavy snowfall in Chitral

Roads to valleys opened for traffic

CHITRAL (APP): After a heavy snowfall in Chitral, the roads to rest of the districts were closed but due to untiring efforts by Deputy Commissioner Chitral Imran Ahmad Khan by utilizing all resources to open up the roads on an emergency basis.

Talking to APP, on phone, Deputy Commissioner Imran Khan disclosed that all roads connecting Chitral to the rest of districts including Dir Upper, Lower, cleared from heavy snow. He said there were fears of avalanches and land sliding even at Boni side, which have been cleared for all types of traffic, soon after the snowfall last week.

He said chances of snow on Saturday and Sunday, preparations have already been made for relief activities all across Chitral, both Upper and Lower wherein some houses have partially been damaged. He said the staff of the district administration is working day and night in order to provide quickly needed relief to the people of Chitral. "I myself monitored all relief activities and opening of roads," Imran Ahmad Khan said.

He disclosed that due to rain and heavy snowfall Bumburet Valley, Rambur, Ursun, Sheshi Koh, Janjirit Koh, Beuri and other areas

had been closed for all types of vehicular traffic. Contractor of NHA cleared the snow from the main highway of Peshawar-Chitral and the roads inside Chitral bazaar, while the C&W Communication and Works Department is clearing the snow from other valleys.

He said Executive Engineer C&W Department Tariq Murtaza and SDO Drosch Waqar Khan, contractor Haider Ali of Drosch Construction Company opened the road from Bomburit valley to Anish, Rambur road to Pondak and Sheshikoh road to Patigal after clearing snow. However, due to continuous land sliding, glaciers on the Sheshikoh road and huge rocks are obstructing the cleaning work but now things have been cleared for all traffic, he added.

Officials of the concerned company worked hard day and night to open the road to Ursun Valley, Jangerit Koh and Beuri for all kinds of traffic. According to local people, the roads of Kalash valley are with the National Highway Authority, but the snow is being cleared from these roads by the C&W Department.

At present, work on the opening of roads continues

in Garm Chashma, Karimabad, Sosum, Madagalsht etc. However, the Missionaries of the C&W Department are working continuously, DC Imran Khan said. It is hoped that very soon the road to Shishikoh will be completely opened for all types of traffic. It will reduce the problems of the people. He said funds are there and they timely utilized it accordingly by opening up all roads on the basis of their personal influence with the contractors.

When contacted Deputy Commissioner Dir Imran Ali Khan, he said they worked day and night and now all roads are open for traffic. He also appreciated the district administration staff, contractors for removing heavy snow from the Dir side of Lowari Tunnel. "We had developed a check-post in order to help the travellers, tourists and those stranded due to heavy snowfall on the Chitral side of Lowari Tunnel," Assistant Commissioner Usman said. He said on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Dir Upper all concerned staff are ready to deal with any kind of situation, Assistant Commissioner Headquarter, Dir Upper Usman said.

Rigging in election: ANP holds protest in Swat

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Awami National Party stage a huge protest against rigging in the election on Friday at Nishat Chowak Mingora. ANP Chief Aimal Wali Khan stated that public mandate had been stolen in the recent general elections, and it was widely recognized worldwide that the elections were rigged.

He spoke at a protest demonstration held at Nishat Chowk Mingora, which aimed to oppose terrorism, military intervention in politics, and advocate for the strengthening of democracy and the constitution. In addition to the ANP chief, Sardar Hussain Babak, the provincial general secretary, and other leaders such as district Swat president Ayoub Khan Asharey, Brigadier retired Muhammad Saleem, Sher Shah Khan, Khwaja Muhammad, among others, participated in the rally.

Aimal Wali reiterated his

rejection of the election results and called for a judicial inquiry into the alleged rigging during the elections. He emphasized that certain elements aimed to manipulate outcomes in Punjab and, failing to do so, targeted Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K-P). He asserted that the public mandate had been openly deceived and stolen in the general elections.

He highlighted that not only local observers but also the international community believed in the occurrence of rigging. He appealed to the Chief Justice to intervene and form a judicial commission to investigate the irregularities and allegations of rigging. He vowed to pursue legal action alongside those who were coerced into influencing outcomes according to certain interests. He vehemently rejected the idea that the establishment could dictate the nation's destiny.

He stated that more than

75% of the rigging took place during the elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "The constitution strictly prohibits the establishment from meddling in elections, yet they interfered and orchestrated rigging," he emphasized. He asserted, "We will not tolerate this practice to persist. This was not an election; it was akin to theft from a shop. Election theft violates the rights of the public."

He continued, "It amounts to robbery. Our ancestors fought for the rights of Pakhtuns. The Supreme Court should initiate a judicial inquiry into the elections. All constituencies in Pakhtunkhwa should be scrutinized, and the people's votes verified." The leaders of ANP insisted that those who violate the constitution should face the death penalty. They deemed it the most severe form of theft and a flagrant violation of constitutional rights to tamper with the people's mandate.

3 shot dead in Hafizabad

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Three accused shot to death a landlord of village Thahta Kalian near Hafizabad and fled away.

According to details, Ansar Iqbal landlord of village Thahta Kalian was present in his home. When he came out in response of door knocking, three accused Aamar alias Chaidoo etc. opened firing after exchange of hot words.

Ansar Iqbal was injured critically and he was carried to Trauma Centre Hafizabad but he lost his breath on the way while accused were fled away

from the scene. Hafizabad police have registered a case and started investigations.

Meanwhile, a speedy driven Dumper Truck crushed to death a school teacher on Lahore-Sargodha Road in Sukheki Mandi. According to details, a school teacher of Government Primary School Ghurat Gujran was on its way to Pindi Bhattian on the Motorcycle, when he reached near Chowki Liaquat Abad on Lahore-Sargodha Road, a speedy driven Dumper Truck hit him. As a result of which he was died on the spot. Dumper Truck driver sped away from the place of accident.

Moreover, the Coordinator on 'Suthra' Punjab Program of the Chief Minister of the Punjab and Ex-Federal Minister Saira Afzal Tarar has expressed her resentment over lake of interest in 'Suthra' Punjab Program by the Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad and other officers in the district. She said that people of the district Hafizabad were complaining against unhygienic condition of various areas repeatedly but Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad and other officers were in slumber to ignore the directions of the Chief Minister of the Punjab Maryam Nawaz.



Strikes cripple air and rail travel across Germany

BERLIN (AP): Millions of travelers across Germany were affected by strikes again after two unions called for two-day walkouts over wages and work conditions. Around 80% of all long-distance trains as well as regional and commuter trains in the country were canceled as train drivers went on strike. Air travel was affected as well, as ground staff for German airline Lufthansa stopped working early in the morning.

The strikes led to traffic jams in cities and on highways, a shortage of share and rental cars, and plane passengers trying to desperately rebook flights to reach their destinations. Students arrived late for school and employees struggled to arrive on time for work as millions who usually rely

on commuter trains found themselves stranded or stuck in traffic. Lufthansa said earlier in the week that about 1,000 flights per day would have to be canceled and that around 200,000 air passengers would be affected. Negotiations continue for Lufthansa ground staff and German rail operator Deutsche Bahn's train drivers. The train drivers' union GDL and Ver.di called for the strikes.

The strike on long-distance and regional passenger train services began at 2 a.m. (0100 GMT). According to GDL, it is to last until 1 p.m. Friday. For freight transport, the strike started at 6 p.m. (1700 GMT) and is to last until 5 a.m. Friday.

In addition to pay raises, GDL has been calling for working hours to be

reduced from 38 to 35 per week without a pay cut, which Deutsche Bahn has refused. The Ver.di union seeks a 12.5% pay raise, or at least 500 euros (\$542) more per month, in negotiations for nearly 25,000 Lufthansa ground workers including check-in, aircraft handling, maintenance and freight staff. Coinciding contract negotiations have resulted in several walkouts in the rail, air and local transport sectors in Germany in recent months, testing passengers' patience over and over again. Train driver union GDL announced earlier this week that more strikes were coming in the near future, but said it would no longer announce them 48 hours in advance, giving travelers less time to look for alternatives.

Haiti extends state of emergency

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haitians have been plunged into a deepening crisis, as gang violence forces thousands of people to flee their homes and businesses and schools to shutter. Haiti's government extended a state of emergency until April 3 in the Ouest Department, where the capital, Port-au-Prince, is located. It was first imposed on Sunday. The measure includes nightly curfews and bans on protests, although rights groups have said they have done little to stem the violence.

A new police station was also set on fire in the Port-au-Prince neighbourhood of Bas-Peu-de-Chose, according to a statement that the leader of the SYNAPHOA police union gave to the Agence France-Presse news agency. The surge in violence began over the weekend when armed groups launched a wave of attacks in the capital, including raids on two prisons that led to the escape of thousands of inmates. According to a SYNAPHOA tally, at least 10 police buildings have been destroyed since the start of the unrest.

Haiti has been plagued by widespread gang violence for more than two years, particularly in the wake of the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. That killing created a power vacuum and worsened political instability in the Caribbean nation. The country's de facto leader, Prime Minister Ariel Henry, has faced a crisis of legitimacy and continuing calls to

resign. Moise chose Henry for the post just days before he was killed. This week, the head of the powerful G9 Haitian gang alliance, Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, warned, "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." Al Jazeera's Teresa Bo, reporting from Dajabon, a Dominican town on the border with Haiti, said displaced Haitians were being prevented from entering the country. "We're being told that the border is now closed," Bo said. "Security forces here are on high alert."

The United Nations said this week that at least 15,000 people in Port-au-Prince - where gangs are believed to control about 80 percent of the territory - have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the escalating violence. The international organisation warned that the country's health system was on the brink of collapse. "What we do know is happening [in Haiti] is that there's looting going on, shooting going on. Businesses are closed. Schools, universities and most public services are not working because of the situation on the ground," Bo added. In the meantime, uncertainty continues to build around the fate of Henry, who was out of the country when the recent wave of violence began. The Miami Herald reported that the United States had asked Henry to agree to a

new transitional government - and resign - amid the growing crisis. But senior US officials, including the country's ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, denied that report. "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. "We think that it's urgent ... that he moves forward in that direction and start the process of bringing normalcy back to the people of Haiti." Henry has been in the US territory of Puerto Rico, apparently unable or unwilling to return to his strife-torn country.

He recently visited Kenya to rally support for a multinational security force to assist in Haiti's fight against gang violence. The National Human Rights Defense Network, a government accountability group, said there is little hope in stemming the violence under the current circumstances. In a position paper released, the network said the unrest has been fuelled by collusion between the "hierarchy of the Haitian National Police" and criminal gangs, who continue to benefit from the "protection of Haiti's judicial and political authorities". "Today, the facts are clear: The government authorities have resigned. The streets of the capital and the entire Ouest department are given over to armed bandits," the group said. — Aljazeera

UN raises alert for people displaced in Mozambique

CAPE TOWN (AP): The United Nations' refugee chief raised a new alert over 780,000 displaced people in Mozambique, the vast majority of them because of a seven-year insurgency by a jihadi group that has thrown the north of the country into turmoil. Filippo Grandi, the UN's high commissioner for refugees, was on a visit to Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province, where an Islamic State-affiliated group has waged attacks on communities since 2017 and where some 1.3 million people were forced to flee their homes to escape killings and beheadings.

Around 600,000 have returned home, many to shattered communities where houses, markets, churches, schools and health facilities have been destroyed. Grandi's visit came amid an upsurge in new attacks by the Islamic State Mozambique group in Cabo Delgado since January following a period of relative calm in 2023. They have caused 80,000 new displacements, taking the total number of people forced to abandon their homes and villages and currently displaced in Mozambique to over three quarters of a million, according to the UN. Other aid agencies have estimated that the number of people forced to flee their villages because of violence in the north since January is higher and closer to 100,000.

Around 700,000 people are displaced in Mozambique because of the violence in Cabo Delgado. The other 80,000 are in the central Sofala province, which was hit hard by Cyclone Idai in 2019, the UN said. Grandi made a call for "sustained involvement by the international community" to help Mozambique, with the UN's humanitarian plan in the southern African country facing a funding gap. The UN needs \$400 million to help people in Mozambique this year alone and has received pledges for just 5% of that required money, said Robert Piper, the special adviser on internally displaced people to UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

"We are not starting from zero ... but clearly more resources are needed," said Piper, who accompanied Grandi on the visit to Cabo Delgado.

More than 280 Nigerian pupils abducted

ABUJA (BBC): More than 280 Nigerian school pupils have been abducted in the north-western town of Kuriga, officials say. The pupils were in the assembly ground around 08:30 (07:30 GMT) when dozens of gunmen on motorcycles rode through the school, one witness said. The students, between the ages of eight and 15, were taken away, along with a teacher, they added.

Kidnap gangs, known as bandits, have seized hundreds of people in recent years, especially the north-west. However, there had been a reduction in the mass abduction of children over the past year until this week. The incident was confirmed by Uba Sani, the governor of Kaduna state, which includes Kuriga. He said 187 students had gone missing from the Government Secondary School and 125 from the local primary school but that 25 had since returned.

The eyewitness, meanwhile, said that one pupil was shot by the gunmen and was receiving medical attention at the Birnin Gwari hospital. A teacher who managed to escape said local people had tried to rescue the children, but they were repelled by the gunmen and one person was killed. Almost every family is thought to have a child among the kidnapped victims and the armed forces have launched an operation to find them. In January, bandits killed a school principal in the area and abducted his wife. The kidnapping comes days after dozens of women and children were feared kidnapped by the Boko Haram Islamist group while they were collecting firewood in north-eastern Nigeria. However, the two cases of mass abductions are not thought to be related.



BERLIN: Passengers waiting at a Lufthansa check-in counter at Munich Airport, Germany. The Verdi trade union is paralyzing important parts of German air traffic and Friday with renewed warning strikes by several professional groups.

UN chief urges Sudan's warring parties to halt hostilities

UNITED NATIONS (AP): The United Nations chief urged Sudan's warring parties to halt hostilities during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, warning that the nearly year-long conflict threatens the country's unity and "could ignite regional instability of dramatic proportions."

Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, the head of Sudan's military which has been fighting for control of Sudan with the rival commander of the country's paramilitary force, welcomed the Ramadan ceasefire appeal, Sudan's UN envoy said. But there was no immediate word from the commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, Mohammed Hammad Dagalo. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' appeal came ahead of an expected UN Security Council vote Friday on a British-drafted resolution calling for "an immediate cessation of hostilities ahead of the month of Ramadan."

The draft resolution expresses "grave concern over the spreading violence and the catastrophic and deteriorating humanitarian situation, including crisis levels of acute food insecurity, particularly in Darfur." Sudan plunged into chaos last April, when long-simmering tensions between the military and paramilitary leaders broke out into street battles in the capital, Khartoum. Fighting spread to other parts of the country, but in Sudan's western Darfur region it took on a different form, with brutal attacks by the Arab-dominated Rapid Support Forces on ethnic African civilians. Thousands of people have been killed. Two decades ago, Sudan's vast western Darfur region became synonymous with genocide and war crimes, particularly by the notorious Janjaweed Arab militias against populations that identify as Central or East African. The International Criminal Court's prosecutor, Karim Khan, said in late

January there are grounds to believe both sides in the current conflict are committing possible war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide in Darfur. At a Security Council meeting on Sudan, Guterres pointed to renewed military offensives and growing fears of a further expansion of hostilities in the east, calls for arming civilians in various states, and armed groups entering the fighting in western Darfur and South Kordofan. "All these dangerous developments are pouring fuel on the fire for an even more serious fragmentation of the country, a deepening of intra-and inter-communal tensions, and more ethnic violence," Guterres said. "A Ramadan cessation of hostilities can help stem the suffering and usher the way to a sustainable peace." Sudan's UN Ambassador Al-Harith Mohamed said the government was "very pleased" with what the UN chief said and told the Security Council that he just heard from general Burhan. "He commends the secretary-general on his appeal for a cessation of hostilities during the month of Ramadan," the ambassador said.

"However, he's wondering about how to do this," Mohamed said, stressing that the Rapid Support Forces are continuing their attacks. "All those who would like to see that appeal transformed into action ... if they would like to present a mechanism for implementation of it, we would welcome it." UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, asked whether there was a UN mechanism, replied: "First and foremost, it is within the capacity of both parties to stop fighting."

"I think everyone is willing and ready to help," Dujarric told reporters. "The most important thing is that those who have their fingers on the trigger silence their weapons." As the conflict continues with no end in sight, Guterres warned that the

humanitarian consequences of the conflict are reaching "colossal proportions." Half of Sudan's population - 25 million people - need life-saving assistance, some 18 million are "acutely food insecure," and the UN is receiving reports of children dying from malnutrition, Guterres said. Sudan also has the world's worst internal displacement crisis, with 6.3 million people who fled their homes and remain in the country seeking safety, he said. Civilian infrastructure has been destroyed and 70% of health facilities in conflict areas aren't functioning. And millions of children aren't going to school. He said the UN is also receiving reports of systematic sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, as well as abduction and trafficking "for the purpose of sexual exploitation." With Ramadan expected to begin around Sunday, depending on the sighting of the new moon, Britain's deputy UN ambassador James Kariuki said he hopes for a Security Council vote on a Ramadan cease-fire on Friday. "The Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces bear responsibility for the horrendous situation in Sudan," he told the council. "Shelling and attacks from both sides in heavily populated urban areas and across the entire western region of Sudan continue to kill and terrorize civilians." Kariuki echoed the secretary-general's call for an immediate cease-fire for Ramadan and urged the government to allow humanitarian aid deliveries from neighboring Chad to conflict-torn Darfur, and both sides to allow deliveries across conflict lines. "It should not be for the military leadership of both the SAF (Sudan Armed Forces) or RSF to determine the political future of Sudan," Kariuki said. "We call on them to give way to a civilian transitional government that will fully respect the basic human rights of the Sudanese people."

Hong Kong prepares tough new national security punishments

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's Legislative Council has begun debating the draft of a new national security law for the Chinese territory after Chief Executive John Lee said it should be passed at "full speed". Discussions on the Safeguarding National Security Bill, as it is officially known, started at 11am (03:00 GMT) on Friday.

The draft bill, some 212 pages long, was published online a few hours ahead of the session and includes new laws on treason, espionage, external interference, state secrets and sedition. Those found guilty of treason could face sentences of up to life imprisonment, while those convicted of breaching state secrets or espionage could face 10 and 20 years respectively. Punishments relating to alleged collusion with foreign forces will also be increased, particularly if people are deemed to be working together rather than alone.

Penalties have also been increased for sedition, currently addressed under a

colonial-era law - to seven years from two - and will also cover inciting hatred against the Chinese Communist Party and the country's socialist system of governance. Police will also be allowed to detain suspects for two weeks before charging them, compared with 48 hours currently. In a statement, Lee urged the passage of the bill at "full speed" to enable the territory to move forward. Hong Kong "has to enact the Basic Law Article 23 legislation as soon as possible - the earlier the better. Completing the legislative work even one day earlier means we can more effectively safeguard national security one day earlier," he said in a statement. "The Hong Kong SAR [Special Administrative Region] can then focus its efforts on developing the economy, improving people's livelihood and maintaining the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong." Previous administrations shied away from introducing Article 23 after 500,000 people took to the streets of the city in 2003 after the

government of then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa tried to bring in the legislation. The latest draft is being considered in a vastly changed political environment. Hong Kong is now subject to a Chinese-drafted national security law that was imposed in June 2020 after hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets the year before calling for more democracy in protests that sometimes turned violent.

The broadly-worded Beijing law bypassed the local legislature and made acts deemed to be secession, subversion, "terrorism" and collusion with foreign forces punishable with sentences as long as life in prison. While the authorities have said the law was necessary to restore stability, critics say it has "decimated" the territory's long-held freedoms, which Beijing had promised to respect for at least 50 years after regaining sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. Thousands have been arrested, media and civil society groups have closed, and many pro-democracy

politicians have gone into exile.

Media tycoon Jimmy Lai, owner of the Apple Daily tabloid, is currently on trial in arguably the most high profile national security case. The Apple Daily was closed in 2021 after police raided its offices, Lai and other staff were arrested and its assets frozen. The legislature has also been overhauled since 2019 with pro-Beijing candidates dominant after changes to electoral rules cut the number of directly-elected seats and ensured only those deemed loyal to China could contest. The house has no opposition members. The bill is being considered just a week after a month-long public consultation process on the bill came to an end. The government said it received some 13,147 submissions and that 98.6 percent "indicated support for the legislation and made positive comments". It also held consultations with select groups involving about 3,000 people. Hong Kong has a population of more than seven million people. — Aljazeera

Polish government blames hooligans for violence at farmer protests

WARSAW (AP): Poland's government blamed hooligans and provocateurs for this week's violent clashes during farmer protests that left many police officers injured, and vowed to prosecute the offenders.

Warsaw police said that 14 officers were hurt, one of them seriously, when aggressive participants in the massive farmer protest

pelted them with pavement stones and other objects. The police used tear gas against them. Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that those found guilty of provoking the violence "for political or other reasons" will be punished according to the law. He said the violence will not prevent him from talking to representatives of disgruntled farmers

who say their livelihoods are being undercut by recent European Union decisions.

Interior Minister Marcin Kierwinski said some people took advantage of otherwise legal protests to sow unrest. "I want to make it clear: We need to differentiate between two categories. The farmers, who were protesting in accordance with the law. But we were

also dealing with a small group of hooligans and provocateurs who attacked the police," Kierwinski said. More than 50 participants were detained and 26 of them are under investigation, according to the police. Farmers across Europe are angry over EU climate policies and food imports from Ukraine that they say threaten their livelihoods.

NK's COVID curbs still strangling economy

SEOUL: Tightened border controls introduced to curb COVID-19 are still strangling North Korea's economic activity and informal trade networks more than 18 months after leader Kim Jong Un declared victory over the pandemic, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said.

North Korea was one of the first countries to act on reports of COVID-19 circulating in early 2020, sealing itself off from the outside world and its economic life-line in China.

As Pyongyang suspended freight shipments from China for two years, authorities also beefed up border barriers to prevent any movement between the countries - going as far as issuing a shoot to kill order for people and animals to prevent them from spreading COVID-19. Satellite photos of six locations on the China-North Korea border show that fencing was expanded to cover 321 kilometres in 2023, up from 230 kilometres before the pandemic, HRW said in a report released.

Existing fences were also updated to include more watchtowers, guard posts, and secondary and tertiary layers of fencing, the rights group said. Since then, heightened border security has made it nearly impossible for North Koreans to leave, with the number of

defectors dropping sharply from 1,047 in 2019 to a low of 63 in 2021, and then 196 last year, the report said.

"The government's persistent drive to control its population, overboard and prolonged responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and expanded nuclear weapons capabilities, have combined with the intensifying external pressures of UN Security Council sanctions to turn North Korea - already effectively a country-wide prison - into an even more repressive and isolated state," the report said. As authorities ramped up border patrols during the pandemic, officials also cracked down on bribery that since the late 1990s had allowed North Koreans to evade government restrictions on daily life to the extent they could enjoy some freedom of movement and buy goods at formal and informal markets, according to HRW. "Almost all" cross-border movement of people and formal and informal commercial trade has stopped since the pandemic began, the report said, citing interviews with 16 North Korean defectors who were in contact with family or informal brokers and smugglers still in the country.

"Informal traders can only get small packages that they can carry easily in their hands or hide in their body," Lee Kwang Baek, director of the

Unification Media Group, a Seoul-based NGO that broadcasts news to North Korea, said in the report. The new security measures have made civilians afraid to even approach border regions for fear they could be shot, according to testimony from a former North Korean trader quoted in the report. "My [relative] said there were no words to describe how hard life was. There was no [informal] trade with China, not even to get some rice or a bag of wheat. If [authorities] heard of a soldier allowing that, that person would just disappear," the trade said in the report. "Soldiers are very scared ... My [relative] said people in [her area] said there is not even an ant crossing the border."

North Korean authorities have also started cracking down on jangmadang, or informal markets, which had been tolerated to supplement people's daily needs following a catastrophic famine in the 1990s, the breakdown of the government rationing system, and continuing international sanctions, according to the report. Officials have imposed tougher punishments from forced labour to capital punishment for "distributing imported products that don't have official trading certificates and conducting economic activity in streets or places without permits," HRW said. — Aljazeera

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Need for accountability & principled governance

THE Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) recently 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. According to the details, the council rendered its opinion in respect of the nine complaints against the former judge under Article 209(6) of the Constitution and declared him guilty of misconduct and should have been removed from the office of Judge. Meanwhile, the top judicial body discussed Article V of the Code of Conduct of the Pakistan Judiciary and observed that a reply or clarification issued by or on behalf of a Judge does not violate Article V when it comes to complaints/allegations regarding the conduct of the judges.

Retired Justice Naqvi faced serious charges of corruption, abuse of power, and professional misconduct being in service as a Supreme Court Judge. The reference was filed against him in the Supreme Judicial Council after his name surfaced in an audio leak last year. The leaked audio transcript revealed that the aforementioned judge appears to be passing an order under being approached by the concerned parties which in itself is a gross violation of his code of conduct. The reference alleged that Justice Naqvi misused authority as an apex court judge in the most obvious manner. Previously, the PDM coalition government constituted an inquiry commission comprising three Supreme Court judges to confirm the validity of the allegations against Justice Naqvi, about whom he objected and refused to cooperate. Meanwhile, Justice Naqvi raised objections over the hearing of the Supreme Judicial Council on personal grounds and sought premature retirement through resignation from his office to elude the ongoing accountability process against him.

There had been rumours in public regarding the trading of justice, the availability of paid witnesses, and frontmen of the adjudicators who help facilitate the criminals in bartering bail/pardon in reward of money/ plots or luxury vehicles for the adjudicators and their family members. However, the former Army Chief General Retired Qamar Javed Bajwa categorically accused the senior judges in his interview of shedding off merit and transparency in their under-trial cases in the fulfillment of mere desires of their family members, spouses, and children through the announcement of biased verdicts and serving of tainted justice.

In fact, persistent political unrest and dogfights between the parties, not only eroded people's trust in the public institutions but this curse seriously polarized and corrupted our national institutions, and undermined institutional discipline and professional ethics. The institutional politics not only disturbed the working environment of the national institutions but prompted intra-institutional grouping and rivalries among the government servants and senior executives. Over the decades, the Pakistani judiciary fell victim to multiple institutional biases including nepotism, corruption, and no accountability of adjudicators and the lower staff that turned the justice delivery into a lucrative business causing serious social and legal issues for the society, system as well as the government. The current Supreme Judicial Council and incumbent Chief Justice Qazi Faez Esa took seriously the cases of professional misconduct and corruption on the part of the senior judges and members from the lower courts, revoked the legal provision barring accountability and prosecution of retired judges/ government prosecutors by continuing Supreme Judicial Council proceeding against former Judge Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi. After the completion of legal proceedings, the top Judicial body declared retired Justice Naqvi of professional misconduct and abuse of authority.

The recent decisions of the top judicial forum are a remarkable milestone in our national history, wherein top judges sat aside the so-called institutional prestige and communal interests and have taken a principled approach clumping hard on institutional menaces in the judiciary that is the most vital organ of the country. Historically, there is a common perception that judges, generals, and bureaucrats are sacred cows and immune from accountability and prosecution not only in the service but thereafter throughout life. These unconstitutional notions, bureaucratic norms, and nepotism seriously marred the justice system of the country wherein courts, police, and other government institutions backed each other making the matter worse, converting the legal and social issues into catastrophes in the past decades. When it comes to national affairs, there is a need to adopt broad patriotic policies instead of narrow vision, ethnic, institutional, or political approaches. So our constitution, federation, and institutions become strong against personalities, parties, and religious and ethnic pressure groups. These are the foundations of modern societies that glorify a nation in the world.

Healthcare, popular politics and bitter realities

KHYBER Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has decided to restore free health care services under the Sehat Card Plus initiative, from 1st Ramadan, for the cent percent population of the province. According to the details, the KP government has released Rs. 5 billion to State Life Insurance to resume its operation while an equal amount would be disbursed every month for the payment of arrears to state Life. The Chief Minister has termed public welfare as an important priority area of his government and said that Sehat Card Plus was a project of public importance that would be continued at all costs.

The Sehat Card Plus Scheme was the magnificent pro-poor initiative of the PTI government that was initially launched in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in late 2020. It was a government-sponsored micro health insurance program under the Prime Minister's Sehat Insaaf initiative that was later expanded to other provinces then ruled by the PTI and its coalition partners except Sindh which was governed by PPP at that time. The PTI government funded several hundred billion rupees while enabling poor patients to get free-of-cost treatment for major diseases including heart surgery, blood dialysis, radiotherapies, and other serious ailments including cancer. Each adult citizen or household was authorized to expand one million rupees on indoor treatment from designated hospitals in a fiscal year. Historically, millions of people benefited from that magnificent project for almost two years until the State Life Insurance Company stopped its operation due to the nonpayment of dues by the treasury in April last year. Interestingly, the caretaker Chief Minister KP late Muhammad Azam Khan held several meetings with concerned authorities and high ups in the State Life Insurance to resume the provision of free of cost healthcare to the poor masses in the province but finally abandoned that endeavors considering the bulk of money involve and huge amounts pending payment on behalf of the previous PTI government in the province. The newly throne government agreed with the insurer to payback government dues through 5 billion rupees in monthly installments together with the same amount on account of fresh contract.

Historically, the Frontier Post categorically mentioned on these pages that the provision of the cent percent free of cost healthcare facility is surely unmanageable for any government and the PTI leadership must devise a mechanism by issuing a health card of affordable worth for each household to collect funds to make this magnificent initiative sustainable for the government as well as the public. The newly formed PTI Government has rediscovered its previous legacy but it is unsure how long the system will sustain and how much the country would pay for such governance of its leaders.



This is not 'Netanyahu's war', it is Israel's genocide

Ahmad Ibsais

I do not blame Benjamin Netanyahu. I do not blame the Israeli prime minister for what is happening to my people. I do not blame him today, as Israeli bombs destroy every corner of Gaza, and children die under the rubble. I did not blame him back in 2013, when I had to watch the slaughter of my people in Gaza on the evening news, either.

My mother did not blame him when snipers perched on rooftops shot at her as she tried to make her way to work in the West Bank. My grandfather, God rest his soul, did not blame him as he died without ever returning to the land settlers stole from him in the 1980s, either. For me, for my family, for my people, what we are witnessing in Palestine today is not "Netanyahu's war". It is not his occupation. He is not being blamed by another cog in the relentless war machine that is Israel.

Yet if you were to ask senators Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren, the supposed champions of Palestinian rights and progressive humanitarianism in the United States, everything that has happened to us in the past 75 years, and everything that is happening to us today, can be blamed on one man, and one man alone: Netanyahu. Sanders insistently calls the ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza "Netanyahu's war", and demands that the US "not give Netanyahu another nickel". Meanwhile, Warren denounces "Netanyahu's failed leadership" as she calls for a ceasefire.

For these progressive senators, the cause of all the pain and suffering in Palestine is clear: a far-right, hawkish prime minister hell-bent on continuing a conflict that keeps him in power. Sure, Netanyahu is evil. Sure, he committed countless crimes against Palestinians and against humanity, throughout his long career. Sure, he is continuing to fuel the carnage in Gaza today in part for his own political survival. And he should be held accountable for everything he has said and done that caused harm and pain to my people. But the racism, extremism and genocidal intent that is on display in Gaza and across the occupied Palestinian territory today cannot and should not be blamed on Netanyahu alone.

The same is true for Netanyahu and Israel. The suggestion that Netanyahu betrayed Israel's progressive, democratic foundations and caused the "humanitarian catastrophe" we are witnessing in Gaza

alone.

Blaming Israel's blatant human rights abuses, disregard for international law, and open celebration of war crimes on Netanyahu alone is nothing but a coping mechanism for liberals like Sanders and Warren. By blaming Netanyahu for the suffering and oppression of the Palestinian people, past and present, they keep alive the lie that Israel was built on progressive ideals, rather than ethnic cleansing.

By blaming Netanyahu, they whitewash their seemingly unconditional support for a state blatantly committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. By blaming Netanyahu, and casting Israel as a progressive, well-meaning state that would respect international humanitarian law but is currently taken over by a bad leader, they are absolving themselves - and the US at large - of complicity in Israel's many war crimes.

Of course, Sanders, Warren and all the others pushing this line know well that the "conflict" in Israel-Palestine would not magically disappear and Palestinians would not immediately achieve liberation and justice if Netanyahu were gone. After all, they've seen a similar scenario play out in the US only a few years ago. People had said if only Trump was removed from the White House, problems that he fuelled and provoked would disappear. The American democracy would be saved and everything would be just fine.

But did that happen? It has been almost four years since the eventful end of Trump's presidency, but we can still see rampant racism, inequality, gun violence and poverty across the country. These problems have not been magically fixed after Trump's presidency, because they were not created by Trump. These were never "Trump" problems, but American ones. Furthermore, there is a very real chance that Trump will return to the White House next year because millions of Americans support him and his agenda.

The same is true for Netanyahu and Israel. The suggestion that Netanyahu betrayed Israel's progressive, democratic foundations and caused the "humanitarian catastrophe" we are witnessing in Gaza

today, ignores the systemic oppression that is inherent to Israel as a settler colony.

Sanders and others may want to believe the Zionist myth that Israel is an essentially progressive country with socialist foundations, built on a "land without people" by a people without land. But they cannot escape the fact that Palestine has never been a "land without a people". Indeed, the founding of Israel required the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who are Indigenous to the land, and the survival of Israel as a "Jewish Nation", as stated in its Nation State Law, requires the continued oppression, disenfranchisement and abuse of Palestinians. Today, millions of Palestinians continue to live and die under Israeli occupation, and they - alongside Palestinian citizens of Israel - are subjected to what is widely described as an apartheid system. This untenable and unjust dynamic is hardly the creation of Netanyahu and his government.

From the very beginning, the state of Israel tied its long-term survival to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, complete erasure of the Palestinian identity, and the oppression of Palestinians who remained on their lands. Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir wrote in a Washington Post op-ed that "There is no such thing as Palestinians" in 1969, decades before the beginning of Netanyahu's reign. Sure, the Israeli left promote their agriculture-based communal living situation in "kibbutzim" as a socialist dream, and many Israelis take pride in their country's "democracy".

But all this is true only if you ignore the humanity of Palestinians who have been ethnically cleansed from their lands to make way for the socialist kibbutzim, and who cannot participate in Israel's democracy despite living under full Israeli control in illegally occupied territory. Before the beginning of the genocide in Gaza, Israelis protested en masse against what they deemed to be an attack on the country's legal system and democracy by Netanyahu for months. Yet they have never protested in such numbers and with such

force the occupation, murder, and brutalisation of Palestinians by their own state and military.

In November, a full month into the genocide, only 1.8 percent of Israelis said they believed the Israeli military was using too much firepower in Gaza, and now, five months into the genocide, some 40 percent of Israelis say they want to see a revival of Jewish settlements in Gaza. It seems the images of thousands of dead and maimed Palestinians do not mean much to Israelis. They are not moved by the videos of fathers carrying the remains of their children in plastic bags, or mothers crying over the bloodied bodies of their murdered babies. They do not care about hungry children stuck under the rubble, or toddlers being poisoned by the bird feed they are forced to eat amid a man-made famine. They are not merely indifferent to the suffering their military inflicts on innocents - thousands of them actually protest at the border gates to ensure no aid reaches Palestinians on the brink of starvation. Many of these are the very same Israelis who took to the streets less than a year ago to protest against Netanyahu's so-called attack on their democracy.

So, no - what we are witnessing in Palestine today is not "Netanyahu's war" as Sanders and Warren insistently claim. This conflict, this genocide, did not start with Netanyahu's rise to power and it will not end with his inevitable fall from grace. Settlers began stealing Palestinians' lands, homes and lives long before Netanyahu became relevant in Israeli politics. Palestinians have been stuck in open-air prisons since long before he was prime minister. The Israeli military did not start abusing, harassing, maiming and killing Palestinians when Netanyahu became their commander. The problem is not Netanyahu or any other Israeli politician or general. The problem is Israel's occupation.

The problem is the settler colony whose very security and long-term viability are reliant on a system of apartheid and the never-ending occupation, oppression and mass killing of an Indigenous population. This is not Netanyahu's war, it is Israel's genocide.

Aljazeera

UK election speculation mounts in wake of budget

Andrew Hammond

THE annual spring budget statement in the UK is always a major national political and economic event. However, Wednesday's fiscal announcements assumed even higher importance than usual, coming ahead of what may be an imminent general election.

There is growing speculation that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will throw his normal caution to the wind and this month call the big ballot for May 2. This is the same day as local elections are held across much of the country. In last year's local elections, the Conservatives lost - for the first time in more than two decades - the mantle as the biggest party in English councils and a further rout looks likely on May 2. If the Conservatives lose big, then it will only intensify the political pressure on the prime minister's position and he may even face a leadership challenge from within his own party.

By calling a May general election, it is also plausible that Sunak could avoid a new by-election in the Northern English constituency of Blackpool South following the recent suspension of Scott Benton from the House of Commons. The Conservatives would defend a small majority of 3,690 votes over Labour in such a ballot. A by-election there would be the fourth such special ballot held this year. And a Conservative defeat would be the 11th time the party has lost a seat in a by-election since the start of this Parliament in 2019, further undermining Sunak's standing in his party and the country.

In this context, UK Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt announced new personal tax cuts in Wednesday's budget - a fiscal event that was brought forward by the government unusually early. Yet, despite the media headlines, Hunt's announcements are unlikely to fundamentally change the UK's political weather. In part, this is because voters are increasingly recognizing the poor state of public services and that further investment is needed in them. Many think tanks, including the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies, have particularly highlighted the challenges facing the health service.

Moreover, the consensus among economists is that the economy is likely to be weak for the foreseeable future. For instance, Andy Haldane, the former Bank of England chief economist, has said that Wednesday's budget will be insufficient to inspire growth, as too many people are still feeling poorer due to the overall tax take going up and interest rates remaining above 5 percent. These economic headwinds make for what he called another year of "sog-giness."

Other economists, including Sanjay Raja at Deutsche Bank and Kallum Pickering at Berenberg Bank, have similar views. Raja stated that the macro backdrop for the UK economy will prove challenging in 2024, while Pickering pointed to the fact that the nation is struggling to meet demand due to weak supply, as indicated by stalling real gross domestic product. So, if Sunak does call

an election for May 2, he will be taking an unusually big gamble. This is not least given that the Conservatives are so far behind in the polls.

According to the most recent Electoral Calculus forecasts, the probability of a Labour majority in the House of Commons is 95 percent. Meanwhile, the likelihood of Labour being the largest party is 99 percent. While the polls may tighten in the coming weeks, the direction of travel appears clear. Almost a decade and a half since the Conservatives first took power in 2010 and five prime ministers later, via David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and now Sunak, the party looks increasingly tired and divided. In recent years, there has been a massive amount of churn within senior ministerial positions. Since 2015, for example, the four so-called great offices of state (prime minister, finance minister, home secretary and foreign secretary) have changed hands a total of 23 times. The independent Institute for Government think tank said such ministerial turnover is "very damaging" and means that ministers focus on "quick wins" rather than long-term policymaking.

In part, this is why Sunak has shown some signs of wanting to defer the general election until after the summer, with the last date he can legally hold it being January 2025. In the meantime, he will hope that the nation's economic fortunes will improve. In particular, he hopes that inflation might fall back to the 2 percent target. History shows that Sunak and other recent "tail-end" prime ministers (beleaguered politicians who come into office at the end of a long period of rule by their parties) tend to put off big ballots as long as possible. This was true of previous Conservative PMs Alec Douglas-Home and John Major, who called the ballots in 1964 and 1997, respectively, very close to the last possible legal date.

Despite the huge diversity of past tail-end premiers in terms of backgrounds, beliefs and styles, a common pattern is that - despite their various talents - they have ultimately proved unable to stop the turning of the political tide against them. After multiple years in office, there is growing momentum for the opposition party, which eventually proves insurmountable.

The fact that Sunak's attempt to win a fifth straight term for the Conservatives would defy political history is also shown in the growing numbers of the party's MPs (59 at the time of writing) to announce their retirement from politics. So, it appears unlikely that the government will be able to regain sustained, significant political momentum.

Taken together, this is why Sunak's time as prime minister is so perilously positioned. No matter if he goes long or short on the election date, the political winds are blowing against the ruling Conservatives and their chances of winning another electoral majority in the House of Commons look slim.

Why Southeast Asia prefers neutrality amid superpower rivalry

Ehtesham Shahid

IN the dynamic geopolitical theater of Southeast Asia, nations like Malaysia exemplify a deliberate stance of neutrality amid the escalating superpower rivalry between the US and China. The country's strategic position along the pivotal Strait of Malacca underscores its significant role in global commerce and military navigation. The preference for neutrality is not merely a matter of geographical necessity; it reflects the complex interplay of geopolitical, economic and historical factors that shape the region.

As an integral member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Malaysia adheres to noninterference and consensus decision-making principles, a stance crucial in a nation marked by its multiethnic composition. The neutral posture is a safeguard, ensuring that Malaysia's territory remains free from the machinations

of superpower conflicts. The country's membership of the Non-Aligned Movement further emphasizes a belief in diplomacy as a path to coexistence rather than competition. Despite the similarities, the ecosystem in which Indonesia operates is slightly different from that of Malaysia. As the largest country in Southeast Asia in terms of population and economy and as an archipelagic state with strategic maritime routes, Indonesia seeks to maximize its autonomy and regional influence. Neutrality allows it to act as a regional leader and mediator, promoting ASEAN centrality and unity while avoiding entanglement in conflicts that could compromise its sovereignty.

Indonesia is cautious of foreign influence that could undermine its sovereignty or involve it in territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, which it has an interest in protecting. Indonesia seeks to play a

constructive role in global and regional diplomacy, promoting dialogue and cooperation on climate change, terrorism and regional security. Collectively, Southeast Asian countries want to avoid getting trapped in a rivalry that risks disastrous consequences. There is no denying China's advantage because of its proximity to Southeast Asia, which facilitates trade, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, reinforcing economic ties. Many Southeast Asian countries have deep historical and cultural ties with China, influencing their foreign policy decisions. China is also a significant trading partner, investor and source of tourists for many countries in the region.

The US may have established regional security alliances and partnerships, countering China's growing military assertiveness.

However, countries in the region seek to maximize their economic benefits while minimizing the risk of becoming overly dependent on any single power. These countries have shown varied levels of alignment toward China and the US, influenced by their unique historical, economic and strategic circumstances. For example, Laos and Cambodia have been perceived as more closely aligned with China, partly due to significant Chinese investment and aid. Conversely, while economically engaged with China, Vietnam often seeks closer security ties with the US to balance against Beijing's assertiveness in the South China Sea.

With Beijing's growing influence and the strategic rebalance of the US toward Asia, Southeast Asian countries often adopt balancing and hedging strategies. This involves engaging with both superpowers to ensure their

interests are protected, regardless of changes in the international system. This strategy helps mitigate the risks associated with the shifting dynamics of superpower rivalry. Southeast Asia's preference for neutrality amid superpower rivalry is a pragmatic approach that reflects the region's complex and multifaceted interests. It allows these countries to navigate the challenges of globalization and geopolitical shifts while striving to maintain sovereignty, peace and economic prosperity. Countries in the region navigate a complex landscape, seeking to leverage their relationships with superpowers to support their national interests with-

out compromising sovereignty or regional stability.

A Chinese Journal of International Politics paper examined the debates about how Sino-US competition affects Southeast Asia by identifying four interrelated issues: power shift, regional countries' strategic behavior, ASEAN centrality, and regional order. It also identified profound disagreement on whether or not China, despite its economic ascent, can rival the US on all fronts. "Sino-US power competition would shape the strategic environment of regional states and ASEAN, whose choice would, in turn, affect the evolution of regional order," it stated.

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Ending the war in Gaza is essential for regional security

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

THE Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers this week held several meetings in Riyadh with their counterparts from Egypt, Jordan and Morocco that were focused on the war in Gaza and its regional repercussions. The Riyadh meetings were part of a flurry of gatherings aimed at de-escalation in the war and reaching a ceasefire before the holy month of Ramadan, which starts next week. The foreign ministers also discussed the long road ahead for a resolution of the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict. How to put out the fires ignited throughout the region under the fog of this devastating war was also high on the agenda.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister, chaired the meetings and then flew directly to Washington to continue efforts to break the deadlock in the Israel-Hamas talks. The GCC statement following Sunday's meetings called for an immediate ceasefire and strongly condemned Israel's continued onslaught on Gaza, which has killed or injured more than 100,000 people, while displacing and starving almost the entire population. It rejected Israel's pretexts for continuing the annihilation of Gaza and expressed disappointment at the UN Security Council's failure to stop the war, in large part because of the US' repeated vetoes. The statement also lamented the apparent double standard whereby the collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza is tolerated and their lives undervalued.

The lone UNSC resolution on the

war, adopted in December, has not been implemented, as Israel has continued to block aid, attack aid convoys and murder Palestinians trying to reach them. The GCC reiterated its call on the international community to protect the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank. It expressed strong support for the UN Relief and Works Agency and called on donors to continue their funding of the vital organization.

The GCC lauded South Africa's efforts to pursue the genocide case against Israel before the International Court of Justice and called for full accountability for Israel's action. It also applauded the filings with the court by many countries on the separate issue of the illegality of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories. On the larger conflict, the ministers called on all nations to recognize the state of Palestine. The number now is about 140 countries, but since the current war started last October, several more have indicated they are ready to make the move. They called on the UNSC to speedily act to enable Palestine to become a full-fledged UN member state. They supported Saudi Arabia's initiative to revive the peace process, in coordination with the Arab League and EU, stressing the need to convene an urgent international conference to expedite the matter.

Since the Gaza war started, Israel has escalated tensions in the West Bank by authorizing the building of more housing units on appropriated Palestinian lands. As Ramadan is near, the ministers expressed alarm at the

possibility of a repetition of the annual escalation at Jerusalem's holy sites, as Israel is planning to severely restrict the number of Palestinians who can pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month, while also allowing growing numbers of fanatical settlers to trespass and harass Muslim worshippers. While focused on Israel's war in Gaza and its escalations in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the ministers also addressed escalations in other parts of the Middle East. Predictably, using Israel's aggression as a pretext, Iran's regional proxies and affiliated actors have escalated their destabilizing activities.

In the UAE islands long occupied by Iran, plans for the additional settlement of Iranians were recently announced. Mohammed Mokhber, Iran's first vice president who is under US sanctions, announced on Jan. 11 the completion of a plan to "develop" the islands, including housing projects and other installations. This announcement was followed by an escalatory statement by President Ebrahim Raisi on Feb. 4. These developments, in addition to military exercises held on the occupied islands, have raised questions about Iran's declared commitments to diplomacy and regional reconciliation. In Iraq, there have been belligerent calls by Iran-affiliated parties questioning Kuwait's independence, calling for the annulment of long-standing arrangements between the two countries regarding navigation in the Khor Abdullah channel and, absurdly, claiming a stake in the Durra gas field, located hundreds of

kilometers away from Iraq and Iran and owned exclusively by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The GCC condemned the increasingly brazen attacks across the Jordan-Syria border by drug traffickers believed to be affiliated with pro-Iran militias operating in Syria. These attacks are undermining an accord reached with the Syrian government last May to combat drug trafficking. In Yemen, the Houthis have escalated their attacks on shipping, disrupting trade flows in the Red Sea and causing economic havoc around the world. Attacks by the US and its partners have not been able to deter the Houthis, in part because they are conducted in isolation from the ongoing peace process in Yemen. The GCC called for "prompt" de-escalation, restraint and ensuring freedom of navigation.

It is clear that the longer the war continues in Gaza, the more likely it is that the regional security landscape will also unravel. While ending the Gaza conflict is an extremely important priority in itself, to end the suffering of the Palestinians who are on the receiving end of Israel's massive war machine, de-escalation is also necessary to contain the conflict and prevent its contagion to other parts of the region. Re-energizing the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians should be a key goal in the short term to prevent a repetition of the Gaza war, but the UN-mediated peace process in Yemen should also be a priority. Reconciliation efforts between Iran and its neighbors should pick up pace to find a modus vivendi for all regional players.

Arab News

Trump's pernicious superpower

Frida Ghitis

YES, it's happening again. Former President Donald Trump has taken center stage again and we're about to become the targets of his relentless disinformation campaign, an effort that has proven astonishingly successful in creating a new reality for a large part of the electorate. That's why Trump can be so hard to beat.

On Tuesday night, when he emerged at his Mar-a-Lago resort to declare victory in the Super Tuesday primaries, Trump unfurled an elaborate tapestry of misrepresentations, exaggerations and outright lies that jolted many of us to the reality of what lies ahead. His dark vision of what America is today, so divorced from reality, is aimed at frightening voters into supporting him. And his surreally glossy reminiscence of his days in the White House seeks to convince Americans that all was great when he was president, now that the years may have clouded the worst of those angst-ridden days in the fog of our memory.

Fact-checking does not work against such well-practiced manipulations. It's impossible to keep up. By the time judicious professionals bring up the truths that Trump has sought to bury, millions have already heard and accepted them, or at least absorbed the essence of Trump's self-serving message. Repeated regularly before a swarm of microphones and cameras, the lies come alive, the truth vanishes. The facts deployed later barely manage a scratch. That is Trump's pernicious superpower. He repurposed the snake-oil hawking skills of a salesman into the rabble-rousing rhetoric of a demagogue. A demagogue, Merriam-Webster tells us, is "a leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power." It's almost a portrait of Trump and his Mar-a-Lago speech (and the ones that Americans will be bombarded with for the next eight months). I found it particularly amusing, and more than a little galling, to hear Trump claim that because of President Joe Biden's policies, "the world is laughing at us." In fact, it was him that the world quite literally laughed at when he boasted at the United Nations in 2018 that "In less than two years, my administration has accomplished more than almost any administration in the history of our country." The solemn hall erupted in guffaws at the absurd claim.

Then there was the time when NATO leaders were caught on tape appearing to mock the strange behavior of the American president. Those were just some of the many times when Trump was ridiculed. The significant possibility that Trump will become president again has left America's allies in worried disbelief as they consider what a second term would do to global security, given Trump's expressed admiration for dictators and disdain for NATO and other alliances. If Trump was suggesting that the world has lost respect for the US under Biden, he got it backwards. Poll after poll shows that views of US leadership collapsed during his presidency, in some cases to record lows, and recovered strongly since Biden came to office. Trump called Biden "the worst president in the history of our country." But when American Political Science Association members were asked to rank US presidents from best to worst, guess who came dead last? Trump finished 45th out of 45, well below Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter. (Biden was 14th; Abraham Lincoln 1st). There was a reason for that. Few presidents have inflamed the country's divisions more than him; none have been indicted, found responsible by juries for hundreds of millions worth of fraud and sexual abuse and launched an effort to overturn the results of a democratic election. But Trump's speeches weave a fantasy that turns dark into light, and radiance into shadows.

As demagogues do, Trump tried to portray our times as filled with dread and danger, much as he did during his infamous "American Carnage" inaugural address in 2017. In his telling, the country is in the grip of rising crime, much of it he says is committed by sinister undocumented immigrants who are "invading" the country. As he has told us, they are "poisoning the blood" of America, using the preferred language of Adolf Hitler and White supremacists when seeking to rile up their base against a minority.

In reality, violent crime has recently declined rapidly, especially in large cities. Homicides, assault, rape, robbery are all down. But that's not what most Americans believe, at least in part because political propaganda works. That menacing, distorted image of reality will help Trump, regardless of statistics. In fact, it was under Trump when crime skyrocketed, with FBI numbers showing a near 30% jump in murders between 2019 and 2020, in the early days of

the pandemic. Assault, robbery and rape all rose, too. Of course there's crime, and some is committed by migrants. Expect every act of violence by migrants, especially those with Hispanic names, to receive outsized attention, weaponized against Democrats.

Then there's the economy, another area where Trump is gaslighting the country with some success. "We had the best economy in the history of the world," he bragged about his presidency. But the economy has performed even better under Biden by almost any measure. Under Biden, more than 14 million new jobs have been created, an average of 400,000 a month. Compare that to the 176,000 monthly average under Trump before the pandemic. (A pandemic, by the way, that Trump mismanaged to the point that the wealthiest country on Earth became one of the world's hardest hit.) The overall economy, GDP, has grown faster under Biden than it did under Trump, even ignoring the pandemic disaster, with unemployment reaching a 50-year-low. Inflation remains a problem, another aftereffect of the pandemic, but it's falling fast. Trump lied about having achieved "energy independence" during his term and seemed to suggest US oil output is weaker because of Biden. In reality, the United States is producing more oil than ever. More oil, in fact, than any country has ever produced. Biden is not destroying the oil industry. When one hears Trump's ominous warnings, it's helpful to recall his market prognostication. "If Biden wins," he predicted confidently during the 2020 campaign, "you're gonna have a stock market collapse, the likes of which you've never had." Then the stock market climbed to record after record, powered by an economy that has defied recession forecasts. After one of those records, the Biden campaign dug up the clip of Trump predicting market doom. "Good one, Donald," Biden joked on X. That was Biden and his campaign confronting Trump and his followers with the truth. But they are up against a mighty power, the power of brazen, shameless, incessantly repeated lies. It's a challenge for Biden, to overcome Trump's practiced tactics - the Washington Post clocked 30,573 lies and misleading claims during his presidency. It is the duty of the media to cover his campaign without magnifying the destructive impact of his endless salvos of lies. It's no easy task.

CNN

Investing in women to unlock Africa's potential

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

AS the global community celebrates the achievements and contributions of women worldwide on Friday's International Women's Day, this year's theme of "Inspire Inclusion" resonates deeply. It calls for concentrated efforts to ensure that women from all walks of life, regardless of background or circumstance, can thrive, fulfill their potential and have equal opportunities to contribute to society. Nowhere is this call to action more urgent than in Africa, where investing in women holds the key to unlocking the continent's full potential and driving sustainable development.

In Africa, where women play pivotal roles in families, communities and economies, investing in their empowerment is not only a matter of justice but also a strategic imperative. Across the continent's diverse landscape, the demographic composition reveals the significant presence of women, as they constitute an average of 50.16 percent of the population across 53 nations. This statistical snapshot encapsulates the multifaceted realities of gender distribution across Africa. Within this spectrum, Zimbabwe emerges with the highest proportion of women at 52.79 percent, underscoring the unique dynamics within its societal fabric. These figures serve not only as numerical indicators but also as windows into the intricate tapestry of gender dynamics, reflecting the varying degrees of social, economic and cultural influences shaping the lives of women across Africa's diverse landscapes. This is the reason it is so important that we examine why investing in women in Africa is critical

cal and explore the transformative impact it can have on the continent's socioeconomic development.

Investing in African women is a necessity for driving sustainable development and fostering inclusive growth. Women play multifaceted roles as caregivers, farmers, entrepreneurs and community leaders. However, they continue to face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities and hinder their full participation in society. Empowering women in Africa yields multiple benefits. First of all, studies have shown that, when women are economically empowered, they invest more in their families' education, health and well-being, leading to intergenerational benefits and poverty reduction. Moreover, closing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could unlock billions of dollars in economic growth and create new opportunities for prosperity across the continent.

In addition, investment in women's education, healthcare, economic empowerment and political participation are essential components for unlocking Africa's potential. By providing women with access to quality education, healthcare services, financial resources and leadership opportunities, we can break down barriers, expand opportunities and create a more equitable and inclusive society. Access to healthcare is one critical aspect of women's empowerment in Africa. Many African women face barriers to accessing essential healthcare services, including maternal and reproductive healthcare. By investing in healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare workers and

expanding access to affordable and quality healthcare services, we can improve women's health outcomes, reduce maternal mortality rates and enhance overall well-being.

Investing in girls' education is another of the most effective ways to empower women and girls in Africa. Education not only equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed, but also helps challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. By ensuring girls have access to quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning, we can empower them to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities and economies. Thirdly, economic empowerment is essential for African women's autonomy, dignity and well-being. Women in Africa often face significant barriers to economic participation, including limited access to financial resources, markets and business opportunities. By providing them with access to financial services, training and support for entrepreneurship, we can unlock their entrepreneurial potential, stimulate economic growth and create jobs and opportunities for all.

The international community can play a crucial role in investing in women in Africa by providing support in various forms. First of all, financial assistance and investment in women-led initiatives, businesses and organizations can help provide women with access to capital, resources and opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. Additionally, capacity-building programs, technical assistance and mentorship initiatives can help women acquire the skills,

knowledge and networks they need to succeed in their endeavors. Advocating for policy reforms that promote inclusive development can create an enabling environment for women's empowerment and participation in all spheres of society.

Lastly, fostering partnerships and collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and international institutions can leverage collective efforts and resources to address systemic barriers and advance women's empowerment agendas. By working together, countries and organizations worldwide can catalyze transformative change for African women and help them contribute to sustainable development, prosperity and equality for all. Increasing women's representation in Africa's political leadership is also crucial for ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are protected. By advocating for gender-sensitive policies and supporting women leaders, this can create more inclusive and responsive governance systems that reflect the diversity and needs of all citizens.

In a nutshell, as we celebrate International Women's Day and reflect on its theme for 2024, let us reaffirm our commitment to investing in women in Africa and beyond. Empowering women in Africa is not just the right thing to do, it is a strategic imperative. By breaking down barriers, expanding opportunities and fostering a culture of inclusivity and equality, we can create a brighter, more prosperous future for all Africans, driving progress, prosperity and sustainable development for all. Together, let us inspire inclusion and build a brighter, more equitable future.

Russia imprisoned my friend Oleg Orlov for telling it like it is

Lana Estemirova

ONE would think that after decades of seeing friends and loved ones being threatened, beaten, and murdered for simply doing their job, you would grow a thick skin. But, the sight of Oleg Orlov - whom I know as Oleg Petrovich - being handcuffed and escorted away by masked policemen hit me with a wave of anger and despair. Despite being 70, he's barely changed since our first meeting 22 years ago, with his neat salt-and-pepper pencil mustache, slim frame, and a defiant, slightly tired expression on his face.

This seasoned, fearless human rights activist - who also happens to be a Nobel Peace Prize laureate - will be spending two and a half years in some Russian prison for "repeatedly discrediting the Russian armed forces." But in reality, Oleg Petrovich was sentenced to jail for telling it how it is: Russia is conducting a brutal, illegal war in Ukraine, and Putinism is the new fascism. He could have left, and many of his friends and colleagues insisted he should have done. But that's not his style. Oleg has always been a rebel with a cause.

Born into a Soviet intelligentsia family in 1953, Oleg could have opted for a safe and respectable scientific career in biology. But in his own words, after witnessing the disastrous impact of the Soviet-Afghan war, he started to feel "suffocated" and was compelled to act. Using a homemade copying device, he pasted anti-war leaflets all over Moscow. This was a seemingly small but dangerous act in a country that locked up its dissidents. During the perestroika years, Oleg joined the new

Memorial organization, whose initial goal was to document and preserve evidence of Soviet repressions. His career naturally pivoted towards human rights activism, as the present injustices could not be ignored either.

From the late 80s onward, Oleg became a colleague and a disciple of the renowned dissident Sergey Kovalev, one of the founders of Memorial who spent 10 years in the Perm-36 Gulag for "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." Together, they traveled across regions of the former Soviet Union that descended into violence, acting as independent observers during conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Tajikistan. Then in December 1994 came the First Russian-Chechen War, which linked Oleg Petrovich to the region forever. It is thanks to him and the rest of Memorial that the most horrific war crimes committed by the Russian army were documented. This includes the infamous Samashki massacre where over 100 innocent civilians were murdered by Russian troops.

The bloody script was repeated again and again, from Syria to Bucha. It was the same army acting with the same levels of brutality. Oleg never worked for accolades and listened to pompous speeches about personal sacrifice and heroism out of politeness, hiding behind clever jokes. But time after time he acted like a true hero. During the 1995 capture of 1,200 hostages in Budennovsk, conducted under the leadership of Shamil Basayev, Oleg and Kovalev offered themselves up as volun-

tary hostages in exchange for captured people. During both Russo-Chechen wars, Oleg took part in negotiations for the exchange of prisoners of war, and facilitated the removal of captured Russian soldiers from the combat zone.

As the head of Memorial's Hot Spots program, Oleg drew public attention to the abductions, torture and murders taking place in the North Caucasus. That's how he met my mother, Natalia Estemirova. In 2000, she brought Memorial news of a horrible massacre in the Chechen village of Novye Aldy, and volunteered to go and document the testimonies. She joined Memorial, and Oleg Petrovich became a staple in our lives. He frequently stayed in our bombed-out apartment in Grozny, where he taught me how to make paper planes, and showed me around Memorial's offices in Moscow. Just like my mum, Oleg believed that if you could save even one human life, it was worth talking to anyone and even working within the system.

The lack of a prison sentence was deemed too lenient by the prosecution and a re-trial followed. This time, we expected a harsher outcome. So did Oleg Petrovich. In the courtroom, he let his lawyer Ekaterina Tertukhina do the talking, while he read Franz Kafka's "The Trial," a novel that eerily mirrors his own incomprehensibly absurd experience. He chose to speak only when delivering his powerful closing remarks once again decrying the "suffocation of freedom" in Russia - the same suffocation he felt as a young man during the dying years of the Soviet Empire. Would he

have done anything differently, had he known the length of his sentence? I very much doubt it.

There has been little good news this February, from the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the loss of Avdiivka, to Navalny's murder in a Siberian penal colony and the sentencing of Oleg Petrovich. These times feel so dark that even the thought of a distant sunrise seems exhausting and untrue. How can you go on when it feels like you are fighting on the losing side? It is so easy to dominate and destroy when you have removed your conscience like an appendage. But Oleg Petrovich would say giving in to the darkness is the worst thing one can do. So, I have started thinking about what I will write when I send him a letter, and I would encourage everyone reading this to do the same.

The last time we saw each other was in a small restaurant in the heart of Lisbon. As always, he refused to talk in detail about his impending court case. Instead, he asked me a thousand questions about my recently broken leg - not to distract himself, but because at that moment it was the most important issue for him. I asked him to come back in the summer when my leg was better so we could go fishing in the sea. I'm hopeless at it, but I know he could teach me a few tricks. Perhaps that's what I'll write to him about. Not about dramatic heroism and sacrifice. Instead, I'll tell him I'm expecting to meet him by the Atlantic Ocean in precisely two and a half years when he is free, waiting for him with two fishing rods in my hands.

The Moscow Times

THE year 2024 is emerging as a very dark year at least across the Northern Hemisphere: the United States administration has enthusiastically "promised" an escalation of the two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the five-month-long Israel-Palestine conflict continues.

Can there still be hope for the world? The answer is "yes". And China can provide it. This is not a vague, ridiculous dream: It is an assessment grounded in rock hard realities. China continues to enjoy a solid, stable political and national leadership. There is continuity in policymaking and predictability in following established principles of economic development at home and massive foreign investment overseas. China has replaced both the US and Europe as the dominant economic power and investment engine, generating economic growth across Africa and Latin America while its Belt and Road Initiative continues to build lasting, massive new infrastructure to help promote growth and prosperity across Asia. In the Middle East, we see an even more dramatic story:

China's overall investment and its diplomatic and strategic footprints in the region are still smaller than those of the US. In fact, Washington, through the US Central Command, continues to deploy a huge number of military personnel in the region and is currently engaged in fighting the Houthi forces of Yemen. Yet a year ago in March 2023, it was China that played diplomatic facilitator, bringing together Saudi Arabia and Iran in a historic

Martin Sieff

and far-reaching reconciliation. China's influence in both Iran - for long a big trade partner and source of oil imports for China - and now Saudi Arabia has never before been more pronounced. Indeed, never in history has China stood so high and wielded so much influence and respect across the Middle East. Now, Teheran and Riyadh, respectively the third-biggest and biggest oil producers in the region, both cherish their ever closer diplomatic and economic ties with Beijing.

Such a future can be envisaged due to the investment flows into Abu Dhabi and other cities in the United Arab Emirates, always the weathervane to assess the fall and rise of superpowers' influence in the region. Yet how can this be? Listen to or read the ever more frenzied media coverage and official government rhetoric that pours out of Washington in an inexhaustible supply of worthless hot air, which is the last natural resource the Joe Biden administration can command in unlimited abundance. And what is some Western countries' message? In their eyes, China's economy is fragile, irrelevant, repressed and weak and China poses a military threat to the rest of the world and imposes ruinous draconian terms on the countries which trade with it and seek investment from it.

This is of course a bizarre, mental inversion of the truth. It is a photographic negative of the 21st century world as it really is. China's armed forces are nowhere on active military duty. The only mis-

sion they are engaged in is the UN peacekeeping mission. More important, China does not fan the flames of war so as to intensify continuing conflicts like the Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine conflicts. China continues to actively seek peaceful resolutions to both the conflicts, not least because Chinese leaders know conflicts are good for no one and have never solved any problems. Moreover, China's enormous high-tech sector is once again booming. Huawei continues to flourish around the globe despite the stringent US sanctions against it.

And young people, in scores of millions, across the West continue to flock to TikTok. Thus, the simple truth, obvious to the rest of the world, is that the US' hyperpower global dominance after the end of the Cold War has long since ended. No one else shares that insane delusion anymore except the policymakers in Washington and the tame American pundits who mindlessly parrot their word, stale cliches. The rest of the world has moved on.

Chinese leaders have no need to provoke any war with the US or any other country or create an artificial crisis to rally other countries' support. They continue to enjoy the quiet confidence that history is driving the world their way. A bright future beckons. And it is being accomplished without military conquest, without hysteria, hate and endless lies, and without fomenting coups and chaos in supposedly allied countries. All these developments are obvious to the rest of the world - and to an increasing number of sensible people in the West.



Weekly inflation up by 1.11 pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 1.11 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on March 7, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 322.86 points as compared to 319.30 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 32.39 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, increased by 1.69 per cent and went up to 317.18 points from last week's 311.92 points.

The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517; Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, increased by 1.45 percent, 1.20 percent, 1.15 and 0.99 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 14 (27.45%) items increased, 14 (27.45%) items decreased and 23 (45.10%)

items remained stable.

The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included chicken (6.95%), tea (1.29%), cooking oil 5 litre (0.96%), bread plain (0.51%), gur (0.40%), garlic (0.39%), pulse masoor (0.26%) and vegetable ghee 1 kg (0.23%).

The items that recorded an increase in their prices included onions (33.86%), potatoes (23.81%), tomatoes (16.42%), bananas (7.12%), lpg (4.43%), eggs (2.66%), petrol & firewood (1.49%) each, beef (1.38%), mutton (0.50%), cooked daal (0.41%) and long cloth (0.27%).

On Year-on-Year basis,

the commodities that witnessed decrease included vegetable ghee 1 kg (20.15%), cooking oil 5 litre (19.53%), bananas (17.95%), mustard oil (16.20%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (16.04%), LPG (4.20%), chicken (1.51%) and cigarettes (0.05%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included gas charges for Q1 (570.00%), tomatoes (176.55%), chilies powder (81.74%), gents sponge chappal (58.05%), wheat flour (57.04%), gents sandal (53.37%), onions (51.56%), garlic (45.69%), gur (44.94%), sugar (41.69%) and potatoes (39.08%).



BAHAWALPUR: People purchasing oranges from vendor's roadside stall.

Turkiye consul general visits SCCI

SIALKOT (APP): Consul General of Turkiye Durmus Bastug and Commercial Attache Nurettin Demir visited the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Friday to discuss ways and means to boost the bilateral trade and investment relations.

SCCI President Abdul Ghafoor Malik and Vice President Amer Majeed Sheikh warmly welcomed the distinguished guests.

During a meeting, President SCCI Abdul Ghafoor Malik said with Sialkot to source high-quality Pakistani products, including surgical instruments, workwear, gloves, sports goods, and sports apparel, which hold considerable demand in Turkiye", he added.

Malik said: "Sialkot enjoys a positive reputation for excellence in these sectors, and our exporters are fully geared to provide quality goods provided that an enabling environment is created for business communities of the two countries to interact

each other strengths and expertise to drive mutual progress and prosperity".

The president SCCI said that it was essential to foster closer business-to-business linkages. The Pakistan-Turkiye Trade in Goods Agreement that came into effect on May 01, 2023, was a step in the right direction to serve as a valuable framework for facilitating bilateral trade.

"In this regard, I request you to support in creating linkages between the private sectors of Turkiye and Turkiye committed to enhancing bilateral cooperation in various sectors as focused by various Government meetings in the past few years.

He said: "We are thankful that Turkiye is also an important investment partner as number of Turkish firms are working in Pakistan in the domains of energy, finance, and infrastructure projects. We believe that both Turkiye and Pakistan must harness

and partner freely. I may propose sending a trade delegation from Sialkot to Turkiye facilitated by foreign missions of both countries".

He said that Sialkot had cultivated a vibrant Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) culture that was highly conducive to business collaborations and joint ventures across a diverse spectrum of industries. The exporters hailing from Sialkot exhibit a profound understanding of international trade regulations and requirements, leading to an impressive annual export value exceeding 2.31 billion US Dollars.

Consul General of Turkiye Durmus Bastug reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to enhancing bilateral trade and investment with Pakistan.

Highlighting the significant presence of Turkiye's companies operating in Punjab, Durmus Bastug underscored the vast opportunities for collaboration in sectors such as

energy, infrastructure, construction, and agriculture.

Durmus Bastug stressed the historic ties between Turkiye and Pakistan, emphasizing the mutual benefits of strengthening trade relations. He noted the progressive efforts of Turkish investors and companies keen on exploring investment prospects across various sectors in Pakistan with a focus on Punjab.

Consul General of Turkiye assured that Turkiye would further promote bilateral trade and investment with Pakistan.

The Business-to-Business (B2B) relations with Pakistan would also be strengthened and more joint ventures would be made, he vowed.

Durmus Bastug said that Pakistan and Turkiye are brotherly countries and all possible measures are being taken to promote bilateral trade.

The meeting was attended by the business community.

Shematters event marked the celebration of International Women's Day

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The "Shematters" event marked the celebration of International Women's Day with a powerful message of women's empowerment.

Led by the esteemed Justice Nasira Javed Iqbal and joined by prominent figures like Fatima Asad Said, the event aimed to uplift and enable women to thrive in all aspects of life.

Justice Nasira emphasized the importance of including women in every part of society, encouraging them to work and stand out.

Her words resonated deeply, echoing the sentiment that women should have equal opportunities to succeed.



the importance of women's empowerment. In one panel, Nazo, a female farmer, shared her inspiring journey of resilience and determination. Despite facing immense challenges, including the loss of her father and brother, Nazo courageously took care of her family.

Other panels featured discussions on wellbeing, innovation, and the intersection of finance and technology, showcasing the diverse ways in which women are driving positive change in society.

Throughout the event, the message was clear: empowering women is essential for creating a better future for all.

By providing women with opportunities to succeed and thrive, we can build a more equitable and prosperous world.

As we reflect on International Women's Day, let us remember the stories of women like Nazo, whose resilience and determination inspire us to work towards a future where every woman has the chance to fulfill her potential.

Together, we can make a difference and ensure that every woman's voice is heard and valued.

Consul General US Kristin Hawkins was our chief guest at the "Shematters" event, and it meant a lot to us to have her there.

Her presence showed support for empowering women and working together across countries.

We were honored by her attendance, and it encouraged us to keep pushing for equality and opportunities for all women.

Bank Holiday F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan will remain closed for public dealing on 1st Ramadan-ul-Mubarak, 1445 A.H., which shall be observed as 'Bank Holiday' for the purpose of deduction of Zakat.

All banks / DFIs / MFBs shall, therefore, remain closed for public dealing on the aforementioned date.

However, all employees of the banks / DFIs / MFBs will attend the office on Bank Holiday treating it as a normal working day (except for public dealing).

Gold rates up by Rs 450 per tola to Rs 228,600

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of per tola 24 karat gold increased by Rs450 and was sold at Rs228,600 on Friday compared to its sale at Rs228,150 on the last trading day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs 386 to Rs195,988 from Rs 195,602 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs179,655 from Rs 179,301 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 \$6 and was sold at \$2,180 as compared to the last day's \$2,174.

Pakistan exports to southern China witness 16% growth in 2023

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan's exports to the southern region of China witnessed a 16% growth last year, partly due to the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) that lowered tariffs as well as events like FoodAg 2023 and TEXPO 2023 which further facilitated exports in the textile and agricultural sectors.

This was stated by Zhou Hanmin, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and President of the Shanghai Public Diplomacy Association.

"I had visited Pakistan before the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed and deeply felt the sincere emotions of Pakistani people towards China.

The CPEC not only improved the bilateral trade but also provides

substantial economic uplift to Pakistani people. If given the opportunity, I still hope to visit this friendly country again," Zhou stated.

During this year's Two Sessions, the National People's Congress (NPC) and CPPCC, Zhou Hanmin expressed optimism about the progress of a BRI and the trade relations between China and the participating countries. In his proposal, he suggested implementing specific measures aimed at expanding the export of agricultural products from Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries, with a particular emphasis on the Least Developed Countries.

Least developed countries (LDCs) is a classification used by the United Nations (UN) to identify and categorize countries that exhibit the lowest

levels of socio-economic development.

The designation of LDC is based on three primary criteria: low income, weak human assets (such as education and healthcare), and economic vulnerability.

"At last year's China International Import Expo (CIIE), I noticed that nearly one-third of the participating countries were LDCs that maintain close and friendly relations with China, consistently offering significant support in international affairs. This year, I proposed that we must provide more assistance to the exports of goods from these countries," Zhou said, suggesting the establishment of a special exhibition zone for the Least Developed Countries at CIIE, enhancing attractiveness through concentrated exhibitions.

Zhou told CEN that China has complementary relationships with 43 LDCs that have joined BRI. "We should analyze China's import data for food and agricultural products from these countries and identify their advantageous varieties. China has a wealth of expertise in agricultural products, seafood, fruits and vegetables.

We can enhance technical support for these countries by providing assistance and expertise."

China's foreign trade in 2023 exceeded 41 trillion RMB in total import and export, with a year-on-year growth of 0.2%. Notably, trade with countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) shows a growth rate of 2.8%, further highlighting the robustness and potential of the BRI."

Workers' remittances record \$2.2b inflow in Feb

ISLAMABAD (APP): The overseas workers' remittances recorded an inflow of US\$2.2 billion during February 2024, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Friday said.

In terms of growth, during the month under review, remittances decreased by 6.2 per cent on a month-on-month basis. However, on a year-on-year basis, the remittance increased by 13 per cent. Workers' remittances inflow of US\$18.1 billion has been recorded during the first eight months of the fiscal year 2023-24.

Remittances inflows during February 2024 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia (\$539.8 million), United Arab Emirates (\$384.7 million), United Kingdom (\$346.0 million) and United States of America (\$287.4 million).

Asian markets join rally after Wall St, European records

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian markets on Friday tracked a record-breaking day in New York and Europe as traders grew increasingly optimistic about a series of US interest rate cuts this year, with attention now on crucial jobs data due later in the day.

Expectations for a first reduction in June have ramped up after Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell this week told lawmakers that while the battle against inflation was ongoing, the economy remained resilient and he saw a more dovish tilt coming soon.

He said the Fed "can and will" begin lowering rates if the economy remains strong, inflation keeps falling and the jobs market softens. His remarks were echoed by Cleveland Fed chief Loretta Mester, who was also keen to make sure the bank continued to rein in prices.

The European Central

Bank added to the upbeat mood in trading floors, with its president Christine Lagarde suggesting reductions could start in June.

Traders seized on the soft pivot on both sides of the Atlantic, with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq chalking up records on Wall Street, while Paris and Frankfurt also closed at all-time highs. Asian investors picked up the baton happily Friday, with Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Wellington, Manila, Mumbai, Bangkok and Jakarta well up. Frankfurt extended gains at the open, while Paris and London dipped. Focus is now on the US non-farm payrolls figures due later in the day, which analysts said will have a big bearing on markets. "Much hinges on (the) US payrolls report for whether intra-week market moves can extend or suffer a

smart reversal," said National Australia Bank's Ray Attrill.

"Bad (weak) news will be good news in this regard, with rising confidence in lower rates currently in the global markets driving seat." The yen extended its gains to hit a one-month high of 147.53 to the dollar as the shift to lower US rates comes as bets increase on the Bank of Japan finally moving away from its long-running ultra-loose monetary policy.

With the Japanese economy strengthening and inflation holding well above the BoJ's two percent target, officials are said to be looking at hiking borrowing costs out of negative territory as soon as this month. "The market has suddenly woken up to the idea that the BoJ will end negative rates in a matter of weeks," said Neil Wilson at Finalto.

Women empowerment can change economic fate, says LCCI Chief

LAHORE (APP): President of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry Kashif Anwar said that women empowerment, equal distribution of resources and increasing number in workforce can change the economic fate of the country.

He said that Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry has always remained a step ahead for the promotion of women entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and

Industry organized a special event in connection with Women International Day at LCCI.

LCCI Senior Vice President Zafar Mahmood Chaudhry, Convener Standing Committee for Women Empowerment and Executive Committee Member Fareeha Younas, Amina Wahaj, Captain (R) Saira Fazal, Additional IG (R) Punjab Shahzadi Gulfam, Uzma Rehman also spoke on the occasion.

On the occasion, an exhibition was also held

where women entrepreneurs showcased their state-of-the-art products.

LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that the celebrations are one of the LCCI efforts to achieve that position for Pakistani women for which they are entitled to.

Lahore Chamber is successfully highlighting the problems being faced by women entrepreneurs which need to be solved on a priority basis.

He said that Lahore Chamber of Commerce and

Industry is acknowledging and honoring the services of women entrepreneurs who are showing outstanding performance in their respective fields.

Kashif Anwar said that LCCI's aim is to present the eminent women who are known and recognized as high achievers so that our new generation can follow their footsteps. He said that Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry would continue to promote such activities to encourage women entrepreneurs.

SECP issues concept paper on Shariah-compliant brokerage services

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Friday published a concept paper aimed at enabling Shariah-compliant brokerage services in the securities market through an optimal organizational and operational model.

The concept paper presents several options available for the provision of Shariah-compliant brokerage services, including the opening of an Islamic brokerage subsidiary having

the license of either a trading-only/online-only or trading and self-clearing category; or through the establishment of a dedicated Islamic window, said a news release.

A critical analysis of the available options and a summary of international best practices have also been included. The SECP released guidelines last year for conventional financial institutions to offer Shariah-compliant services.

A separate set of guidelines was issued enabling the general public to invest in PSX while adhering to Shariah principles. The SECP is dedicated to fostering Islamic capital markets for sustainable market growth, long-term economic investment, and financial inclusion, the press release added. The paper invites the stakeholders to submit their feedback on the available options for offering Islamic brokerage services.



In brief

Karachi Kings arrive in city

KARACHI (APP): The Karachi Kings' cricket squad has touched down in the bustling metropolis of Karachi after their journey from Islamabad on Friday. Their arrival marks the commencement of their quest to conquer the remaining matches of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Scheduled to face off against Lahore Qalandars on Saturday at the esteemed National Bank Stadium in Karachi, the Kings are gearing up for a fierce battle on the pitch. On the horizon, Monday, March 11, holds the promise of an electrifying clash as the Kings prepare to go head-to-head against Peshawar Zalmi in their final league stage encounter. With the Kings boasting 6 points from 8 matches, Lahore Qalandars trailing at 3 points from an equal number of matches, and Peshawar Zalmi securing a commendable 9 points from their 8 matches, anticipation runs high as the PSL action unfolds.

IM Olympiad kicked off

PESHAWAR (APP): The three-day IM Olympiad 2024 kicked off at the IMSciences here Friday. Jointly organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) and the IM Sciences, the gala is showcasing thrilling sports, including futsal, badminton, e-games, table tennis, and sessions for different trainings and skills, and stalls for foods and snacks. Music and Qawali night are also part of the Olympiad 2024. On the first day, sports competitions like futsal, badminton, e-games, table tennis were held in which over 700 male and female students participated. The futsal players exhibited extraordinary skills and spirit in a bid to win the game. Futsal is a football-based game played on a hardcourt like a basketball court, smaller than a football pitch, and mainly indoors. Later, music and Qawali night were also arranged to entertain the students and visitors. The young students performed "Atharan" dance to the drumbeat and sang songs that mesmerized the audience. Atharan is a traditional dance, which is performed during weddings and other celebrations. Finals of various games would be held on the last day of the festival.

‘Guardiola is best manager’

LIVERPOOL (AFP): Jurgen Klopp on Friday hailed Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola as the best manager of his lifetime as he prepares his Liverpool team for what could be the final chapter in their captivating rivalry. City have won five out of the past six Premier League titles but Liverpool have been their main rivals over the last decade, snatching the crown in 2020. The two teams are once again locked in a tussle at the top of the table, with leaders Liverpool ahead of the champions by a single point before Sunday's clash at Anfield. Klopp, 56, said Guardiola, whose team are chasing a second successive treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup, was "outstanding in many aspects". "I know that, I do the job myself so I see excellence when I face it and Pep is definitely that so it's just so many different things over the years he did with his teams," Klopp told reporters on Friday. "How can I judge managers from the past? But in my lifetime he's the outstanding manager, definitely."

Hosein’s hat-trick in vain as Zalmi crush Gladiators to seal playoffs berth

RAWALPINDI (Monitoring Desk): Babar Azam's quickfire half-century, followed by a ruthless bowling effort led Peshawar Zalmi to crush Quetta Gladiators by 76 runs in the 25th match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9 here at Pindi Cricket Stadium on Thursday. Put into bat first, Peshawar Zalmi registered a formidable total on the board, courtesy of Babar Azam's half-century. Openers Saim Ayub and Babar Azam once again provided Zalmi a decent start to the innings as the in-form duo notched up a quickfire 46-run stand which lasted with the former's dismissal in the fourth over. Ayub smashed one boundary and three sixes on his way to a 12-ball 30. Mohammad Harris then partnered briefly with

Babar for a 47-run partnership before a direct hit from Gladiators' skipper Rilee Rossouw brought curtains on his knock in the eighth over. He scored 20 off 13 deliveries, hitting one boundary and a six. Zalmi then lost another wicket when Haseebullah Khan (six) was cleaned up by Abrar Ahmed on the first delivery of the 10th over. Their mainstay with the bat Babar Azam soon perished when he was trapped lbw by Akeal Hosein in the 13th over after scoring 53 off 30 deliveries, laced with nine boundaries and a six. He was quickly followed by Tom Kohler Cadmore in the next over, who fell prey to Mohammad Hasnain after scoring a brisk 33. His 19-

ball knock featured four boundaries and a six. Akeal Hosein put Quetta Gladiators in control in the 16th over when he dismantled Peshawar Zalmi's lower middle-order with a hat-trick, removing Aamer Jamal (5), Mehran Mumtaz (0) and Luke Wood (0). Hosein's hat-trick, the first of PSL 9, halted Peshawar Zalmi to a mammoth total but Rovman Powell gave it a late push with an undefeated 39-run partnership with Naveen-ul-Haq, who scored a sensible 10 off nine deliveries. Powell struck four boundaries on his way to a 25-ball 28. Akeal Hosein led the Gladiators' bowling attack with 4/23 while Hasnain, Abrar and Sohail Khan picked one wicket apiece.



RAWALPINDI: The Zalmi players celebrate after Luke Wood took out Jason Roy, Peshawar Zalmi vs Quetta Gladiators.

Wapda grabs National Kabaddi C’ship title

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wapda bagged the 43rd National Kabaddi Championship title here at the Jinnah Stadium of Pakistan sports Complex on Friday. Pakistan Air Force secured second position while Pakistan Army grabbed third position. Wapda beat Pakistan Air Force by 48-40 in the final to win the title. In the third position match, Pakistan Army defeated Higher education Commission by 40-22 points. Pakistan Sports board Director General Shoab Khosa was the Chief Guest of the closing ceremony of the championship. Meanwhile Secretary General of Pakistan Kabaddi Federation Rana Muhammad Sarwar presented medals and trophies to the players at the closing ceremony. A total of 13 teams of departments, provincial and regional associations affiliated with the federation from across the country participated in the championship. The participating teams included Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force, Wapda, Police, POF Wah, Higher Education Commission, Pakistan Railways, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad.

Int'l Women's Day celebrated at National Hockey Stadium

LAHORE (APP): Two friendly hockey matches were played between women hockey teams to commemorate International Women's Day at the B-Turf of the National Hockey Stadium, here on Friday. The women hockey friendlies were arranged by the Khawaja Junaid Hockey Club (KJHC) and the Punjab Sports board (PSB). Women leaders Mrs. Sophia Warraich, Chairperson Almarah Foundation, and Asma Hamid Advocate, Honorary Consul General of the Kingdom of Netherlands, were the chief guests on the occasion. Commandant Police Training College (PTC) Chung DIG Mehboob Aslam also graced the occasion. Speaking on the occasion, Asma Hamid said that International Women's Day is the day to reiterate our commitment to empower women in all fields of life, especially hockey. She said that the Netherlands embassy in Islamabad was committed to supporting all the efforts towards inclusion of women in sports and other fields. She hailed Punjab Police for taking steps for investing in women through opportunities to excel. Mrs. Sophia Warraich said that islam has granted rights to women and given them share in inheritance, which was denied to them in the earlier religions. She said she was lucky to have the support of her father and husband to achieve goals. She said the IWD was a reminder to continue concerted efforts for the empowerment of women. DIG Mehboob Aslam said as Commandant PTC Chung, he was pleased to contribute to the success of the event to celebrate women in sports.

Mohsin Naqvi orders upgradation of Gaddafi, Pindi, NBP stadiums

LAHORE (APP): The Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi ordered upgradation of major cricket stadiums of the country in anticipation of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 to be held in Pakistan. Presiding over an important meeting with National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAC) at the PCB headquarters, Gaddafi Stadium here on Friday, he directed that the upgradation of three major venues including Gaddafi Stadium,

Lahore, Pindi Cricket Stadium Rawalpindi and National Stadium Karachi should be undertaken in the country. Director Infrastructure PCB Nasir Hameed and other officials were also present. The Chairman PCB emphasised the need for the upgradation, of Gaddafi Stadium Lahore, National Stadium Karachi and Pindi Cricket Stadium Rawalpindi, to be completed before the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. He directed the concerned departments to sub-

mit comprehensive plan for the upgradation of Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore within three days, followed by the plans for the other two venues. Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi said that the fans should be facilitated at all costs and their ease must be kept in mind while devising the upgradation plan. The seating capacity of Qaddafi stadium should be increased and this upgradation process must be swift without compromising on the quality.

Four KP players excel in South Asian Jr Badminton

PESHAWAR (APP): Four of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa players part of the South Asian Junior Badminton Championship recently played at Islamabad, got one gold, four silver and as many bronze medals. In the Pakistan team, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa players performed brilliantly. In the double Under-17 final, Fahad Ahmad won 1 gold medal, in U15 Abdul Haseeb Khan won silver in singles, Ryan Khan won silver medals and bronze medal and double, Qari Muhammad Umar claimed bronze medal in mixed double U17 and bagged silver medal in U-17 mixed team

event and bronze medal in the U15 team even, all these players trained and coach under the two prominent international coaches of the Directorate General Badminton Academy Peshawar including Muhammad Nadeem Khan, Hayat Ullah and Malik Faraz and Bushra. Talking to APP, international badminton player who represented Pakistan in the Canadian Open Badminton Championship Syed Sadaqat Shah appreciated the players of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for their remarkable performances in the recently concluded South Asian Junior Badminton Championship

Islamabad-2024. He said winning one gold, four silver and four bronze medals of the junior players of Directorate General Badminton Academy needed much appreciation. He also appreciated the coaches who did hard work with the junior players. He lauded Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Badminton Association President Zafar Ali Khan, Secretary Muhammad Amjad Khan with all coaches. He said besides Pakistan, teams from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan. The Pakistan Badminton Federation organized the Championship.

Punjab win Women Blind Cricket C’ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab downed Islamabad by nine wickets in the 3rd Women's Blind Cricket Championship, as to mark International Women's Day at Shalimar Cricket Ground. The Australian High Commission, in partnership with the Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) and Serena Hotels, supported a cricket coaching clinic and tournament for visually impaired women and girls from across Pakistan from March 3 to 8 in celebration of International Women's Day. In the morning, Punjab won the toss and elected to field first. Islamabad batters put up a strong fight, scoring a commendable 202 runs in their allotted 20 overs. Kiran Rafique led the charge with a stellar 74 runs, ably supported by Rabia Javed Hashmi's contribution of 35 runs. Esha Faisal from Punjab managed to pick up the only wicket for her team. In response, Punjab chased down the target in a nail-biting final over, showcasing exceptional batting skill. Nisha Bux laid a strong foundation with 76 runs, while Noor Sabir's brilliant knock of 82* runs secured the win for Punjab. Noor Sabir was declared players of the match while best players of Women Championship included B1: Esha Faisal (Karachi), B2: Nimra Rafique (Rawalpindi), B3: Noor Sabir (Punjab) and Best Wicketkeeper: Samreen (Hyderabad). The event was graced by the presence of Australia's Acting High Commissioner

to Pakistan, Nicole Guihot, Air Commodore Ashar Jameel (ACS Admin, Pakistan Air Force), Aziz Boolani (CEO, Serena Hotel Islamabad), and Syed Sultan Shah (President, World Blind Cricket Ltd & Chairman, Pakistan Blind Cricket Council). They distributed prizes among the players, celebrating their exceptional display of talent and sportsmanship. Speaking at the award-giving ceremony at the conclusion of the tournament, Nicole Guihot said Australia's continuing support was aimed to empower more women and girls with disabilities to realise their potential and broaden their horizons through sport. "We are supporting the development of blind women cricket in Pakistan because sport breaks down barriers to inclusion, diversity and equity, fosters understanding and builds resilient communities," Ms Guihot said. Coaches Abdul Razaq, Ibrar Shah, Shahida Shaheen, and Tahir Mehmood Butt, who coached the national blind men's team, worked with the women to hone ball skills, enhance team cooperation, and strengthen leadership. Chairman of Pakistan Blind Cricket Council, Syed Sultan Shah, said: "Blind Cricket is a sport that has gained popularity in recent years for its unique approach to the inclusivity. It provides an opportunity for people with visual impairments to compete at a high level, develop

their skills and confidence, and become people of vision, both on and off the field. I hope that this initiative will inspire more people with disabilities to participate in sports and lead fulfilling lives." He also revealed that the first-ever T-20 World Cup for Women Blind Cricket is happening in India in December 2025! This is a big deal because it gives these girls a chance to shine on the world stage, representing their countries. "It shows that all the hard work to develop women blind cricket is paying off, and it's a great opportunity for these girls to show what they can do." Air Commodore Ashar Jameel lauded the female players for performing well in the championship. "Pakistan women team is coming up and everyone is looking forward to it. PAF will continue to support you," he said. In 1922, two blind factory workers invented blind cricket in Melbourne, Australia when they used a tin can containing rocks as a ball. In 1928, the first sports ground and clubhouse for blind cricket was built in Kooyong, Melbourne. Today blind cricket was played at club level and nationally throughout Australia. This championship not only highlighted the crick-eting potential of women with visual impairments but also served as a powerful symbol of women's empowerment and inclusion on International Women's Day.

Indian Wells Raducanu earns first-round win against Masarova

INDIAN WELLS (Agencies): Emma Raducanu earned a 6-2 6-3 win against qualifier Rebeka Masarova in the first round at Indian Wells. The 21-year-old Briton broke the Spaniard's serve twice to go 3-0 up, but a third double fault from Raducanu allowed Masarova to pull a game back. Raducanu went 0-40 down when 5-2 in front but recovered to serve out for the first set in 43 minutes. She struggled on her serve at times but won the second set to book a meeting with Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska. Raducanu served eight double faults and had a first serve percentage of 51.9%, but the 21-year-old was helped by some impressive ground strokes and a number of errors from Masarova, who is 96 in the world. "It was super important for me to get through that," said Raducanu, whose ranking has dropped to 250 an eight-month absence from the tour through injury. "It's one of the trickiest tournaments conditions-wise to play in because it varies so much. "I dealt with that really well and overcame a really tough opponent," Raducanu, who reached the fourth round at Indian Wells last year, needed four match



points to beat Masarova and set up the second-round tie against Yastremska, who is ranked 31st in the world. "Tennis, I think, is one of the toughest sports out there about focusing, refocusing," she added. "Momentum shifts and the scoring system are pretty brutal so I was really pleased how I stayed really focused and didn't get down and competed really, really hard in tough situations." Elsewhere, American Venus Williams, whose first-round tie against Japan's Nao Hibino on the opening day was suspended when rain stopped play, was beaten when their match was finished on day two. Williams won the first set but fell way as she suf-

fered a 2-6 6-3 6-0 defeat in just over two hours, with Hibino reeling off 10 straight games from 3-2 down in the second set. The 43-year-old Williams hit seven aces but served 10 double faults in her first match since last year's US Open. Meanwhile, former Indian Wells champions Naomi Osaka and Caroline Wozniacki won their opening matches in California. Japan's four-time major winner Osaka, who returned to the tour in January after giving birth to her first child, defeated qualifier Sara Errani 6-3 6-1, while Wozniacki, who came out of retirement last year, won 7-6 (8-6) 6-1 against China's Zhu Lin.

Verstappen tops final practice in Jeddah

JEDDAH (AFP): Max Verstappen topped Friday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix third and final practice for the troubled Red Bull team after British teenager Oliver Bearman was handed a dramatic debut for Ferrari. The defending three-time world champion clocked a best lap in one minute 28.412 seconds to beat Ferrari's Charles Leclerc by two-tenths as he again struggled aside the controversy around the team, following Christian Horner being cleared of all allegations of improper conduct last week. Bearman, 18, was called in by Ferrari to replace appendicitis victim Carlos Sainz – who had taken part in both of Thursday's sessions despite great discomfort – on Friday morning and delivered a calm performance to finish 10th. Sergio Perez in the other Red Bull took third with George Russell fourth for Mercedes ahead of Lando Norris of McLaren, Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, who was fastest on Thursday, and team-mate Lance Stroll. Oscar Piastri was eighth in the second McLaren ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Mercedes and the cool and impressive Bearman. The session began in hot conditions with an air temperature of 26 degrees and the track at 43 following the unexpected news that Bearman was being handed



his competitive Formula One debut with Ferrari after Sainz was diagnosed with appendicitis. Valtteri Bottas led the way as the lights turned green followed by Bearman. The Finn clocked 1:31.307 and Bearman 1:33.114, a very respectable effort. "Take your time, take your rhythm and build up from there," his Ferrari engineer Riccardo Adami advised him. "Copy," came the reply. Hamilton joined the fray after nine minutes and went top before Bottas took control and then Bearman, on mediums, seized his moment with a lap in 1:30.277. He kept the initiative until Hamilton regained top spot on softs. Russell then became the first man under 1:30 before Perez took over with a lap of 1:29.562. Leclerc then established Ferrari's pace in front with 1:29.206 on mediums, three-tenths clear of Perez. Red-flagged After half an hour, Verstappen delivered a lap on softs that put him in command three-tenths clear of Leclerc with Russell third ahead of Alonso and Bearman, sensibly building

his confidence, logged a solid number of laps. Then with 13 minutes remaining, Zhou Guanyu lost control of his Sauber at Turn Five and smacked the barriers. He was unhurt and climbed out of his car, but the session was red-flagged. After repairs, the session resumed with four minutes of high-speed qualifying simulation laps to leave Verstappen on top ahead of Leclerc and Perez. For Bearman, the youngest driver to compete for Ferrari, it was mission accomplished and gave him a base from which to build and prepare for qualifying later Friday. Sainz reported unwell on Wednesday, but took part in both of Thursday's practice sessions although he felt severely ill with stomach and abdominal complaints. Bearman, the team's reserve driver, qualified on pole for Saturday's Formula Two race, but his Prema team has now withdrawn him to allow to focus on his new role driving Sainz's SF-24. He is the first Briton to make his F1 competitive debut in a Ferrari since Derek Bell at the 1968 Italian Grand Prix at Monza.



In brief

ANF recovers 114 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations across the country managed to recover 114 kg drugs and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He said, 3.6 kg Ice was recovered from a parcel book for Bangladesh at a courier office in Karachi. 72 kg hashish and 13 kg opium were recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Giga Mall Rawalpindi. In fourth operation, 12 kg hashish and 5 kg opium were recovered from Karachi Road Kalat area and two accused were arrested. In fifth operation, 9 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near Burhan Interchange Attack. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

Police carry out search operation

RAWALPINDI (APP): The district police here on Friday carried out search operation in 'Kamalabad' and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of R.A Bazar Police Station. According to a police spokesman, the search operation was conducted in order to maintain law and order and flush out suspects following the directions of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Hamdani. He informed, senior police officers and personnel including women police took part in the operation. The police checked as many as 78 houses, 21 shops, 17 tenants and 85 individuals during the operation. The spokesman said that police were fully prepared to shield the lives and property of the public and combing and search operations were being done to flush out the suspects and hardcore criminals. He said that police were more vigilant to keep an eye on suspects and maintain law and order in the district.

Police arrest six gamblers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The district police arrested six gamblers and recovered Rs 9500 stake money, five mobile phones, and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that Sadigabad police conducted a raid and arrested six gamblers namely Shehzad, Nazakat, Shah Rukh, Saeed, Riaz and Arif, who were allegedly involved in betting while playing cards. The police recovered Rs 9500, fine mobile phones and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is under process. Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Faisal Saleem said that gambling was the root cause of other evils and those involved in such crimes did not deserve any concession.

Complaint against flour mill

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Food Department had lodged an FIR and destroyed 1,500 kilograms low quality rice during a raid on a flour mill here on Friday. According to details, the PFA team on the instructions of DG PFA, inspected a flour mill in the area of Baga Mor and recovered 7,280 kg of Maize and 600 kg of substandard flour. The authorized team also seized 1,500 kg of substandard rice during the raid and smashed it on the spot. Meanwhile, DG PFA Asim Javed said that poor-quality flour was being mixed with basin, and added that the samples had been sent to a food laboratory for further analysis.



ISLAMABAD: First Lady Begum Samina Alvi addressing a seminar on International Women's Day organized by Serena Hotels.

Ulema urges world to pressure Israel to allow Muslims to worship in Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramazan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ulema and Mashaikh on the call off Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) in their surmons on Friday denounced Israeli coercion and tyranny, expressing solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians. Condemning the egregious violations of human rights in the holy land, the religious scholars and leaders emphasized that humanity was suffering in Palestine, with Israel's actions transcending all moral boundaries.

They condemned the international community's failure to address the escalating humanitarian crisis, urging organizations like the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to intensify efforts for a ceasefire during Ramazan. This, they stressed, would allow Palestinians to worship freely during the holy month. During the sermons, the Ulema and Mashaykh lamented the dire situation in Palestine, highlighting the relentless Israeli attacks, widespread hunger, poverty, and the scarcity of essential resources. They decried the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a sacred site for Muslims, calling upon the international community to pressure Israel to allow Muslims to worship there freely during Ramazan. The religious scholars and leaders said with more than 30,000 Palestinians martyred and hundreds of thousands injured, Gaza had become a symbol of devastation and

despair. They urged for concrete action from the international community, emphasizing that mere rhetoric was insufficient in addressing the plight of Palestinians. In an appeal to the OIC leadership, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, they called for safeguarding the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and upholding the rights of Palestinians. "As the holy month of Ramazan approaches, the PUC stands united in condemning Israeli aggression and advocating for justice and peace for the Palestinian people. They vowed to continue their efforts to raise awareness and garner support for the oppressed Palestinians until their rights are restored and justice prevails." These views were expressed by PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Allama Abdul Haq Mujahid, Maulana Muhammad Rafiq Jami, Maulana Nauman Hashir, Maulana Asad Zakaria Qasmi, Maulana Muhammad Shafi Qasmi, Maulana Asadullah Farooq, Allama Zubair Abid, Maulana Muhammad Ashfaq Pitafi, Maulana Abu Bakr Hameed Sabri, Maulana Tahir Aqeel Awan, Maulana Aziz Akbar Qasmi, Maulana Haq Nawaz Khalid, Maulana Obaidullah Gormani, Allama Tahir-ul-Hasan Maulana Hanif Osmani, Maulana Muhammad Asghar Khosa, Maulana Anwar-ul-Haq

Mujahid, Maulana Abdul Malik Asif, Maulana Aslam Siddiqui, Maulana Abdul Hakeem Athar, Maulana Abdullah Haqqani, Maulana Abdul Waheed Farooqi, Maulana Abu Bakr Hamza, Maulana Habib Rehman Abid, Maulana Aminul Haque Ashrafi, Maulana Izharul Haque Khalid, Sahibzada Hamza Tahirul Hasan, Maulana Saadullah Ludhianwi, Maulana Anisur Rahman Baloch, Maulana Abdul Rasheed, Mufti Muhammad Umar Farooq, Maulana Abdul Ghaffar Shah Hijazi, Maulana Muhammad Ahmad Makki, Maulana Azizur Rahman Muawiya, Mufti Imran Muawiya, Maulana Saadullah Shafiq, Maulana Yasir Alvi, Qari Abdul Rauf, Maulana Mokhtal Mahar, Maulana Zubair Khatana, Maulana Aqeel Zubiri, Qari Azizur Rahman, Maulana Shabbir Khatana, Maulana Zubair Khatana, Qari Abdul Majid Lahori, Maulana Farooq Khanpuri, Maulana Qasim Sangi, Maulana Ashraf Malik, Maulana Ijaz Malik, Qari Abdul Wahab Muawiya, Maulana Muhammad Bilal Saqib, Qari Ibrahim, Qari Riaz, Maulana Ameer Muawiya, Maher Abdul Khaliq Murali, Maulana Muneebur Rehman Haidari, Qari Mohabbat Ali Qasmi, Qari Zul Qarnain, Maulana Tayyab Qureshi, Qari Mahmood Al Hasan, Qari Abdul Majid Malik, Maulana Waqas Iqbal and others during Friday sermons across the country.

Education key to unlocking full potential of women: First Lady

ISLAMABAD (APP): First Lady, Begum Samina Alvi on Friday said that education was the key to unlocking full potential of women and girls as investing in their education and empowering them with knowledge and skills would help creating a more equitable and prosperous society for all.

"Education is not just about acquiring knowledge; it is about empowering individuals to become agents of change in their communities and beyond," she said while addressing an event organized in connection with the International Women Day by Serena Hotels.

She stressed to pledge to work towards gender equality in all spheres of life, including technology and innovation.

"Together, we can create a future where women have equal access to opportunities and can contribute fully to society," she said, adding currently, the ratio of women in Pakistan was almost 50 percent, but the country still had a long way to go in terms of their inclusion and empowerment.

"According to the Global Gender Gap Index-2023, Pakistan ranked at 142nd position out of 146 countries.

This represents a very sorry state of affairs due to low economic participation, educational attainment, access to healthcare services and workforce participation. These challenges are not just obstacles; they are injustices that must be addressed with urgency and determination," she remarked. She highlighted that Pakistan, as a member state of the United Nations, fully endorsed the Charter of the United Nations which strived to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination of gender.

The constitution of Pakistan also ensured fundamental rights and provided ample guarantees to women against all forms of discrimination, exploitation and marginalization, in addition to the right to equality, to grow and lead a healthy and prosperous life, she said.

Samina Alvi also stressed on girls' education to make the country's women strong enough to face the challenges of life with the strength of their minds.

Besides, she also stressed the need to make continuous efforts to equip our women with vocational skills to utilize their potential and also to save them from economic exploitation.

By using digital platforms, she said the women could overcome many of the barriers they might encounter in traditional job pursuits. "We need to work towards increasing access to digital resources, providing education and training in technology, and

building supportive environments that enable women to excel in tech-related fields," she said adding this included initiatives such as mentorship programs, scholarships, and providing digital technologies. "This, in turn, will promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistan by providing an enabling environment for women to enter the workforce and contribute to national development," she added.

Highlighting her key area of focus on raising awareness about breast cancer, Samina Alvi said she had been advocating for better access to screening and treatment services for women across Pakistan.

"Breast cancer is not just a health issue; it is a social justice issue. Every woman, regardless of her socioeconomic status deserves the right to quality healthcare and the opportunity to live a healthy life," she added. Similarly, she said she had been deeply committed to promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Earlier panelists, Dr. Sania Nishtar, Azima Dhanjee and Dr. Maha Noor Khan discussed in detail about the role of women in a progressive society.

Meanwhile, First Lady Samina Arif Alvi on Friday said that the self-dependence of women was inevitable for the socio-economic development and prosperity of any country.

The first lady, addressing a seminar held in connection with International Women's Day at Rawalpindi Women University in collaboration with SOS Foundation, said Islam had granted full rights to women and now it was our responsibility to give them their rightful place and protection in the society.

She lauded the Rawalpindi Women University for not only empowering young women through education but also giving them awareness of important economic and social issues. She said the International Women's Day was an opportunity to review the progress of women's rights and make a pledge for more efforts required in that regard.

The first lady said women comprise half of the country's population, despite that their participation in various sectors was still low necessitating more efforts for their economic empowerment.

Citing Quaid-e-Azam's strong support for women's rights, she said there were many examples of successful working women in Islamic history like Hazrat Khadija as well as in Pakistan's history including Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, and Benazir Bhutto who made a prominent place in practical life.

Message of Chairman PTA on International Women's Day

F.P Report

ISLAMABAD: As we mark International Women's Day under the theme "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress," it's vital to recognize the seismic impact of digital inclusion in empowering women. PTA is dedicated to ensuring access to ICTs and enhancing gender inclusion across Pakistan. However, real change happens when all stakeholders collaborate to eliminate the digital gender divide.

Despite notable strides, women con-

tinue to face significant obstacles in achieving equal participation in the digital economy. Our collective efforts must focus on targeted digital skills training, encouraging women to own SIMs in their name, addressing affordability concerns related to mobile devices, advocating for STEM education, and enhancing online safety measures.

This International Women's Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to a future that recognizes the potential within every woman for #HerDigitalPakistan.

IIUI organizes seminar to commemorate Int'l Women Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): Directorate of Student Affairs, Female Campus, International Islamic University (IIUI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Rights, on Friday organized a seminar titled "Empower Her: Unlocking Potential" to mark the International Women Day.

The participants shed light on the importance of investing in women empowerment to accelerate progress in various spheres of society.

Participants, including students from International Islamic University, got engaged in a series of activities designed to foster interaction and reflection.

These activities included sharing stories of inspiring women, discussing empowering quotes, and reflecting on the qualities of effective women leaders.

Throughout the interactive session, participants delved into discussions on the impact of women empowerment on social, economic, and political realms. They shared their perspectives, experiences, and insights on the challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality.

The activity was moderated by Zeeshan Munir, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Human Rights. Shahzad Ahmad Khan, Director Ministry of Human Rights and Legal Advisor Ministry of Human Rights, Ms. Maimoona Khattak emphasized the theme of "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress," underscoring the critical importance of investing in women empowerment for societal advancement.

They provided valuable insights and perspectives, further enriching the discussions held throughout the seminar.

The participants were invited to pledge their support for gender equality initiatives and commit to being agents of change in their communities. Dr. Summaya Chughtai, Incharge Female Campus reiterated the importance of individual and collective action in advancing women rights and empowerment, leaving attendees inspired and motivated to drive positive change.

Dr. Sadia Saleem, Female student's advisor said that the seminar provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas, inspiring action and advocacy among the attendees.

PMD forecast rain with wind, thunderstorm

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) Friday forecast rain with wind and thunderstorm in various parts of Punjab, Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan from March 10 till March 14 with occasional gaps. A westerly wave was likely to enter Balochistan on March 9 and likely to extend to upper parts on March 11 followed by another westerly wave on March 12.

Under the influence of this weather system, rain-wind and thunderstorm with isolated heavy falls is expected in Balochistan including Turbat, Kech, Gwadar, Jiواني, Pasni, Ormara, Panjgur, Kharan, Kalat, Khuzdar, Lasbela and Awaran on March 9 (evening/night) and March 10. While, rain-wind and thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected in Chagi, Noushki, Washuk, Mastung, Sibbi, Naseerabad, Zhob, Sherani,

Barkhan, Musakhel, Kohlu, Jhal Magsi, Loralai, Ziarat, Quetta, Chaman, Pishin, Qila Abdullah and Qila Saifullah from March 10-13 with occasional gaps.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, rain-wind/thunderstorm with snowfall over the hills is expected in Waziristan, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Chitral, Dir, Swat, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Haripur, Kohistan, Shangla, Buner, Bajaur, Karak, Khyber, Peshawar.

Google celebrates IWD by launching several initiatives for women empowerment in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): On International Women's Day, Google celebrates the growing potential and aspirations of women in Pakistan, and reaffirms its dedication to empowering them further with the belief that by equipping women with the skills and resources they need, the country can unlock a future filled with greater equality, inclusion, and prosperity for all.

As part of the company's commitment to help create 'Future Forward Pakistan', Google has been running various initiatives to help not only to bridge the digital gap for women but also empowering top Pakistani female talents to compete in the global market said a news release received here.

Bridging Gaps Through Upskilling: While the country is on the path of progress in female literacy, gender parity remains a challenge. In Pakistan, female labor force participation rate is among the lowest in the world, hovering around 22%.

Google recognizes the incredible potential and aims to bridge these gaps by launching several programs to help drive stronger equality, and the empowerment of women in the workforce. One such example is the Google Career Certificates program, launched in Pakistan in 2022.

50% of the program scholarships are allocated exclusively for women, in order to increase women's access to economic opportunities and enable them to pursue their aspirations. The program awarded 44,500 scholarships in 2023 and has committed 45,000 new scholarships for 2024 to empower more learners.

Supporting Women Founders and

Women in Tech: It is estimated that only 1% of entrepreneurs in Pakistan are female. In an effort to ensure that Pakistani women are an equal part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem; The Women Founders Circle, a collaboration between Google Cloud and the National Science and Technology Park (NSTP), offers workshops and mentorship for women entrepreneurs in tech, fostering greater inclusion in the startup landscape.

In addition, the Women Techmakers (WTM) program works to upskill and inspire women in technology, running events, providing mentorship, and advocating for greater diversity. There are 7 WTM ambassadors in Pakistan across 5 cities (Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Hyderabad). In 2023 alone, Google supported Pakistani WTM Ambassadors to run 7 events across those cities to celebrate the International Women's Day, which inspired more than 1,500 women.

Nurturing Future Voices: Google News Initiative (GNI), with the support of its local partners, trains young journalists, providing opportunities for women to gain reporting experience, addressing the accessibility of newsrooms.

Marium Chaudhry, a passionate journalist in Pakistan, is on a mission to make the newsroom more accessible for the younger generation in the country. To fulfill her mission of empowering readers, the Google News Initiative partnered with her to help train 120 students in digital journalism using GNI resources.

In 12 months, 36 hours of in-per-

son training were conducted, and 50+ blogs were written by students. Sharing stories, achieving dreams: While YouTube has been a positive force in Pakistan in more ways than one, it also continues to serve as a powerful platform for women to share their voices and inspire others.

Throughout the years, there are more and more creators who choose YouTube to be the platform of choice to share their stories and their passion. But not only that, many created a career and gained financial independence through YouTube.

A great example is Iqra Kanwal, one of Pakistan's top female creators on YouTube. She is a role model of someone who has been able to break stereotypes by following her dream, and empowering and entertaining her community in Pakistan through her content.

Kanwal shares "I strongly believe that every voice is significant, every story is valuable, and YouTube has played a pivotal role in enabling its creators to bring these stories to life. The platform has been instrumental to my success as a content creator and has provided strong avenues to share my narratives, connect with the audiences globally, and achieve success."

"Google believes that empowering women is key to driving progress and creating a more equitable future," states Farhan Qureshi, Google's Country Director for Pakistan. "Our women-focused programs are strategically designed to equip women in Pakistan with the necessary tools and resources they need to overcome hurdles and unleash their full potential."



ISLAMABAD: WAPDA workers busy in installing new electricity cables on pylons at Tarlai.

Plans for Afghan economic growth

KABUL (TOLONews): Din Mohammad Hanif, the acting Minister of Economy, at the opening of the Afghanistan-Iran joint exhibition, said that the Islamic Emirate has plans for economic growth. The Afghanistan-Iran joint exhibition was inaugurated for four days in Kabul. "The Economic Deputy of the PM's Office is working on a five-year developmental strategic plan, and its secretariat is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy and is now being completed."

India, Afghanistan relations

KABUL (Khaama Press): Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting Foreign Minister of the Taliban, met with J.P. Singh, the head of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Division of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, in Kabul. India is interested in expanding political and economic relations with the Taliban government. According to the Taliban's Foreign Ministry, Amir Khan Muttaqi discussed bilateral relations between Afghanistan and India, as well as economic and transit issues, with J.P. Singh.

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

Women’s rights in Afghanistan a test for global community: UN official



KABUL (Ariana News): The issue of women's rights in Afghanistan is a test for global community, Alison Davidian, Special Representative for UN Women in Afghanistan, said on Friday on the occasion of International Women's Day. "The space for Afghan women and girls continues to shrink at an alarming pace, and with it Afghanistan's future prospects to escape a vicious cycle of war,

poverty, and isolation," Davidian said in a statement released by UNAMA. "The situation of Afghan women and girls must be kept at the center of international concerns and action. The fight for women's rights in Afghanistan is a global fight and a battle for women's rights everywhere. What we do – or fail to do – for Afghan women and girls is the ultimate test of who wears

as a global community and what we stand for," she added. UNAMA called on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to end restrictions on women and girls or else risk further pushing the country into deeper poverty and isolation. "As we mark this year's International Women's Day, the global theme of 'invest in women' should be a moment when we redouble our efforts to unlock

even greater progress," said Roza Otunbayeva, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). "It is heartbreaking that we are seeing precisely the opposite unfolding in Afghanistan: a catastrophic and deliberate disinvestment that is causing immense harm to women and girls, creating only barriers to sustainable peace and prosperity," Otunbayeva said. Former president Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, former chairman of reconciliation council, in statements posted on X expressed hope that women's rights are ensured in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, US Embassy for Afghanistan said on X: "On International Women's Day, we stand in solidarity with Afghan women and girls and their right to quality education, economic employment and other fundamental human freedoms." This comes as IEA has repeatedly said that it is committed to ensuring women's rights in Afghanistan according to Sharia.

Restrictions against women exacerbate Afghanistan’s poverty and isolation

KABUL (Khaama Press): Roza Otunbayeva, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Head of the UN Deputy Mission in Afghanistan, highlights the escalating danger of pushing Afghanistan further into poverty and isolation due to restrictions against women. As the world commemorates International Women's Solidarity Day on March 8th, the Head of the UN Deputy Mission in Afghanistan calls upon the Taliban administration to put an end to the constraints imposed on women and girls. According to UNAMA's statement, Otunbayeva expresses regret over witnessing in Afghanistan a "disastrous negative investment" instead of investing in women, which inflicts severe harm on women and girls, hindering peace and prosperity. UNAMA's statement underscores Afghan women's plea for global support in advocacy, ensuring active participation and representation

of women in all discussions regarding Afghanistan's future, and maintaining international assistance directly supporting women. Alongside these urgent calls, Afghanistan is grappling with dire humanitarian crises, compounded by political instability and conflict, exacerbating the vulnerability of women and girls. Restrictions on

women's job opportunities and their removal from public spaces not only perpetuate gender inequality but also impede the country's progress towards sustainable development and peace. The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan underscores the pressing need for immediate action to address the plight of women and girls, who are

disproportionately affected by the conflict and socio-economic constraints. As the international community rallies support for Afghan women's rights, concerted efforts are imperative to dismantle barriers, foster inclusivity, and ensure women's active participation in shaping the nation's future, thereby fostering peace and prosperity for all.



Protesters: Afghanistan now most dangerous for women

KABUL (Khaama Press): Women's Freedom Movement" has labeled the Taliban's actions against women as "gender apartheid" on the occasion of International Women's Day. The group asserts that Afghanistan under Taliban control is "the most dangerous and insecure place in the world for Afghan girls and women." In a resolution

issued on Thursday, March 7th the Women's Freedom Movement highlighted the hardships faced by women under Taliban rule, stating that women face "arbitrary arrests, torture, mass rape, and killings" in their fight for rights. The resolution states that Afghan women have been taken hostage by the Taliban. These women protesters have cited over 85

decrees issued since the Taliban's takeover, banning or restricting rights to education, employment, freedom of travel, freedom of speech, cultural activities, sports, and public services. According to the group, the Taliban's policies are not in line with the desires, culture, and religion of the Afghan people. In addition to the dire

situation highlighted by the Women's Freedom Movement, the economic plight of Afghan women worsens amid returning refugees from neighboring countries, exacerbating the crisis. The harsh policies implemented by the Taliban further exacerbate the situation, pushing Afghan women deeper into poverty and despair.



IEA condemns Israel’s plan to build 3,500 new settlement homes in West Bank

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) condemned Israel's plan to construct 3,500 new homes in West Bank settlements, its foreign ministry said on Friday. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan strongly condemns the decision to build 3,500 new bases in the West Bank of Palestine by the Zionist invaders, and this heinous action is another blatant violation in the series of occupation of Palestinian lands. We strongly call for its prevention," the ministry said in a statement. "IEA-MoFA deems the Palestinian territory as the legal land of the people of Palestine. Such cruel actions and the ongoing genocide in Gaza by the Zionist colonisers have irreparable consequences and the cause of the instability in the region," the statement added. It called on the interna-



tional community and parties to the Islamic countries to "take urgent measures to prevent this catastrophe and fulfill their responsibility thereof so that the oppressed people of Palestine may not be killed, and prevent land usurpation." An Israeli settlement-

planning body has advanced permits for 3,500 new homes in West Bank settlements near Jerusalem, according to statements by Israeli ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Orit Strock. The homes are expected to be built in the Israeli settlements of Maale

Adumim, Kedar, and Efrat, which are all close to Jerusalem, The Times of Israel reported on Wednesday. The occupied West Bank is part of territories captured by Israel during the 1967 Middle East war. Palestinians seek statehood in the region.

10th anniversary of Marshal Fahim’s death remembered

Kabul (TOLONews): Today, the 18th day of Hout (March 8), is the 10th anniversary of the passing of Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim. The former president Hamid Karzai and the former Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, called Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim an "unforgettable personality" of the country.

"I honor the memory of my brother and best friend Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim. He was a patriotic figure who always strived for peace, stability, and national unity," said Hamid Karzai on X. "Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim wished for the people of Afghanistan to live together in a peaceful and non-violent environment, with brotherhood and equality, and to contribute

to the prosperity of their country." Abdullah Abdullah also said on X. Marshal Fahim was born in 1957 in Omraz, a small village in Panjshir province. He started his primary education in his birthplace and then started his higher education in Islamic Sharia at the Arabic Institute of Kabul in 1970. "His behavior with his people was very correct; that is, those who were in government during

his time, he treated them well," said Sayed Akbar Agha, a political analyst. After the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan, Marshal Fahim was made First Vice-President and Minister of Defense in Karzai's temporary government. Fahim Qasim was named the highest military rank of Marshal in appreciation of his service to Afghanistan, on May 5, 2002.

Trade interest among Northern Afghanistan’s women has risen amid humanitarian crisis

KABUL (Khaama Press): Officials from the economic department in Jawzjan province of Afghanistan have announced the opening of an exhibition of agricultural products and handicrafts aimed at strengthening the economy of families in the province. The exhibition was announced by the provincial officials of the Jawzjan province through the social media platform X on Thursday, March 17. According to the head of the Department of Economy of the Acting Government, about 5,000 women are working in various fields in the province. Reports indicate that interest among women in Jawzjan Province has increased, and many of them are striving to create job opportunities for other women. Previously, media outlets related to the Acting Government had reported that currently 4,500 women are engaged in 18 industrial sectors in the province. According to the head of Industry and Trade in Jawzjan Province, Mrs. Sangi Mah, a 50-year-old woman, has facilitated job



opportunities for 170 other women by establishing a wool-weaving workshop in the province to support women. Meanwhile, Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister of Industry and Trade of the Taliban, emphasized the enhancement of women's capacity in the trade sector during his trip to the Turkmen-Afghan business networking conference in Ashgabat. He traveled to Ashgabat on Friday, March 1st, with 15 businesswomen for the opening of the Turkmen-Afghan business

networking conference. It is worth mentioning that several exhibitions have been organized for businesswomen in Kabul and several provinces of the country to enhance women's economic capacity. Since the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, they have implemented suppressive policies that severely limit women's rights, including their access to education and employment. These actions have been vehemently criticized by both the international community and the

Afghan populace. In the aftermath, Afghanistan has been plunged into a severe humanitarian crisis. The situation has been exacerbated by the harsh winter conditions, compounding the hardships faced by the population. Adding to the crisis, Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries are confronted with a dire lack of basic necessities. This includes limited access to medical care, food, shelter, and job opportunities, further worsening their plight.

Afghanistan’s future depends on meaningful participation of men and women: Karzai

KABUL (Ariana News): Former president Hamid Karzai on the occasion of International Women's Day once again called on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to reopen the doors of schools and universities for girls. Karzai said in a statement that the future of Afghanistan depends on the solidarity and meaningful participation of both women and men in this land. He stated that to achieve progress, evolution, and freedom from dependency, it is essential to pay serious attention to the education and job opportunities for women and to provide an environment for the growth and



flourishing of the bright talents of girls in the country. He said: "According to history, Afghan women

have had a significant presence side by side with men in all developments and arenas, especially in the

struggles for independence, and have established their role and position as responsible members of society."

KP CM vows to take all decisions on merit

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The first meeting of the newly formed provincial cabinet was held here at Civil Secretariat Peshawar on Friday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Besides the cabinet members, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries and Administrative Secretaries of the provincial departments attended the meeting. The chief minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur formally welcomed the cabinet members and said that an excellent cabinet team consisting of both experienced and fresh members has been formed.

"In the prevailing tough situation, we have got a huge responsibility; that's why we have to work as a team to discharge it effectively"? He remarked and made it clear that henceforth, all decisions will be made purely on merit and no one will be allowed to go against merit in the new system. Sustainable development of the province and wellbeing of the people will be our top priority, and for this purpose, everyone has to perform and deliver according to public expectations.

Addressing a press conference after cabinet meeting, the Chief Minister highlighted the priorities of his government and said that maintaining law and order and providing immediate relief to people would be the top most priority of incumbent provincial government. He made it clear that since the PTI elected government at centre was overthrown through conspiracy, the economic conditions of the country began to deteriorate with each passing day resulting in severe financial crunches, today we are faced with. Keeping in view the prevailing economic situation and its adverse impacts on the life of general public, providing relief to the people alongside improving law and order situation in the province will be the first priority of provincial government, he said and added that as a first relief step in this regard, the provincial cabinet has formally decided to fully restore Sehat Card Plus scheme from the first of Ramadan this year.

He maintained that as another

important relief step, the cabinet has approved relief package for needy people during the holy month of Ramadan, under which 8,50,000 households already listed in Ehsas and BISP, would be provided with Rs. 10,000 per household with a cost of Rs. 8.5 billion. Besides 1,15,000 additional households who were not listed in aforementioned programs for any reason, would also be provided with Rs. 10,000 per household. Similarly, he said that directives have already been issued to reactivate all "Langar Khanas" established by the previous PTI provincial government, adding that a number of Langar Khanas have been made functional so far, and all others would also be made functional by the 1st of Ramadan.

Apart from this, Dastarkhawsan would be arranged in the District and Tehsil Headquarter Hospitals across the province so that people can have the facility of Sehri and Iftar during the holy month. Ali Amin further said that promoting employment opportunities would also be an integral part of government's priorities; special attention would be given to skill-development of youth for this purpose in addition to providing them interest free loans, thereby enabling them to initiate their own business as per their skills and capabilities. He went on saying that his government will go all out to ensure that available resources are being utilized for wellbeing of the people. Ali Amin Khan further said that matter of provincial rights would be taken up with the centre and hoped that media would also play its role in this regard. He made it clear that Rs. 1510 billion of the province, in lieu of NHP (as per AGN Qazi Formula) are due with the federal government, which is undoubtedly a huge amount and can help us a lot to steer the province out of financial problems.

"We are not asking for charity, but we are demanding our legitimate and constitutional rights" he remarked and said that we are also well aware of the current economic situation of the country, and that's why we do not insist for lump sum payment of the arrears; any viable mechanism to this effect can be devised with mutual understanding. However, it should be clear to everyone that the province

cannot afford to give up this right at any cost. He on this occasion, also expressed his heartfelt sympathy with the families who have lost their loved ones in the incidents due to recent torrential rains and snowfall, adding that victims had already been provided with financial assistance.

He said it was good to see that the prime minister has also announced relief package for them, but it would have been much better if the federation continued to pay the dues of the province well in time, because we need to have pragmatic and sustainable steps in order to save the precious human lives in case of floods and other disasters. "Giving something relief every time is not solution to the problem, because nothing can replace the human life", he remarked and added that if the province is provided with aforementioned arrears, then this money can be spent on the protection and welfare of the needy people.

He urged the general public to raise their voice against corruption and bribery adding that the incumbent government would stand by the public because with the support of public that curse could be eradicated once for all. Ali Amin Gandapur, also stressed the citizens to keep eye on the quality of development works and incase of any irregularity, matter may be reported to concerned authorities timely, strict action would be taken against concerned contractor and government officials.

He said that Pakistan particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot afford lavish life style at public expense that's why the provincial cabinet in its very first meeting decided to withdraw the perks and privileges of ex-chief ministers adding that the public mandated the government for its welfare and development only not anything else.

To a question, he replied that he will definitely attend the meetings of all forums including council of common interest and plead the case of the province in a befitting manner despite the political and ideological differences with central government. Ali Amin also made it clear that there will be no load shedding for three hours during Aftaar and Sehri even in rural areas.



ISLAMABAD: Women activists scuffle with police personnel during Aurat March, to mark International Women's Day.

Pak Navy's Maritime exercise concluded

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The concluding session of Pakistan Navy's Major Maritime Exercise SEASPARK-2024 held at Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the session as Chief Guest. The exercise was conducted in North Arabian Sea to validate operational plans designed under realities of ever-evolving geo-strategic environment. Relevant elements of PAF and Pak Army also participated in the exercise to practice tri-services synergy during war.

Addressing the closing session, Chief of the Naval Staff highlighted that the exercise helped in synergizing Naval Operations with Land and Air Operations. He stressed that the on-going strategic competition among major countries are being increasingly confronted with difficult foreign policy choices to safeguard national interests. Evolving character of war under Grey Hybrid scenarios coupled with internal security challenges also complicate the threat matrix. All these threats and challenges necessitate a constant review of our operational plans through major exercises.

Earlier, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) presented overview of the exercise and conduct of the exercise was discussed threadbare to draw pertinent lessons. Towards the end, recommendations were presented to revise war plans and strategies under the evolving maritime environment in the region.

Exercise SEASPARK-2024 was aimed to assess combat readiness and operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy to meet the entire spectrum of National Security Challenges in the Maritime Domain. The exercise was conducted on a two force format with Blue Force being the own and Orange Force being the enemy forces. Successful conduct of the exercise was a testimony of perpetual readiness of Pakistan Navy in proving its capability to combat broad spectrum of threats in the maritime domain. The concluding session of the exercise was attended by high ranking officers from Sister Services and notable representatives from various Ministries.

Umar Ayub granted bail

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub Khan on Friday granted transit bail in six cases bail from Peshawar High Court (PHC).

As per details, Omar Ayub along with his counsel Babar Awan appeared before the PHC Abbottabad bench to seek transit remand in six cases registered against the former minister in Mianwali, Faisalabad and Lahore. The court after initial arguments granted Omar Ayub transit bail in six cases until April 14. He was directed to appear before the concerned courts. Talking to newsmen after getting transit bail, Omar Ayub claimed 95 'fake' cases have been registered against him under sections of murder, attempt to murder and terrorism. He demanded the release of all PTI workers including the former prime minister.

IMF backs new programme for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Reuters): The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will support formulating a new economic programme for Pakistan if the new government seeks one, a spokesperson for the lender said on Friday, encouraging fair resolution of all electoral disputes.

"We look forward to engaging with the new government to complete the second review under the current stand-by arrangement and, should the government request, support the formulation of a new medium-term economic program," the Fund spokesperson said in an e-mail. The reference was to a \$3-billion standby arrangement Pakistan secured last summer from the IMF, though the country has been struggling with record inflation, currency devaluation and shrinking foreign reserves.

The IMF said that while it did not comment on domestic political developments, it encouraged the fair and peaceful resolution of all electoral disputes, given the importance of the institutional environment for economic stability and growth. The spokesperson said that "in terms of our engagement with Pakistan, our aim is to support the implementation of strong policies to deepen financial stability, address longstanding economic and underlying balance of payments challenges, and restore sustained and inclusive growth

for the benefit of all Pakistani citizens".

The statement highlighted that sustained growth could be achieved with "stronger public finances, through high quality revenue measures to broaden the tax base while scaling up the support for the most vulnerable, restoring energy sector viability, improving institutional governance and anti-corruption effectiveness". It also drew attention to reforms in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), building climate resilience, and creating a "level playing field for private businesses" to promote investment and employment for inclusive growth.

On the basis of these objectives, we look forward to engaging with the new government to complete the second review under the current Stand-by Arrangement and, should the government request, support the formulation of a new medium-term economic program. After a new cabinet is formed, the fund stands ready to send a mission for the second review of the stand-by arrangement, IMF communications official Julie Kozack told a briefing.

"The focus, therefore, is currently on completion of the current Stand-By programme, which ends in April 2024. We look forward to working with the new government on policies to ensure macroeconomic stability," IMF Director of Communications Julie

Kozack told journalists at a news briefing on Thursday. Kozack noted that the IMF Executive Board had approved the first review of Pakistan's Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) on January 11, with disbursements totaling approximately \$1.9 million.

The SBA aims to stabilise the economy, particularly focusing on safeguarding vulnerable segments of the population. Highlighting the caretaker government's efforts, Kozack praised their commitment to fiscal targets, the protection of social safety nets, and a tight monetary policy to control inflation. She also acknowledged timely adjustments in tariffs to enhance the energy sector's viability.

Looking ahead, Kozack emphasised the IMF's readiness to conduct a mission for the second review of the Stand-By arrangement after the formation of a new cabinet. The current Stand-By programme concludes in April 2024, and the IMF anticipates working closely with the new government to ensure macroeconomic stability. Responding to a question regarding political instability, Kozack refrained from commenting on politics. Instead, she reiterated the IMF's commitment to collaborating with the new government and expressed optimism about fostering stability for the benefit of the people of Pakistan.

Ship leaves for Gaza as test of new humanitarian corridor

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP): A top European Union official is in Cyprus on Friday to inspect preparations to send desperately needed aid to war-ravaged Gaza by sea, just hours after President Joe Biden announced that the US military will set up a temporary port off Gaza's Mediterranean coast to support deliveries.

Efforts to dramatically ramp up aid deliveries signaled growing frustration with Israel's conduct in the war in the United States and Europe. Biden's announcement of the sea port plan underscored how the United States is having to go around Israel, its main Mideast ally and the top recipient of US military aid, to get aid into Gaza, including through airdrops that started last week. Israel accuses Hamas of commandeering some aid deliveries. Efforts to set up a sea route for aid deliveries come amid mounting alarm over the spread of hunger among Gaza's 2.3 million people. Hunger is most acute in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by Israeli forces for months and suffered long cutoffs of food supply deliveries.

After months of warnings over the risk of famine in Gaza under Israel's bombardment, offensives and siege, hospital doctors have reported 20 malnutrition-related deaths at two northern Gaza hospitals. While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used his State of the Union speech to reiterate demands that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to allow in more aid to Gaza.

"To the leadership of Israel, I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip," Biden declared

before Congress. He also repeated calls for Israel to do more to protect civilians in the fighting, and to work toward Palestinian statehood as the only long-term solution to Israeli-Palestinian violence. US officials said it will likely be weeks before the Gaza pier is operational.

Officials from the US, Europe, Israel and the Middle East were already deep in discussions and preparations for a maritime aid route. Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the European Union's powerful executive arm, arrived in Cyprus last Thursday to inspect facilities at the port of Larnaca, where aid ships are expected to depart for Gaza. In November, Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides offered the use of the port, which is a 230-mile (370-kilometer) journey from Gaza.

It's unclear when the first ship will set sail, but it's believed it could happen as early as Sunday, the expected start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. A ship belonging to Spain's Open Arms NGO is moored at Larnaca waiting for permission to deliver food aid from World Central Kitchen, a US charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés.

Aid groups have said their efforts to deliver desperately needed supplies to Gaza have been hampered because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order. It is even more difficult to get aid to the isolated north. Sigrid Kaag, the UN senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters late Thursday that air and sea deliveries cannot make up for a shortage of supply routes on land.

EU Commission spokesman Balazs Ujvari said on Wednesday the bloc would consider air drops, but this would be a last resort and cannot replace ground access to the enclave. Ujvari said the EU has so far carried out around 40 flights to deliver aid to Gaza, primarily through Egypt. Meanwhile, efforts to reach a ceasefire before Ramadan appeared stalled. Hamas said Thursday that its delegation had left Cairo, where talks were being held, until next week.

International mediators had hoped to alleviate some of the immediate crisis with a six-week ceasefire, which would have seen Hamas release some of the Israeli hostages it is holding, Israel release some Palestinian prisoners and aid groups be given access to get a major influx of assistance into Gaza. Palestinian militants are believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others captured during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants killed about 1,200 people in Israel and took some 250 hostages. Several dozen hostages were freed in a weeklong November truce, and about 30 are believed to be dead. Egyptian officials said Hamas has agreed to the main terms of such an agreement as a first stage but wants commitments that it will lead to an eventual more permanent ceasefire, while Israel wants to confine the negotiations to the more limited agreement. The officials 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.

Peshawar journalists call on Gandapur

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has said that New Peshawar Valley and Peshawar Dera Ismail Khan Motorway projects will be completed on priority basis through BOT model.

He expressed these views while talking to senior journalists here at the Chief Minister's House on Friday. On this occasion, Advisor to the Chief Minister for Information and Public Relations Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, Secretary Information and Public Relations Syed Abdul Jabbar Shah and Director General (DG) Information Muhammad Imran were also present.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said that the completion of the project of public interest while maintaining the best financial discipline is among his top priorities and he will try to complete these projects as soon as possible through Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) model. He said that New Peshawar Valley City and Peshawar Dera Ismail Khan Motorway projects will also be included in the same model and priority.

IHC directs MWM chief's meeting with Imran Khan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday directed Superintendent of Adiala Jail to arrange meeting of Raja Nasir Abbas, chief of Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) with PTI founder Imran Khan as per jail manual. MWM's counsel Imaan Zainab Mazari moved to Islamabad High Court seeking order for the meeting of Raja Nasir Abbas with former PM Imran Khan in Adiala Jail.

IHC Justice Ms Saman Rafat Imtiaz heard the petition and directed Adiala Jail Superintendent Asad Warraich to arrange the meeting as per jail schedule. Meanwhile, PTI leader from Sindh Firdous Shamim Naqvi also moved Islamabad High Court seeking an order for his meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan. After hearing the petition, IHC Justice Saman Rafat sought reply from jail administration on Shamim Naqvi's petition.

NA passes resolution paying tributes to Shaheed BB

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Friday passed a resolution paying glowing tributes to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the first elected Prime Minister in the Islamic world, for her unwavering dedication to the democracy, women empowerment, human rights, social justice and equitable society.

The resolution moved by Sehaz Kamran said that Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was an icon of women struggle, courage and resilience in the face of challenges. It noted that Benazir Bhutto was a role model for women and mothers in general and women politicians and parliamentarians in particular. The resolution pledged to uphold her legacy by championing policies that empower women, ensure equitable opportunities and eradicate gender discrimination.

Recognizing the significant potential and contributions of women in all spheres of life, the resolution emphasized the importance of continued and sustained efforts to remove barriers and obstacles that hinder the real-

ization of women full potential. It called upon the government and the private sector to invest more in women, enabling them to make even greater contributions to progress and development of Pakistan.

The resolution directed all departments concerned to show zero tolerance towards the perpetrators and inciters of crimes against women. It resolved to promote gender equality through legislative measures, education and awareness campaigns. The resolution also urged the inclusion of women in decision making processes at all levels, ensuring their meaningful participation in shaping policies and programs that impact their lives. The House has now been adjourned to meet again on Wednesday at 2:00 pm.

Punjab, Balochistan pass resolutions to call Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as national hero: Punjab and Balochistan Assemblies on Friday passed resolutions to call Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto a "martyred and national hero", in the light of the Supreme Court's opinion in the presidential reference.

According to the details, the PPP's leader Ali Haider Gilani presented the resolution in the Punjab assembly. The resolution was passed with a majority. Separately, Balochistan Assembly also passed the resolution to affix the word 'martyred' before PPP founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and give him the status of "national hero".

The joint resolution of the Pakistan People's Party and Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) was presented in the assembly by Mir Sadiq Umrani. The resolution demanded to declaration of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as a "national hero" in the light of the Supreme Court's opinion in the presidential reference.

It should be noted that in the Sindh assembly a resolution was passed to declare former prime minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as a national hero and award Nishan-e-Bhutto to political workers for making great sacrifices for the restoration of democracy. The resolution was presented by the Leader of the House chief minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah on March 7.

In Punjab Assembly, PML-N women, minority MPAs sworn in

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Following installation of the provincial government, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's women and minority MPAs appointed on reserved seats took oath in the Punjab Assembly on Friday. Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmed Khan administered the oath to those 21 women and three minority MPAs.

Tariq Masih, Wasim Anjum, and Basrooji were appointed on the minority seats while women's reserved seats were given to Sadia Muzaffar, Fiza Maimoona, Abida Bashir, Maqsoodan Bibi, Amira Khan, Somia Atta, Rahat Afza, Rukhsana Shafiq, Tahseen Fawad, Farzana Abbas, Shagufta Faisal, Uzma Butt, Maria Talal, Sajda Naveed, Nasreen Riaz, Afshien Hasan, Amna Parveen, Shahr Bano, Zeba Ghaffoor, Rubina Nazir and Syeda Sameera.

advocates for the allocation of one reserved seat for minorities and two reserved seats for women to the SIC. The federation, and the chief election commissioners of Pakistan and Sindh have been named as respondents in the petition, alongside political entities such as the PPP, MQM, and the successful candidates on reserved seats. During the hearing, a division bench of the court summoned the lawyers representing the SIC to discuss

the case in chamber. However, Sindh Advocate General Hasan Akbar and other government lawyers attempted to enter the chamber, but were prevented by court staff.

Later, the AG was also called in the judge's chamber. Previously, similar petitions were filed before the Lahore High Court against the election commission's decision to allocate the SIC's reserved seats to other parties.