

Four killed in mishap

SRINAGAR (PPI): At least four people were killed and three rescued after a boat carrying mostly school children capsized in the river Jhelum in Srinagar on Tuesday morning. Personnel of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) have been deployed to rescue the other missing persons. The three rescued were receiving treatment in Srinagar's SMHS hospital.



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Pakistan, KSA call for truce in Gaza

Saudi FM says Pakistan visit to reap 'significant benefits' amid push for strategic, commercial partnership

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Tuesday, while regretting the failure of the international community to ensure ceasefire in Gaza, demanded its immediate enforcement, opening of a humanitarian corridor and averting of famine that was leading to a catastrophe.

Addressing a joint presser along with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said that Pakistan was deeply concerned over the catastrophic situation in Gaza. Both the brotherly countries shared the same feelings on Gaza, he said, stressing upon the international community to help end the genocide.

More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed, the world conscience must wake up and enforce an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to ensure unimpeded humanitarian aid, he added. More Palestinians should not be killed due to starvation, he said, demanding for a global probe into the crimes committed against humanity in Gaza.

Foreign Minister Dar said that different investigations had been carried out across the world over the war crimes against humanity so why it could not take place in Gaza! He reiterated that Pakistan believed that the perpetual solution to the issue was in the establishment of an independent state of Palestine with its pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

He shared views of the Saudi Foreign Minister that the world woke up after the killing of six aid workers from the West but not on the deaths of thousands of Palestinians. The foreign minister said that the world must act fast and quick. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said that in Gaza, so far more than 33,000 people had been killed.

"They are now facing a famine like situation and starving to death as the international humanitarian aid is not getting in. It is a complete failure of the international community," he added. Terming the situation unacceptable, he said there was no

justification to it. In reality, he said, the two United Nations resolutions regarding immediate ceasefire in Gaza had not seen implementation. Efforts were seen after six Western aid workers were killed but not when 33,000 Palestinians died which showed the double standards, he regretted. Prince Faisal called for an immediate end to the killings and sufferings of the people of Gaza. He said that they were already living in an unstable region leading to a catastrophe in Gaza and 'there is no need for further confrontation', adding that 'de-escalation should be everybody's priority'. Replying to various queries, both sides reiterated to further build up and convert the strong partnership into a strategic partnership and further promote economic cooperation for the mutual benefit of the two brotherly countries.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar expressed his pleasure on the arrival of the high-powered delegation from the KSA, terming it an 'impressive group of dignitaries visiting Pakistan for the first time during his long political career'. About their deliberations, he said that they had discussed ways and means to transform the cordial cooperation between the two brotherly nations into a strategic partnership and enhancement of investment in Pakistan. He explained that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) was functioning like one window for fast tracking foreign investment, adding that Pakistan was committed to strengthening of its investment environment. He expressed the hope that Pakistan would soon become a hub for investment and innovations. He further expressed the optimism that their detailed briefings had highlighted the extensive opportunities for the Saudi investors in energy, agriculture, minerals and IT sectors. Foreign Minister Dar said that they would ensure full support to the Saudi investment and provide a conducive environment under the directives of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

(Continued on Back Page)



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif hosted a banquet in honour of Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud.

COAS expresses resolve to eliminate terrorism

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) presided over 264th Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC) held at GHQ. Forum paid rich tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhada including officers and men of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies and the citizens who have laid their lives for peace and stability in the country.

COAS appreciated the untiring efforts of Pakistan Army and LEAs in successfully thwarting several terrorist attacks and neutralising key terrorist commanders during ongoing counterterrorism operations. COAS directed commanders to proactively deny any space to the terrorists. COAS said, "Armed Forces and LEAs of Pakistan, fully backed by the resilient nation, remain determined to permanently eliminate this menace from Pakistan, INSHA'ALLAH". The forum condemned

heartless terrorist attack against Chinese nationals in Besham as well as heinous killings of innocent civilians in Balochistan. Forum was briefed on how terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan pose a threat to regional and global security, besides acting as proxies against Pakistan and its economic interests, especially China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Forum expressed serious concern over the ongoing Indian aggression in Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Forum reiterated that Pakistan will continue to provide political, diplomatic and moral support to our Kashmiri brothers and sisters. The forum expressed solidarity in countering the illegal spectrum, particularly smuggling, hoarding, electricity theft and safe repatriation of all illegal foreigners. COAS directed field commanders to ensure the highest standards of operational preparedness and motivation within their outfits and to pursue professional excellence through objective training.

late immediately. Forum noted with concern the malicious propaganda campaign meant to demoralise the Armed Forces and underscored that "Unfounded and baseless allegations on Law Enforcement Agencies and Security Forces have become a fashion and are part of the larger design to drive a wedge between the people and the Armed Forces of Pakistan. We will not allow such efforts to succeed and as per the law and constitution, stern action will be ensured".

Forum resolved to provide full support to the government towards achieving sustainable socioeconomic growth in the country including wholehearted assistance in countering the illegal spectrum, particularly smuggling, hoarding, electricity theft and safe repatriation of all illegal foreigners. COAS directed field commanders to ensure the highest standards of operational preparedness and motivation within their outfits and to pursue professional excellence through objective training.

Saudi FM calls on COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: H.E. Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs KSA, accompanied by a delegation, met with General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) on Tuesday.

Discussions centered on mutual interests and policies to further bolster bilateral cooperation across various sectors. The esteemed visitor underscored the enduring and strategic nature of the relationship between the two nations, emphasizing on exploring multiple avenues for continued reinforcement of bilateral ties.

In response, COAS conveyed appreciation for the delegation's visit, affirming traditional bond of fraternity between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He underscored the reverence and affection that the people of Pakistan hold for their Saudi brethren. COAS reiterated full support for the delegation and conveyed his best wishes for mutually beneficial outcomes from the interaction for both states.

Nawaz's win challenged

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The victory of PML-N supremo and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif from NA-130 has been challenged in the election tribunal of Lahore High Court (LHC). The election result of NA-130 was challenged by PTI-backed Dr Yasmin Rashid.

It has been pleaded by the petitioner that the election commission issued the notification of Sharif's victory contrary to the law. The election tribunal consisting of Justice Sultan Tanvir Ahmad will hear the petition.

It merits mention here that the victory of former prime minister from NA-130 was challenged in LHC on Feb 10. Nawaz Sharif had clinched the seat by grabbing 179,310 votes against PTI-backed Dr Yasmin Rashid who could get 104,485 votes. Rashid's lawyer had said that she secured a lead of over 20,000 votes after the results of 334 out of 376 polling stations.

She stated her results were tempered during night with the help of police. "Our agents were expelled from the polling stations and over 100,000 votes were cast fraudulently in favour of Nawaz Sharif from the remaining 33 polling stations," she had said.

Six children killed in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Six more children were killed in different drowning and rain related incidents in the Lower Dir district here on Tuesday, residents and police said. They said that two minors identified as Ateeq 7 and Abu Bakar 6 were drowned while taking a bath in a stream at Malala Khazana area in the jurisdiction of Munda police station.

The bodies were retrieved by local volunteers and shifted to the district headquarters hospital Timergara by the Rescue 1122 medical team where the doctors announced them dead. Another child Rizwan 14 was also reportedly drowned while bathing in a stream at Gosum area of Jandol.

The Rescue 1122 divers and rescue team started a search operation for the body. Similarly a child identified as Suliman s/o Ghulam Muhammad was killed when he fell into a deep well at Gul Dherai area of Balambat here on Tuesday. Locals retrieved the body and shifted to the hospital wherein the doctors announced him dead.

Two more children identified as Nasinullah 10 and Aleema Bibi 12 were killed while three others were injured when roof of a house owned by one Nazir collapsed due to torrential rains at the Sakhawono village of Asbanr here on Monday night, residents said.



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud holding a joint press conference.

Pakistan, KSA resolve to build strong partnership

Islamabad, Riyadh reiterate commitment to enhanced bilateral strategic, economic relations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Tuesday reiterated their resolve to build a strong partnership and further promote economic cooperation for the mutual benefit of two brotherly countries.

This was discussed during a meeting between President Asif Ali Zardari and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release.

Welcoming the delegation, the president said that Pakistan and KSA enjoyed a long-standing and decades-old relationship and Pakistan intended to transform the existing ties into a long-term strategic and economic partnership. The two sides discussed the regional dynamics and recent developments in the Middle East and called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and end to the Israeli atrocities in Gaza.

Both sides also exchanged views on issues of bilateral importance and the challenges being faced by Muslim Ummah. The Saudi foreign minister was accompanied by a high-powered delegation, comprising the Minister of Water and Agriculture, the Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, the Assistant Minister of Investment, the Head of the Saudi

Special Committee and senior officials from the Ministry of Energy and Saudi Public Investment Fund. Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Minister for Foreign Affairs Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for Privatization and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan, Minister of Petroleum and Water Resources Musadik Masood Malik, Minister of Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, Foreign Secretary Syrus Sajjad Qazi and senior govern-

ment officials attended the meeting.

President Zardari also highlighted that the Government and the people of Pakistan had the highest regard for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and would continue to stand with KSA. He said that the prosperity of the Islamic world was linked to the progress of KSA.

The president lauded the courageous and visionary leadership of Crown Prince and Prime Minister of KSA Muhammad Bin Salman and the remarkable progress being made under the Vision 2030. He also thanked the leadership of KSA for its support to Pakistan in difficult times.

The Saudi Foreign Minister said that KSA considered its relations with Pakistan very critical and was committed to building a strong partnership with Pakistan. He highlighted that both countries enjoyed strong bonds and had helped each other for decades. He appreciated the contributions of the Pakistani diaspora in the development of KSA.

He also conveyed the greetings of Saudi leadership and underlined the importance of Pakistan for the Kingdom. President Zardari also conveyed best wishes to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud also called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif wherein the two sides reiterated the commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, focused on mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

Led by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the high-powered Saudi delegation arrived here Monday on a two-day visit, essentially to expedite follow-up on the understanding reached between Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman during their recent meeting in Makkah

Al Mukarramah to enhance bilateral economic cooperation. Recalling his warm and productive meeting with the Saudi crown prince, the prime minister said that the Saudi delegation's visit after his recent visit, was a manifestation of the strong commitment of both countries to the strengthening of bilateral relations focused on mutually beneficial economic cooperation, according to a PM Office press release.

In this regard, he said that both sides needed to work closely to expedite the first phase of Saudi investments in Pakistan under the new arrangement. During the meeting, the prime minister expressed his deep appreciation for the Saudi leadership and conveyed his sincerest wishes to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud.

Prime Minister Shehbaz underscored the significance, accorded by Pakistan to its longstanding fraternal, economic and strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and said that both countries had always stood together at all times. He informed the delegation about the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and its initiatives to promote investment in Pakistan. He also highlighted the key role of Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir and the cooperation of all institutions for the promotion of investment in the country through SIFC.

The Saudi foreign minister expressed gratitude for the warm welcome, accorded to his delegation and highlighted that Saudi Arabia attached high importance to its strong and close ties with Pakistan. He also conveyed the Kingdom's commitment to an enhanced strategic and economic partnership with Pakistan. The escalating situation in the occupied Palestinian Territories was also discussed.

Need 2-3 years for structural reforms, says Aurangzeb

WASHINGTON: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said that Pakistan needs two to three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Speaking at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, Aurangzeb said that Pakistan doesn't need more policy prescriptions as it knows what it needs to keep the economy steady which is implementation of reforms. "We have known the what and why not for years but for decades. [...] It's time for us to actually start moving the execution of these aspects and why we're looking for a larger and extended program, so once we get into the execution we will need a two to three-year time period to go through the structural reforms," said Aurangzeb.

The finance minister is currently in the US to hold talks with the global lender for a new bailout package and attend the World Bank meetings. Aurangzeb said that if Pakistan — which has entered 24 programs with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — doesn't go through the structural reforms, unfortunately, the country would still be looking for another program.

"The purpose is to agree on the priorities with the Fund and try to get the EFF in place as quickly as we can but these are just preliminary discussions," said the finance minister. Speaking about the country's economic outlook, Aurangzeb said that Pakistan entered this year in much better shape and a lot of it has to do with the nine-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) programme.

He said that the overall GDP was moving in the right direction, agriculture GDP and services sector are doing well inflation has come down from the peak of 37-38% and the exchange rate is stable, adding that all of this has moved the country in the right direction. "Now we need permanence in the macroeconomic stability hence the discussion with IMF on a larger and extended program. We are also going to be focused on the growth aspects of it because when you are talking to Fund or you are in a Fund program, it's only about stabilisation."

Aurangzeb said that the ownership and the sponsorship of the next program comes from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as he has been "quiet keen and vocal" that Pakistan is

going to go in another program to run with the structural reforms agenda. When asked how is the Finance Ministry going to achieve close to balance budget, FinMin Aurangzeb said that they need to bring the under-taxed and untaxed sectors into the net.

When it comes to revenue and tax authority, Pakistan needs to go end-to-end digitalisation of the tax authority to minimise human intervention, he added. "Its not just about revenue, its about transparency and client experience which is going to bring trust and confidence back into the tax authority."

He added that Pakistan needs to move towards public-private partnerships at federal and provincial levels. When asked about Pakistan's priorities with reforms at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, Aurangzeb Pakistan deals with the effects of climate change and financial inclusivity.

"We are dealing with adaptation and financing and to the extent that these institutions come in to help countries like Pakistan from inclusive growth perspective and climate change perspective. Our interests are going to be very well aligned." — Agencies

Heavy storms soak Gulf as Oman death toll rises to 18

DUBAI (AP): Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai. Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

The rains began overnight, leaving massive ponds on streets as whipping winds disrupted flights at Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel and the home of the long-haul carrier Emirates.

Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets, their emergency lights flashing across the darkened morning. Lightning flashed across the sky, occasionally touching the tip of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building.

Schools across the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms, largely shut ahead of the storm and government employees were largely working remotely if able. Many workers stayed home as well, though some ventured out, with the unfortunate stalling out their vehicles in deeper-than-expected water covering some roads.

Israeli forces must halt: UN

GENEVA (AFP): The UN voiced grave concern Tuesday over escalating violence in the West Bank, demanding that Israeli security forces "immediately end their active participation in and support for settler attacks" on Palestinians there. "Israeli authorities must instead prevent further attacks, including by bringing those responsible to account," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the United Nations rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

DC reviews performance of MCL regulation wing

LAHORE (APP): The Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL) has tightened its grip against the encroachment mafia, paving the way for an encroachment-free Lahore. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner and MCL Administrator, Rafia Haider, chaired a meeting of the Regulation Wing of MCL here on Tuesday. The Metropolitan Officer (Regulation) presented a three-month performance report, and the relevant officers provided a detailed briefing. A report on the removal of banners, streamers, anti-encroachment operations, and line marking supervision of all zones was presented in the meeting. In the Ravi Zone, 1962, in the Data Ganj Baksh Zone, 3795, and in the Samanabad Zone, 928 encroachments belongings were confiscated. In the Gulberg Zone, 2191, and in the Allama Iqbal Zone, more than 4046 encroachments were seized, the report indicated.

In the Shalimar Zone, 2173, in the Nishtar Zone, 3959, in the Wagah Zone, 1541, and in the Aziz Bhatti Zone, 1440 encroachments were seized. The meeting was briefed that from the city's main roads and areas, 106,817 banners and streamers were removed. During the anti-encroachment operations, fines were issued to 9123 individuals. 431 points of selling vulture meat commonly known as 'Cheel Kosht' were eliminated, while 1730 complaints about stray dogs in the city were resolved.

The deputy commissioner said that 90 percent of complaints received on social media were addressed on a priority basis, adding that officers continued to monitor line marking for businesses within specific limits. To reduce traffic problems and ease commutation, the anti-encroachment operation will continue. Officers are instructed to coordinate with traffic police to ensure that traffic flow is not affected by encroachments on major roads, she added. The DC appealed to citizens to cooperate with the relevant department in the eradication of encroachments during the operation.

LDA razes several illegal constructions

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Development Authority (LDA) on Tuesday conducted an operation against violators of illegal constructions and demolished structures of ten properties. In a response to the directives of LDA DG Tahir Farooq, LDA teams took an action in Shadman, Muslim Town, Jail Road, and Timber Market after giving several warnings to property owners. The operation was supervised by Director Town Planning Ayesha Muttahir and properties with unpaid commercial fees, including private schools, clinics, offices, and medical stores, were sealed on account of non-payment. Shops with illegal constructions on Main Ferozepur Road were also demolished while on Jail Road, construction on the third floor of a showroom was partially dismantled.

Situation in Kachcha area in Sindh is better than before

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, Mass Transit, Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has stated that the situation that arose during the caretaker government is being improved. The situation in the Kachcha area in Sindh is better than before. The Home Minister and IG Sindh are present in the Kacha area. Thirteen hostages have been rescued in the last fortnight, two hostages in Ghotki, eight in Kashmore, and three in Shikarpur. Six people have been rescued through a honey trap. The abduction attempt was thwarted by the police taking timely action. The police and Rangers are conducting an operation in the raw area, and Alhamdulillah, the situation has improved significantly. Addressing a press conference at Archives Complex Karachi, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the targeted operation is ongoing, and the law and order situation has significantly improved. Efforts are underway to control street crime. In the early days of April, 11 street criminals were killed and 60 injured in encounters by the Karachi police. A total of 104 street criminals were arrested during this period. Additionally, 85 suspects involved in vehicle theft were apprehended, and 246 pistols, a rifle, 2 short guns, and 2 hand grenades were recovered from various suspects. In the past week alone, 6 street criminals were killed, 33 injured, and a total of 59 street criminals were arrested in police operations against street crime. Karachi West Police apprehended 7 suspects of the Raja Gang involved in several incidents, while

ference at Archives Complex Karachi, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the targeted operation is ongoing, and the law and order situation has significantly improved. Efforts are underway to control street crime. In the early days of April, 11 street criminals were killed and 60 injured in encounters by the Karachi police. A total of 104 street criminals were arrested during this period. Additionally, 85 suspects involved in vehicle theft were apprehended, and 246 pistols, a rifle, 2 short guns, and 2 hand grenades were recovered from various suspects. In the past week alone, 6 street criminals were killed, 33 injured, and a total of 59 street criminals were arrested in police operations against street crime. Karachi West Police apprehended 7 suspects of the Raja Gang involved in several incidents, while

Karachi Central Police arrested 3 street criminals involved in 8 incidents of street crime. Kemari Police also arrested 6 street criminals after an encounter, who were involved in numerous incidents of street crime. He emphasized that illegal immigrants in Sindh pose a significant and long-standing challenge, with some found involved in various incidents. The government is earnestly working to address this issue. The Sindh government has demonstrated a strong commitment to maintaining law and order, as evidenced by the Chief Minister of Sindh convening the first meeting specifically dedicated to this matter. Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted the pervasive drug problem in Pakistan, emphasizing the dangers of substances like crystal and ice which impair cognitive function. He noted that even parents have fallen victim to the influence of these drugs.

The province is committed to cracking down on narcotics with a zero-tolerance policy, and the Sindh Police is collaborating closely with the Excise Police in this regard. Memon urged parents to monitor their children closely. He also mentioned that during Eid, 2 gangsters were killed in an encounter in Hyderabad. Furthermore, the Excise Police have conducted 49 operations since last month, resulting in the arrest of 47 drug dealers, brewers, and sellers of raw liquor. Sharjeel Inam Memon disclosed that the police have recovered 42 kg of hashish, while the excise police have seized 128 kg of hashish in operations against drug dealers. Specifically, 60 kg of hashish was seized in Rohri Sukkur, 26 kg in Korangi, 5 kg in Jacobabad, and 4 kg in Karachi West. Additionally, 1 kg of ice and 10,306 liters of raw liquor were confiscated from the accused, as



reported by the Excise Police. Moreover, an attempt to smuggle cocaine from Lahore to Karachi was thwarted, leading to the arrest of a Nigerian citizen named Onika. Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized the importance of media cooperation with the government in tackling drug trafficking and street crimes, assuring that action would be taken if crime reporters identify criminals. In response to a question, he stated that street

crime is a global issue. According to the International Crime Index, Karachi ranks 78th out of 333 cities in various countries. The situation of street crime in American cities such as Oakland, New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Houston, San Francisco, and Washington is worse than in Karachi. Even in Paris, the capital of France, according to the crime index, the situation of street crime is worse than in Karachi.

Additionally, Memon announced the expansion of the pink bus service following the directive of Faryal Talpur Sahib. More pink buses will be introduced starting from April 19, along with the launch of new pink bus routes. Furthermore, a people's bus service is scheduled to begin in Mirpurkhas. Moreover, plans are underway to connect the Orange line and the Green line with a shuttle service, which will be provided free of charge.

LHC moved for complete ban on kite flying

LAHORE (PPI): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Tuesday served notices to the Punjab government, IG Punjab and home secretary on a plea seeking complete ban on kite flying in the Punjab province. Justice Ahmed Nadeem Arshad took up the plea of Azhar Siddique advocate. Stray chemical strings of kites have claimed several lives across Punjab, while police and the relevant authorities have failed to

protect lives and ensure a ban on kite flying. The high court was urged to order authorities for legislation to ensure a complete ban on kite flying. The court after the initial hearing on the plea served notices to the Punjab government and others for their response to the plea. Earlier this month, a resolution to declare kite, string-making, a non-bailable offence was moved to Punjab Assembly.

The resolution was moved by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MPA, Hina Parvez Butt. The resolution expressed concerns about the increasing incidents of stray kite strings in the province. The PML-N MPA in her resolution urged the Punjab Assembly House to declare kite and string-making non-bailable offences and urged judges to not give bail to people booked under the said charges.

Lanjar for crackdown on highway robberies

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Home Minister Zia-ul-Hassan Lanjar emphasized the imperative of eradicating highway robberies, ensuring the safety of highways, and providing security to passengers during a meeting on the overall law and order situation in Ghotki. Chairing the session, the Minister underscored the need to bring to justice those responsible for robbing individuals and vehicles on highways. He stressed the necessity of preventing honey traps and kidnappings for ransom under all circumstances,

emphasizing the importance of maintaining peace and harmony with utmost dedication. The Minister pledged to review follow-up reports on the directives within fifteen days and conduct field visits to ensure their implementation. Sindh IGP Ghulam Nabi Memon, also present at the meeting, highlighted the police force's commitment to combatting crime, urging the police to execute their duties within the bounds of the law. He stressed the importance of enhancing the effectiveness and coordination of police check posts along

Sindh highways, particularly during snap checks, patrolling, and picketing. Memon emphasized that decisive actions against criminals are essential for ensuring successful outcomes and advocated for intelligence-based operations to prevent dacoities and facilitate the apprehension of criminals. The meeting extensively discussed police measures aimed at maintaining peace in Ghotki and other adjacent areas, with DIGP - Sukkur and concerned SSPs providing detailed briefings on law and order and police initiatives.

District admin crackdown: 592 fined, 79 arrested

LAHORE (APP): The district administration, in its efforts to enforce the revised prices of roti and naan at Rs 16 and Rs 20 respectively, has fined 592 violators of Rs 1.55 million and apprehended 79 individuals for flouting the regulations. In a move, 3,496 roti and naan points were inspected and warning notices were also issued on various points over violations. The enforcement action was led by assistant commissioners and price control magistrates who

conducted checks across various tehsils in Lahore. Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider told media on Tuesday that around 248 inspections were carried out in tehsil City, while 229 in Shalimar, 132 in Raiwind, 461 in Model Town, 110 in Cant by the assistant commissioners concerned. Similarly, price control magistrates inspected 2,416 point during the crackdown. The approved rates have been set at Rs 16 for a 100-gram roti and Rs 20 for a 120-gram naan.

The district administration is actively ensuring the implementation of the new pricing across the city. Citizens are encouraged to report any discrepancies in roti and naan prices by calling the helpline 0800003245. Meanwhile, safety teams of the district administration has eliminated dengue larva at 98 points during the last 24 hours. DC Rafia Haider instructed all ACs and ADCs to monitor the anti-dengue activities in their jurisdictions.

Karachi youths scammed of Rs 20 million in fake job scheme

KARACHI (INP): Over 80 young people in Karachi have become victims of an alleged job scam that promised employment abroad. According to media reports, the fraudulent company lured victims seeking better career opportunities overseas. The company collected a total of over Rs 20 million from the youths. However, upon arriving at the company's office after Eid-ul-Fitr, the victims discovered it to be locked and the owner vanished. The distraught youths have approached the police to file legal complaints. The authorities have launched an investigation into the case. This incident coincides with a recent surge in crime across Karachi. In response, the provincial government has appointed Javed Alam Odho as the new Additional IG Karachi. Odho previously held the same position. The Sindh government, however, maintains that the law and order situation is a nationwide challenge, not specific to Sindh. They point out that crime incidents worsened under the previous caretaker government. They acknowledge taking action, including police operations in the Kacha area, which have shown improvement. The provincial government emphasizes its commitment to public safety. They highlight ongoing targeted operations and hostage rescues in Ghotki and Shikarpur as evidence of their efforts.

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NJHP generation restricted to 530MW

LAHORE (APP): Electricity generation from Neelum Jhelum Hydel Power Station (NJHP) has been restricted to 530 MW due to decrease in Head Race Tunnel pressure on April 03, 2024. This precautionary measure has been taken to observe the behaviour of pressure fluctuation. Generation from the Power Station will be increased gradually after analysis and deliberations with the Project Consultants, WAPDA spokesman told media here Tuesday. He added Neelum Jhelum Hydel Power Station remained on full generation of 969 MW from March 28, 2024. The spokesman mentioned that all possible maintenance has been carried out during the observation, and this maintenance included cleaning of trash racks installed at the intake gates in the reservoir, flushing of all three desanders, flushing of pressure gauge installed at the Power House and inspection of the spiral cases of the generating units. Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Project has a tunnel system comprising 51.5 kilometers and it is prudent to observe and monitor such a vast network, he said and asserted that the power station has so far generated 19,829 billion units of electricity since its commissioning in 2018, while 1.54 billion units since resumption of electricity generation after rehabilitation of Tail Race Tunnel in August last year.

CM visits THQ Murree, reviews medical facilities

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has expressed indignation on seeing long queues of patients in the OPD, when she suddenly reached Tehsil Headquarters (THQ) Hospital Murree. The CM reprimanded the MS for making patients wait, and warned him to fix the hospital system, said a handout issued here on Tuesday. Maryam Nawaz visited various departments and wards of the hospital including OPD, Emergency, Medical Ward, Gynecology and Nursery. The CM comforted a sick mother and her daughter, assuring them that everything would be fine. She expressed her love and compassion for a little child under treatment there, and directed the doctor to provide him best treatment facilities. The CM also visited patients in the emergency ward one by one and prayed for their speedy recovery. She directed to ensure better care of patients in the emergency. Chief Minister Maryam

Nawaz Sharif interacted with the patients and their families and inquired about facilities in the hospital. She also inquired about the provision of free medicines and medical tests in the hospital. She inspected the PCU center, and reviewed treatment facilities there. An elderly patient told the Chief Minister that medicines were available and there was no problem. On her return from the hospital, the CM posed for a picture and hugged a female security guard on her request.

LESCO detects 281 power pilferers in 24 hours

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 281 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 210th day of grand anti-power theft campaign. The LESCO spokesman told media here Tuesday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 1112 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 11 accused have been arrested by the respective police. Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations.

The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice. On the 210th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections 07 were commercial, 05 agricultural, 01 industrial and 268 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 181,466 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 4.841 million. Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he explained that

LESCO charged Rs 377,000 detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Mandi Usmanwala area of Kasur; Rs 145,000 detection bill to a power pilferer in Mochi Gate area; Rs 120,500 detection bill to an electricity thief in Manga Mandi area on Multan Road; and Rs 100,000 fine in the form of detection bill to a customer stealing electricity in Misri Shah area. During the 210 days of the grand anti-theft campaign, the spokesman mentioned, the LESCO detected pilferage on 72,416 power connections and 69,561 FIRs have been registered against electricity thieves in the relevant police stations, while 29,164 accused have so far been arrested by the police. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 88,139,129 detection units worth Rs 3,315,188,502 to all the power pilferers.

Plastic bags banned in Punjab's educational institutions

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab School Education Department, in a move to combat plastic pollution and promote environmental responsibility, has announced a ban on plastic bags in all government schools across the province. The department issued a letter to education authorities, outlining the new policy. Students will no longer be allowed to bring items in plastic bags, and canteens and cafeterias will also be prohibited from using them. The initiative goes beyond just banning plastic. The department encourages schools to embrace green practices. Planting trees along school boundaries and creating "Miwaki forests" (densely planted urban forests) are both part of the plan. These efforts aim to improve air quality and beautify school grounds without compromising p l a y g r o u n d s . Additionally, color-coded

bins will be installed to promote proper waste disposal. This school-based plastic ban aligns with the broader provincial initiative. The Punjab government has already announced a complete ban on plastic bags across the entire province, set to go into effect on June 6th, 2024. Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb, who spearheaded the anti-smog campaign, emphasized the government's commitment to environmental improvement. She highlighted Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's goals in achieving initial milestones in waste reduction, air quality improvement, and increased plantation by June 30th. The plan also includes mandatory fitness certificates for all vehicles, annual inspections, and a shift to solar energy for government buildings. These combined efforts aim to create a cleaner and more sustainable Punjab.

11 ACE employees get promotion

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Secretary, Syed Asif Hyder Shah, Tuesday, granted approval for promotion of 11 officers and employees of Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE). The approval was granted in a meeting held here with Sindh CS Syed Asif Hyder Shah in chair while Chairmen ACE Farhat Junejo and other relevant officers attended the meeting, said a statement issued here. The meeting granted approval for promotion of Assistant Director Asad Ali Korai as Deputy Director and Inspectors Zahid Hussain Mirani and Sarfraz Shah as Assistant Directors while eight Assistants- namely Muhammad Parvez Alam, Saleem Abbas Shah, Mir Muhammad Khokhar, Manwar Ali Salro, Nizamuddin, Aurangzeb Abro, Asghar Ali and Muhammad Qamar Ali- were also promoted to the post of Office of Superintendent BPS 17. Syed Asif Haider Shah, at the occasion, extended felicitations to all the promoted employees.

CM directs Irrigation, Agri depts to introduce low delta high yield crops

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah expressing concern over the impact of climate change on water scarcity said that this could be addressed by introducing a new cropping pattern that includes low delta crops aimed at reducing water consumption and increasing efficiency in agriculture. He said that climate change impact was emerging in the shape of water scarcity. "In order to tackle water scarcity his government is planning a new cropping pattern that includes low delta, high-yield crops to reduce water intake and upturn agricultural productivity. This he said while presiding over a joint meeting of Irrigation and Agriculture departments here at the CM House. The meeting was attended by Minister Irrigation Jam Khan Shoro, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, PSCM Agha Wasif, Chairman P&D Najam Shah, Secretary Irrigation Zareef Khoro and officers of the agriculture department.

The CM said that during the Kharif season-2024 water shortage was expected to 30 per cent but it could be more acute, therefore our agriculture sector would suffer. "I want the Irrigation and Agriculture depts to sit together and chalk out a plan for changing the cropping patterns," he said and added that the list of the proposed/recommended crops may be submitted to him for further discussion and approval. The CM Murad Shah directed Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah to chair joint meetings of the irrigation and agriculture departments and work plans for changing the cropping pattern so that the low-delta high-yield crops could be introduced. Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah said that he would activate the agriculture department's Research wing for necessary research so that that could be disseminated to the farmers and growers. The CM directed Minister Irrigation Jam Khan Shoro

to ensure the efficient use of water by the growers. "This becomes a joint responsibility of the Irrigation and Agriculture depts to educate the farmer for efficient and effective use of water," he said and added this was the reason his government has given priority to the lining of water courses. According to the chief minister conservation in agriculture has become important. He added that there were various for agricultural water conservation, including Drip Irrigation, Sprinkle system, dry farming, conservation tillage and various others. "We have to study which method suits of weather, which method would be successful in which area, and how and when to start," he said and added this all needed an appropriate study and research. The Minister Irrigation briefed the chief minister on the reconstruction/repair of the irrigation network/system damaged by the recent floods.



PESHAWAR: Minister for Education Faisal Khan Tarakai chairing meeting of the heads of educational boards.

21 died, 330 houses damaged by recent rains: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister on Information Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, has stated that multiple districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been affected by rains and floods, where relief operations are underway in the affected areas on the direc-

tive of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur. Due to recent rains and floods, 21 people have lost their lives, 32 have been injured, and 330 houses have been affected. Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif mentioned that an emergency flood control room has been established in the Chief Minister's

Secretariat.

He further stated that the provincial government is distributing relief checks to affected families, and emergency relief operations are ongoing in the affected areas. Immediate relief efforts are being carried out in districts affected by rains and floods.

He mentioned that the provincial government is

distributing relief supplies among the affected individuals, and free medical camps have been set up in the affected districts by the provincial health department.

Furthermore, instructions for infrastructure restoration have been issued to commissioners and deputy commissioners in the affected division.

SSC papers under Peshawar Board in Chitral postponed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Minister for Education Faisal Khan Tarakai has stated that due to recent rains and floods, the exams scheduled for April 18, 19, and 20 in Chitral district under the Peshawar Board are being postponed. This decision is made to prevent difficulties for the students in taking exams, he said. The minister was addressing the meeting of heads of educational boards.

Tarakai mentioned that the postponed exams would be rescheduled and announcements regarding new dates and schedules would be issued later. The

exams will continue as per the previously announced schedule and timing in other parts of the province, Tarakai added.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Education Masood Ahmed, Additional Secretary Muhammad Zahid Khan, Director IT, and all educational board heads. In the meeting, all educational board heads informed the Provincial Minister about the preparations for their respective board exams, stating that exam staff has been deployed on time and papers have been delivered to selected centers, which will later be delivered to the examination centers. The meeting was

apprised that security and all other arrangements for the exams have been completed. The Education Minister said for the successful conduct of exams the district administration and police were fully supportive, and monitoring of examination centers throughout the province is being done through control rooms. Additionally, a hotline number and an information desk have been set up in the Education Department so that they can be informed through the information desk and hotline number.

The Education Minister further stated that measures will be taken to prevent cheating, and all

means will be employed to conduct transparent exams. Immediate action will be taken against those responsible if any paper leaks occur.

He also mentioned that all exams are being conducted on merit to ensure fairness, and their own team along with the secretariat team will oversee the examination centers. CCTV monitoring of examination centers will also be carried out for which all arrangements are complete. He directed the Director IT to ensure that arrangements for monitoring examination centers across the province at the secretariat level are completed through IP address.

SACM pays surprise visit to TVC, checks attendance

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Abdul Karim Tordhir paid a surprise visit to Government Technical and Vocational Centre, Gulbahar on Tuesday.

During the visit he checked the register, biometric attendance of staff, went to 13 different departments to review teaching and training programmes. He also met with the teach-

ers and students and held a detailed discussion with the Principal of the centre.

Talking to the principal and other administrative and teaching staff of the centre, he emphasized on the implementation of various suggestions to make the centre financially stable and self-reliant while increasing the efficiency of the centre.

The Special Assistant said that there is an urgent need to work on self-reliance proposals to financially stabilize the Vocational Centre of

Gulbahar and the products produced here serve as samples for the market and make it able to produce to generate resources for its own annual budget.

He said that apart from training, the institution also needs to start working on the commercial level, saying it move the institution towards self-reliance. So, he said the skills imparted in the centre will meet the demands of the market and will help those acquire skills to start their own business.

The Special Assistant

further directed the management of the centre to take steps to implement the proposal and focus on various aspects of technical training.

He further directed to ensure improvement in the attendance of the technical experts and other staff through biometric method and also to take steps to improve the attendance of students as well.

He directed the inclusion of relevant experts on the management committee of the institute so their useful opinions can be utilized.

Austerity measured directed by CM

57 employees of Auqaaf & Religious Affairs Dept fired

PESHAWAR (APP): In the light of the austerity measures directed by the Chief Minister KP Ali Amin Gandapur, the Auqaaf and Relief Affairs Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa fired 57 employees after declaring them unnecessary and burden on the provincial exchequer.

In a statement issued here on Tuesday, the Provincial Minister for Religious Affairs, Sahibzada Adnan Qadri has said that they will not waste the taxes collected

from the people in any circumstances.

He said that so far 57 employees who were a burden on the provincial exchequer have been laid off.

The provincial minister said that the laid off employees were recruited on fixed salaries during the caretaker government without any justification. He said that the process of austerity and reforms are continuing at all levels in the province.

He said that they are the

trustees of taxes collected from the people and they will not waste a single penny of it.

He further urged the people to contact his office in case of finding any negligence in the service delivery.

In the meanwhile, Advisor to KP CM on Finance, Muzammil Aslam also called on the Provincial Minister for Auqaaf and Religious Affairs, Sahibzada Adnan Qadri and beside development funds for district

Khyber other matters also came under discussion.

The Provincial Minister Sahibzada Adnan Qadri said that after approval of the annual budget in June, work on more development schemes would be initiated to turn district Khyber into an economic hub.

Speaking on the occasion, the Advisor on Finance said that the provision of development funds to merged districts is the top priority of the provincial government.

PESCO notifies power suspension F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Tuesday notified that due to maintenance work power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar Cantt Grid Station on 17th and 20th April from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Consequently, it said consumers of Tehkal, Islamia College, KTH, Commercial, Jahangir Abad, University Town, NCB, Airport, PAF Base, Saddar Road, Mall Road, MES 1,2, Old MES, Babu Ghari, Marble Industry, SAA, Palosi 1, Behari Colony, Tehkal Payan feeders will face inconvenience.

It said the power supply will also remain suspended from PESCO Colony Grid Station on 17th and 20th April from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of Bank of Khyber, Scarp 1, ICF, Darmangi, Warsak Road and Jail feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from 500 KV Ghazi Barotha Circuit on 17th and 18th April from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Peshawar Industrial, Hayatabad, Shabqadar, Peshawar University, Nowshera City, Nowshera Industrial, Jehangira, Mardan 2,3, Chakdara, Nizampur, Jalala, Katlang, Hussai, Dargai, Barikot, Batkhela, Timergara, Swat, Khwazakhela, Shangla, Madyan grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will also remain suspended from Madian-Dir Transmission Line on 18th April from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. resultantly, consumers of 132 KV Lal Qila Maidan and Dir grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

Minister hints at e-transfer policy in higher education

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi has said that government was pondering over proposals to introduce e-transfer policy that would be implemented with due deliberation.

In a statement issued here, he said that teachers of colleges would be trans-

ferred under the policy that would be implemented with consent and deliberations besides keeping in view shortage of teachers in far flung areas.

He said that teachers would be transferred on apolitical basis keeping in view domiciles of teachers and added that teachers working in big cities would be transferred to their native areas.

The minister said that transfer of teachers to their native areas would reduce financial burden on exchequer, increase confidence of people on public sector educational institutions and promote transparency in transfer process.

He said that government is working to improve education system and the introduction merit and clarity in affairs of education.

PDMA dispatches relief goods to rains-hit districts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the special directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur, relief activities are in full swing in the rain-affected districts across the province.

As an important step in this regard, PDMA has dispatched relief packages for Swat, Mohmand, Peshawar, Lower Chitral, Lower

Kohistan and other affected districts.

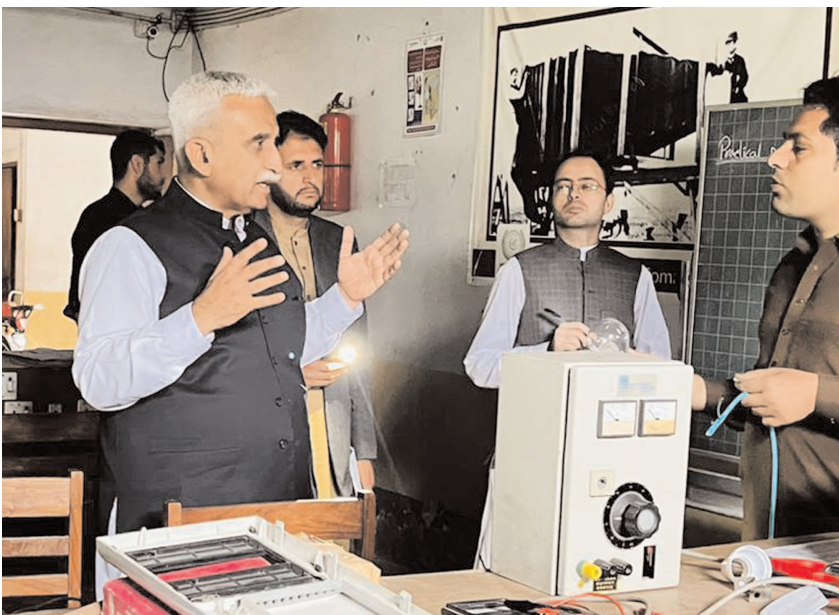
Relief supplies include tents, blankets, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, mosquito nets, mattresses and other necessary items.

Apart from this, disbursement of financial assistance announced by the Chief Minister, has also been started. So far, Rs. 30 million have been disbursed among affectees in the different districts of the

province.

Moreover, the chief minister has directed the district administrations and PDMA to further accelerate relief activities and rehabilitation of infrastructure damaged by recent torrential rains and floods in the certain parts of the province.

He further directed them to ensure that victims are provided with relief packages without any delay.



PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Abdul Karim Tordhir paid a surprise visit to Government Technical and Vocational Centre, Gulbahar.

Transparency in public funds to be ensured: Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Local Government Arshad Ayub Khan stated that planning feasibility, design, and accountability are checked in all projects to ensure transparency and prevent waste of public funds. He emphasized that they are working for the welfare and benefit of the public. Provincial Minister Arshad Ayub Khan said that improvement projects are being launched for the provision of water, better drainage systems, and solid waste management in all cities for the benefit of the people. He stressed the completion of all city projects timely and transparently, and offices of the TMAs will be solarized to save electricity and benefit the national exchequer. He announced the establishment of a Women Development Center and a Mega Park in Hariapur.

Torrential rains affect wheat crop, fruits orchards in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Damaged fruits orchards in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Swat, Shangla and Dir districts, the recent torrential rains and flash floods have adversely affected standing wheat crops on hundreds of acres land inundated by the gushing water, inflicting substantial economic losses to poor farmers now looking for Govt. assistance.

In KP, the financial woes of affected farmers were further increased after flash floods in rivers Punjkora and Kabul have entered in standing wheat crops especially in low-lying and rivers bed areas of Nowshera, Peshawar and Charsadda districts.

Kamal Khan, a 28 years old progressive wheat farmer and a resident of village Mohib Banda Nowshera district told APP that the climate change induced weather patterns including the recent torrential rains and high floods in River Kabul have brought havoc to wheat crop besides delayed harvesting process in KP.

Kamal is worried regarding harvesting of wheat crop on his five acres agriculture lands at Mohib Banda located on south of River Kabul after the gushing

flood water an inundated it completely on Tuesday morning.

The farmer along with three other brothers were seen pumping out flood and rains water from his field from dawn to dusk, hoping to start wheat harvesting process as soon as possible.

Kamal Khan and the flood hit farmers of Mohib Banda and adjoining villages of Nowshera and Charsadda districts have demanded of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government to provide them compensation.

Kamal, who was also among hundreds of thousands of people affected by the 2022 floods, has expressed the strong resolve to come again in his field on Wednesday morning to pump out all the remaining standing water. KP agriculture department officials told APP that survey of the standing wheat crops and fruits orchard gardens affected by the recent torrential rains and flash floods would soon be started and relief to be provided to the affectees on the basis of the survey's report.

He said that areas located in rivers beds in Nowshera and Charsadda were most vulnera-



ble to flash floods as evident of the August 28, 2022 flooding that brought havoc to hotels, agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Started from Mataltan, Mahudhand and Kalam valleys in Upper Swat, the 2022 floods had badly damaged the irrigation sector especially canals, watercourses, channels, tube-wells and flood protection walls and still substantial financial resources were required for its reconstruction.

The restoration of flood hit water sources for agricultural purpose is also a big challenge and the farmers years were eyeing on new KP Govt for rebuilding of the destroyed irrigation infrastructures as quickly as possible to increase wheat production.

The destruction of lift irrigation, SCARP and irrigation projects and watercourses comes out of rivers and canals in Hazara, Malakand, Peshawar, Bannu and DI Khan divisions by the 2022 floods caused neg-

ative effects on wheat, rice, maize and fruits orchards in KP.

He said the velocity of the 2022 floods was so high that it not only swept away canals and flood protection walls but also destroyed tube wells and lift-canal irrigation schemes in KP, creating a lot of problems for wheat growers till today.

Ahmed Said, former Senior Planning Officer of the KP Agriculture Department told APP that farmers have pinned high expectations from the KP government for its speedy

reconstruction.

He said that Pakistan was among the 10th countries vulnerable to climate change.

He said the climate change induced weather patterns have negatively impacted on the agriculture production in Pakistan and time has come to plants tree more and more vital to slow rains water velocity.

Ahmed Said that Pakistan was an eight leading wheat production countries in world after China, India, Russia, USA, Canada, Australia and Ukraine and its ranking could be improved by constructing new dams inevitable to bring the vast arid and dryland under agriculture cover.

He said that Pakistan's total wheat consumption grows to 30.2 metric tons from 29.2 metric tons in 2022-23 while 32.12 metric tons target was fixed for 2023-24 by the Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA).

He said that Punjab has been projected to produce 25 metric tonnes of wheat while Sindh's target is four metric tons followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's 1.6m tonnes and Balochistan's 1.5 metric tonnes during 2024 which could

be produced from 8.9 million hectares.

Ahmed Said that KP's canals irrigate about 2.25 million acres of agriculture lands to cater food requirements of the population that passed the psychological barrier of 241 million mark this year.

The surveys and field formations' reports of the KP Irrigation Department has revealed that out of about Rs22.387 billion damages caused by the 2022 floods to irrigation sector, about Rs3.245 billion losses were incurred to flood mitigation and drainage infrastructure projects having accumulative length of 90 kilometers and 237 irrigation structures in the province.

Two projects i.e. "restoration of irrigation structures and water drainage system" worth Rs3.245 billion and restoration of water supplies and channels in irrigation system" worth Rs2.457 billion were approved for KP a non-ADP schemes after the devastated floods.

The official said PC-I of both the projects were approved and practical work on restoration of canals and irrigation structures were already started to facilitate the farmers.



In brief

Three killed in Nowshera firing Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: At least three people were killed when unknown assailants fired at them in Malli Khel area of Akora Khattak in Nowshera district on Tuesday. Police said those killed by the firing of unknown assailants were close relatives adding that the dead bodies have been shifted to District Headquarters Hospital for medico legal procedure. Soon after the incident a big force of police personnel cordoned off the area and started investigation process after collecting evidence from the crime scene.

Wild pig injures a youth F.P. Report

KARAK: A young man was seriously injured due to the collision of the pigs that attacked the people, the youth of the area killed the pig which became a symbol of fear. The young Lal Nawaz who was grazing goats was hit by the pig in Chambai, a suburb of Karak city. After being informed, the people of the area reached and transferred the injured youth to the hospital where he is undergoing treatment, but on the other hand, the youth of Chambai area gathered and gathered the pigs and shot them, according to the people of the area, including two pigs. The pair was a symbol of fear in the area and a dead pig would attack humans on sight while causing severe damage to the ready wheat crops in the said area. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Karak held meeting with District Police Officer and SP Investigation regarding law and order situation in the district at his office. An important meeting was held with Police Officer Karak and SP Investigation in his office during which he probably focused on the law and order situation in the district and discussed how to maintain law and order in the community.

Three laid to rest in Rustam F.P. Report

MARDAN: The funeral prayer of three youths killed in a road mishap in Malaysia was offered in Rustam tehsil of Mardan district on Tuesday. Local sources said the funeral prayer of the three youths was attended by thousands of people from political, social, religious entities and civil society. The deceased were killed in Malaysia by a speedy car when they were going to offer Eid prayer. Four other people had also sustained injuries in the accident and were under treatment in Malaysia. The deceased named Adil, son Noor Ullah, Shayan, son of Mumtaz and Zahir Khan were later laid to rest at ancestral graveyard amid moving scenes.

Two killed, three injured

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): Two people were killed and three other injured in separate road accidents in different localities of Bahawalnagar, police and rescue sources said on Tuesday. According to details, an overspeeding oil tanker ran over a motorcycle carrying mother and son at Chishtian Road. As a result of accident, mother identified as Zaitoon Bibi was killed on the spot while son was critically injured and oil tanker driver fled the scene. In another accident, two over speeding motorcycles collided with each other. The collision resulted in death of a 7-year-old child on the spot and left two others critically injured.

Closure of girls' schools Mayor assures redressal of owners' demands

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar held meeting with Deputy Commissioner along with the local people and land owners regarding the closure of seven government girls' schools including primary, middle, high and higher secondary schools in the district, on Tuesday.

Mayor Mardan argued land owner for opening of the schools. Landlords and local people agreed for opening of the schools on the terms of immediate recruitment after the ban on recruitment. Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar assured the land owner that their demands will be fulfilled and said that the closure of the school will harm our children and our future and bring disrepute to the area, so the school should be opened completely so that the students can learn. He assured that the land owner's demands would be fulfilled as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of District Police Officer Zahoor Babar Afridi with city division police officers in which SP Investigation Arshad Khan, SP City Shafi-ur-Rahman, DSP Ijaz Khan and Circle SHOs, in-charge police stations and investigation officers and others responsible Police officers attended.

In the meeting, security measures were discussed in detail, including the overall situation of crime and law and order at the divisional level. On this occasion, DPO Zahoor Babar Afridi in his address to the participants of the meeting said that all the police officers should ensure the safety of the lives and Property of the people by using all resources to maintain the atmosphere of law and order.

Actions should be continued indiscriminately against elements hostile to the country and society,

including criminals, narcotics, aerial firing and social crimes. No one is allowed to disturb the peace, treat citizens who come to the police stations for legal assistance in a courteous manner by ensuring prompt legal proceedings. All Investigating Officers should complete all pending cases in a timely manner ensuring investigation process on merit and transparency.

All the responsible officers should play their positive role in solving the problems by getting help from the local leaders and DRCs to end the public conflicts and enmity in their jurisdiction while in view of the current situation, necessary orders were also issued regarding making the security arrangements of important and sensitive places, police installations and more effective and ensuring the implementation of security measures of Police personnel.

Commissioner naugurates new police office

Saqib Mushtaq

MULTAN: Commissioner Multan Mariam Khan inaugurated new police station at Gulgasht along with Regional Police Officer (RPO) Muhammad Sahil Chaudhry, CPO Multan, CTO, SP Gulgasht, and SP City were also present on the occasion, on Tuesday.

Commissioner Multan, Mariam Khan, extended felicitations and best wishes at the inauguration. RPO Multan Muhammad Sahil



Chaudhry, expressed satisfaction over the establishment of the new office, emphasizing its aim to facilitate citizens and provide relief.

The police offices are intended to be located in areas easily accessible to

the public. CPO Multan, Sadiq Ali, highlighted the importance of further establishing new offices to prioritize public convenience.

Later, Commissioner Mariam Khan, RPO Sahil Chaudhry, along with other officers, visited police stations where SHO Shabana Seif provided a detailed briefing. Additional Commissioner Abdul Jabbar and Deputy Director Information Iram Salimi were also present.



HYDERABAD: Main drain of city filled with garbage showing apathy of civic bodies.

Ghazala Anbreen

PAKISTAN is the fifth most populous country in the world. As per 2023 digital census of Pakistan, the population is 241.49 million. It was the 7th census in Pakistan. About 5.53 million new births in Pakistan are there every year while alone Norway's whole population is 5.46 million people.

The world population in 1974 was 3.99 billion and in 2023 it was 8 billion. In 1971 East Pakistan's population was 75 million and that of West Pakistan was 60 million. In 2023 the population of Bangladesh was 172 million and Pakistan was 241 million. In Pakistan the fertility rate is 3.5 and in Turkiye it is 1.88. It is important to note here that even the Islamic countries like Iran and Bangladesh have successfully controlled their populations.

The mindset of the less educated people is like that they take more kids as an asset for them. Cultural norms play a vital role in moulding such opinions. Many people lack information about family control methods. The subject is considered a taboo to be discussed in media and in public. All of these social attitudes are aggravating the problem.

Social problems in areas as health, education, transport, water and power get intensified due to this snow ball effect caused by rapid increase in population. At state level old age benefits are scare. The people feel afraid that in old age they may face difficulties in living a comfortable life and therefore, consider sons as a help during that time of vulnerability. Often in a desire to have a son, people go on having many daughters till

Snowball effect of population in Pakistan

they are blessed with a son.

The population of Pakistan is growing at a much rapid pace. It results into water scarcity and malnutrition among kids of the poor families. All this impedes the pace of the economic development. More the population grows, more students with degrees are there graduating every year. But the avenues for employments remain scanty, especially in the wake of artificial intelligence, the impending fear is looming all over the world that more people will go out of jobs as robots will replace them.

Another alarming situation is that abnormal increase in population leads to more urbanization. There emerges a need for establishing more colonies and societies to accommodate the huge number of people. This causes adverse impacts on environment. Infrequent resources, water crisis and inability of catering to the basic needs of ordinary people come out as the big challenges. Overburdened infrastructure, competition for resources, low per capita income become inevitable as a consequence.

This leads to a low yield and low productivity. The results will be evident in the growth of slums in bigger cities, poor sanitation, malnutrition, low mortality due to advancement in medical technology to treat the deadly diseases. On a planet with dwindling resources, more people mean more demand of natural resources and more CFC emissions. Pollution is due to more movement of the population. It is not the huge population that is making the difference, it is the huge use of resources. Education prospects suffer too. UNICEF

data suggests that Pakistan has the world's second highest number of out of school children (22.8 million) with age bracket of 5-16.

Every year 11th July is celebrated as world population day and the purpose of celebrating this day is to make the masses aware of evoking their rational faculties to be sensible about the size of the families as per their resources. Every parent would like to give their kids a better future by giving them best education and opportunities for becoming a productive citizen. That is possible only if the people start realizing the importance of having families as per their means. It should be remembered that this does not come in contravention with the religious principles.

Evolving appropriate strategies regarding small family size is a social development issue. State has to intervene. Otherwise the enormous increase in population size will manifest itself in more number of out of school children. Provision of basic facilities should be the agenda of the political parties' manifestos. Foremost among these should be the population stabilization, observing the demographic cycle and then evolving a strategy to combat this problem. Achieving the economic growth by lowering population growth must remain the priority of all policy makers. This better economic progress will lead to reduction in poverty. Increase in population should be as per resources, otherwise it becomes a burden on us.

In this connection financial incentives can be given to those who want to rear small families. For instance, a small tax exemp-

tion for the people with less number of kids will encourage other people to follow suit. There is a need to educate people through media and civic society. Only then we can use our population as a human capital. Child marriage should be strictly prohibited.

Although it is legally prohibited under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 but under a new Bill passed by the Senate of Pakistan, the minimum age of marriage for a female is fixed as 18 years and if somebody violates this he will be punished with a fine of Rs.1000 and an imprisonment of one month or both but still there is a need for further rigorous punishments. There must be an open debate on the subject. Political parties should talk on this issue at length. Seldom it is seen that topics like abnormal increase in population, street children, water scarcity become agenda for political parties' manifestos. They should be part of the national discourse as well.

There is a need to make people aware about ways of birth control and tell them its importance. National awareness campaign by media and religious people will also help achieve the purpose to a great extent. TV, radio and social media can play a persuasive role in starting media campaigns. Religious scholars exercise quite an influence in Pakistan. They can be asked to preach this cause among the illiterate and semi educated people. They must educate the people, make them aware about the benefits of having small families.

Advocacy through public figures, opinion builders and influencers about adopting the mod-

ern techniques to control population thereby checking the birth rate to see that the effects of our economic development are not neutralized by huge increase in population can be a productive step. Multi sector approach through coordination of different ministries can also produce good results. All religious organizations and NGOs must participate in this cause and propound the policy that we have to exercise a balance between population and resources. That is how China was able to control its population by taking suitable measures. Now its population is 1.42 billion and in 2018 it was 1.39 billion. While the population of Pakistan saw an increase of 25.5 million population in previous 6 years.

Advocacy of small family size of those who lack knowledge to practice this in reality, living in the rural areas and a change in the belief and value system is required, the negation of those obsolete ideas and promotion of forward looking thinking is the need of the time, focusing on mass education, promoting macro and micro level efforts, paving public opinion through effective use of media are some of the measures which can help overcome this malediction. Various influential groups, media professionals and experts and intelligentsia all should try and serve this national cause by moulding the public opinion and sensitizing them.

Training and capacity building of concerned staff in the subject under discussion and projection of population welfare programs on a wide scale can help produce commendable results. It should be imparted to all popula-

tion welfare training personnel. In service and pre-service trainings should be mandatory. A comprehensive human resource development plan must be prepared to cater to the needs of the new training skills and refresher courses should be arranged to impart training as per contemporary needs. Coordination of all the related departments is essential in this context. Health ministry, education Ministry and the social welfare sector can work through a concerted effort and devise a monitoring mechanism to gauge the effectiveness of the policies.

Management information system can help ensuring the review and Logistic management information system can be devised for ensuring the smooth functioning for supply chain system. GIS mapping system can help finding out whether the different staff and different material are being utilized correctly.

The role of research cannot be ignored in population development, and population management. The researchers can be assigned the task of taking the samples in different fields and conduct surveys to make it a success. If all the aforementioned departments try work on these scientific principles and consider it as a cause to make our country progress, we can surely control the population to a great extent.

The 18th Amendment led to the increase in fiscal allocation to provinces' share in the NFC Award on the basis of population. Some experts opine that it needs to be revisited by laying emphasis on other indicators like women empowerment and their contribution to generate financial revenue. Moreover, focus should be to impart skills to the population to make them productive in and out of the country.



CHARSADDA: Provincial president of Qaumi Watan Party, Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao addressing party workers at UC Gandheray.

Vaccination in remote areas directed F.P. Report

LARKANA: Adviser to Chief Minister for Livestock Syed Najmi Alam visited the Larkana office during his three-day and presided over a meeting at the regional office and inspected vaccination drive. He directed the officials to set up mobile laboratories to test the efficacy of the vaccine at the village level and to provide all possible facilities for animals in the remote villages.

The advisor also directed functioning of veterinary hospitals functional in the villages as well. He asked that the Livestock Department keep all its records so that it can be called at any time. He said that the public should be informed about the usefulness of salt in animals because the use of salt increases the production of malondi. Consultant Najmi Alam also visited Breeding Office Larkana where he presided over a meeting and took a briefing from DG Livestock and also reviewed all ongoing projects.

Provincial Counselor Najmi Alam also visited the office of Sub Sector Livestock Larkana and inquired about the facilities from the Deputy Director of Hospitality. Provincial Counselor Najmi Alam expressed his satisfaction regarding the department's briefing, all ongoing projects and public facilities. He said that he will talk to the Chief Minister of Sindh and get approval for the new buildings of the Livestock Department and inform the Chief Minister of Sindh about the visit and activate the schemes that caused the delay.

On this occasion, Deputy Director Livestock Animal Husbandry Larkana Dr. Mansoor Ali Junejo, Additional Director Livestock Production and Services Larkana Dr. Rukhsana Mansoor Ali, Additional Director Animal Husbandry Larkana Dr. Muhammad Azam Brohi, Director Animal Husbandry Sindh Hyderabad Dr. Hezbollah and other related officials were also with him.

Three die, four injured in road mishap

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: As many as three persons of one family dead while four others including women were critically injured in road mishap at Lachi area of Kohat on Indus Highway, on Tuesday.

According to details, the mishap was result of collision between motorcycle and passenger van. The deceased were husband and wife along with daughter. The deceased were residents of Bakhshu Pul area of provincial capital Peshawar.

Moreover, the accident was occurred due to negligence of passenger van's

driver while escaped from the scene while a case has been registered against him. The injured were also shifted to Peshawar for further treatment in critical condition.

Meeting discussed improvement of sanitation situation: Deputy Commissioner Kohat, Azmatullah Wazir here Wednesday chaired a meeting to discuss improvement of sanitation situation in the city and to clear district of encroachments.

The meeting was also attended by MPA, Shafiullah Jan, District Administration Officers, Cantonment Executive Officer and Town Municipal

Officers (TMAs). On the occasion, meeting was briefed about measures taken to further improve sanitation situation and eliminate encroachments.

Chairing the meeting, DC ordered WSSC Kohat, TMA Kohat and Cantonment Board to utilize available machinery and staff to improve sanitation situation in their zones and areas. He also sought a complete report along with maps regarding the encroachments so that concrete steps could be taken to remove encroachments. He also ordered removal of illegal parking and obstacles from roads of the city.

Farmers hold protest for acceptance of demands

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Farmers and landowners from the district staged a protest in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office against non-purchase of wheat crop at official rates, overbilling and black marketing of fertilizer.

Meanwhile, farmers and landlords raised slogans and said that the government has fixed the official rate of wheat at Rs. 3900/- rupees, but due to non-purchase at the official level, it is being bought at Rs. 3000/- rupees in the local grain markets. Due to which farmers and landlords are being exploited.

They said that the government has completely failed to provide relief to the farmers and landlords even though the prices of fertilizer, oil and electricity have increased during the last one year, yet the government has not increased the official price of wheat. Farmers and landlords have been greatly exploited and now they are being further oppressed by not buying from them even at the fixed government rate, due to which they have been forced to protest on the streets.

Meanwhile, overbilling

by GEPCO in Hafizabad has raised cries from landlords and citizens. Customers lined up at local GEPCO and revenue offices to get their bills corrected. According to the details, electricity bills were sent a day before the last date by adding thousands of extra units to the agricultural, commercial and domestic consumers of Hafizabad on behalf of GEPCO.

On which the consumers protested against the cutting hand of GAPCO officers and the excess units. Agricultural consumers said that they are being billed in lakhs every month by adding 1500 to 2000 bogus units, but no one is asking the GEPCO officials due to which they started cursing the government.

In this regard, XEN GEPCO Zulfiqar Ali said that the overbilling has not done by me but by the concerned SDOs. On the other hand, consumers have demanded GEPCO Chief and Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to take notice of this cruelty.

Old grain market becomes criminal safe house: The old Grain Market, located at the very

Murderer convicted

F.P. Report

SHAHADADKOT: Model Criminal Trial Court of Qambar sentenced Hamzo Kalhoro for death penalty in murder after conclusion trial.

Model Criminal Court also order to pay 20 lakh rupees to the relatives of the deceased as compensation. It should be noted that the accused had killed his father Mohammad Kalhoro with a machete on 16 July 2022. Ali Hassan Mughiri, who was following the case on behalf of the prosecution, recorded the statements of 10 witnesses who fully supported the prosecution's case.



Philippine president says he won't give US access to more local mily bases

MANILA (AP): The Philippine president said his administration has no plan to give the United States access to more Philippine military bases and stressed that the American military's presence in several camps and sites so far was sparked by China's aggressive actions in the disputed South China Sea.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in 2022, allowed American forces and weapons access to four additional Philippine military bases, bringing to nine the number of sites where US troops can rotate indefinitely under a 2014 agreement. The Biden administration has been strengthening an arc of security alliances in the region to better counter China, a move that dovetails with Philippine efforts to shore up its external defense, especially in the South China Sea.

Marcos' decision last year alarmed China because two of the new sites were located just across from Taiwan and southern China. Beijing accused the Philippines of providing American forces with staging grounds, which could be used to undermine its security. "The Philippines has no plans to create any more bases or give access to any

more bases," Marcos said, without elaborating in response to a question during a forum with Manila-based foreign correspondents. Asked if he was concerned that allowing the US military access to Philippine bases had provoked Chinese actions in the South China Sea, Marcos said the presence of US troops was in response to China's moves. "These are reactions to what has happened in the South China Sea, to the aggressive actions that we have had to deal with," he said, mentioning Chinese coast guard vessels using water cannons and lasers to deter Philippine ships from the area Beijing claims as its own.

He also mentioned collisions, blocking of Filipino fishermen and sea barriers to block ships from Scarborough Shoal, which lies in the Philippine economic zone. Under Marcos, the Philippines has adopted a strategy of publicizing the incidents by allowing journalists to board its patrol ships to witness China's assertive actions. "It is crucial that the media ... continue to expose these actions that not only threaten the peace and stability of the region but also undermine the rules-based order that has under-

pinned global development and prosperity over the previous century," Marcos said. China has blamed the Philippines for sparking the confrontations by intruding into what it says were Chinese territorial waters and reneging on an alleged agreement to pull away an old Philippine navy ship, which now serves as Manila's territorial outpost in the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. Marcos said he was not aware of any such deal, and added that he considers the deal rescinded - if it ever existed.

Last week, President Joe Biden renewed Washington's "ironclad" commitment to defend Pacific allies in a summit with Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House. He reiterated that the US is obligated to defend the Philippines if its forces, aircraft or ships come under an armed attack. Asked when the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines could be invoked amid territorial hostilities between China and the Philippines, Marcos cited Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin as saying that could happen "if any Filipino serviceman is killed on an attack from any foreign power."

Somali pirates free BD-flagged vessel

MOGADISHU (BBC): Somali pirates have released a Bangladesh-flagged vessel and its 23-member crew after a ransom was reportedly paid. The MV Abdullah was carrying coal from Mozambique to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) when it was hijacked off Somalia's coast about a month ago. The pirates alleged that they received \$5m (£4m), but there is no independent confirmation of the claim.

A spike in hijackings has been reported off Somalia's coast in recent months. More than a dozen vessels have been targeted since late November. Security experts said a security vacuum had developed off Somalia's coast after foreign navies patrolling its waters turned their attention to the Red Sea, where Yemen's Houthi rebel group have been attacking ships. Between 2005 and 2012, pirates off the Horn of Africa raked in between \$339m and \$413m by holding crew members hostage and demanding ransom payments, the World Bank has estimated. Reuters news agency reported that it was told by two pirates that a \$5m ransom was paid for the release of MV Abdullah and its crew. "We checked whether the money was fake or not. Then we divided the money into groups and left, avoiding the government forces," Reuters quoted one of the pirates, Abdirashid Yusuf, as saying.

The vessel's owner, the KSRM Group, said the vessel and its crew were freed following negotiations. "We struck a deal with the pirates," Mizanul Islam of SR Shipping, the group's maritime arm, told AFP news agency. "We cannot say more about the money," he said, adding: "All the crew are safe and secure." The ship has since sailed to UAE, escorted by two warships.

Lebanese officials charge financier

BEIRUT (AFP): A Lebanese minister and two senior officials said preliminary findings suggest Israel's Mossad spy agency was behind the killing of a US-sanctioned Lebanese man accused of sending Iranian money to Hamas. The body of Mohammad Sarur, 57, was found riddled with bullets in a villa in the Lebanese mountain town of Beit Mery last Tuesday.

Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi told Al-Jadeed TV that, "according to the data we have so far, (the killing) was carried out by intelligence services." Asked whether he was referring to Mossad, Mawlawi confirmed. AFP has requested comment from Israeli government officials but has received no response so far. The US Treasury said in August 2019 that it had sanctioned Sarur for funneling "tens of millions of dollars" from Iran's Revolutionary Guards "to Hamas for terrorist attacks originating from the Gaza Strip," through Lebanon's Hamas-allied Hezbollah.

The Lebanese group has been exchanging near daily cross-border fire with the Israeli military since October 7 when Hamas launched its unprecedented attack on Israel, triggering the war in Gaza. A Lebanese judicial official and a security source told AFP that Mossad likely masterminded Sarur's killing, both speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the press. "The preliminary results of the investigation indicate that the Israeli Mossad was behind the assassination," the security official told AFP. Initial findings "suggest the Mossad used Lebanese and Syrian agents to lure Sarur to a villa in Beit Mery," the official said, adding that they had wiped fingerprints from the crime scene and used silenced weapons. The judicial official also told AFP that preliminary information pointed to Mossad, but that the probe was ongoing, with investigators collecting evidence "especially from communications data."

Protesters demand Georgia govt withdraw proposed 'Russian law'

TBILISI (BBC): Thousands of people demonstrated in the Georgian capital Tbilisi demanding the withdrawal of a controversial "foreign influence" bill they say is inspired by authoritarian laws neighbouring Russia uses to crush dissent. "No to the Russian law," chanted thousands of protesters outside parliament, many waving EU and Georgian flags.

A previous attempt by the government to introduce a "foreign agents" bill was abandoned in the face of mass street protests last year. But this month, the government announced it would reintroduce the legislation, renaming it a bill on the "transparency of foreign influence." Outside parliament, 23-year old Marisha said: "We are fighting for our freedom," as she held a long stick with the Georgian flag hoisted on top.

"We want to have a bright future, and I think it's the responsibility of every person who lives in this county to come out." The bill would require non-governmental organisations and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as an "organisation serving the interests of a foreign power". Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said the proposed law was needed to ensure the financial transparency of grant recipients.

But opposition parties and independent journalists have said the bill is an attempt to crush critical voices in Georgia and sabotage the country's chances of joining the EU. They have said it mirrors similar legislation introduced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in his country. "Georgia will not surrender to re-



Sovietisation!" pro-Western President Salome Zurbishvili wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The Georgian government has rejected any comparison to the Russian legislation. "I agree that no Russian laws should be adopted in Georgia," Georgian Dream's parliamentary leader Mamuka Mdivaridze said during a parliamentary debate. Shortly after he was punched in the face by opposition MP Aleko Elisashvili while speaking at the despatch box, triggering a brawl in parliament. Opposition politician Zurab Japaridze of the libertarian Girchi - More Freedom party claimed that Georgian Dream was scared of losing power.

The party currently holds a majority in parliament but the country is gearing up for parliamentary elections later this year. "We have to implement reforms in judiciary, electoral system, anti-corruption, de-oligarchisation. This is what the West is asking us to do in order to join the EU

and Nato," Mr Japaridze said. "But if [the government] implements these reforms it will lose power. So they decided to get rid of all civil society and critical media and stay in power forever, like Putin in Russia." Opposition MP Mr Elisashvili, with visible bruises on his forehead, which he claimed he sustained from being badly beaten up by pro-government MPs, later said outside parliament: "We will not be Russia! They are shamelessly dragging us to Russia. It won't happen."

The proposed "foreign influence" bill has been strongly condemned by both the EU and the US. Both have said it is incompatible with the country's stated aim of EU integration. A 2023 poll found that more than 80% of Georgia's 3.7 million population supported joining the EU. Last December, the EU granted Georgia candidate status, subject to extensive negotiations on topics including democratic norms.

Sweden launches war crimes trial against former Syrian officer

STOCKHOLM: Sweden has launched the trial of a former Syrian army officer over his alleged role in war crimes committed in 2012 during the country's civil war. The case against Brigadier General Mohammed Hamo, who resides in Sweden, opened. The trial is one of a very small number thus far against high-ranking Syrian government or military officials, despite efforts in Europe to implement justice against those responsible for human rights abuses during Syria's 13-year civil war.

Hamo is charged with aiding and abetting abuses of international law. The 65-year-old former military official is accused of participating in operations that "systematically included attacks carried out in violation of the principle of distinction, caution and proportionality", during his time as brigadier general in the Syrian army between January and July 2012. Prosecutor Karolina Wieselander read out the charges which were described as constituting "a serious crime". Hamo contributed, through "advice and action", to the

Syrian army's "indiscriminate" warfare, according to the case.

The prosecutor also said Hamo worked in the Syrian army's 11th Division and was vital in making "strategic decisions and [implementing] military operations". Hamo's defence lawyer said her client maintained his innocence, claiming he could not be held liable for the actions "as he had acted in a military context and had to follow orders". According to estimates, nearly half a million people have been killed in the Syrian civil war, which began after the government's repression of pro-democracy protests spurred unrest between the regime of Bashar al-Assad and the opposition. Since the war began in 2011, half of the country's pre-war population of 23 million have fled the country, igniting a wave of migration in the Middle East and Europe.

However, few Syrian officials have been brought to trial. In November, France issued an international arrest warrant for Assad, accusing him of complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes over chemical

attacks in 2013. Three other international warrants were also issued for the arrests of Assad's brother Maher, the de facto chief of the army's elite 4th Division and two generals. In March, Swiss prosecutors charged an uncle of Bashir with war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, Rifaat al-Assad - who recently returned to Syria after 37 years in exile - is unlikely to show up for the trial, for which a date has yet to be set.

In January 2022, a German court sentenced former Colonel Anwar Raslan to life in jail for crimes against humanity in connection with "state-sponsored torture". Activists claim that the case against Hamo strikes a blow by putting the first military official on the stand over army operations. "This trial is important because it's the first time that anyone from the Syrian government or the Syrian army is actually put on trial for the attacks that took place," claimed Aida Samani of the Stockholm-based Civil Rights Defenders human rights group. "The attacks in and around Homs and Hama in 2012 resulted in wide-

spread civilian harm and an immense destruction of civilian properties," Samani added. "The same conduct has been repeated systematically by the Syrian army in other cities across Syria with complete impunity." If convicted, the former general faces up to 18 years in jail and even life imprisonment, the activist suggested.

Little is known about Hamo, who in July 2012 defected from the Syrian army and joined those fighting to remove President Bashar al-Assad from power. Syrian opposition activists say he was involved in the fighting in the once rebel-held neighbourhood of Baba Amr in Homs, Syria's third-largest city. He lived in central Sweden until he was arrested over his supposed participation in war crimes in 2021, but he was swiftly released due to a lack of evidence. Several plaintiffs are set to testify at the trial, including Syrians from the cities that were attacked and a British photographer who was injured during one strike. The trial at the Stockholm District Court is planned to run for 18 days, with the last court session on May 21. — Aljazeera

Europe pledges to boost aid to Sudan

BRUSSELS: Germany will provide 244 million euros (\$260m) in humanitarian aid to Sudan, one year after the country plunged into war, as other European countries are also expected to pledge more funds.

European diplomats met in France to mark the anniversary of the conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced 8.5 million since fighting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) last April. "We can manage together to avoid a terrible famine catastrophe, but only if we get active together now," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said, announcing the pledge of funds. She added that in the worst-case scenario, one million Sudanese could die of hunger this year.

At the conference, France is seeking contributions from the international community and attention to a crisis officials say is being crowded out of the global conversation by ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. "For a year the Sudanese people have been the victims of a terrible war," French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said. Yet they had also suffered from "being forgotten" and "indifference". "This is the reason

for our meetings today: to break the silence surrounding this conflict and mobilise the international community," he said in opening remarks.

Donors will hopefully pledge "well over a billion euros" (\$1.07bn) at the conference, a French diplomatic source told the Reuters news agency, without specifying where the rest of the money will come from. The United States, hoping the Paris conference could loosen purse strings elsewhere, also planned to announce an additional \$100m in aid, Reuters reported. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom announced sanctions against businesses linked to the warring parties in Sudan.

The foreign office said "strict measures" would include an asset freeze on companies linked to the SAF and the RSF. "We continue to see appalling atrocities against civilians, unacceptable restrictions on humanitarian access and an utter disregard for civilian life," said British foreign minister, David Cameron. "The businesses that support the warring parties must be held to account, alongside those responsible for human rights abuses. The world must not forget about Sudan. We urgently need to end the violence." Sudan descended into conflict on April 15, 2023,

when simmering tensions between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and the rest of the country.

The war has since devastated infrastructure, prompted warnings of famine and displaced millions. Some 1.8 million people have fled Sudan, many to neighbouring Chad, now also suffering a humanitarian crisis; another 6.7 million are internally displaced. Thousands of civilians have been killed, although death toll estimates are highly uncertain, and each side has been accused of committing war crimes. Both sides have largely denied the accusations against them. The United Nations said recent Sudan is experiencing "one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory" and "the largest internal displacement crisis in the world".

It has made a call for \$2.7bn for aid inside the country, where 25 million people need assistance, and another \$1.4bn for assistance in neighbouring countries that have housed hundreds of thousands of refugees. Last week, US Special Envoy Tom Perriello called the international response so far "pitiful". "We're at 5 percent of the needed amount," he said. — Aljazeera

Solomon Islands prepares for polls since independence

SOLOMON ISLANDS: The people of the Solomon Islands are set to vote for their next government on April 17, in an election that could have repercussions for the rest of the Asia Pacific region due to the country's close relationship with China.

The Pacific state's 760,000 citizens are spread across its 900 islands and 28,230 square kilometres (10,900 square miles) of territory, making this one of the most logistically challenging elections in the world. It will take several weeks to collect all the ballots and then wait for the country's 50 MPs to form a government before they choose the next prime minister. Neighbours like Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have sent police to help with security during the election period as elections in the past have been followed by periods of unrest.

The election is taking place a year later than usual so the Solomon Islands government could focus its resources on hosting the 2023 Pacific Games, a move which raised more than a few eyebrows among

observers. The election has been described as "perhaps the most important to [the] Solomon Islands since independence" by Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, an associate professor and former director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaii, because of the country's ongoing economic problems and its role in the greater rivalry between China and the United States. For foreign observers, the major issue is the Solomon Islands's ongoing relationship with China and whether Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare will be re-elected.

Sogavare is best known overseas for switching diplomatic recognition in 2019 from Taiwan to China. The controversial decision stirred unrest and in November 2021, protesters targeted Honiara's Chinatown and tried to storm Sogavare's residence. Peace was restored with the help of a contingent of Australian police following a request from the government. Then in 2022, Sogavare signed a secretive security pact with Beijing causing alarm in Australia,

New Zealand and the US. The countries feared China could one day build a naval base there, dramatically increasing Beijing's military reach. The island chain lies about 2,000km (1,200 miles) east of the Australian city of Brisbane and just more than 6,000km (3,728 miles) southeast of the Chinese city of Shanghai. One of Sogavare's rivals for the top job, Peter Kenilorea Jr, an outspoken MP and the son of the country's first prime minister, has pledged to switch ties back to Taiwan.

For Solomon Islanders, however, "bread and butter" issues trump all else, according to Graeme Smith, a fellow at the Australian National University's Department of Pacific Affairs. "I don't think that the China thing is really that central of an issue. Normally, what people are excited about in their daily lives are health, education and transport," he told Al Jazeera. Although it is rich in natural resources, the Solomon Islands ranks just 155 out of 199 countries in the United Nations's Human Development Index. — Aljazeera

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Iran must not go unpunished

THE attacks on Tuesday by armed drones on Saudi oil-pumping stations, and two days before-hand on oil tankers off the coast of Fujairah in the UAE, represent a serious escalation on the part of Iran and its proxies, should the initial conclusions of an international investigation prove to be accurate.

Riyadh has constantly warned world leaders of the dangers that Iran poses, not only to Saudi Arabia and the region, but also to the entire world. This is something former President Obama did not realize until the Iran-backed Houthis attacked the US Navy three times in late 2016. The recent attacks on oil tankers and oil pipelines were aimed at subverting the world economy by hitting directly at the lifeline of today's world of commerce. Tehran should not get away with any more intimidation, or be allowed to threaten global stability.

It was in 2008 that the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz called upon the US to "cut off the head of the snake," in reference to the malign activities of Iran. Nearly a decade later, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman referred to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the "new Hitler of the Middle East." We are in 2019 and Iran continues to wreak havoc in the region, both directly and through its well armed proxies. Crown Prince Mohammed was therefore clearly correct when he argued that appeasement does not work with the Iranian regime, just as it did not work with Hitler. The next logical step — in this newspaper's view — should be surgical strikes. The US has set a precedent, and it had a telling effect: The Trump strikes on Syria when the Assad regime used Sarin gas against its people.

We argue this because it is clear that sanctions are not sending the right message. If the Iranian regime were not too used to getting away with their crimes, they would have taken up the offer from President Trump to get on the phone and call him in order to reach a deal that would be in the best interests of the Iranian people themselves. As the two recent attacks indicate, the Iranians insist on disrupting the flow of energy around the world, putting the lives of babies in incubators at risk, threatening hospitals and airports, attacking civilian ships and putting innocent lives in danger. As the case always is with the Iranian leadership, they bury their heads in the sand and pretend that they have done nothing. Nevertheless, investigations indicate that they were behind the attack on our brothers in the UAE while their Houthi militias targeted the Saudi pipelines. Our point of view is that they must be hit hard. They need to be shown that the circumstances are now different. We call for a decisive, punitive reaction to what happened so that Iran knows that every single move they make will have consequences. The time has come for Iran not only to curb its nuclear weapon ambitions — again in the world's interest — but also for the world to ensure that they do not have the means to support their terror networks across the region.

We respect the wise and calm approach of politicians and diplomats calling for investigations to be completed and all other options to be exhausted before heading to war. In the considered view of this newspaper, there has to be deterrent and punitive action in order for Iran to know that no sinister act will go unpunished; that action, in our opinion, should be a calculated surgical strike.

Calming tensions

WITHIN hours of Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel on Sunday, China initiated intensive diplomatic mediation efforts involving Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel, seeking to use its balanced relations with these countries to calm the situation in the Middle East. Iran has stated that its military action was in response to Israel's airstrike on its consulate in Damascus, Syria, and it deems the matter to be concluded, so there is no reason why a lid cannot be kept on the tensions, if all parties in the region refrain from acting rashly as China is urging.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's talk by telephone on Monday with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud testifies to Riyadh and Beijing having a solid foundation on which to coordinate efforts to exert influence on Teheran and Tel Aviv, whether directly or indirectly, so as to prevent a further escalation of tensions. Wang also talked by telephone with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on the same day, in which he condemned the attack on Iran's embassy as a serious violation of international law. He recognized the restraint Iran demonstrated in its response, which was not aimed at any neighboring country, and Teheran's willingness to continue to pursue peace and stability in the region. Until the conflict erupted in Gaza, the realization of the common aspiration of countries in the region for a regional environment conducive to development had seemed to be on the cards after the China-brokered reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Beijing believes that Teheran, having made its point, can avoid further actions that aggravate the tensions while safeguarding Iran's sovereignty and dignity. And although Israel has an advanced defense system, the losses it incurred from Iran's measured retaliation on Sunday should be enough to convince Tel Aviv of the potentially dire consequences of opening a new front against Iran. Such a development would be in no country's interests, including the United States, which has so far been reluctant to use its influence to exert any meaningful pressure to rein in Israel's aggression in Gaza. This round of escalation of tensions is nothing but the latest spillover effect from the conflict in Gaza. The world should be more vigilant against the longstanding frictions in the region causing sparks to fly due to hotheaded decisions and reckless moves, since these have the potential to ignite a tinderbox of troubles.

Attention should continue to be focused on the root cause of regional chaos: the long-time prevention of the Palestinian people realizing their legitimate national rights, which is the longest-lasting injustice in modern times. That's why Wang rightly pointed out that the top priority for the time being is to strictly implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2728, immediately achieve an unconditional and lasting cease-fire, protect civilians, and ensure humanitarian relief can reach the besieged Palestinians in Gaza who are in dire need of it. The international community should take more active actions to support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the convening of a larger, more authoritative international peace conference that formulates a realizable timetable and road map for the implementation of the two-state solution. The longer the conflict in Gaza drags on, the more possibility there is that a stray spark will ignite a wild fire.

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Biden's not-so-secret path to success in November

Lawrence Levy

FROM the veterans who surged into new "bedroom communities" after World War II to the growing number of immigrants now diversifying and reviving them, suburbia has served as a symbol of renewal. President Joe Biden knows this fresh-start narrative poignantly: The suburbs are not only where he built a soaring career but rebuilt a broken family after a traffic accident took his wife and daughter decades ago.

Now, Biden needs the suburbs to save his political life. And despite his low approval ratings and cracks in the Democratic base, it's likely these politically pivotal places again will step up for him against former President Donald Trump. Biden's longtime affinity with suburban voters, especially women, could give him an edge. And recent primary results underscore this strength over his rival.

In the most recent primaries, Trump technically ran unopposed. However, non-candidate and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley still took a significant chunk of the voters in swing states including Wisconsin, taking 13% of the vote to Trump's 79%. Multiple media sources report that well-educated suburban women comprised a large share of non-candidacy support of Haley, reaffirming Trump's disconnect with the "swingiest" of voters. Their defections were fatal to Trump in 2020 and can only help Biden in November.

The primary in Wisconsin offers insight into Trump's suburban problem. In Milwaukee County, which includes several suburban communities, Trump received 73%, down from his winning percentage statewide. In neighboring Waukesha County, Trump fell only one percentage point shy of his statewide total but well behind his totals in more rural areas, such as Rusk County, where he rolled up 88%.

By contrast, Biden overperformed in several Milwaukee suburbs. Overall, he won 88% of the Wisconsin Democratic vote, with an even stronger showing in suburban Waukesha, capturing 90%

(compared to Trump's 78%) and Racine, garnering 92% to the former president's 81%. In Virginia and North Carolina, among other Super Tuesday contests, Haley's only centers of strength were suburban and urban counties with significant concentrations of young, college-educated voters.

In the swing state of North Carolina, Trump received 74% of the vote to Haley's 23%. But in Mecklenburg County, where Charlotte comprises about a third of the population, Trump gathered only 52%, Haley 45%; in Wake County, where nearly half of the residents live in Raleigh, Trump won 58%. In Virginia, Haley won several suburban counties outright, racking up 71% in

Biden needs "purple" suburbanites to join with the "blue" city voters, at least as much as they did four years ago - otherwise, he'll struggle to cover the potential loss of Muslim and young voters if they abandon Biden over issues like Israel.

Arlington, 71% in Alexandria and 57% in Fairfax, and ran ahead of her statewide totals in suburbs surrounding Richmond. The former president isn't the only one with work to do: The results in a number of other primaries weren't completely positive for Biden, who faced a protest vote amid dissatisfaction from the progressive wing of his party and softening support in polls from voters of color. But when it comes to suburbanites, Biden clearly has a head start.

For decades, with the close exception of 2012, the candidate who won the suburbs went on to win the White House. Comprising more than 60% of the population by some measures, suburbanites also have played an outsized role in determining which party controls Congress. The challenge for candidates is to build a bridge to the suburbs from their urban or rural bases. Biden needs "purple" suburbanites to join with the "blue" city voters, at least as much as they did four years ago -

otherwise, he'll struggle to cover the potential loss of Muslim and young voters if they abandon Biden over issues like Israel. But from performances in the voting booth to stronger polls, these moderate, open-minded "swingsters" are increasingly likely to remain in Biden's corner.

Even before his strong State of the Union address and subsequent campaign blitz, a New York Times/Siena poll showed Biden leading among suburban voters by slightly more than in 2020. And with Trump unwilling or unable to broaden his base, Biden is well-positioned to build on his suburban margins. Suburbanites have supported Biden for every office he's held, from a county councilman to commander-in-chief. A daily commuter between Delaware and Washington, DC, during his 36 years in the Senate, people like his New Castle neighbors and fellow Amtrak passengers shaped his political sensibilities and enhanced his centrist appeal.

In 2008, Barack Obama chose "Amtrak Joe" as his running mate as much for Biden's moderate image as his experience in Congress. And in 2020, Biden was able to push aside and then unite progressive opponents behind a centrist candidacy that resonated with swing voters, making Trump seem all the more extreme. Four years after Hillary Clinton lost the suburbs, Biden trumped Trump by two percentage points among suburban voters, driven especially by suburban women who, as key advisors warned Trump, found rhetoric on the suburbs, and his positions on issues they cared about, unpalatable.

Of course, recreating his urban-suburban coalition isn't going to be easy for Biden, given the blame he's

received for a bipartisan immigration mess, the intraparty feuding over the Israel-Hamas war, the leakage of previously loyal Latino voters and denial that the economy is soaring. Biden's strength in the suburbs isn't only his track record there. His party's recent performance on issues - abortion only the most obvious - has animated suburbanites up and down the ballot.

Last year, suburbanites embraced Democratic politicians and positions in state and local contests. Voters in Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and even deep "red" Kentucky rebuked Republicans, who pushed positions that moderate, independent (and even some Republican-leaning) suburbanites saw as extremist. Abortion garnered the most headlines, as suburban women especially came out in droves for "pro-choice" plebiscites and politicians. Last month, Democrat Thomas Suozzi won a special election to recapture a Long Island congressional seat, following former GOP Rep. George Santos' expulsion. Inflation, a key concern in polling, didn't stick to suburban Democrats as much as they had feared and Republicans hoped; their candidates repeatedly turned back Republicans who campaigned on that issue.

On immigration, another issue on which Biden and other Democrats poll poorly, Trump's and other Republicans' refusal to embrace a bipartisan solution enabled Suozzi to refocus the issue as one of GOP intransigence and partisanship. Like Suozzi, Biden and other Democrats are taking a tougher stance on border security, while pounding Republicans for being more interested in scoring political points than solving problems. Suburban Democrats also have experienced less fall-out on the issue because migrants aren't nearly as prevalent in their districts as they are in many cities. Biden and the suburbs have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship for decades. If his new momentum in the polls is to be sustained through November, it will be suburbanites who step up to save one of their own.

Domino effect of Middle East crisis on Pakistan and way out

Palwasha Aftab

IRAN launched its first-ever direct assault on Israeli territory late on Saturday in retaliation for a deadly Damascus strike, marking a major escalation of the long-running covert war between the regional foes. Tehran's retaliatory strikes against Israel were less about inflicting substantial damage on Israel but more about restoring deterrence and sending a strong message to Tel Aviv that it had the capability to take such an action in self-defense in accordance with UN Charter's Article 51.

Tehran's actions were prompted by Israel's attack on its consulate in Damascus in which seven of its military advisers, including three senior commanders serving in Syria, were killed, marking a major escalation in Israel's conflict with Iran. On that occasion, major world powers avoided unequivocally condemning the attack and censuring Israel for its recklessness; the UN Security Council didn't condemn the Israeli move either after US, Britain and France opposed a condemnation statement drafted by Russia.

The reaction from Pakistan's Foreign Office also contained a reference to the Damascus consulate attack as the trigger for Iranian action against Israel. This episode has sparked fears of a full-blown regional war, which if not de-escalated timely, may have ripple effects on Pakistan, endangering its security and economic interests linked with Iran.

Ties between Iran and Pakistan have been functional, and in periods warm, but ultimately not particularly strong. Traditionally, Iran has had a negative perception of Pakistan due to its strong relations with geopolitical forces opposed to Iran: the United States and Gulf powers, especially the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

For Pakistan's part, it has seen Iran as a difficult and not very useful neighbor due to its pariah status in the West. Iran has also had a closer relationship with Pakistan's archival India, and Pakistani leaders have accused Iran with credible evidences of supporting and providing haven to anti-Pakistan ethno-nationalist groups.

Currently, keeping in view the Middle East's volatile situation, Pakistan fears that Iran could mobilize its proxies, like the Zainebiyoun Brigade in Pakistan, to wage a protracted proxy war against Israel and its interests across the Middle East. Furthermore, following the Iran-Pakistan tensions in January, the latter also feared that Iran could use the Zainebiyoun Brigade as a proxy against Pakistan for being a "Major Non-NATO Ally" (MNNNA) of the US and so, to plunge Pakistan into sectarian tensions.

Expectedly, in January, Pakistan decided in principle to add the Zainebiyoun Brigade to the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)'s list of proscribed organizations. The decision was implemented on March 29 and publi-

cized on April 11.

Before this, Pakistan has also banned two obscure Iran-supported Shia militant outfits, Ansar-ul-Hussain and its offshoot, Khatam-ul-Anbia, under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997 in 2016 and 2020, respectively, for recruiting Pakistani Shias to fight in Syria. In short, Pakistan's ban on the Zainebiyoun Brigade, in view of its potential use as an Iranian proxy against Israel and Pakistan, has the potential to further strain the already tense Pak-Iran ties amid a rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, it is also true that hostile third countries would like to see a permanent break in Pakistan-Iran ties. Reportedly, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has a fraction of elements within who act like mercenaries, raising the spectre for triggering a protracted three-front dilemma, involving Afghanistan, India and Iran, for Pakistan.

Leaders in both capitals must ensure this does not happen. Apart from the security sphere, the Middle East heat can also jeopardize Islamabad's economic interests, particularly its endeavors to complete the multibillion-dollar Pak-Iran gas pipeline project which can address its energy shortage crisis and ward off \$18bn potential penalties from Tehran. Washington has already said that it does not support the gas pipeline project from going forward and cautioned about the risk of sanctions in doing business with Tehran. In these challenging times, domestically, it is crucial for the political leaders of Pakistan to restore political stability and provide unwavering support to our Armed Forces, who stand as the bulwark of national security, to prevent the ongoing regional conflict from destabilizing Pakistan.

Internationally, as a country in the region, Pakistan desires a peaceful neighborhood. It has an interest in containing the hostilities in Middle East that have the potential to engulf the entire region. Ever since the start of the war on Gaza by the Israeli occupation forces, Pakistan has underlined the necessity of international efforts to prevent the expansion of hostilities in the region and for a ceasefire in Gaza. Pakistan has also condemned Israeli aggression against Syria and Lebanon. The actions taken by Israel in the coming days, along with the effectiveness of international diplomatic interventions, will be critical in shaping the next phase of this increasingly complex geopolitical theatre.

No wonder, de-escalation is pressing need of the hour, the path for which is clear. Israel must immediately end the slaughter in Gaza, which is the key driver of the current confrontation in the Middle East. Moreover, it must cease its roguish acts of targeting sovereign states including Iran, Lebanon and Syria. The UN Security Council should send a similar message to Israel and its backers.

Charting a new course in Sino-German ties

Liu Zhongwei

THE ongoing visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is very important because Scholz's delegation includes several federal ministers and a large number of business leaders from across different sectors. This is Scholz's second visit to China. In November 2022, he led a German big business delegation to China.

The 2022 visit was not only Scholz's first to China as German chancellor but also the first visit by a European leader to China after the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. It was also the first face-to-face meeting between the top leaders of the two countries since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scholz's second visit to China in one and a half years shows he is keen to strengthen relations with China. However, the personal efforts of Scholz and the eagerness of

German enterprises to engage in dialogue and cooperation are not enough to elevate Sino-German relations to newer heights in the new era. To write a new chapter in Sino-German relations, the German government and strategic community, too, have to adopt a forward-looking attitude toward China, build a strategic consensus on bilateral ties and follow a foreign policy independent of the US. Germany should also stop devising its China policy based on ideology. In this regard, Scholz, who was vice-chancellor and finance minister in former chancellor Angela Merkel's government, has advocated inheriting as well as adjusting Merkel's policies, reflecting his pragmatic attitude toward China.

Yet Scholz's is a coalition government of three major parties: the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Free Democratic Party. There

are significant differences among the three parties in terms of China policy. From example, Green Party and Free Democratic Party politicians have been hyping up the "China threat" theory and advocating for a tough stance against China, in particular, reducing Germany's economic dependence on China. They also demand that Germany's China policy reflect that China is an "economic competitor" and "systemic rival". In fact, during Scholz's first visit to China, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (a Greens leader) publicly criticized Scholz's China policy for being too mild, saying China's values differ from Germany's, which disrupted the normal development of bilateral ties.

Baerbock's contention sounds similar to what many US politicians have been saying and the US'

China policy is based on. In order to raise Sino-German ties to newer heights, the Scholz government has to stop aping the US' China policy, especially because China-US relations have undergone the most extensive changes after Donald Trump became US president in January 2017. The US has basically devised a comprehensive strategy toward China, which it sees as its "strategic competitor". And as an important member of NATO, Germany has always regarded its alliance with the US as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. In fact, its positions on economic and security policies, global issues and values are largely consistent with those of the United States.

In terms of its China policy, Germany, as a Western country, is also deeply influenced by the US' China policy which emphasizes the element of

competition. So while developing relations with China, Germany constantly reminds itself to be vigilant against China's strength. This is the reason why Germany, after Scholz became chancellor, has broken the tradition of preferring dialogue with China to fine-tune its Asia policy and made the "Indo-Pacific" region a new focus of its foreign policy, which reflects its US-style Cold War thinking. As a pillar of European integration and a major world power, Germany is capable of and should break free from its dependence on US foreign policy, work out an independent foreign policy, including a China policy free of US influence, and promote the comprehensive development of Sino-German relations for the benefit of not only the two countries but also the rest of the world.

Elevating Sino-German relations to newer heights requires creating more

favorable conditions for bilateral economic cooperation and making full use of the cornerstone Sino-German economic and trade relations. In recent years, Sino-German relations have been able to withstand US-orchestrated disruptions and the changes brought about the election of a new German government and international developments, largely because of mutual trust and a solid economic and trade foundation. The fact that Sino-German economic cooperation is yielding positive results is proved by the record 11.9 billion euros (\$12.7 billion) German direct investment in China last year. Therefore, under the new historical conditions, China and Germany should engage in in-depth discussions on major issues such as the security of global industry and supply chains, and further strengthen economic and trade cooperation.

The China Daily

Time to stop manmade disaster in Sudan

Josep Borrel Fontelles & Janez Lenarcic

“THE world’s worst, most complex and cruel crisis” is unfolding in Sudan without making it onto our prime-time news, says to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. With nearly 9 million people displaced within the country - half of them children - and almost 2 million refugees abroad, Sudan is currently the largest displacement crisis in the world.

And the worst is still to come: fighting has disrupted planting season in Sudan’s most fertile regions, and nearly 20 million people - almost half the population - are facing acute food insecurity in a country that used to be a major food producer. On April 15, Sudan’s war enters its second year. On this day, the EU with France and Germany will host a high-level conference in Paris to plead for additional humanitarian aid and call for an end to this conflict. It must be a wake-up call for Africa, Europe and the whole international community. We know who is responsible for this disaster. With their joint military coup in October 2021, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces hijacked the aspirations of the democratic Sudanese revolution.

Their alliance unravelled and descended into conflict between them on April 15, 2023. The two belligerents decided to wage war not only against each other, but also against Sudan and its people. In Darfur, the genocidal atrocities against civilians based on their ethnicity that put Sudan in the headlines in 2003 have resumed. Throughout the country, aid is being deliberately withheld and humanitarian workers are being denied access. Hundreds of thousands Sudanese have fled to neighboring countries, notably Chad and South Sudan, two states already facing their own humanitarian and food security crises. The suffering is entirely manmade and could be stopped today. External sponsors, bringing in cash and weapons, fuel the fighting. Players like Iran are delivering arms, including drones, to the SAF. The UAE also have direct leverage on the RSF that they should use to end the war.

Russia plays both sides, hoping for access to strategic infrastructure and resources, including via mercenary private military companies, which are mainly after gold and minerals. The Red Sea is Europe’s most important maritime

connection to Asia and the Pacific, and Sudan could become a revolving door for human trafficking, radical fighters, weapons and all kinds of illicit trade between the Sahel, North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Europe’s security is at stake. Before the war, during the victorious popular uprising against a brutal dictatorship, the many young activists, women’s rights defenders and community leaders have shown to the world their will and determination to build a democratic and peaceful Sudan.

Ever since, the EU and its member states have stood firm in their view; the only side we take in this conflict is the side of civilians and the hope they have for their country. We will continue to engage with the belligerents from a neutral position that puts peace and respect for civilian’s lives and rights front and centre. April 15 in Paris must become a joint rallying cry for peace. It has to be the on-ramp for more comprehensive, concerted and consequential action of Europe, Africa and the international community on Sudan.

Chief among the goals of today must, of course, be to avert the looming famine in Sudan and to support the countries and commu-

nities that have taken in people fleeing war. The available aid held up by the belligerents on political calculus must reach the people in need, wherever they are. Such war tactics violate international law and may amount to war crimes.

We expect also the two leaders of the belligerent parties, Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, to finally heed the calls to stop this carnage and come to the negotiating table. Failure to do so would have consequences. Our action on Sudan is not isolated: in Sudan as in Ukraine or elsewhere, democratic aspirations should not be fought through the barrel of a gun. The Sudanese people have demanded no less since they took over the streets of Khartoum five years ago. This is why we are tirelessly calling for a ceasefire without delay, unfettered access of aid and the return to the path of a democratic transition in Sudan. We always favour African solutions to African problems. As Sudan enters the second year of its most fateful war, we look to the region to take responsibility. Alongside our regional and international partners, we stand ready to help Sudan in its darkest hour.

Arab News

EU’s new migration pact is intended to neutralise far right - it risks empowering it

Daniel Trilling

THE Oscar-nominated **Io Capitano**, now showing in cinemas, is a sensitive and moving portrait of the trials faced by two teenage boys as they attempt to reach Europe, via unofficial migration routes, from their homes in Senegal. The film is unsparing in its depiction of the violence and danger they face along the way - but what it doesn't show is how the boys' journey is shaped by European border policy from almost the moment they set off.

Their first stop, the people-smuggling hub of Agadez, Niger, is the capital of a country into which the EU has poured millions of euros in recent years to combat smuggling. It hasn't halted the trade entirely, but it has forced it further underground. In Libya, where the boys are tortured and trafficked by armed gangs, European governments have striven to keep migrants in place - as painstakingly documented by Sally Hayden in her recent book *My Fourth Time, We Drowned* - despite the dire threat to their safety.

When the boys eventually make it on to a rusty boat and set off across the Mediterranean for Italy, they enter a space where the EU has curtailed search and rescue operations, and where volunteer rescuers have faced persistent harassment from European authorities. And as migrants' rights activists in Italy have pointed out, should the passengers reach Italian shores alive, then Seydou - the protagonist of the story, who ends up piloting the boat - may well find himself labelled a smuggler and threatened with prison.

Seen in this light, the EU's long-awaited pact on asylum and migration, which passed a knife-edge series of votes in the European parliament last week, continues an

established trend towards deterrence. Ahead of European elections in June, in which rightwing populist parties are predicted to make significant gains, the pact's centrist supporters have hailed the legislative package as a victory for the traditional EU values of compromise and moderation. Yet with a heavy focus on security screening and the removal of migrants deemed undeserving, the pact highlights how far Europe's centre has already shifted to the right on migration - and risks further empowering the radical right it aims to neutralise.

The pact is an attempt to fix some of the problems that have bedevilled European politics since the refugee crisis of 2015. The new laws allow for enhanced screening and surveillance of irregular migrants at EU borders, with a "fast track" process for asylum applications and greater powers to return people ineligible for asylum to their countries of origin. At the same time, "solidarity" measures aim to set basic accommodation standards across the EU and relieve the pressure on states at the bloc's physical frontiers. During sudden spikes in the number of people arriving - for instance, if there's a refugee crisis in a neighbouring region - asylum seekers can be relocated elsewhere in the EU. If hostile states use migration to foment chaos on the EU's borders, as Belarus and Turkey have both done in recent years, then EU member states will be allowed to take emergency measures to detain migrants or turn them away.

In the words of the European Commission vice-president Margaritis Schinas, it will create "not a fortress Europe, but a well-guarded house, with more secure external borders and clear rules on who is

entitled to enter". Human rights NGOs, on the other hand, warn that in combination, these measures will lead to the increased use of detention at EU borders - for example in the kind of "closed" reception centres that Greece already operates - and an increased risk that people will be sent back to countries where their lives are in danger.

The logic of these measures is that tougher controls will reduce the sense of chaos at the EU's borders and allow Europe to more efficiently give asylum to those in genuine need. But the plan is undermined by a series of misconceptions. The first is that tougher measures, focused on removing those deemed ineligible for asylum, will lead to the appearance of greater control. The majority of people who take smuggler routes to Europe do so, as official statistics show, because they are fleeing violence and persecution. They do so for a lack of safe, legal options. A record 114 million people are displaced by conflict worldwide today, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

Second, the EU's problem was never really a lack of common standards on asylum - but a lack of will to enforce them. Think, for instance, of the revelation last year that the Greek coastguard was abandoning refugees at sea. Greece has faced no real sanctions for this violation. If human rights standards are not respected, then a measure that looks good on paper - a fast-track asylum procedure, for example - can become a recipe for unfair treatment. The UK's experiment with "fast track" immigration detention, ruled unlawful in 2015, is a cautionary tale here.

Third, the political compromise that the pact represents - it was supported by most centre-right,

centre-left and liberal MEPs, though not the Greens or the left, who opposed it on human rights grounds - risks reinforcing the radical right's framing of migration. Radical right MEPs were perfectly happy to vote for the package's deterrent measures, while stridently opposing the more humanitarian elements like the proposed EU-wide "relocation" scheme, which they see as an unacceptable constraint on national sovereignty. (France's Rassemblement National, for instance, said the pact "imposes the distribution of migrants" on EU member states and called for a "defeat" of the project in June's elections.)

It's dangerous to try to split the difference on this. The radical right don't oppose migration because it's not efficiently managed; they oppose it because they see it as a threat to European identity. Support for these parties is rooted in a widespread sense among some voters that conventional politics has failed, not a mere kneejerk reaction to recent immigration. Without a more comprehensive challenge to their worldview, then the pressure to shift the dial even more towards migration deterrence is only likely to grow.

Even in these circumstances, there is what some human rights NGOs call a "glimmer of hope". The pact will take several years to implement - the commission doesn't expect to get going until 2026 at the earliest, and it must still be approved by national governments. It contains some progressive measures, such as a proposal to expand safe, legal routes to asylum with the support of the UNHCR. It's not too late to argue for measures like these to be expanded, and for the pact's more authoritarian elements to be reined in. But to do that, Europe needs politicians who are up for the fight.

World missed warning of 2014 Ukraine invasion

Nikolaus von Twickel

RUSSIA'S full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, deserves a place in history books for being more widely anticipated in Washington than in Moscow - or even Kyiv. In the weeks before that fateful Thursday, US officials, relying on their own intelligence sources, predicted confidently that Russia was going to attack Ukraine. In contrast, senior Kremlin officials seemed taken by surprise - judging by their faces - during the Security Council meeting on Feb. 21, 2022, when Vladimir Putin tore up the Minsk agreements by recognizing the so-called Donbas People's Republics as independent, paving the way for all-out war.

Putin had apparently only shared his plans with a few trusted people like Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev. However, the US did not share details of their intelligence widely with its allies either. A fairly good proof for this is that the head of Germany's foreign intelligence service, Bruno Kahl, was in Kyiv for talks on Feb. 24. He had to be hastily evacuated by car. Poor intelligence is one thing. What is much more serious is that both Ukraine and her friends in the West systematically failed to anticipate a large-scale war. This has much to do with the fact that such a scenario just seemed too irrational.

Even in early 2022, when Russia had deployed more than 100,000 troops along the border with Ukraine, many experts argued that this force was too small to take large cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv without massive losses. On Jan. 24, one month before the invasion, a group of Ukrainian military experts argued that a full-scale invasion to

capture most or all of Ukraine would be "an adventure with no chance of success." They were proven right - the initial invasion force failed miserably. But more importantly, the Kremlin did not appear to realize they were setting themselves up for failure. Today, we can safely assume that Putin, surrounded by sycophantic yes-men, simply believed that Ukrainians would welcome his troops with flowers. Few people guessed the level of misinformation and naivety that must have guided the Kremlin's decisions.

The other compelling argument against a fresh Russian invasion was the prospect that the West would respond with sanctions much harsher than in 2014. In the 2020 book "Beyond Frozen Conflict" (with Thomas de Waal), I argued that both sides were deterred from breaking the truce by "asymmetric mutual deterrence." While Ukraine's armed forces were facing an adversary four times its size, Russia was facing the likelihood of much harsher sanctions. While the sanctions did come, initial expectations that the measures would cripple or destroy the Russian economy have not come true so far. Whether this was anticipated in the Kremlin or not may seem unimportant. The risk certainly did not put Putin off.

Again, the lesson here is that Putin and his cronies make different cost-benefit calculations than many Western democracies - if they make them at all. This also holds for the costs of running occupied territories. This was another aspect that led many observers - including myself - to believe that Russia would not break up the status quo in place since 2015, when the "Package of Measures," commonly

known as "Minsk 2," was signed in the Belarusian capital. The extremely messy and potentially costly experience of controlling the Donbas should have actually deterred Putin. Between 2014 and 2018, numerous field commanders were assassinated in the region after they had resisted the Moscow-installed administrations. For example, in 2017, Donetsk sent troops to Luhansk to help depose local strongman Igor Plotnitsky. A year later, Plotnitsky's rival in Donetsk, Alexander Zakharchenko, was killed in a bomb explosion that bore the hallmarks of an inside job.

These violent troubles made observers speculate about infighting in Moscow over the republics, leading to headlines about the Kremlin's factional infighting. However, the eight years in which the Donbas People's Republics existed as Russian-sponsored lawless black holes in Ukraine's flank, showed that Moscow was totally unwilling to let them return to Ukraine - contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the Minsk agreements. From 2014 onwards, any pro-Ukrainian sentiment inside these regions was crushed by the local State Security Ministries. Their cruel record of detaining and torturing dissenters is unrivaled anywhere in Russia, save Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechnya. As the years passed, the People's Republics increasingly became infamous as neo-Stalinist outposts for Moscow's imperial ambitions. While it was clear that Putin was only interested in the potential they had to prevent Ukraine's integration into the West, few predicted that these little military dictatorships would be blueprints for a new, brutal Russian dictatorship that jails the opposition and stifles dissent everywhere.

Could all this have been prevented in 2014? Of course, more Western support would have made Ukraine stronger, and tougher sanctions would have made Russia weaker. Whether this could have prevented the 2022 invasion is debatable. As I argued above, there are many indicators that Moscow did not see itself on a road to war over the years. To the best knowledge, Putin is no strategist. Rather, he is a tactician who decides often hesitantly without long-term thinking. I am quite certain that his (crazy) plan to conquer Kyiv only materialized during his Covid-induced self-isolation when he must have read too many bad history books and talked to few and too dubious people.

This is not to deny that Western policies were mostly driven by largely naive hopes. Not a single point of the Minsk agreements was ever really implemented, and the belief - popular in Germany - that closer economic ties would foster democracy in Russia was finally proven untrue. But in 2014 and 2015, it was simply more attractive to hope for a return to business-as-usual with Putin rather than declaring a turning point to contain and deter Russia's imperial ambitions. The fact that more than two years later, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's famous Zeitenwende declaration is still far from implementation only proves how hard it is to change the complacency and ignorance-driven mindsets of Europeans, especially those in the west of the continent. Rather than debating who was right and wrong, Europe now needs to learn from its mistakes. It needs to learn quickly and forcefully because too much is at stake. Our biggest hope for Russia now hinges on the defeat of Putin's armies on the battlefields of Ukraine.

US has received a rare invitation from China

W.J. Hennigan

IN the middle of the last century, as the United States and Russia rapidly amassed thousands of nuclear weapons, China stayed out of the arms race, focusing its energy on growing its economy and broadening its regional influence.

Beijing did build hundreds of nuclear weapons during those years, but the nation's leaders insisted their modest arsenal was merely for self-defense. Since China's first nuclear weapons test, in 1964, the country has pledged loudly to never go first in a nuclear conflict - no matter what. That stance, coupled with a stated strategy of "minimum" deterrence, didn't demand the level of American fear, loathing and attention that the Russian threat did.

Now there is increasing unease in Washington about China's nuclear ambitions. The Pentagon says Beijing is on track to double the number of its nuclear warheads by the decade's end, to 1,000 from 500 - a development that senior US officials have publicly called "unprecedented" and "breathhtaking." China has drastically expanded its nuclear testing facility and continued work on three new missile fields in the country's north, where more than 300 intercontinental ballistic missile silos have recently been constructed.

China's transformation from a small nuclear power into an exponentially larger one is a historic shift, upending the delicate two-peer balance of the world's nuclear weapons for the entirety of the atomic age. The Russian and American arsenals - their growth, reduction and containment - have defined this era; maintaining an uneasy peace between the two countries hinged on open communication channels, agreement on nuclear norms and diplomacy.

Little of that nuclear scaffolding exists with China. In Washington, how exactly to interpret Beijing's sharp nuclear buildup is still a matter of debate. At best, American officials say, their Chinese counterparts are trying to catch up with the United States and Russia, which still each have roughly a 10-to-1 nuclear advantage over China with their stockpiles. At worst, they say, this is Beijing's boldfaced attempt to deter the United States from defending Taiwan against a Chinese invasion, the most likely flashpoint for an armed conflict between the competing superpowers. In truth, no one knows what China is planning. President Xi Jinping's government, as with much of its domestic policy, releases vanishingly little information about its nuclear intentions, strategies or goals, and it has been equally unwilling to engage on arms control.

That is, until now. In February, in a rare offer for nuclear diplomacy, China has openly invited the United States and other nuclear powers to negotiate a treaty in which all sides would pledge never to use nuclear weapons first against one another. "The policy is highly stable, consistent and predictable," said Sun Xiaobou, director general of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's department of arms control, in Geneva on Feb. 26. "It is, in itself, an important contribution to the international disarmament process."

The invitation came as a surprise. While Beijing has long claimed moral superiority over other nuclear powers on this issue - China and India are the only nuclear-armed nations to declare a no-first-use policy - opening the possibility for talks in such a public way is something China hasn't done in years. It may seem like a no-brainer to take China up on the offer - wouldn't it be better if everyone agreed not to be the first to use their nuclear weapons? - but it has been met with public silence from Washington. For American policymakers, committing to no-first-use is deeply divisive. The United States, the only nation to ever use nuclear weapons in conflict, when it dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, has never ruled out being first to use them again, nor has it detailed the circumstances under which it would consider doing so. This approach of calculated ambiguity is intended to prevent adver-

saries from taking military action against the United States - and the more than 30 allies it is bound by treaties to defend - out of fear for what could come their way in response.

It's also a personal issue for President Biden. He supported a no-first-use policy as vice president amid deliberations inside the Obama administration, and as a presidential candidate on the campaign trail he said the "sole purpose" of the US nuclear arsenal should be aimed at deterring or retaliating against an adversary's nuclear attack. But when it came time for his own administration to adopt a declaratory nuclear policy, he decided not to break with America's longstanding nuclear dogma and retained the first-use option. Mr. Biden's about-face was a sign of the times, a result of both internal deliberations and consultations with allies in Europe and Asia. According to current and

treaty." Some argue the Biden administration should take Beijing's offer at face value. "China genuinely believes that any serious nuclear arms control discussion needs to start with no-first-use," said Tong Zhao, a nuclear expert focused on China at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "From Beijing's view, that's the most effective way to reduce the role of nuclear weapons."

Even if it is a strategic gambit, engaging with China and other nuclear nations on first-use talks could be a crucial step in establishing critical guardrails for the new nuclear era. It would be a major breakthrough for Washington to get China to the table for arms control talks. It could also help jolt the stalled relations between the United States and Russia, which together control nearly 90 percent of the world's nuclear warheads. "US administrations have not responded with great alacrity or interest to

He has overseen a sweeping modernization of China's military, including developing and fielding new nuclear-capable missiles, submarines and bombers. Meanwhile, the stockpile of warheads steadily climbs. The White House believes that China's recent offer is a distraction from its broader unwillingness to engage diplomatically on the nuclear portfolio, including its own aggressive buildup.

former administration officials, these nations' leaders feared a US policy reversal would undermine confidence in America's commitment to come to their defense and would potentially embolden China, Russia and North Korea.

The uneasiness surrounding a potential change to America's first-use policy almost certainly played a role in China's unusually public invitation to negotiate. China may simply be trying to stoke anxieties among American allies and partners - and particularly Taiwan, South Korea and Japan - by floating a public offer outside of private diplomatic channels. It's not the first time it has gone down this road. During the Cold War, China made offers for a mutual no-first-use pledge at the United Nations in 1971 and 1982, and presented a draft treaty in 1994 to the other nuclear weapons states. Four years later, China tried to persuade President Bill Clinton to change American nuclear policy when he visited Beijing, but Mr. Clinton decided against it, choosing instead to share a pledge to stop targeting each other with their nuclear weapons.

Such overtures have all but halted under the leadership of Mr. Xi, who has pursued a far more aggressive foreign policy. He has overseen a sweeping modernization of China's military, including developing and fielding new nuclear-capable missiles, submarines and bombers. Meanwhile, the stockpile of warheads steadily climbs. The White House believes that China's recent offer is a distraction from its broader unwillingness to engage diplomatically on the nuclear portfolio, including its own aggressive buildup. The Biden administration is wrestling with how it can deter both China and Russia without touching off a destabilizing three-way arms race. Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden's national security adviser, publicly invited the two nations last summer to hold nuclear arms control deliberations without preconditions. Russia dismissed the offer outright, while China agreed to preliminary talks. At a follow-on meeting in November, the United States proposed possible measures to manage nuclear risks, such as an agreement to notify one another when their militaries test-launch ballistic missiles.

"The P.R.C. has yet to respond or show interest in engaging substantively on these proposals," a National Security Council spokeswoman, using the abbreviation for the country's formal name, the People's Republic of China, said in a written response to questions about Beijing's recent offer. "This P.R.C. behavior calls into question the aims behinds the P.R.C.'s call for discussions of a no-first-use

Chinese outreach on the question of no-first-use," said Steve Andreasen, who served as Mr. Clinton's director for defense policy and arms control on the National Security Council. "But as we look forward into ... the increasing US national interest in engaging China in all things nuclear, we're going to have to cross the Rubicon on this issue."

It's true that it's not an easy time for trust-building exercises; the current level of mistrust between Chinese and American military intentions is deep. Speaking to Congress in March, Gen. Anthony Cotton, commander of all US nuclear forces, suggested that China's rapid nuclear expansion indicated its no-first-use policy was no longer credible. The Pentagon wrote in an October report that, despite China's rhetoric, Beijing might consider using nuclear weapons first anyway during a crisis if it came down to the survival of Mr. Xi's regime, such as defeat in a war with Taiwan. It also remains unclear how exactly China would respond if its nuclear forces were hit during a conflict. Would that trigger Beijing's nuclear use? "Unknown," the Pentagon said in the report. Talking through these points of contention may help Beijing and Washington understand and appreciate the factors that go into formulating the finer points of each other's nuclear policy. The very process of dialogue and diplomacy can help the Chinese hear American concerns, and vice versa. Given the widening gulf of fear and suspicion between the two nations around Taiwan, there is no better moment for them to sit down and discuss what constitutes a credible no-first-use commitment.

It may be that an unequivocal no-first-use pledge ends up being impossible. The talks may not result in a deal anyone can agree upon, and even if a deal were to be reached, it would be impossible to verify, meaning it would be more symbolic than substantive. But that doesn't mean Washington shouldn't take up Beijing's invitation. In the increasingly endangered world of nuclear diplomacy, discussions on one treaty can still set the table for another. New START, the only remaining major arms control agreement between the United States and Russia, was built on the foundation of the original START I, which was signed two decades earlier. Under Mr. Xi, China appears to have left its policy of minimum deterrence behind. If the Biden administration is serious about arms control, it's time to look for common ground with Beijing to build new agreements for a safer future.

The New York Times

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In brief

Slater refused bail on charges

SYDNEY (Agencies): Former Australia batter Michael Slater has been refused bail and remanded in custody over domestic violence charges. Slater, 54, reportedly collapsed after being denied bail by a Queensland court and had to be helped to his feet by prison officers before being led away. He faces 19 charges relating to alleged offences between 5 December 2023 and 12 April. They include stalking, intimidation, assault occasioning bodily harm and choking or strangulation. Slater has denied any allegations of violence against the complainant. His next court appearance is scheduled for 31 May. Slater played for Australia's cricket team from 1993 to 2001, playing 74 Tests. He then forged a career as a high-profile cricket commentator, but was let go by Australia's Channel Seven in 2021.

15-year-old pacer named in Bangladesh

DHAKA (Agencies): Bangladesh have announced their 15-player squad for the five-match T20I series against India later this month. Habiba Islam Pinky, Bangladesh's 15-year-old pacer, will get a first taste of international cricket when the Tigresses welcome India for a five-match T20I series at home. The up-and-coming pacer has already featured in U19 cricket for Bangladesh earlier this year when she was part of the tri-series that also involved Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Nigar Sultana Joty will lead the side in the five-match series, with Nahida Akter acting as her deputy. Squad: Nigar Sultana Joty (Captain), Nahida Akter (Vice Captain), Murshida Khatun, Sobhana Mostary, Shorna Akter, Ritu Moni, Rabeya Khan, Sultana Khatun, Fahima Khatun, Marufa Akter, Fariha Islam Trisna, Shorifa Khatun, Dilara Akter, Rubya Haider Jhelik, Habiba Islam Pinky Stand By: Sumaiya Akter, Nishita Akter Nishi The upcoming five-match T20I series holds significant importance for both teams. Bangladesh will seize the opportunity to gauge their skills against India, while the Women in Blue will aim to acclimate themselves to the conditions in the neighbouring country, which will host the ICC Women's T20 World Cup later this year.

Maxwell takes break at IPL

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has opted to take an indefinite mental and physical health break during the Indian Premier League. Maxwell, 35, only scored 32 runs in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's first six games and asked the management to be left out of Monday's 25-run defeat by Sunrisers Hyderabad. He also took a break to protect to his mental health in 2019. "For me, personally, it was a pretty easy decision," said Maxwell. "I went to [captain] Faf du Plessis and the coaches after the last game and said I felt it was probably time we tried someone else. 'I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole.' Maxwell, who has taken four wickets this season, came into the tournament in good form with the bat, averaging 42.26 in 17 T20s since November at a strike-rate of 185.85. He scored the fastest century in 50-over World Cup history against the Netherlands and then made a maiden double century against Afghanistan as Australia went on to win their sixth title.



BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal of Spain in action against Flavio Cobolli of Italy during Second Round of Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell 2024 at Real Club De Tennis Barcelona.

Nadal wins on injury comeback at Barcelona Open

BARCELONA (AFP): Rafael Nadal made light work of Flavio Cobolli on a triumphant return from injury at the Barcelona Open on Tuesday. The 22-time Grand Slam champion had not played an ATP Tour match since January but dispatched the Italian 6-2, 6-3 in one hour and 25 minutes to reach the second round. Nadal, 37, was able to play on clay for the first time since winning the French Open in 2022 and showed flashes of his usual brilliance in a solid display. "It was a good start -- when you return you can't get rid of the doubts in one day, above all, on a physical level," Nadal told TVE. "Within what it could be, it was a good first round. He made mistakes and I think I played the game that I had to play," Nadal who has triumphed at Roland Garros a record

14 times, is hoping to play there in May in what he expects to be the final year of his professional career. The clay court king, who missed most of 2023 injured, will face Alex de Minaur on Wednesday after breezing past Cobolli. "It will be at a speed that I don't know if I will be able to keep up with, but I'll try," Nadal said of facing the 11th-ranked De Minaur. After a double fault to fall 30-0 behind Nadal found his rhythm, with Cobolli intimidated by the fervent support for the Spaniard on the court named after him. Nadal converted his third break point in the fourth game for a 3-1 lead, with Cobolli surviving four more to hold at 4-2 down. The 12-time Barcelona Open winner broke again to claim the set in 43 min-

utes, clenching his fist in celebration. Cobolli handed Nadal a break for 2-0 in the second set with two more unforced errors but finally put some pressure on Nadal's serve in the third game to break back. However Nadal broke again for 3-1 after Cobolli's third double fault and served it out to triumph. The Spaniard did not produce any aces and his serve was effective but not explosive. "I've gone months without being able to serve, (and) although I've got a lot of excitement to play here and do the best I can, I'm not going to go crazy with the serve," added Nadal. "I have to serve with caution that the moment I'm in dictates... there are moments in which I feel more liberated and others in which I'm more careful."

National Women's One-Day Tournament begins tomorrow

LAHORE (PPI): The industrial city of Faisalabad is ready to host the expanded and rebranded National Women's One-Day Tournament, which kicks off on Wednesday. Until last season, the 45-over competition was contested by three sides -- Blasters, Challengers, and Dynamites -- under the Pakistan Cup Women's Cricket Tournament banner. This year, the Pakistan Cricket Board, in its continued endeavor, support and promotion for women's cricket, has included six regional sides for the competition that will be held in a double-league 50-over format, guaranteeing each

side, at least 10, matches. The six regional sides competing in the event, which carries a total prize money of PKR2.245 million, are: Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta, and Rawalpindi. The top two sides after 30 league matches will progress to the final on 11 May, with the winning side lifting the silverware and collecting a PKR one million cheque. The venues for this important event are Jawad Club Cricket Ground, Iqbal Stadium, and Bohranwali Cricket Ground, with Saeed Ajmal Academy Ground as the reserve venue. Omaima Sohail will cap-

tain the Karachi Region, Lahore will be led by Kaynat Hafeez, Saima Malik will skipper Quetta, Humna Bilal will lead Multan, while Gull Rukh and Mahnoor Aftab will captain Peshawar and Rawalpindi, respectively. Fixtures for Wednesday: Quetta vs. Rawalpindi, Jawad Cricket Club Ground; Karachi vs. Multan, Iqbal Stadium; Peshawar vs. Lahore, Bohranwali Cricket Ground. Fixtures for Friday: Quetta vs. Peshawar, Iqbal Stadium; Lahore vs. Karachi, Jawad Club Cricket Ground; Rawalpindi vs. Multan, Bohranwali Cricket Ground.

'Great season' still possible for Bayern Munich: Harry

LONDON (Agencies): Striker Harry Kane said Tuesday that Bayern Munich still have a chance of a "great season" by winning the Champions League, before Wednesday's home quarter-final second leg against Arsenal. Bayern Munich officially ceded the title to Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen on Sunday, breaking their 11-year streak as champions. They are now staring at a first trophyless season since 2012. The England captain, still without a trophy in his career despite an array of stellar personal records, said Champions League glory would give the season a different face. "It's no secret here that the club sets out to win the Champions League every season," the 30-year-old told reporters. "You know, from the club's point of view, it will be a failed season if we don't win anything this year because we're expected to win,"

Kane said, describing it as the "harsh reality of winning and losing." "We still have the opportunity to turn the season into a great season if we win the Champions League. "The motivation is still there for us as players. If we can do something special tomorrow night of course that keeps that hope alive." Bayern Munich and Harry Kane returned from north London after a 2-2 draw at the Emirates. The abolition of the away goal rule means one tram needs to win on Wednesday to reach the final four. Harry Kane moved to Tottenham, Arsenal's north London rivals. He played his entire career at Spurs, having been released from the Gunners academy as a child. At Tottenham, he scored 14 goals in 19 games against Arsenal and added another in Bayern's visit last week. "Maybe it is in the back

of my mind that I was released at a young age (by Arsenal) there was a point to prove and I'm the kind of player who has had points to prove throughout my career. "I don't think that ever leaves you. That will always be in my DNA until I'm retired." "Now I'm here at Bayern Munich and of course, I have a history with them (Arsenal) but all I can try and do is help Bayern Munich qualify for the semi-finals of the Champions League." Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel confirmed Manuel Neuer and Leroy Sane, who missed the weekend's league win over Cologne, would return. Serge Gnabry and Kingsley Coman will be missing through injury, while Alphonso Davies is suspended. "We have one decisive match to make the next step in this beautiful competition and we're determined to bring everything to the table," Tuchel said.

'Over 40 KMC grounds have been encroached'

KARACHI (PPI): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab said Tuesday that more than 40 sports grounds of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation had been occupied by various organizations and individuals, which would be recovered from their control and opened for the citizens, no matter how powerful someone was, as safeguarding the assets of KNC was their responsibility and they would fulfill it. The swimming pool of KMC Sports Complex has been opened for citizens, family area and restaurant for members of KMC Sports Complex and Women Sports Complex Gulshan Iqbal would also be made available for members so that better recreational facilities can be provided to the citizens, he said this while presiding over a meeting in the KMC Sports Complex after a detailed visit to the Sports Complex, Kashmir Road on Tuesday. Wahab inspected the football stadium, tennis court, bowling alley and other facilities in KMC Sports Complex and issued on the spot directive to concerned officers. Addressing the meeting, Wahab said that the KMC sports complex built on an area of 40 acres should be equipped with more facilities for the citizens. He also directed the Senior Director Culture and Sports to provide the update of the KMC sports grounds in the city within seven days.

Mushtaq Ahmed appointed as Bangladesh's spin bowling coach

DHAKA (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed is set to join the Bangladesh cricket team as the spin bowling coach, confirmed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Tuesday. The 1992 World Cup winner will join the Bangladesh team later this month ahead of the T20I series against Zimbabwe and will work with them until the end of the ICC T20 World Cup 2024. BCB announced the appointment of Ahmed as the spin bowling coach through a press release. "Former Pakistan leg-spinner and World Cup

winner Mushtaq Ahmed has been appointed Bangladesh National Team Spin Bowling Coach," the press release stated. "He will join the side ahead of the preparation camp later this month for the T20 series against Zimbabwe and will work with the Bangladesh team until the end of the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 in the West Indies and the USA." Ahmed has previously served as the spin bowling coach for England (2008-2014), West Indies (2018-19) and Pakistan (2020-22). "It is a great honour for me to be a part of the Bangladesh cricket team as a spin bowling coach,"

Mushtaq Ahmed said in a statement released by BCB. "I am looking forward to the role and want to pass my experience to the players because they are very coachable and I always believe that they are one of the most dangerous teams around. "They can beat anyone because they have the capability, the resources and the talent. I will try to instil that belief into them. I am very excited at the opportunity to work with the team," he concluded. The right-handed bowler took 185 wickets in 52 Tests and 161 wickets in 144 ODIs for Pakistan.

Babar back as captain as Pakistan face New Zealand in WC build-up

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Babar Azam makes his return as Pakistan captain in a five-match Twenty20 series starting Thursday against an understrength New Zealand with the World Cup weeks away. Azam regained the captaincy last month in a shock U-turn that ended the short-lived reign of Shaheen Shah Afridi, raising fears of a rift between the players. The hosts hope that spending time together at a fitness camp at an army base will have been good for bonding. Head coach Azhar Mahmood said on Tuesday that the T20 World Cup in June in the United States and West Indies is very much on their minds. "I have full faith in the selected squad and the morale is very high in the team, so we will overcome all the shortcomings so that we can do our best in the World Cup," he told AFP. "You cannot take any team lightly in the T20 format and if New Zealand is missing their key players then there is an opportunity for their young players." Pakistan suffered major upheaval following their first-round exit from the one-day World Cup last year. Azam stepped down as captain in all three formats and head coach Mickey Arthur left along with Pakistan Cricket Board



chairman Zaka Ashraf. Mohsin Naqvi, the country's interior minister, took up the board's top post and reorganised the selection committee, paving the way for batsman Azam's return. Fast bowler Mohammad Amir and spinning all-rounder Imad Wasim also return to international cricket in this series after coming out of retirement. Youthful New Zealand New Zealand arrived in the country at the weekend, having sent a security team last month. In 2021 the Black Caps pulled out of a tour of Pakistan at the 11th hour over security fears, but returned twice in 2023. New Zealand are missing nine top players including skipper Kane Williamson because of the Indian Premier League. Stand-in skipper Michael Bracewell says it is a chance for the younger players. "I think the group of young players have come through and have played a lot of T20 cricket growing up," said Bracewell, who has returned after a year-

long injury lay-off. "They have fresh ideas on how the game should be played and as a group we will just try to play our game." Ace pacer Tim Southee, the world's top wicket-taker in Twenty20 internationals with 157, is rested. The experienced duo of Adam Milne and Finn Allen suffered injuries a day before the team's departure. All-rounder Zac Foulkes, hard-hitting batsman Tim Robinson and seamer Will O'Rourke are uncapped in T20s. The first three games of the series are in Rawalpindi, with Lahore hosting the last two. Teams (from): Pakistan: Babar Azam (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Amir, Irfan Niazi, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Usama Mir, Usman Khan, Zaman Khan New Zealand: Michael Bracewell (captain), Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConehille, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi, Zac Foulkes, Tom Blundell.

Paris 2024 Games flame lit in ancient Olympia

ANCIENT OLYMPIA (AFP/APP): The sacred flame for the Paris 2024 Olympics was lit Tuesday in Olympia, Greece, the birthplace of the ancient Games, in a ceremony inspired by antiquity and marked by messages of hope amid multiple global crises. "In ancient times, the Olympic Games brought together the Greek city states, even - and in particular - during times of war and conflict," said International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach. "Today, the Olympic Games are the only event that brings the entire world together in peaceful competition. Then as now, the Olympic athletes are sending this powerful message: yes, it is possible to compete fiercely against each other and at the same time live peacefully together under one roof," he said. Owing to cloudy weather, Greek actresses in the role of ancient priestesses used a flame lit in a rehearsal Monday in the 2,600-year-old Temple of Hera, near the stadium where the Olympics were born in 776 BC. Carrying the flame in a pot, Greek actress Mary Mina lit the torch for the first bearer, 2020 Olympic rowing champion Stefanos Ntouskos. Retired French swimmer Laure Manaudou, who won her first gold medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, followed as France's first torchbearer in Olympia. - 'Inclusive' Games - Officials on Tuesday



stressed that the Paris Games will set new milestones, following the legacy of the other two prior Olympics held in the French capital. "The Olympic Flame will shine over the first Olympic Games inspired by our Olympic Agenda reforms from start to finish," Bach said. "These Olympic Games will be younger, more inclusive, more urban, more sustainable. These will be the very first Olympic Games with full gender parity, because the IOC allocated exactly 50 percent of the places to female and male athletes," he said. Paris Olympics chief organiser Tony Estanguet noted that women took part for the first time in the Paris 1900 Games, while the first Olympic Village was created for the Paris 2024 Games. For the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic imposed toned-down events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and 2022 Beijing Winter Games, the ceremo-

ny was back with full regalia and scores of spectators. Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou, French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo were present at the ceremony. American mezzo soprano Joyce DiDonato delivered the Olympic anthem. The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Games. During the 11-day relay on Greek soil, some 600 torchbearers will carry the flame over a distance of 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) through 41 municipalities. - Security concerns - The Olympic flame will be handed over to Paris 2024 organisers in a ceremony at the all-marble Panathenaic Stadium, site of the first modern Olympic Games of 1896, on April 26. Nana Mouskouri, the 89-year-old Greek singer with a worldwide following, has

been invited to perform at the ceremony. On April 27, the flame will begin its journey to France on board the 19th-century three-masted barque Belem, which was launched just weeks after the Athens 1896 Games. A French historical monument, the Belem carried out trade journeys to Brazil, Guyana and the Caribbean for nearly two decades. France's last surviving three-mast steel-hulled boat, it is expected to arrive in Marseille on May 8. Ten thousand torchbearers will then carry the flame across 64 French territories. It will travel through 400 towns and dozens of tourist attractions during its 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) journey through mainland France and overseas French territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific. On July 26 it will form the centrepiece of the Paris Olympics opening ceremony. The ceremony is planned to be held on the river Seine -- the first time it has not been held in the Games' main stadium. However, French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday said it could be moved to the national stadium in the event of a security threat. Macron said instead of teams sailing down the Seine on barges, the ceremony could be "limited to the Trocadero" building across the river from the Eiffel Tower or "even moved to the Stade de France".



In brief

Four gamblers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested four gamblers on cock fights and recovered four mobile phones, stake money Rs 35,000, 13 motorcycles, four chickens and other items from their possession during a crackdown here on Tuesday, informed a police spokesman. According to the details, Taxila Police held four gamblers identified as Waqar, Umar, Abdul Wajid and Imran. Police have registered a case against all the accused and further investigation is in progress. Superintendent of Police, Potohar appreciated the performance of the police team adding that gambling was the root of other evils and action against such elements would be continued.

IRSA releases 188,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 188,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 301,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1423.30 feet and was 25.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 66,900 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1113.50 feet, which was 63.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 78,700 cusecs and 27,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 95,900, 38,800, 35,100 and 7,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 137,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 13,600 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

Police searched "Dhoke Syedan"

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police on special directive of City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Mahmood Hamdani conducted search operation in "Dhoke Syedan" and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of Race Course Police Station here on Tuesday. According to police spokesman, heavy police contingents, Elite Force, Special Branch personnel and Ladies police under the supervision of senior police officers of Race Course Police Station carried out search operation. During operation, police have searched 19 houses and collected data of 06 tenants. However, no arrest was made on the occasion. The spokesman informed that the search operations to net criminals and proclaimed offenders are being conducted in different areas regularly.

3-day training program on AI

ISLAMABAD (APP): A three-day faculty training program on "Empowering Educators: Integrating AI into Teaching Practices" has started in Allama Iqbal Open University (AIKU). The program is being organized in collaboration with Directorate of Academic Planning and Course Production, AIKU and Commonwealth Educational Media Center for Asia (CEMCA). This program aims to educate teachers about artificial intelligence tools and technologies and how to use them effectively in teaching methods. The inaugural session was presided over by Dean, Faculty of Education, Prof. Dr. Fazal ur Rehman, while Director, CEMCA, Dr. Basheerhamad participated online as the Chief Guest.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Mehmet Pacaci called on Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif.

Rawalpindi Police elevates 43 ASIs and 24 HCs to higher ranks

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region Babar Sarfraz Alpa has issued promotion orders of 43 Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASIs) and 24 Head Constables on the recommendations of the departmental board. A special departmental board was formed and chaired by RPO Rawalpindi Region Babar Sarfraz Alpa, while the board members included City Police Officer Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani, DPO Attock Dr Sardar Ghiyas Gul Khan, DPO Chakwal Captain (ret'd) Wahid Mahmood and DPO Jhelum Nasir Mahmood Bajwa. The board made its recommendations after checking the excellent service record and all the data of all the personnel, based on these recommendations, 43 ASIs were promoted to Sub-Inspectors (SI) whereas 24 head constables were promoted to the post of (ASI).

Among those who were

promoted to the post of Sub-Inspector (SI) from ASI are Muhammad Maqsood, Ijaz Mahmood, Abid Ali, Arshad Mahmood, Nawaz Hussain, Muhammad Fayaz, Babar Khan, Ishtiaq Ali, Murtaza Aslam, Imad Anwar, Sagheer Ahmed, Saqib Sattar, Muhammad Arsalan, Muhammad Faisal, Shahid Akhtar, Zakir Hussain, Azhar Iqbal, Nauman Mahmood, Muhammad Kamran, Sadaqat Ali, Imran Mahmood, Amir Hussain, Muhammad Ramzan, Naeqeb Al Hasan, Aamir Ali, Anshahyat Khan, Shahid Mahmood, Numan Shehzad, Saeeda Akram, Nabeel Javed, Qasim Hussain, Adil Hussain, while among those promoted subject to the completion of Pending Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) are Muhammad Altaf, Aamir Mahmood, Saroor Mehdi, Basheer Ahmed, Khalid Mahmood, Muhammad Farooq, Khurram Shehzad, Rashid Ali, Akmal Khan, Adnan Sikandar, Azad Khan, while among those promoted

to the post of ASI from Head Constable, Sattar Ahmed, Shahzad Akhtar, Muhammad Faisal Iqbal, Yasir Ali, Syed Muhammad Ali, Aamir Ali Khan, Kamran Rasheed, Waqar Haider, Ijaz Yusuf, Aamir Shahzad, Arif Mahmood, Abdul Salam, Imran Adalat, Naseer Ahmed, Asif Ali, Wasim Akhtar, Muhammad Mursaleen, Muhammad Aqeel, Muhammad Irfan, Aamir Khan, Muhammad Ikram, Shehbaz Ahmad, while those promoted subject to the completion of Pending ACRs include Faheem Khan, Ahmed Nawaz.

Expressing his congratulations to the newly promoted officials, RPO Babar Sarfraz emphasized the importance of diligent and dedicated service in fulfilling the enhanced responsibilities that come with their new ranks. He reiterated that these promotions align with the directives of the Inspector General of Punjab, ensuring timely recognition of exemplary performance within the force.

PPAF distributes relief items among affected families

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) has distributed relief items among affected families in light of the dire situation caused by the heavy rainfall in Gwadar. According to an official source, "PPAF extended its hands to the families affected by the floods, aiming to alleviate their immediate needs for food and support". The PPAF had swiftly executed the distribution of these items before Eid-ul-Fitr, ensuring that these families felt included and relieved during these challenging times. PPAF provided the relief items including providing nutritious ration packs, essential hygiene kits, and household items to 400 families who were hit hardest by the floods across 08 wards of the Surbandar union council.

The initiative has been executed with the invaluable support of PPAF's local partner SPO. With presence in 147 districts of the country through its partnerships with 130 organisations, PPAF initiated strategic development from grassroots levels prioritizing the communities in the direst conditions first, so the society moves towards a secure future, together. The institution's strategic approach through time has focused on building and supporting value-based institutions of, for and by the people that is essential for giving voice to and empowering them.

Bilawal meets PPP delegation from Gilgit-Baltistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday met with the PPP delegation of Gilgit-Baltistan Chapter.

The delegation comprised Amjad Advocate, Jameel Ahmed, Engineer Ismail, Sadia Danish, Imran Nadeem,

Ayub Shah, Shahzad Agha and Kulsoom Mehdi, a press release said.

They informed Bilawal Bhutto about the overall political situation in Gilgit-Baltistan. Bilawal Bhutto assured the delegation to raise the political issues of Gilgit-Baltistan at the federal level.

Eid Special Trains gets passengers' overwhelming response

ISLAMABAD (APP): The special trains on Eid ul Fitr introduced by Pakistan Railways had received an overwhelming response from thousands of travelers who visited their loved ones in their native towns through having a comfortable traveling experience.

The passengers have expressed their gratitude to Pakistan Railways for facilitating them on Eid ul Fitr through special trains which saved their precious time and money, making their journeys memorable.

A large number of passengers with families were seen at the railway stations according to whom the staff at the stations was quite helpful in informing them about timing of trains, platforms' numbers, ticketing and booking issues.

Talking to APP Azhar Rahjou who arrived at Rawalpindi Railway Station from Karachi said that Pakistan Railways had won the passengers' hearts through completing Eid trains operation with a lot of improvement. Another passenger, Muhammad Ehsan said that the services being provided by the management were very much improved while all the railway stations were neat and clean.

Muhammad Ehsan said that although the tracks were not in good condition across the country, the timing of the trains

was also improved as compared to the previous years. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan Railways has run four special trains on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr to facilitate the passengers leaving for their native towns to celebrate the auspicious occasion with their dear ones.

According to the schedule issued by Pakistan Railways, the first Eid special train departed from Karachi to Peshawar and the other from Karachi Cantonment to Lahore. As per the schedule, the first special train left Karachi for Peshawar on April 07 at 6:00 am while the second special train left from Quetta to Rawalpindi on the same day at 10:00 am.

The third train left from Karachi Cantonment to Lahore on April 08 at 9:00 pm while the last Eid special passenger train left from Lahore to Karachi on April 09 at 5:00 pm.

On the other hand, Pakistan Railways Police had also tightened security arrangements in trains as well as at stations to avoid any untoward incident during Eid-ul-Fitr vacations. The department had directed all superintendents (SPs) of Railways Police to depute sufficient force at exit and entry points of all railway stations and strictly watch to be carried out of suspicious persons, he added.

Rains may escalate breeding of dengue larvae: DC

RAWALPINDI (APP): The present spell of rains could escalate the breeding of dengue larvae, which needed immediate steps to tackle it. Deputy Commissioner Hassan Waqar Cheema said this while chairing a meeting to review anti-dengue arrangements here at his office. He directed the departments concerned to implement Anti-dengue SOPs in letter and spirit and create awareness among the people about the hazardous virus.

that after conducting indoor and outdoor surveillance, completely clear the areas affected by the dengue virus last year. The DC also asked the people to remove stagnant water in outdoor and household settings to stop mosquitoes from breeding after rain and submerged water.

Meanwhile, the District Healthy Authority (DHA) had sealed 47 premises and lodged 47 FIRs on violations of anti-dengue SOPs from January 1 to date, said District Coordinator

Epidemics Prevention and Control Dr Sajjad Mahmood. The health officer said that the district administration, in collaboration with allied departments had issued tickets to 112 and a fine of Rs 199,000 was imposed on violations of dengue SOPs in 2024. Dr Sajjad informed that around four confirmed cases had been reported in the district this year, while the number was two in 2022, and 2023 during the period.

IIUI ranked among top 51-100 in QS World subject rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) has been named as one of the world's top universities and placed among 51-100 in the subjects of Theology, Divinity & Religious Studies and is placed at 351-400 in Mathematics across the world in the latest 2024 edition by the world's top most university rankings agency QS (Quacquarelli Symonds).

In addition, for the first time the university is placed in Physics at 601-640 across the world in the latest edition by the world's top most university rankings agency QS.

Earlier, IIUI was ranked 249th in QS Asia University Rankings 2024 as well as IIUI was placed at 49th position in QS Southern Asia University Rankings 2024 by QS. IIUI Rector, Dr Samina Malik and President, Dr Hathal Homoud Alotaibi while expressing gratitude for the achievement congratulated the academic and administrative staff of the institution and hoped that they would remain committed to the university in the future by continuing their hard work so that the institution gets the top slot in all world rankings in the future. They specially appreciated the hard work of Director Quality Assurance Department (QAD) and his team.

The recent positive results generated by

IIUI are outcome of continued reforms and initiatives introduced by the university management that includes preparation of university's new strategic plan that also helped in gleaning exact view of the university accomplishments on scientific basis. The university leadership believes that upcoming ranking will be much positive as new reforms and initiatives have entered into the advanced stages through various steps taken such as implementation of the university's strategic plan.

The university leadership has also lauded the efforts of all relevant quarters including Departments from the Faculty of Usul uddin, Mathematics and Physics as well as other faculty members and research scholars publishing in cross-cut/overlapping areas from IRI, Dawah Academy, Faculty of Shariah & Law, Faculty of Arabic, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering and CAEP contributing towards the Research citation per paper, H-index and International research network by broad faculty area.

Director Quality Assurance Department Dr Rehmat Ellahi has vowed that in the supervision of the varsity leaderships, the efforts with the help of the varsity researchers and the departments will continue to bring IIUI further high in international rankings.

529 teachers of FDE schools, colleges granted promotion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has approved the time scale promotion of as many as 529 teachers of federal government educational institutions working under the ambit of the Federal Directorate of Education. According to the notification issued here yesterday, 529 teachers have been given time scale promotion in the next grade, which includes vice principals, principals, and associate professors of schools and colleges. As per details, the meeting of the Departmental Promotion Committee(DPC) to develop the time scale for the teachers of government educational institutions was held on January 5, 2024, but the notification was delayed due to various reasons.

Secretary Education Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani gave orders to issue notification by immediately approving the recommendations of DPC.

Leaders of Federal Teacher Organizations, Fazal Mola, Malik Ameer Khan, Mansoor Shah, and others have expressed their gratitude to the Secretary of Education and said that teachers have the basic right to development, which will improve their performance.

According to the notification, 13 principals were given Grade 21, 90 assistant professors have been promoted to grade 19, and 173 vice principals have also been promoted to grade 19. Similarly, 103 assistant professors and principals have been promoted to grade 20, while 8 deputy headmistresses have been also

promoted to grade 20.

Teachers leaders Fazal Mollah, Malik Amir Khan, and Mansoor Ali Shah have said in a joint statement that Secretary Education Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani has given basic rights to teachers by promoting them.

They said that the Secretary Education has implemented the best reforms in the education system, the results of which will be seen soon, adding, that empowering the heads of the institutions will be an important milestone for the best performance of the employees of the institutions. The teachers have also thanked Senior Joint Secretary Sohail Akhtar Malik, Director Promotion Muhammad Luqman, SO Promotion Rashid Marwat, and other concerned authorities.

Tandoors/Nan-bais defy govt's Roti, Naan price reduction in ICT

ISLAMABAD (APP): In response to this initiative of the Punjab government, the federal capital has also reduced the prices of bread and naan by fixing their prices at Rs 16 and Rs 20 respectively, however, Tandoor and Nanbai kept their prices while refusing to obey the government order. The district administration issued a notification fixing the prices of Roti and Naan at Rs 16 and Rs 20 for a standard serving size of 120 grams. Assistant Commissioners and Price Control Magistrates have been tasked with ensuring the enforcement of these new prices across Islamabad.

In line with Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon's instructions, Assistant Commissioner Secretariat Abdullah Khan convened a meeting with the Nanbai Association to discuss the implementation of the revised prices. Despite these efforts, Tandoors/Nan-bais in the twin cities are standing firm on their prices, declining to reduce them as per the government's rates.

Talking to APP, a citizen namely

Muhammad Tassawar, a resident of the Sohan area lamented the lack of reduction in prices at local Tandoors and Nan-bais, where Roti was still being sold at Rs 20 and Naan at Rs 25. Similarly, Shabeer Hussain from the G-8 area, highlighted that despite the government's intervention, Tandoors and Nan-bais in the Federal Capital were selling Roti at Rs 25 and Naan at Rs 30, placing a financial burden on the residents.

When contacted by the Spokesman of ICT, Dr. Abdullah Tabassum, he assured that strict action would be taken against those violating the price regulations.

He emphasized that Assistant Commissioners and Magistrates have been assigned specific tasks to ensure compliance with the new Roti and Naan prices in Islamabad.

Price Magistrates impose fines on 68 'Tandoors' for profiteering: Price Magistrates while conducting raids across Rawalpindi district checked prices of Roti and Naan during last 24 hours and imposed fines

on 68 'Tandoors' for profiteering.

Punjab government had fixed the price of 100 grams Roti at Rs16, while the price of 120 grams Naan at Rs 20, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hassan Waqar Cheema said. He informed that more than 100 'Tandoors' were checked during last 24 hours while 68 were found guilty of violating the fixed rates of Roti and Naan. Fines amounting to Rs 170,000 were imposed on the violators, he added. Seven violators were also sent behind the bars while four 'Tandoors' were sealed during the campaign launched against the profiteers, the DC said.

All available resources were being utilized to ensure implementation of the fixed prices of Roti and Naan, he added. A district administration spokesman said that on the instructions of the DC, Hassan Waqar Cheema, the Price Magistrates were mobilized to ensure implementation of the prices of Naan and Roti, issued by the Punjab government across the district.



ISLAMABAD: NDMA & IRC representatives exchanging documents after signing LoU for Cooperation on Disaster Resilience & Preparedness at IRC Headquarters.

Torkham border closed

KABUL (Khaama Press): Officials in Nangarhar province say that once again, the Torkham border crossing has been closed to Afghan patients by Pakistan. National radio and television reported on Tuesday, April 16th, that from today onwards, patients without legal documents such as passports and visas will not be allowed entry into Pakistan. According to the reports, around 7:00 PM last night, April 15th, Pakistan closed its borders to patients.

'150 check dams to be constructed'

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Water and Energy says it plans to build 155 check dams in a number of provinces this year. A check dam is a small dam constructed across a drainage ditch, swale, or channel to lower the velocity of flow. Reduced runoff velocity reduces erosion and gully in the channel and allows sediments to settle out. Spokesman for MoWE, told Pajhwok that last year the ministry had planned to construct 140 check dams and 50 of them were constructed and the rest were under construction.

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

Acting Foreign Minister urges Afghans abroad to contribute to national development



KABUL (BNA): The Acting Foreign Minister held a meeting with Afghan scholars and cultural figures residing abroad, encouraging them to actively participate in Afghanistan's journey towards progress and prosperity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office reported that Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi discussed national issues, government progress, and unity with 12 Afghan

expatriates living in European countries. He acknowledged the challenges Afghanistan has faced over the years but highlighted the current positive developments, including the establishment of an Islamic system, improved security, and the fulfillment of long-held aspirations for happiness.

He emphasized that every Afghan has a role to play in the reconstruction, progress, and development of the country and the strengthening of the Islamic system. Participants at the meeting expressed their support for the current system in Afghanistan and shared reform proposals with Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi aimed at enhancing the system and advancing the nation.

The importance of ongoing dialogue and addressing the needs of Afghan residents abroad, particularly in the consular section, was underscored as a key outcome of the meeting. The continuation of such sessions was also emphasized to further engage Afghan expatriates in contributing to the progress of their homeland.

Hekmatyar slams US for 'occupying' Afghanistan's airspace

KABUL (Ariana News): Former Jihadi leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has criticized the United States for patrolling Afghanistan's airspace with drones.

Hekmatyar said in a speech Tuesday that any form of American presence in Afghanistan is unacceptable. "Afghanistan's airspace is under occupation. Expressing this issue is our religious responsibility. We have sacrificed the most for freedom. We do not accept any presence of America. We do not accept any kind of foreign rule," he said.

Hekmatyar also stated that there is a possibility of American troops entering the country again.

[Former] President Trump's national security advisor says that their departure was a mistake and that they should return. This is not an ordinary issue. The possibility that they will make a mistake again and return to



Afghanistan is very strong," he said.

The Islamic Emirate has not commented so far on Hekmatyar's remarks, but it has confirmed sightings of drones over Afghanistan.

"It is required that the respected officials of the caretaker government give explanations on this matter and respond to the concerns of the Afghan people in this matter, because important

and great national issues are important for every Afghan citizen and if there is a problem, it will be a cause of concern for everyone," said Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazin, a university lecturer.

Baradar visits flood-hit areas of Uruzgan province

URUZGAN (Ariana News): Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, visited flood-hit areas of Uruzgan province where he met with local officials and members of the public.

During his visit, Baradar assessed the impact of the floods and ordered necessary assistance to be provided. He assured the people of the government's commitment to supporting those affected by the disaster. Emphasizing the importance of effective governance, Baradar urged provincial officials to prior-

itize the welfare of vulnerable citizens and underscored the sacrifices made by the people in establishing the Islamic system.

He also said the people had a right to a peaceful life under the Islamic Emirate.

Baradar also said the government had an obligation to promptly address the needs of citizens across the country in times of crises.

Residents of Uruzgan province in turn expressed their satisfaction with the responsiveness of civil and military authorities under the Islamic Emirate. They lauded the government's intervention during times of

need and expressed optimism about the elimination of hatred, ethnic biases, and hypocrisy under Islamic Emirate, heralding a new era of unity and stability for Afghanistan.

Baradar also visited Kajaki Dam in neighboring Helmand province on Monday where he praised officials for work done on the dam.

He said the Kajaki Dam project was of national value and vital to the well-being of the country.

Baradar said that due to recent droughts and the lack of water in dams, the level of electricity produc-

tion had also decreased, but that this year, thanks to heavy rains in the country, the water levels had increased and many of the dams, including Kajaki Dam are overflowing.

He said this will boost harvests this year and that electricity production in the country will also increase. Kajaki Dam is one of the largest dams in the country and was built in the Kajaki district of Helmand province to control seasonal floods on the Helmand River, irrigate agricultural lands and generate electricity.

Uzbek and Qatari leaders discuss Trans-Afghan Railway project

KABUL (Ariana News): Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani for talks on a number of issues including the Trans-Afghan Railway project.

The two leaders also discussed bilateral trade issues, strengthening of relations and regional matters, including the escalation situation in the Middle East. In October 2023, Uzbekistan Railways JSC presented the Trans-Afghan Railway project to Qatar's Ministry of

Transport.

Subsequently, deliberations were held on Qatar's involvement in the project's execution. In February 2021, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan signed a roadmap for the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway con-

struction. The envisioned transport corridor, estimated at approximately \$5 billion, aims to connect Europe, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Southeast Asian nations, boasting a transit capacity of up to 20 million tons of cargo.



Deputy PM Kabir deems Iran's attack on Israel a justifiable self-defense

KABUL (BNA): The Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir in a meeting with Iran's Deputy Ambassador in Kabul, labeled the country's attack on Israel as justifiable self-defense. According to a statement from ARG, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, held a meeting with Seyyed Hassan Mortezaei, Iran's Deputy Ambassador in Kabul.

In this meeting, in addition to appreciating the

position of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on international issues, Seyyed Hassan Mortezaei has called for the expansion of relations between Kabul and Tehran.

Mortezaei stated that Tehran advocates for the continuation of positive relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors and strives to facilitate the Islamic Emirate's positive interaction with regional countries.

According to him, opponents of the Islamic Emirate in Iran, as ordinary immigrants, live and are not allowed to engage in political activities.

"Tehran is prepared to cooperate in economic, trade, and healthcare sectors with Afghanistan by facilitating the implementation of agreements reached between Iran and the Islamic Emirate in various fields," he added.

For his part, Mawlawi

Abdul Kabir, the Deputy PM for Political Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, deemed Iran's attack on Israel as a justifiable defense.

He further emphasized the development of relations between Kabul and Tehran, while expressing gratitude for Iran's assistance and cooperation with Afghans, stating that the Islamic Emirate is eager to maintain good relations with all its neighbors.

Customs offices urge for timely resolution of traders and clients' issues

KABUL(BNA): Mufti Abdul Matin Sayed, the Head of General Customs at the Ministry of Finance, underscored the importance of addressing the concerns of traders and clients during a meeting with customs chiefs from Kandahar, Nimroz, and Farah.

According to the Bakhtar News Agency, during this meeting, the Head of General Customs at the Ministry of Finance advised the officials of the mentioned customs to accurately document, price, inspect, and laboratory-test commercial goods.

He further emphasized the need for customs officials to work beyond the specified timeframe to



complete the procedures related to commercial

goods. He urged for inter-

adherence to administrative procedures.

US military review: ISIS Kabul airport bombing in 2021 not preventable

KABUL (Khaama Press): A recent U.S. military review has revealed that the perpetrator behind the bombing outside Kabul airport in August 2021, which resulted in the deaths of 170 Afghans and 13 American service members, was an Islamic State operative.

He had previously been detained in a coalition facility in Afghanistan but was released by the Taliban, marking the first identification of his involvement.

Despite claims from certain service members present at the airport on that fateful day, who asserted they had identified the suicide bomber and were instructed not to intervene, a review determined they had targeted the wrong individual. Consequently, the strike was deemed unpreventable.

"There was no opportunity to engage the bomber prior to the attack," according to a high-ranking U.S. military official familiar with the supplemental

review. The US military confirmed that Abdul Rahman al-Logari, a Daesh bomber at Kabul Airport, had been released from prison after the Taliban took control.

"With access to analysis from across the intelligence community, we were able to identify the Abbey Gate person-borne IED bomber as Abdul Rahman al-Logari, an [ISIS-K] member since 2016," said one Army official on the 12-person, joint supplemental review team.

CENTCOM released its findings on the Kabul airport bombing of August 2021, on Monday, amid the tumultuous withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, following a suicide attack that killed 13 US soldiers and 170 Afghans. Tyler Andrews, a former US Marine, testified to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March this year that he and his colleagues had spotted a suspicious man who might

have been a Daesh attacker, but their requests for action were denied at the time.

The US military also identified for the first time the suicide bomber at Kabul airport as Abdul Rahman al-Logari, a member of ISIS-K, who was imprisoned in Afghanistan and released after the Taliban took over.

Members of the Kabul Airport incident investigation team provided images of the suspected man to some reporters, identifying him as a potential threat, but after comparing the

image with al-Logari, they concluded they were not the same person.

Meanwhile, the US Department of Defense, shortly after the incident, announced the primary perpetrator of the Kabul airport attack as Kabeer Idiri and claimed that Idiri was killed in a US airstrike on August 27. According to recent US military reviews, the suspected Daesh militant was seen around 7 a.m. local time at Kabul Airport and was not seen after 10 a.m., nearly seven hours before the bombing occurred.



Balochistan faces wrath of devastating flash floods

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Rainfall played havoc with various parts of Balochistan as flash floods hit several districts of the southwestern province. Harnai and adjoining areas experience flooding in local rivers and nullahs as land link with several areas severed. Traffic could not be restored at Harnai-Quetta-Punjab highway for the fourth day.

Flooding has damaged railway track suspending railway traffic on Sibi-Harnai railway section for second day. Railway officials have said that the repair work has been started at the track. Chagai district administration has said that some vehicles carrying picnickers were swept away in flooding water. "The vehicles were destroyed but the passengers survived by fleeing to the nearby hills," district administration stated.

At Toba Kakari in Pishin a local dam developed breach. "The PDMA and irrigation department staff filled earth around the dam to strengthen it," DC Jumadad Mandokhel said. "The earth filling has been made in the dam's outer part after 48 years," deputy commissioner shared. Floodwater of Nari River in Naseerabad district has entered in Bala Nari. The local people being evacuated to safer places while the wheat crop standing on several acres in Mithri has been destroyed in flooding.

Pakistan Meteorological Department has forecast more rains amid devastating flash floods in Balochistan. According to the Met Office, more rains are expected in the province till April 19. During the last 24 hours, 33 mm of rainfall recorded in Quetta, 28 mm in Sibbi, Dalbandin and Zhob 19 mm, Kalat 16, Sumingli 11, Barkhan 07, Lasbela 05 and Nokundi 2mm. On Monday, strong winds and gusty winds prevailed in Gwadar, Kech, Panjur and Turbat.

Operation ongoing in katcha area: Sharjeel

F.P. Report

KARACHI: An anti-bandit operation ongoing in katcha area and the situation has improved, provincial minister Sharjeel Memon claimed here while talking to media on Tuesday.

Information Minister Sharjeel Memon said that the law and order is not only Sindh's problem, but also a nationwide issue. He said, 11 outlaws have been killed in encounters in April in Karachi, while 60 accused were arrested in injured condition. "Overall, 104 accused arrested this month," Sindh's minister said.

He said those involved in murders during robberies are mostly illegal immigrants. He suggested compensation for the families of the street crime victims dying during crime. "If the MQM intends politicking over street crimes, we don't care about their any line of action," he said.

"Sindh's home minister and IG Sindh Police are present in Shikarpur," commenting on situation in katcha area the minister said. "We will soon control the situation," he said. Provincial information minister blamed the caretaker government for worsening law and order in the province.

He claimed that 13 hostages have been recovered in Ghotki, Kashmore and other areas in last 15 days. "Three abductees of Shikarpur have also been recovered," he said. "Six persons were saved from being kidnapped under honey trap," he said.

PTI founder will be out of jail very soon, says KP CM

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister and PTI leader Ali Amin Gandapur said on Tuesday that cases against PTI founder were fake and this system was being exposed day by day.

KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, while talking to media outside the court in Rawalpindi, said, "We respect the judiciary and have appeared before the court. It is necessary to form a commission to probe the allegations leveled by Islamabad High Court judges."

He said beneficiaries of Form 47 were sent to the house by stealing the mandate of PTI founder. "We and the people stand by the PTI founder. The war will continue until real liberty is achieved. Gandapur said that one day the people making a new experiment will be exposed. "What kind of system are you installing in this country? When the conscience of people wakes up, they say such guys are mentally sick. You cannot stop people from speaking truth by instituting fake FIRs," he said.

He said PTI founder will be out very soon and he will be the prime minister of this country. Gandapur said he had been made the chief minister of a province by the PTI founder. The PTI leader asked the rulers

to accept their mistake and avoid pushing the country further into darkness.

He said after the letter written by the judges, everything was crystal clear. All the decisions made by courts went against PTI and its founder. "The rulers have no clue what to do now. They think they will deceive the nation and make them fools," he said.

Earlier, Gandapur appeared in the anti-terrorism court in a case in which his non-bailable arrest warrant was issued. The court granted bail to Gandapur in 12 cases relating to May 9 incidents. The court also ordered the KP chief minister to submit surety bonds.

PTI labels PML-N-led govt as 'pickpocket for siphoning off people's earning': Hitting hard the PML-N-led government over soaring inflation, PTI Central General Secretary Omar Ayub Khan has said the incumbent rulers are siphoning off people's hard-earned money like pick-pockets.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad on Tuesday, Ayub, who is also the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, said: "[Prime Minister] Shehbaz Sharif is siphoning off money from people's pocket."

He slammed the government for its "failure" in providing immediate relief to the inflation-hit masses

and said: "Unemployment and inflation are on the rise in the country." In his fierce presser, the PTI leader also criticised the Maryam Nawaz-led Punjab government for its popular decision about reducing the price of roti (flat bread made in tandoor) to Rs16, saying that she did not now about the "economy".

To a question, Ayub welcomed the Saudi delegation in the country and said: "PTI will welcome whoever invests in Pakistan." A day earlier, a high-level delegation of Saudi Arabia led by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah arrived in Pakistan on a two-day official visit. The development came after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, during a recent meeting with PM Shehbaz, reaffirmed that Riyadh would never leave Islamabad alone.

He further said that Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar should have issued a statement on Iran-Israel tensions. The PTI leader also slammed the incumbent government over the lack of healthcare facilities for former first lady Bushra Bibi in the Bani Gala sub-jail. "Cameras have been installed in Bushra Bibi's room and washrooms," he added. The PTI leader said: "We are patriotic citizens. We have to take Pakistan forward."

Former CM security: PHC orders govt to submit reply

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprised Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Syed Arshad Ali ordered Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for submission reply against removal of security from former Chief Ministers on Mahmood Khan plea, on Tuesday.

The counsel Shumail Ahmad Butt advocate argued for provision of security as the provincial government sacked earlier. He further added that firstly two personnel will be deployed for security of former Chief Minister then it is increased eight guards.

However, Justice Ijaz Anwar remarked that the providing eight security personnel to lay burden on public exchequer and argued for adaptation of simplicity will be better. If someone facing threats then it is entertainable, Justice Ijaz observed.

The petitioner is former Chief Minister and politicians are facing more threats than common man, the counsel argued. He

added that any unfortunate with Chief Minister will raise serious question regarding security of the province.

In the meantime, Justice SM Attique observed that session judges, commissioners and deputy commissioners will also ask for provision of security in future. He added that session judges are more vulnerable to threats because they are granting judgement to convict outlaws. PHC's divisional bench issued notice to provincial government and ordered for submission of reply in the regard while adjourned further hearing.

Meanwhile, PHC similar ordered both federal and provincial government for submission reply against enlisting Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) backed Member National Assembly Ali Khan Jadoon in Provisional National Identification List (PNIL) within seven days. The counsel Ali Azeem advocate argued for removal of Ali Khan from PNIL while PHC adjourned hearing after initial arguments.

PTI four lawmakers bail extended: Special

Anti-Corruption Court Khyber Pakhtunkhwa extended bail of former Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser, his brother Asad Ullah, Rangeez Khan and Shahram Khan till 14th May in illegal recruitment case. During hearing Shahram Khan, Aqib Ullah and Rangeez Khan appeared before Special Anti-corruption court Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Asad Qaiser was absent from the proceedings.

According to prosecution, Shahram Tarakai, Muhammad Ali Tarakai, Asad Qaiser, Aqib Ullah and Rangeez Khan are nominated two cases of illegal recruitment in Swabi district. The accused had obtained interim bail from concerned court in the case, the prosecution pleaded.

Former Minister Shahram Tarakai asked Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to quash fabricated cases against PTI workers and argued for punishment of culprits involved in corruption. This he asked while addressing media personnel at Peshawar High Court.

Iran 'frees' Pakistanis onboard seized Israeli cargo ship

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Iranian government Tuesday allowed the two Pakistanis aboard an Israeli ship to return to Pakistan, diplomatic sources told media.

According to the sources, Iran permitted the release of the Pakistani captives following efforts by the Foreign Office. They added that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam assured the release of both Pakistanis, further sharing that the Iranian ambassador made the assurance in a meeting at the FO.

"Iran has informed that Pakistani personnel are free to return home," the sources said, adding that the captain of the ship has the power to disembark whenever his crew allows. At least two

Pakistanis, among the 25-member crew, were on board the cargo ship seized by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) — the elite force that lost seven members, including two generals, in the Syria strike — near the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday.

The development came after the family of one of the Pakistani nationals onboard the Israel-linked container ship asked the government of Pakistan for help. Muhammad Adnan Aziz — the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Portugal-flagged MSC Aries — was on the ship seized by Iran's forces, along with another Pakistani.

His family lives in Karachi and Azad Kashmir and some of his relatives live in London who shared their worries with the media. The

vessel was seized by Iran amid rising tensions across the region after a deadly Israeli attack on Iran's consulate in Syria, killing senior IRGC commander Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi.

The vessel — identified as the Portugal-flagged MSC Aries — had departed from a port in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) en route to India. It is associated with the London-based Zodiac Maritime, a part of the Zodiac Group run by Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer and his family. White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the ship's crew comprised of Indian, Filipino, Pakistani, Russian, and Estonian nationals, and pushed back against the vessel's seizure.



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud, along with his high level delegation, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

ECP suspends notification of Balochistan PA speaker's win

QUETTA (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has suspended the notification of Abdul Khaliq Khan's victory in the general elections and ordered re-polling at 12 polling stations in the provincial constituency PB-51 (Chaman) on April 21.

The decision comes after petitions were filed by Mr. Khan's opponents, Muhammad Asghar Achakzai of the Awami National Party (ANP), Abasin Achakzai, and Muhammad Sadiq, alleging irregularities in the polling process. Mr. Khan had won the PB-51 seat with 20,390 votes, defeating Mr. Achakzai, who received 19,623 votes. However, the losing candidates challenged the results, accusing the ECP of rigging the polls.

The ECP, after reviewing the petitions, ordered re-polling at 12 polling stations: 56, 57, 61, 62, 79, 89, 90, 91, 95, 106, 129, and 130.

The re-polling will be held on April 21 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, and the final results for PB-51 will be announced after the re-polling is completed. This decision has significant implications for the Balochistan Assembly, as Mr. Khan currently serves as the Speaker. His removal from the post could lead to a change in leadership in the provincial legislature.

LHC suspends PML-N candidate's win notification

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court on Tuesday suspended the notification of success of PML-N candidate Rana Arshad from PP-133, Nanka Sahib, and gave time to the ECP to submit a reply.

Justice Shahid Karim passed the order on a plea by Muhammad Atif of Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) challenging the notification of Rana's success. A counsel for the petitioner stated that his client won the election by a margin of 3500 votes, but the ECP declared the respondent successful after recounting of votes. He said the returning officer reduced the petitioner's votes in the recount and declared his defeat with a margin of 2,500 votes. It is pertinent to mention here that on April 6 Rana Muhammad Arshad of Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) was Friday declared successful from PP-133 after vote recount. According to the returning officer, Rana Muhammad Arshad of PMLN got 44,323 while independent candidate Mian Atif got 41,632 votes. Rana Arshad was declared successful with a margin of 2,691 votes.

Meanwhile, the Lahore High Court on Tuesday declared the success notification of PML-N MNA from NA-81, Gujranwala as void on the plea of rival PTI candidate.

The high court's Justice Shahid Karim granted petition of PTI candidate Bilal Ijaz against the election commission's decision. "How the election commission could neglect the Supreme Court's decision," the bench questioned. "Isn't neglecting the apex court's verdict a contempt of court," the bench observed. "How could the election commission intervene after completion of the election process," the court questioned.

PTI candidate Bilal Ijaz in his petition said that he won in February 08 election with over 7,000 votes' lead. "In recounting PML-N candidate Azhar Qayyum Nagra was declared winner with 3,100 votes' margin". "In recounting over 10,000 votes of the petitioner were discarded," Bilal Ijaz pleaded.

Transfer to Adiala jail

IHC disposes of Bushra Bibi's plea

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday disposed of a petition filed by ex-premier Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi seeking her transfer from her Banigala residence, which had been declared a sub-jail, to Adiala Jail.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb disposed of the plea due to Bushra Bibi's lawyers failing to appear before the court. The former first lady was taken into custody on January 31 after an Islamabad accountability court sentenced her and Imran to 14 years in jail in the Toshakhana reference. While the IHC on April 1 suspended their sentences in the Toshakhana reference, she remains in custody in the Iddat case. Imran also remains incarcerated in other cases.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Aurangzeb expressed his displeasure at no lawyer appearing before the court from Bushra Bibi's side. He asked why the former first lady's counsels were absent. "If they had won this case, Bushra Bibi would have gone to [Adiala] jail, but they (lawyers) themselves do not want Bushra Bibi to go to jail," the judge remarked.

Remarking that the lawyers had made light of the proceedings, Justice Aurangzeb said that despite him stating at the previous hearing that he would decide the matter today, the lawyers were absent. The state counsel then informed the court that a meeting between Bushra and Imran had been arranged at Eidul Fitr. Justice Aurangzeb then said, "Even this side is not working properly and even now, is not doing [things] right. Politics is being played with the court from both sides."

The judge went on to note that PTI lawyer Shoaib Shaheen had arrived at the court but then left and did not return. Subsequently, the IHC disposed of Bushra Bibi's petition due to her lawyers not actively pursuing the case. A while after the court had disposed of the plea, Bushra Bibi's counsel Usman Gill reached the IHC, at which Justice Aurangzeb told him that the petition had been disposed of.

The IHC judge suggested Gill file an

application to restore the petition, at which the lawyer said he would do so. Following the Toshakhana verdict, Bushra had arrived at Adiala Jail, where the National Accountability Bureau's team was already present, to surrender to the authorities. Subsequently, she was taken into custody by the anti-graft watchdog.

How-ever, she was moved to her Banigala home after it was declared a sub-jail in a late-night notification. Her shifting to the residence has been under discussion for weeks as she and her husband denied submitting any application to declare the residence a sub-jail. Almost a week after her arrest, Bushra Bibi had challenged the residence's status as a sub-jail, urging the IHC to let her complete her 14-year sentence in Adiala Jail.

In a subsequent hearing, the Adiala Jail administration had opposed moving her back to the prison, claiming that overcrowding posed security threats for the former first lady. Last month, Justice Aurangzeb had asked if the authorities sought permission from Imran before converting his Banigala residence into a sub-jail.

A day ago, Bushra Bibi filed another petition before the IHC, alleging violations of her fundamental rights during her incarceration at Banigala. After the hearing, Bushra Bibi's lawyers Barrister Salman Safdar, Usman Gill and Khalid Yousuf Chaudhry filed a petition seeking to restore the now-disposed plea.

In the restoration plea, the lawyers contended that "unforeseen and severe traffic congestion around Serena Hotel and surrounding areas" had caused them to arrive late at the court. "Despite the best efforts, including opting to proceed on foot, the counsel arrived at the courtroom at 10:20am," the petition said. It asserted that the "delay was neither intentional nor within the control of the counsel", and that the "non-appearance was not deliberate or neglectful". The plea further said that non-restoration of Bushra's petition could "potentially result in irreparable loss and prejudice to the petitioner".

Pakistan, KSA call for truce

(Continued from Page 1)

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal expressed his profound appreciation for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to him and his delegation. He termed his meetings with the Pakistani leadership very productive.

The Saudi FM stressed upon the importance of strategic partnership between the two countries and expressed commitment for strengthening of investment. He said that the delegation was impressed with the proactive and business focused approach of the Pakistani side. The minister said that there were significant investment opportunities in Pakistan, and termed their visit 'very positive on their perspective', which would lay the groundwork for future ventures.

The untapped potential in Pakistan needed to be tapped, he emphasised. Prince Faisal bin Farhan further reaffirmed to continue working closely for the economic progress and regional security with historic bilateral cooperation. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, to another query, said that the SIFC and launch of Sovereign Wealth Fund were established through the acts of parliament.

The Fund had a worth of 9 million dollars now as against its initial launch at \$2.3million. Moreover, the country had 10 trillion dollars worth mineral assets, he added. He said both the countries enjoyed fraternal ties and had historic background of common approach at all the regional and multi-lateral fora.

He said the KSA was hosting about 2.5 million Pakistanis that formed 28 percent of total number of Pakistani expatriates working abroad and they had been sending 25 percent out of the total remittances received by the country. He informed that the Government of Pakistan would export trained and skilled workforce to meet the KSA's new policy.

The Saudi Foreign

Minister also lauded contributions made by the Pakistanis to the development of KSA, expressing the confidence that the positive contribution in their economy would continue in the future. The Saudi minister further said that the two brotherly countries were facing the challenges together, cooperated and relied on each other in the past, and would continue in the future.

The two countries believed in dialogue to end the global challenges, he reiterated. Meanwhile, Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator Ishaq Dar on Tuesday said that the Saudi investment in Pakistan, would not only strengthen the deeply valued partnership but also make a sterling contribution to regional peace and stability.

The foreign minister, addressing the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Forum held here and attended by the visiting high-powered Saudi delegation, led by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, said that the incumbent government's goal was to transform Pakistan into a hub for economic activity and innovation, creating an attractive environment for global investors, particularly those from Saudi Arabia. The visiting delegation consists of Saudi Minister of Water and Agriculture,


Eng. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley; Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, Bandar Ibrahim Alkhorayef; Assistant Minister of Investment, Ibrahim bin Youssef Al-Mubarak; Head of Saudi Special Committee, Mohammed Maziad Al-Tuwaijri; and senior officials from Ministry of Energy and Saudi Public Investment Fund.

The foreign minister assured the delegation that the Saudi investment in Pakistan was not just the placement of capital, rather it would prove to be instrumental for mutual progress and prosperity. The foreign minister reaffirmed that the Saudi investment in Pakistan would be handled with the utmost respect and through institutionalized mechanisms.

He told the gathering that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia shared deep-rooted ties, anchored in rich Islamic heritage and mutual strategic interests and the Saudi delegation's visit underscored a deep and abiding connection between the two countries. He said a longstanding and time-tested friendship with Saudi Arabia was a significant element of Pakistan's foreign policy with an aim to transform the traditionally fraternal ties into a strategic economic partnership.



WASHINGTON: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb meeting with Regional Vice President for MCT, IFC Hela Cheikhrouhou.



We, the people of Kohat,
Express our deepest gratitude to
Mr. Azmatullah Wazir
Honorable Deputy Commissioner Kohat
and Mr. Muhammad Shoaib
Chief Municipal Officer

For maintaining the prices of essential commodities in the month of Ramadan and eliminating encroachments from across the city. On the occasion of Chand Raat, he played a positive role in implementing Section 144 and strictly Implementing it.

By: Ahlian Kohat