

WB demands tax reforms

ISLAMABAD (INP): The World Bank has put forth major demands for tax reforms from the Pakistani government and eliminating the exemptions on duties and sales tax. The World Bank released its report on Pakistan and suggested the government of the urgent need for tax system reforms and the elimination of sales tax exemptions to promote economic and social improvement.



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President calls for steering country out of ‘political crisis’

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has called for making joint efforts to steer the country out of crisis and also called upon all stakeholders to play their role for the prosperity of the nation.

He stated this while addressing the joint session of parliament on Thursday after the February 8 general elections amid protest staged by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) lawmakers. “Let me also take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all parliamentarians and provincial assembly members for their trust and confidence in electing me for a second time as the president of Islamic republic of Pakistan,” the president said this in his opening remarks.

President Zardari said their agenda and ideology will strengthen the country and underlined the need for creating a political environment to fulfill the expectations of all stakeholders. He asked the political leadership of the country to highlight their priorities and stressed the need for ending differences for the country's prosperity.

“While there are many economic reforms the government will drive in spurring jobs, reducing inflation and expanding the tax net, I want to underscore the importance of promoting positive working relationships and effective coordination, within our constitutional framework, between the Federal Government and the

Provinces. This is absolutely essential for promoting an inclusive national development agenda and rolling out policies that execute tangible action on the ground.” President Zardari called for taking positive steps, saying harmony among institutions is the need of the hour to pave wave for the development of the country.

“If we see today as a new beginning, which it is, then we can build on our strengths by investing in our people, by focusing on public needs, and by harnessing our resources to create pathways to inclusive growth.” He said: “I also feel that we have little time to waste. The country needs us to move on from the polarisation so common now to contemporary politics. This joint House must play a leading role in rebuilding public confidence in the parliamentary process and establish a foundation for the uninterrupted sustainable development of our nation.”

Zardari called for turning a new page and making a fresh start, emphasising a meaningful dialogue, parliamentary consensus and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation to do away with the polarisation and overcome the challenges pervading the country. “In my considered view, it is time to turn a new page... The challenges we face are not impossible to overcome. They just require the fundamentals of meaningful dialogue, and parliamentary consensus... We can effectively tackle our challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation.”

The president's address encompassed all of the major national and international matters and challenges from economy, poverty, social welfare, women empowerment and foreign policy to Kashmir and Palestine as well as climate change. He said having given away his powers to the parliament, his role was as a unifying symbol of a joint, robust federation, where all people and provinces should be treated as equal before the law.

As a new beginning, President Zardari said the country needed to build its strengths by investing in people, focusing on public needs, and harnessing its resources to create pathways to inclusive growth. “We have little time to waste. Calling for resetting the political atmosphere and reflect “more light than heat”, he emphasised reforms, to promote good governance and turning challenges into opportunities.

Stressing the need for joint efforts, President Zardari has warned that terrorism is rearing its head again in the country, hoping that neighbouring countries will take action against militants involved in cross-border attacks. “Terrorism is a threat for our national security, prosperity and regional peace. Pakistan considers terrorism as a common threat.” The president said that the terrorist groups involved in attacks on the security forces and people. He hoped that the neighbouring countries would take measures against the terrorist groups involved in launching attacks inside Pakistan.

Hafiz Naeem sworn in as JI Emir

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Hafiz Naeemur Rehman, the newly elected emir of the Jamaat-e-Islami, took the oath of office on Thursday.

In his address during the ceremony, Emir Naeemur Rehman highlighted the movement's 76-year history, emphasizing its dedication to establishing peace and eliminating oppression and corruption.

Naeem asserted that the Jamaat-e-Islami would not seek to seize power through conspiracies, but rather aim to bring about a revolution through the support of the people. Emir Naeemur Rehman also commended former JI chief Sirajul Haq for his leadership, likening him to a fatherly figure who has guided everyone.

Expressing confidence in Jamaat-e-Islami's ability to lead the nation, he reiterated their commitment to advancing their policies. The new JI chief criticised the coalition government imposed through Form 47, arguing that they were not the rightful leaders of Pakistan. He announced plans to initiate a significant movement against those who he said have unlawfully assumed power through Form 47.

Vacant posts of judges to be filled: CJ

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa has said that filling vacant positions of judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts is a priority.

Addressing a function organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association at the Lahore registry, the chief justice stressed the need for filling the vacancies within the superior courts. Justice Isa highlighted the necessity of amending high court rules before appointing new judges. He said that a committee led by senior judge Justice Mansoor Ali Shah was formed for this purpose.

The CJ underlined adherence to existing procedures for judges' appointments, ensuring consultation with relevant parties. Also, he discussed the impact of technology on top court registries and advocated for maintaining efficient bench schedules.

IMF chief, finance minister discuss reforms agenda

WASHINGTON (INP): Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb met International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva to discuss the economic reforms agenda in Pakistan.

The meeting held in Washington discussed economic issues, policy preferences and reforms agenda to uplift Pakistan's economy. Matters related to expanding the tax net, privatisation and facilities to the private sector also came under discussion. The finance minister is currently in the US to discuss new loan programme with the IMF for Pakistan. Muhammad Aurangzeb appreciated the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank extended to Pakistan for economic development.

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Mr.

International Monetary Fund ready to support Pakistan

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is ready to support Pakistan and the package of reforms is now more important than the size of a new programme, the fund's Middle East and Central Asia director said on Thursday. “I think what is important at this stage is to accelerate the reforms, double down on the structure of reforms in order to provide Pakistan with its full potential of growth,” Jihad Azour told a press conference on the sidelines of the IMF 2024 Spring Meetings. — Agencies

Muhammad Aurangzeb, attended the G-24, Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting, said a press release issued here. The minister talked about reforms in the areas of taxation, energy, privatization and digitalization, and underlined the need to bring in more private sector investment and leverage the “Adaptation Fund” to help the country deal with adverse impacts of the climate change.

The South Asian nation is nearing the end of a nine-month, \$3 billion loan program with the International Monetary Fund designed to tackle a balance-of-payments crisis which brought it to the brink of default last summer. With the final \$1.1 billion tranche of that deal likely to be approved later this month, Pakistan has begun negotiations for a new multi-year IMF loan program worth “billions” of dollars, Finance Minister.

Iran tells US it does not seek ‘expansion of tensions’

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran's top diplomat said Thursday his country has told the United States that it is not seeking escalation after an unprecedented attack on Israel. The Islamic republic carried out its first-ever direct attack on Israel, firing drones and missiles on the weekend. The barrage — to which Israel's army chief has vowed a response — was retaliation for an April 1 air strike on Tehran's consulate in Damascus. Iran blamed Israel for the consular attack.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who is in New York to attend a UN Security Council meeting, said his country has “tried to tell the United States clearly” that Iran is “not looking for the expansion of tension in the region,” he said in a video posted by his ministry. Iran and the United States have had no diplomatic relations since 1980, but neutral Switzerland represents Washington's interests in Iran. Both the US and Iran have alluded to the Swiss role as an intermediary.

According to Amir-Abdollahian, Iran communicated with Washington “before and after” launching its attack on Israel. Iran informed the United States that the decision by the Islamic Republic of

Washington imposes new sanctions on Tehran

WASHINGTON: The administration of United States President Joe Biden has imposed new sanctions on Iran in response to its missile and drone attack on Israel, as tensions mount over the possibility of further escalation in the Middle East.

In a statement on Thursday, Biden said the sanctions targeted “leaders and entities connected to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's Defense Ministry, and the Iranian government's missile and drone program that enabled” the April 13 attack on Israel. “As I discussed with my fellow G7 [Group of Seven] leaders the morning after the attack, we are committed to acting collectively to increase economic pressure on Iran,” the US president said. “And our allies and partners have or will issue additional sanctions and measures to restrict Iran's destabilizing military programs.” The Biden administration — which has faced pressure to curb its support for Israel amid the conflict in Gaza — is now facing calls to restrain the Israeli government's response to Iran's attack. — Aljazeera

Iran to “respond to the (Israel) regime is final,” and the matter concluded, he said. Iran's retaliation against Israel left a girl severely wounded but caused little damage. It followed the strike in Damascus that killed seven members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, including two generals.

“Before the operation, we clearly told the American side that we will not target American bases and interests in the region,” Amir-Abdollahian said. The Islamic republic has

celebrated the attack as a success but President Ebrahim Raisi warned of “a fierce and severe response” to further “aggression” by Israel. During his trip to New York, Amir-Abdollahian is set to meet United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and his counterparts from other countries.

The United States, Israel's top ally, has said it would soon impose new sanctions on Iran's missile and drone program following the strike on Israel, and said it expects allies to take parallel measures.

EU Ambassador calls on PM F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the European Union Amb. Riina Kionka Thursday paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and discussed matters related to mutual concern. The prime minister thanked the EU leaders for their congratulatory messages on his re-election and said he looked forward to working closely with the EU.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari addressing the joint session of Parliament.

4 Customs officials gunned down

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: At least six people, including four Customs officials, were killed on Thursday in a firing incident in Dera Ismail Khan district, police said. The law enforcers said the unidentified assailants targeted the Customs officials on the Sago Road in Daraban tehsil.

A driver, a citizen and four Customs personnel were killed in the firing incident, the police added. The armed attackers, who hid in bushes, attacked the Customs' vehicle and fled the scene unchallenged on motorcycles.

Will personally monitor Saudi investment plans

PM orders for boosting privatization, outsourcing process of power Discos

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that he would personally monitor the Saudi investment projects and warned against any laxity due to red tape or outdated procedures.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the matters related to the recent high-powered Saudi delegation and Saudi investment in different sectors, thanked

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for sending a high-level Saudi delegation that would usher new era of Saudi investment in Pakistan, trade partnership as well as business ties.

He lauded the relevant federal ministers, Special Investment Facilitation Council and relevant senior officers for their efforts for converting the Saudi delegation's visit into a mutually beneficial partnership. The prime minister instructed the

authorities concerned to engage world-class experts to execute the foreign investment projects and called for capacity building of the ministries to achieve the desired results.

He asked the Board of Investment, SIFC and relevant ministries to devise a mechanism to ensure execution of the projects agreed with the Saudi delegation. He told the expected visit of

(Continued on Back Page)

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13m paid to complainants on ombudsman Punjab orders

LAHORE (APP): On the orders of Ombudsman Punjab Azam Suleman Khan , the district account officer, chief executive officer, district health authority, district education authority, municipal corporation, chief engineer central zone, building department, Rescue 1122 , chairman district welfare fund board paid pending dues of more than 13 million to 13 complainants.

According to a spokesman for the ombudsman office, 13 complainants belonging to different districts requested that they have contacted their respective institutions several times to get family pension, monthly assistance and pending dues. In this context, Ombudsman Punjab Azam Suleman Khan issued orders to institutions concerned to pay pending dues as soon as possible.

LESCO detects 271 power pilferers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 271 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 212th day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

A LESCO spokesman told media here Thursday that the company had also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 127 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 18 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 212th 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 also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections 07 were commercial, 02 agricultural and 262 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 194,347 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 5.765 million.

Massive crackdown against drug mafia continues on orders of Sharjeel Memon

KARACHI (APP): On the directives of Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, a series of crackdowns against drug peddlers in various districts of Sindh is underway.

Twenty-six more drug peddlers were apprehended in the ongoing crackdown by Excise Narcotics Control and Police from various districts. Eighteen kilograms of hashish, approximately one kilogram of ice, harmful gutka mawa, raw liquor, and other drugs were seized from the suspects. The Excise Narcotics Control team in Gulistan e Johar area of Karachi arrested the accused Abid, son of Shah Muhammad. The Divisional Special Squad established on the orders of Senior Excise Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon in Hyderabad arrested an accused Kashif Makrani, during an operation in Makrani Muhalla, who was supplying drugs in an educational institution. Kashif was identified as the main operative of the Amjad Makrani group, and the Excise Narcotics Control had been pursuing the accused for three years.

During an operation near Lyari General Hospital, Dubai Chowk in Karachi, accused Iqbal was apprehended, and 5050 grams of hashish were seized. An Excise team near Indus Hospital in Korangi arrested two accused, Muhammad Umar and Akhtar, with 10 kg of hashish recovered from their possession. In the Pinyari area of Hyderabad, the police arrested the notorious ice supplier Imran in an injured condition after an encounter.

A pistol and 270 grams of ice were recovered from the arrested accused.

Badin police apprehended the notorious drug dealer Mushtaq Mallah alias Mama Mushtaq and recovered 2025 grams of hashish. In another operation by Badin police, Gutka vendor Mashooq Shaikh was seized, and 600 packets of harmful Gutka were seized.

Kadhan Police, Badin arrested drug dealer Sikander Ali Shoro and recovered 10 liters of

raw liquor from his possession. Additionally, Gutka seller Muhammad Hanif Mallah was arrested, and 300 packets were confiscated. Nindo police arrested drug dealer Nasrullah Khoso along with 10 liters of raw liquor.

In Badin's Kario Ganhwar area, Gutka seller Sarfraz Korejo was arrested, and 200 packets of harmful gutka were seized.

Notorious drug dealer Atta Muhammad alias Attani Magasi was apprehended with a pistol in a police encounter by Ghorabari police of Thatta. According to police, accused Atta Muhammad alias Attani Magasi is a major dealer of ice and heroin in Thatta and other areas.

Tando Allahiyar B Section Police arrested the accused Lalu along with 1300 grams of hashish during a targeted operation. Another police operation in Haji Mir Bahar village of Tando Allahiyar led to the arrest of the accused Sajjad Ali Mallah and the recovery of 100 liters of raw liquor. Achhu son Bhaloo Kolhi was arrested with 30 liters of raw liquor near Tando Allahiyar Quba stop. Acting on a tip-off, Tando Allahiyar A Section Police arrested three accused, Saleem Pathan, Afaq Mastoi, and Abdullah Mastoi, in Mastoi Colony and recovered 200 ready-made Main Puri and 140 mawa. Excise Police in Jamshoro arrested the notorious drug dealer Ghulam Ali Jamali in a targeted operation based on intelligence and recovered 500 grams of ice.

Thatta district police arrested 7 drug peddlers while conducting operations in Gharo, Thatta, Dhabeji, Ketu Bandar, Sakro, Jhirik, and Jhampir. A total of 1640 grams of hashish, 3950 packets of Gutka Mawa, 91 kg of Gutka-making material, and an abundant quantity of raw liquor were recovered from the suspects.

Commenting on the successful operations of Excise and Police, Sindh Senior Minister for Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control, Sharjeel Inam Memon appreciated the dedication and bravery of Excise and Police officers.

Gas theft crackdown

162 connections disconnected in Punjab, KP and Islamabad

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 162 connections; Rs. 8.27 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 3 connections on the illegal use of gas. In Multan 12 connections were disconnected on illegal use while another three were disconnected on use of the compressor. The team also lodged 2 FIRs against gas thieves.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 118 connections on account of direct use of

gas and illegal use of gas and amount of Rs. 4.67 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged 14 FIRs against gas thieves. In Sahiwal two connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas.

In Faisalabad, the team disconnected 3 connections for illegal use of gas while imposing a fine of Rs. 0.08 against gas pilferers. The regional team of Bahawalpur disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas and another seven on the use of a compressor and also booked an amount of Rs 0.35

against gas theft cases. In Gujranwala, two connections were disconnected for the illegal use of gas while one on the use of a compressor.

The team also imposed a fine of Rs. 0.46 against gas theft cases. The regional team of Mardan disconnected 08 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed a fine of Rs. 0.16 against gas theft cases. In Sargodha, one connection was disconnected by the team for illegal use of gas while imposing a fine of Rs. 2.55 million against gas pilferers.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Muhammad Javed with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Alaq Ahmed citizen number 1310117702981 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Samina Kousar (Mother)
2. Muhammad Javed (Father)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Ms. Faiza Mansoor with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Karan Elahi citizen number 1730135352077 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Muhammad Jamal Elahi (Son)
2. Mohammad Bilal Elahi (Son)
3. Naseem Elahi (Spouse)
4. Faiza Mansoor (Daughter)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Ms. Muhammad Jan with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Muhammad Ayub citizen number 1310155419409 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Naseem Bibi (Daughter)
2. Malkani Bibi (Daughter)
3. Yasmin (Daughter)
4. Muhammad Jan (Spouse)
5. Rukhsana Bibi (Daughter)
6. Babar Nazakat (Daughter)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Application for issuance of Letter of Administration / Succession Certificate by Mr. Amir Zeb with regards to moveable & immovable assets of deceased Mr. Aurangzeb Khan citizen number 1310108966009 has been received. Following are declared as legal heirs.
1. Ayeshah Zeb (Daughter)
2. Amir Zeb (Son)
3. Uzma Zeb (Daughter)
4. Atif Zeb (Son)
On the above application the objections of public at large are invited. Any aggrieved person may approach in person the undersigned for submission of objection (if any) within fourteen (14) days after publication of this notice.
INCHARGE SFU, NADRA ABBOTABAD-SFU

PUBLIC NOTICE
Auction of Gold
Finance facilities were extended by Mobilink Bank against the security of deposit and pledge of gold to the customer mentioned below. The customer who has neglected and failed to repay the finance extended to them by Mobilink Bank along with the markup there on.
Details
Branch Haripur
Branch code 0017
Date of auction 25th April 2024
Time 02:00 PM
Call deposit PKR 2000/-
Customer Name CNIC # Address
Malik Muhammad 37405-3385526-3 Chachah Post Office, Pind Gujran, Tehsil Khanpur, and District Haripur.
Yasir
Notice is hereby given to the customer in above mentioned that if payment of entire outstanding amount financed along with markup is not made by them to Mobilink Bank within 1 day of the publication of this notice, Mobilink Bank shall auction the gold ornaments and no further Public Notice shall be issued to call upon the customer to make the payments.
Mobilink Bank

Rangers arrest four involved in robberies

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Rangers Sindh and the police apprehended four robbery suspects during snap-checking operations in the Federal Government Housing Society and Sachal Cutt, Jamali Bridge areas. Additionally, they recovered a mobile phone from the possession of the accused individuals. As per a statement by a Rangers spokesperson on Thursday, the detained suspects were identified as Shahid, Muhammad Rizwan alias Wadera, Saeed Khan alias Torrey, and Muhammad Amir.



ISLAMABAD: UNHCR's Country Representative Ms. Philippa Candler called on Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Engr. Amir Muqam at his office.

Action to be taken against advertising agencies for delaying in bill submission

F.P Report

KARACHI: Secretary Information Department Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon said that action will be taken against those advertising agencies, who deliberately delays in submission of the bills, this he said while chairing a meeting with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Advertising Agencies, which are on the panel of Information Department in his office on Wednesday. He said that the effective mechanism for early payment to media houses has been devised in the department in order to avoid the outstanding liabilities at maximum level.

Secretary Information said that third party audit firm is being hired to clear the liabilities of media houses by ascertaining the genuineness and verification of the claim bills accordingly and the payment details will be uploaded on the website. Stressing on early submission of the bills, Secretary Information Nadeem-ur-Rehman directed the advertising agencies to submit the bills of the campaigns within the fifteen (15) days after release of any public awareness campaigns to print, electronic or social/digital media. Secretary Information said that the scope the information department is not only limited to the publicity of the Government but also to get public issues to be redressed by sending the



media reports of public demands and grievances to the concerned quarters.

He said that the effective steps are being initiated for the revamping and improvement of Information Department by using latest tools of Information and Communication Technology. He said that advertisements are being released by the department as per the criteria mentioned in the Advertisement Policy-2023, by considering the regularity, circulation, readership, viewership and audience assessment, whatsoever other than this directed in the policy.

He further said that the detail of released advertisement mentioning space, amount and client department is being uploaded on the website of Information Department. Secretary

Information said that action is being taken against the irregular newspapers by removing them from Sindh Media List (SML). "Daily attendance and regularity report of the newspapers will also be uploaded on the website of the department", he added.

Director General Public Relations Muhammad Saleem Khan, Director Information Administration and Accounts Muhammad Yousif Kaboro, Director Information Advertisement Intiaz Ali Joyo, Deputy Director Information Sahib Khan Bhand, Information Officer Liaquat Ali Jamali and representatives from the different advertising agencies include Salman Mansoor, Makhdoom Mansoor Hashmi, Sharaiz Hashmi, Abdul Qadir Shah and others attended the meeting.

Lahore revamping plan gets deadline of June 30

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has set a deadline of 30 June for the completion of "Chief Minister Lahore Revamping Plan" and to transfer the authority of Punjab Local Governments Department as an executing agency to Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL).

The decision was made during a meeting chaired by Punjab Local Governments Minister Zeeshan Rafique held here at WASA head office on Thursday, attended by Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Political Affairs Zeeshan Malik, Director General LDA/Commissioner

Lahore Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Lahore Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider, MD WASA Ghufuran Ahmed and other concerned officials. During the meeting, a detailed review of the progress in "Lahore Revamping Plan" was made. Local Governments Minister Zeeshan Rafique while addressing the participants said that according to the revamping plan, launched under the directions from Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, 188 schemes of MCL and 207 schemes of Wasa would be completed.

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GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

Prime Minister's Office (Public)

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING COMMISSION

NAVTTTC Headquarters, Plot No. 38, Kirthar Road, Sector H-9/4, Islamabad



PROJECT VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT UNDER PROJECT TITLED "SDP (2023-28)"

National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), under Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training is responsible for National Policies, Plans, Strategies & Qualifications Framework for TVET Skills sector; Designing & Implementing skill training programs to bridge demand-supply gap; Conducting Accreditation, Registration, Certification, Developing skill standards & curricula; Strengthening TVET sector through public-private partnership & Industrial Engagements and Maintaining databanks of skilled youth for their placement in industry. NAVTTTC is required an applications for Test / Interview to hire the project staff under the project titled "SDP (2023-28)" as per detailed given below (for project duration only).

S.No	Position / No. of Vacancies	Qualification / Experience
1	Data Analyst (Equivalent to PPS-08) Vacancies:01, (Max Age 50 Years) Place of posting: NAVTTTC HQs or Regional Offices.	16 years of education from any recognized university preferably Master's degree in Statistics or any other relevant 16-year of education from a HEC recognized University/Institution. At least 07-years post-qualification experience in public / private sector organizations in data analysis, preparation of reporting. Temporary posts on contract basis (for project duration only). Performance based 06 months renewal policy will be followed till the completion of the project period
2	Software Developer (Equivalent to PPS-07) Vacancies:03, (Max Age 45 Years) Place of posting: NAVTTTC HQs or Regional Offices.	16 years of education from any recognized university preferably Master's degree in Computer Sciences or B.Sc Software Engineering, IT, MIS or any other relevant 16-years of education from a HEC recognized University/Institution. Experience with a donor/NGO/Development sector will be an advantage. At least 02-years post-qualification experience in public / private sector organizations in software development particularly in DOTNET/CORE, ASP.NET / MVC, SQL Server. Temporary posts on contract basis (for project duration only). Performance based 06 months renewal policy will be followed till the completion of the project period
3	Network Administrator (Equivalent to PPS-07) Vacancies:01, (Max Age 45 Years) Place of posting: NAVTTTC HQs or Regional Offices.	16 years of education from any recognized university preferably Master's degree in Computer Sciences or B.Sc Software Engineering, IT, MIS or any other relevant 16-years of education from a HEC recognized University/Institution. Experience with a donor/NGO/Development sector will be an advantage. At least 02-years post-qualification experience in public / private sector organizations in network designing, Server Administrations, Cyber Security, Configuration Managements (Version Management). Temporary posts on contract basis (for project duration only). Performance based 06 months renewal policy will be followed till the completion of the project period

How to Apply:

- Interested candidates fulfilling the above criteria, may apply through National Employment Exchange Tool (NEXT) at www.jobs.gov.pk within 15 days of the date of publication of this advertisement.
- Incomplete application submitted by hand or received after the closing date WILL NOT BE ENTERTAINED. Only eligible / shortlisted candidates will be informed for Test/Interview/ through E-mail/WhatsApp etc.
- The applicants who provide fake/forged documents or attempt to influence the recruitment process shall stand disqualified.
- NAVTTTC reserves the right to cancel the position at any stage without any reason.
- No TADA will be admissible.

NOTE:

- The applicants who provide fake/forged documents or attempt to influence the recruitment process shall stand disqualified.
- NAVTTTC reserves the right to cancel the position at any stage without any reason.
- No TADA will be admissible.

Deputy Director (HR), NAVTTTC

Ph:051-9044141

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GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

Prime Minister's Office (Public)

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING COMMISSION

NAVTTTC Headquarters, Plot No. 38, Kirthar Road, Sector H-9/4, Islamabad



ADMISSION NOTICE

(A SPECIAL INITIATIVE FOR SKILL YOUTH OF NEWLY MERGED DISTRICT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHUA)

National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) with collaboration of its reputed training partners has launched a special training program for skilling the youth of Newly Merged District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the initiative will socio economically empower them enabling the youth to integrated in to job market on the basis of their acquired skills.
The targeted trainings encompass the following Trades:

Trades
Construction: (Aluminum Fabricator & Steel Fixer, Mason / Tile fixer, Plumber / Pipe Fitter, Carpenter, Welder, Domestic Skilled Worker)
Services: (Fire Fighter, Security Guard, Health & Safety Technician, Optical Fiber Technician / Cable Joiner, Electrician, Auto Mobile Mechanic, HTV Driver / Heavy Machinery Operator, LTV Driver, Lift Operator) (Solar, Wind & UPS System Assembly, Plumber cum Solar Water Heater Installation)
Renewable Energy:

VENUE FOR TRAINING:
Said trainings will be imparted in the following cities:

- Peshawar
- Bannu
- Rawalpindi

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- The candidate must have an age of minimum 18 years and maximum 50 years.
- The candidate must be literate.
- The candidate should be resident of NMD.

BENEFIT FOR THE TRAINEES:

- Admission Fee, Cost of Consumable and Training Material, assessment and Certification Charges and overheads/Utility Bills will not be charged from the trainees.

PROCEDURE FOR APPLICATION SUBMISSION:

- The youth belonging to NMDs may submit application on the given portal <https://nsis.navttc.gov.pk/> or may apply in above provided training partners.
- The last date of submission of application through online portal/hard copy at indicated partner institute is 5TH May, 2024.
- For more information Call us at Toll free No: 0800-88866

Deputy Director (Project & Business Development)

Plot No.38, Kirthar Road, H-9/4, Islamabad Ph: 051-9044413

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893,000 students appear in SSC exams in KP Tarakai inspects exam hall, assures transparency

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Education Minister Faisal Khan Tarakai on Thursday visited the examination hall of Government High School City No-1 and inspected arrangements for ongoing matric exams.

Expressing well wishes for the students, he said practical steps were being taken to ensure transparent examinations across the province.

The future of the nation, he said, depends upon students who were the builders of the nation and ensuring supremacy of merit was prerequisite to ensure achievement of this goal.

Secretary Education Masood Ahmad, Special Secretary Asfandyar Khattak and Chairman Peshawar Educational

Board Nasrullah were also present on the occasion.

The Minister said he himself and his team were inspecting the matric examination process across the province and no negligence in this regard would be tolerated.

He said the educational boards have made sufficient arrangements, assuring the students that they would get the fruit of their hard work.

He informed that for the merit-based transparent exams, assistance from district administration, police, WAPDA and relevant departments has been obtained.

He said during the current matric exams a total of 893524 students from across the province were taking part of which

457000 were from the ninth class while 435000 from the 10th class. For this purpose, he informed that a total of 3569 examination halls have been set up in the province. The services of around 24000 supervisory staff have also been acquired for the transparent conduct of the exam.

To ensure successful and transparent examinations, the minister said an information desk has also been established in the education department. The minister also paid a visit to the monitoring cell, established at the secretariat and took a detailed review of the exam halls.

Meanwhile, the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) final examinations have started across Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa wherein about 893,000 registered students would appear.

According to education department, 422,000 female students and 471,000 male students had submitted their documents for SSC final exam.

As many as 3,528 examination halls had been established across KP while 23,996 invigilator would perform exam duty.

Chairman Peshawar Board Professor Nasrullah Yousafzai said that 178,335 students would appear in the exam under Peshawar Education Board, adding 61,879 female students were among the students.

He said all the examination halls were equipped with hidden cameras for strict monitoring of the examination.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur chairing a meeting of food department.

KPRA to adopt fixed tax for wedding halls and beauty parlors

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance Mr. Muzammil Aslam held a meeting with Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) Miss Fouzia Iqbal on Wednesday.

The DG KPRA briefed the minister on issues related to shifting of sales tax on services from percentage to fixed regime in various sectors including Wedding Halls and Beauty Parlors in the province.

It was proposed that a parallel system of fixed tax and percentage-wise tax would be provided to the service providers to choose between the two regimes and those who violate the rules and resort to tax evasion will be subjected to heavy fines and will be shifted back to standard rates of the sales tax on services which is 15 percent.

The wedding hall and beauty parlors will be divided into different categories depending on their sizes and business volumes and rates of sales tax will

be fixed for different categories.

It was also decided that traders' associations and chamber of commerce will be taken on board and all the service providers will be compulsorily registered with KPRA.

The minister also said that a rebate of 2 percent will be given to those who make payments on credit cards in restaurants and hotels registered as companies with KPRA in the 15% tax slabs.

"We are taking these steps to overcome the trust deficit and to facilitate our

taxpayers and service providers," the Advisor said adding that these steps aim to document the economy and provide ease to the taxpayers and service providers.

The advisor finance directed the KPRA team to include doctors and lawyers in the fixed tax category.

He said that they are making amendments in the KP Sales Tax Act 2022 and whistleblowers who point out any tax evasion will be given a certain percentage of the fine collected from the tax evaders.

Quality education must for development: Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education archives and libraries Meena Khan Afridi has said that quality education and research is very important for development of a nation.

"Without quality education a nation cannot achieve its target and development" he said as a chief guest in the closing ceremony of three day progress review meeting & training for Quality Enhancement Cell organized by Quality Assurance Agency, Higher Education Commission (HEC) in collaboration with Khyber Medical University Peshawar.

He highlighted the paramount importance of quality education and commended the HEC Pakistan for its role emphasized the need to prioritize and promote quality education, as the world looks to us for our standards. He also expressed appre-

ciation for the Progress Review Meetings and Consultative Workshops on Pakistan's Precept, Standards, and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (PSG-2023)

Furthermore, Mr. Meena Khan underscored the ongoing significance of these consultative workshops, emphasizing their pivotal role as a platform for fostering understanding and facilitating effective implementation strategies.

He stressed that these endeavors will persist in illuminating the crucial role they play in both sustaining and elevating the standard of education throughout Pakistan.

By fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration, these workshops will serve as catalysts for continuous improvement in the realm of education quality assurance across the nation.

The event, attended by esteemed dignitaries and

stakeholders, witnessed profound insights and commitments towards advancing the quality of higher education across Pakistan.

During his address, Vice Chancellor KMu Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq extended a warm welcome to the chief guest and all participants, emphasizing the inclusive spirit of the occasion. In his speech, he eloquently outlined the paramount significance of PSG-2023 in leading a transformative journey for higher education. Dr. Zia stressed its pivotal role in steering the ethos of education towards enhancement and student-centricity.

Mr. Nasir Shah, Director General of Quality Assurance at HEC, delved into PSG-2023's advantages, highlighting its role in preserving and elevating educational standards domestically and internationally. He emphasized its capacity to foster a culture of improvement and accountability within Higher Education

Institutions (HEIs), ensuring responsiveness to evolving needs.

Executive Director HED, Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Quaym, emphasized the imperative of promoting quality education, stressing that every individual within the teaching profession must assume responsibility for utilizing available resources effectively. He underscored the importance of a collaborative effort among educators to enhance educational standards, ensuring that each student receives a high-quality learning experience. Dr. Khan urged educators to meticulously refine their teaching methods and utilize resources efficiently to achieve this collective goal of delivering quality education to all.

The Consultative Workshop's conclusion signifies a collective commitment towards advancing educational quality in Pakistan, guided by the principles of PSG-2023.

Shangla blast and scapegoat police officers

M. ilyas khan Sadozai

FOLLOWING the tragic suicide bombing targeting Chinese nationals in Shangla, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif visited the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad to offer condolences for the loss of lives. During the visit, Prime Minister Sharif conveyed messages of sympathy to the Chinese President and Prime Minister regarding the incident. He assured that Pakistan will conduct thorough investigations into the incident and ensure that those responsible face justice swiftly.

Prime Minister Sharif emphasized that attempts to undermine the Pak-China friendship will not succeed and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to continue the fight against terrorism until its complete eradication. It was revealed that immediately after the blast, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Jawans actively participated in rescue efforts. Meanwhile, a special committee comprising officials from the Ministry of Interior and Power Division was formed to inquire into the



incident.

This committee, however, placed the blame solely on the police department, absolving officials from the Ministry of Interior and Power Division of any wrongdoing. Acting upon the committee's recommendations and recognizing the security lapses, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif promptly suspended four police officers, including two Deputy Inspectors General of Police.

One police officer disclosed that neither the SSU nor the Hazara Division Police were informed about the transfer of foreign nationals, highlighting a lack of communication. Furthermore, the police were excluded from the security task force respon-

sible for protecting Chinese engineers and other foreign nationals, a responsibility falling under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry and Power Division. Remarkably, during the inquiry, these officers attempted to shift blame onto the KPK Police.

Military experts have emphasized that preventing incidents like IED explosions or suicide attacks on long routes is extremely challenging. It is noteworthy that even superpowers like the US and NATO faced similar attacks in Afghanistan, resulting in significant losses and eventual troop withdrawals. In a similar incident in 2021, 13 Chinese engineers lost their lives, prompting various security measures to safeguard Chinese workers. The use of bomb-proof vehicles and helicopters was also recommended. However, after the Shangla incident, instead of making the police officers a scapegoat, there is an urgent need to examine the ground realities. The Federal Government should seriously consider the recommendations of

SSU to ensure the safety of foreign workers who are playing vital role in country's development.

Taking into account ground realities, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Special Security Unit (SSU) has proposed various measures to ensure the security of foreign nationals. It is imperative to examine these proposals in light of recent events. In the aftermath of the incident, the services of the suspended DIGs SSU, Zafer Ali and Ijaz Khan, along with other DPOs, were commendable. They prevented adverse situations and ensured the protection of minority groups, including Chinese engineers. Similarly, the SSU has repeatedly demanded logistical support, including helicopters and bomb-proof vehicles. However, rather than scapegoating Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police officers after the Shangla incident, it is necessary to scrutinize ground realities. The federal government should carefully consider the recommendations put forward by the SSU to bolster the security of foreign workers who are integral to the nation's development efforts.

World Hemophilia Day celebrated

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Fatimid and Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia and Hemophilia centers and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa celebrated World Hemophilia Day.

Hemophilia is a blood disorder disease in which a patient has blood clotting problem due to factor eight or fresh frozen plasma (White blood cells) deficiency.

At present more hundreds of poor and deserving Hemophilia patients belonging different far flung areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are registered with Fatimid and Hamza Foundation Welfare Hemophilia centers Peshawar.

Delay in passports issuance not resolved

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Due to the poor strategy of the Interior Minister and DG Passports and Immigration, the issue of delayed passports could not be resolved even after 9 months, due to which the backup passports reached millions, while the passport fees have increased in recent years.

Due to the increase, not getting passports on time is beyond comprehension, due to which not only people have lost the happiness of Umrah and Hajj, but fights in offices have also become a daily routine. He said that despite the increase in fees, it is fair to say that passports are not being received on time.

Entry of CM advisor to PPC banned

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Press Club strongly condemned baseless and reckless allegations leveled against senior female journalist Nadia Sabohi by Ms. Mashal Yousafzai, the Social Welfare Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In response, in the first phase, a ban has been imposed on the entry of the Advisor to the Women's Press Club, and a boycott of her events and activities has been announced. She has been asked to delete her social media posts within 24 hours and to apologize for the incident on behalf of the provincial government. Furthermore, complete boycott of the coverage of the events and activities of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leadership will be implemented.

An emergency meeting of senior journalists was held Thursday, at the Peshawar Press Club to devise a joint strategy to address the matter of baseless allegations against female journalist Nadia Sabohi by Mashal Yousafzai, the Social Welfare Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

President Peshawar Press Club, Arshad Aziz Malik, chaired the meeting.

PHC issues notice to ECP in reserved seat case

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court comprised of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Syed Arshad Ali issued a notice to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding a petition filed by the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) against the allocation of a minority seat to the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUIF) in the

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly while directed for submission of reply, on Thursday.

Barrister Saqib Raza, argued that the ECP had announced the name of Gorpall Singh for the minority seat on March 26, despite the fact that the PML-N was entitled to 7 seats, but was given only 6.

The ECP's decision was in violation of the Constitution, Election Act, and rules. The lawyer

requested the court to declare the ECP's notification null and void and restrain the Speaker of the Assembly from administering the oath to Gorpall Singh until a final decision is made on the petition.

Moreover, Barrister Kamran Murtaza appeared on behalf of JUIF nominated candidate Gorpall Singh. The court has issued a notice to the ECP and adjourned the hearing until 8th May.

KP politicians, civil society laud President address

PESHAWAR (APP): Political leaders and members of civil society here Thursday lauded the address of President Asif Ali Zardari and termed it wide-ranging as well as comprehensive.

Malik Azmat, former Minister told APP that President Asif Ali Zardari in his landmark address has touched all important issues faced by the country today and collective efforts are needed to address these challenges.

He said a single political party cannot address chal-

lenges such as energy shortfall, socioeconomic imbalances, shabby economy, poverty and illiteracy single handedly and we as nation have to move forward and work hard to solve these issues.

The PPP leader said that President Asif Ali Zardari has laid great emphasis on political reconciliation and unity besides strengthening of democracy.

PMLN leader and ex Environment Minister Wajid Ali Khan termed the address of the President inclusive.

He urged political leaders including PTI to shun differences and work for betterment of the country.

Advocate Ashfaq Khan, LG representatives Bahadar Khan and former school teacher Pir Muhammad Khan termed the address of President was very important and as per people wishes.

They said the issues highlighted by the President should be focused upon and implementation of his guidelines would help address the country's challenges swiftly.

Special drive for registration of vulnerable groups soon

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Secretary for Social Welfare and Women Development, Anila Mahfooz Durrani, held a meeting with Director General Nadra, Reema Aftab, at her office in Peshawar.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategizing of a special campaign aimed at increasing the registration of women, transgenders, and children in orphanages, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

During the meeting, it was decided that Nadra, through the Social Welfare Department, would conduct special registration campaigns across various districts of the province.

These campaigns would include a comprehensive summer campaign for women, while separate campaigns would be organized every two weeks for Khwaja Siras and individuals with disabilities.

These registration campaigns will be carried out by mobilizing mobile reg-

istration vehicle to access far flung areas of the province.

Secretary for Social Welfare and Women Development, Aneela Mahfooz Durrani, stated that the objective of these campaigns is to increase registration of women, individuals with disabilities, transgenders, and other vulnerable groups in the national database. This inclusion will facilitate them in accessing their rightful entitlements more easily.

Qasim attends 4th Int'l Public Health Conference

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: KP Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah attended the Fourth International Public Health Conference as a special guest held at Khyber Medical University Peshawar. The four-day international conference is being held from April 16 to April 19 at Khyber Medical University. Eminent experts and speakers from University of Central Lancashire, Aga Khan University, Qatar University, Dow University of Health Sciences, Baqai University, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, World Bank, WHO, and other relevant institutions delivered lectures on infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, health hazards under climate change, and strengthening healthcare systems.

Addressing the Public Health Conference as a special guest, the Health Minister stated that thirty percent of our society is afflicted with diabetes, and symptoms like high blood pressure are prevalent among eighteen-year-olds. We not only need to talk

about health but also take practical steps. In this regard, we are launching initiatives under "Live Well" to emphasize healthy living among students in educational institutions. We urge students to participate actively in this initiative.

The Health Minister also distributed appreciation shields among the conference speakers.

The speakers at the conference revealed in their lectures that fifty percent of deaths in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are due to non-communicable diseases, the prevention of which is entirely possible. Failure to timely prevent these diseases can lead to complications. It was highlighted in the conference that our society's average lifespan has been limited to 67 years, whereas in developed countries like the UK, it is 87 years. It was suggested by the speakers that by changing lifestyle and adopting healthy habits, our life expectancy can increase by up to twenty years. Balanced diet, adequate sleep, stress management, and a health friendly environment are fundamental principles for a better

life. Changing lifestyle can prevent nine out of ten type 2 diabetes patients from falling ill, while changing lifestyle can also prevent 60% of cancer cases.

Minister lauds role of FAO

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting was held under the chairmanship of Minister for Agriculture Major Retired Sajjad Barkawal regarding FAO's initiatives for the development of agriculture in the province.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Agriculture Minister Major Retired Sajjad Barkawal presided over a high-level meeting in Peshawar in which Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretary Imtiaz Hussain Shah, Secretary Agriculture Javed Marwat, United Nations FAO Country Representative Miss Florence Rolle and FAO Regional Chief Farrokh Tayrif were present.



In brief

Freedom fighter remembered F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: The Sixty fourth (64th) death anniversary of famous freedom fighter, Mirza Ali Khan alias Faqir Aipee was observed here in Landi Kotal last day. In this connection a seminar was organized by the local literary organization in Landi Kotal press club, district Khyber that was attended by scores of witters, political elites and members of civil society. Addressing on the occasion speakers including Riaz Shah Afridi, Yousaf Bahir, Nazeef Lala, Aftab Shinwari and others highlighted various aspects of Faqir Aipee and paid homage to the nationalist leader. The speakers said that Pakhtuns have forgotten their heroes like Mirzali Khan, Khushal Khan who had won freedom for them from British rule. Fiqir Aipee not only led their countrymen politically but also established institutions to decorate them with knowledge, they remarked. The Britishers deliberately distorted Pakhtuns history who had given them a tough time during freedom fighting, they maintained and said it was irony of the time that after creation of Pakistan the same attitude was continued towards Pakhtuns. They went on that it was one of the core causes of the Pakhtuns digression that they were deprived of the right to get their education in their mother language, Pashto. The speakers urged the Pakhtuns to hold their culture and civilization and avoid following alien customs and tradition if they want to be part of developed societies.

Two killed in Bannu firing F.P. Report

BANNU: A monetary dispute in Bannu district on Thursday claimed the lives of two people and caused bullet injuries to three passersby. Police said the incident took place at Railways Road where a monetary dispute between Amir Khan and Tufail Khan led to indiscriminate cross fire at each other. The firing resulted in deaths of two people while three other passersby identified as Nasir Khan, Jenhangir Khan and Asad Ullah sustained bullet injuries. The dead and injured were shifted to Khalifa Gul Nawaz Hospital.

Grand Jirga for peace held F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: An extraordinary jirga of tribal leaders from across the Kurram district was held at Governor Cottage Parachinar in which GOC 9 Division Major General Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, prominent tribal leaders and elders of Upper, Lower and Central Kurram attended here on Thursday. The grand Jirga was presided over by Deputy Commissioner Javed Ullah Mehsud to maintain law and order in District Kurram. The Deputy Commissioner stated the aims and objectives of the Jirga and said that peace has been restored in Kurram district after many sacrifices, so to maintain this peace, the leaders of the area should cooperate with the government. Addressing the Jirga, GOC 9th Division Major Gen Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti said in his address that all peace will be maintained in the district of Kurram and full action will be taken against the miscreants with the cooperation of the people of the area. They should demonstrate practical unity and brotherhood among themselves.

Rains, floods closed roads in Chitral

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: Due to the recent incessant rains and devastating floods, roads in various areas of Chitral were closed for all types of traffic floods in the rivers and canals brought down huge stones and debris from the mountains resulted in blocked the roads. As a result of the floods, the roads to Orghoch, Bakamak, Shadok, Dinian Gahtak etc. have been closed due to which thousands of people are facing difficulties. There are some villages around Ghoch, where the road of this valley containing fifteen thousand people is closed on both sides. On the main Chitral road, the bridge that has been built across the river Chitral to Orghoch is blocked, while on the road

from Faizabad, heavy stones, trees and debris fell from the mountain and this road is closed to all kinds of traffic.

After the continuous rains, land sliding hills in different areas continued with electricity poles have also fallen in many places due to which electricity supply has also been suspended in these areas from the last one week.

Similarly, the road of Shadok, Dinin, Gahtak is also closed for all kinds of traffic, which is very difficult as well as dangerous for pedestrians. Because mudslides, heavy rocks and debris are still falling from the mountains, closing the road to Orghoch from the rest of the areas.

Due to the closure of this road, people are forced to walk 15 kilometers while

carrying food items on their shoulders and patients to the hospital. The local people thanked Deputy Commissioner Chitral Muhammad Imran Khan and Executive Engineer of C&W Department Communication and Works Tariq Murtaza for their quick response for the opening of roads and other ways for the public. The C&W Department has also repaired the roads of Abdul Wali Khan Bypass Road, Dunin Chidok, Officer Mess Road, Mughalanda, Shah Dok, Hoon Faizabad, and Ghoch Dom Shughur, Karbitoli and Upper Chitral District which were closed due to recent rains and floods. The C&W had cleared the Bonny road was again closed due to heavy rock and landslides from the mountain.

Husband kills his wife over domestic dispute

F.P. Report

LARKANA: A husband shot killed her wife, the mother of 3 children, and escaped. The police reached the spot and handed over dead body to the relatives after taking necessary action. While the suit of the murdered woman, Masmat Safiya, spoke to the journalists, she said that the husband of the suit, Masmat Safiya, Manthar Jamal, called his sister-in-law, who happens to be my aunt, in the morning and said, "I am yours."

The daughter was killed and dumped inside the house, after which we informed the border police, who arrived at the place and took details where the

tortured body of my suitor Musmat was lying in the room of the house. Murad Ali Shah and the Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana Region have demanded that the murderer be arrested and the justice for the blood of the infant should be done.

Meanwhile the Deputy Commissioner of Larkana district, Dr. Sharjeel Noor Chana, has directed the officials of the revenue department to resolve all the issues related to the revenue department on an urgent and legal basis.

While the requests and complaints of the public should be resolved promptly and the pending cases should be given relief, he expressed such thoughts

while presiding over the meeting held with the officials of the revenue department in his office today.

In the meeting, the revenue officers gave a briefing to the Deputy Commissioner Larkana about the pending cases of the revenue department and the functions of the department.

The deputy commissioner checked the records of the Larkana department and ordered the officials to try to solve the issues related to the revenue of the people as soon as possible. Revenue records should be updated. If there are any issues at the relational level, the issues should be solved together with the relevant officials.

Timely completion of uplift projects directed

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad directed the officers of nation building departments to ensure completion of ongoing mega development projects of construction of University of Hafizabad, DHQ hospital, museum and development work to upgrade Trauma Centre according to specification and timely so that people of the district could get benefits of government expenditure shortly.

DC issued theses directions while inspecting construction work on ongoing developments projects being completed with the cost of more than Rs. 20 billion. Deputy Director Development Hafizabad Tasawar Abbas, CEO Health Dr. Umer Sharif, Deputy Director Colleges Hafizabad Professor Azhar Janjuwa and other officers were also accompanied by her.

During the visit of under

construction building of University of Hafizabad, she directed the concerned officer to expedite construction work on the project to ensure use of hundred percent funds released by the Punjab government to complete this project according to specification. DD Development informed the DC that hundred percent funds had been utilized released by the Punjab government already and he requested to release more funds for completion of building of DHQ Hospital earliest.

DC also visited site of Museum being constructed for enlighten the youth about traditional culture local, national culture and ancient heritage as well as provision of recreational facilities to the youth at local level. While checking upgradation work in Trauma Centre, DC reviews ongoing construction, maintenance work and reviewed treatment facilities available to patients in the centre so that the best

treatment facilities could be provided to people at local level instead of visiting other cities for treatment. She directed the officers to ensure use of quality material while executing development work on the projects and use of substandard material would not be tolerated at all.

Donate blood for thalassemia patients: Ex-District Nazim Hafizabad Col. (R) Ali Ahmad Awan has urged the citizens especially youth to come forward to donate blood to save precious lives of Thalassemic children and lives of the Thalassemic children are endanger due to shortage of blood and patients and their parents are suffering from mental agony.

While talking to media, he said that serving the ailing humanity was great worship and big means of getting pleasure of Almighty Allah and Hazoor Nabi Kareem (SAWW) as well as salvation in this world and hereafter.



HYDERABAD: Chief Secretary Sindh Asif Haider Shah talking to media persons after court hearing.

Tribal youth hold first ever education seminar F.P. Report

MIRAN SHAH: First ever education seminar arranged by students and youth of Khadarkhel tribe at Government High School Datta Khel, area of north Waziristan to aware youngsters regarding academic disciplines to compete with the demands of global era.

Former candidate for tehsil mayor Noor Kalam Wazir stressed on the importance of education and argued the participants that world has been changed rapidly after information technology in the 21st century. He claimed that tribal youth possessing God gifted talent but it needs attention of concerned authority to utilize it in the larger public and national interest.

Moreover, local elders and tribesmen also addressed the educational seminar while arguing for provision of both academic and technical education institutions in the area to ensure uplifting human development index among tribal youth. They appreciated youth of Khadar Khel for organizing such event and hopeful for their success.

Poppy crop destroyed at Swabi F.P. Report

SWABI: Swabi Police here on Thursday destroyed poppy crop cultivated over 27 kanals of land in remote area of Darlegi. The poppy crop cultivated in far flung mountainous area of Darlegi was destroyed in a raid conducted on the directives of District Police Officer Swabi, Haroon Rasheed.

Raid was conducted by armed contingent of police under the supervision of Parmooli and Kalu Khan Police.

Recovery of drowned minor & driver Rescue operation continue in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Rescue 1122 divers in the presence of the missing driver's relatives continued a search and rescue operation from the zero point of Talash stream to the Panjkora River for the fourth consecutive day. The pickup driver Saleem Khan, a resident of Shamoza Swat had drowned while crossing a flooded stream in Talash four day ago.

The body is yet to be recovered. Similarly Rescue 1122 divers and the Al-Khidmat Foundation volunteers failed to search the missing body of a child Rizwan 14 who drowned while swimming in a stream at Gosum area of Jandol the other day. The Samarbagh assistant commissioner Numan Pervaz visited the family of Rizwan and offered feteha for the departed soul. The family was also provided with food items.

Meanwhile, chairing a meeting the Lower Dir deputy commissioner Wasil Khan directed the assistant

director National Highways Authority Junaid Khan to complete the remaining work on the Talash Shamshi Khan Bridge soon. He said that legal actions would be taken against the concerned contractor if the work was not completed within the stipulated time. The DC said that wings would also be constructed on both sides of Talash bazaar culvert.

The Pakistan Tahreek Insaf backed MPA Azam Khan along with deputy commissioner Wasil Khan, additional deputy commissioner relief and human rights Tariq Hussain and Khall tehsil nazim Ashfaqur Rahim visited the family of Muslim Zada in Luqman Banda and handed over a compensation cheque of Rs 4 million to the family. The wife of Muslim Zada, his son and two sisters were killed when the roof of his house collapsed due to heavy rains the other day.

The lawmaker also offered feteha for the departed souls and expressed his grief over the sad incident. The family

was also provided with food and nonfood items. The PTI another lawmaker Humayun Khan also visited the family of one Nazir at Sakhawono village of Asbahr and handed over food and nonfood items to the victim's family. Two children were killed while three others were injured when the roof of Mazir's house collapsed due to heavy rains the other day. The lawmaker expressed his grief over the human losses and said the government would soon compensate the family.

Seminar and awareness walk held to mark World Quantum Day: Speakers at a function held at the University of Malakand (UoM) on Thursday demanded the concerned authorities to declare mathematics a compulsory subject up to grade 12th, promote the science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and organize programmes on quantum and STEM at regional, provincial and national levels across Pakistan.

Senior Civil Judge burns hashish in Buner

F.P. Report

BUNER: Senior Civil Judge Admin, Shiraz Firdus on Thursday burnt to ashes 6922 grams of hashish. This huge quantity of Hashish was seized by police and the court was confiscated in the last three months i. e., January to March 2024.

The SCJ Admin, told the aim behind burning the Hashish was to make it unusable. He claimed the confiscated Hashish were burnt in an empty quarter of the court premises in his presence so that no one would use the hashish

again. While talking to the media, Senior Civil Judge Admin, said that every 3 months the seized drugs are burnt and this time from January to March 2024, the seized hashish was burnt and added that drugs especially hashish harms the young generation.

SCJ showed deep concern over increased use of the Hashish as it is used as a fashion instead of an addictive drug, which adversely affects the physical health and mental health and work capacity of the young generation. He added nowadays the police take young people to court

in cases of different Narcotics, especially Hashish. He added the courts are punished them under the law and the Narcotics are confiscated and later burnt in their presence.

But it is necessary that parents and the elders of the family, elders and scholars play their role in controlling the scourge of addiction. To inform the society about the evil effects of the curse of drugs and spread awareness among the young generation so that this evil can be fought together, he concluded.

LG system key for political prosperity in democratic society

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar has said that the role of local governments has always been prominent in the development and prosperity of a country, political, democratic and economic stability and provision of basic facilities to the people and equal opportunities for the citizens to move forward.

The stronger and more empowered the local government system the higher the rate of growth and the more prosperous and satisfied the people will be. He expressed these views while addressing a ceremony held on the occasion of the visit of the delegation of the non-governmental organization Bidari Organization to Mardan in TMA Hall Mardan, along with Project Manager of Bidari Organization Sajid Iqbal, Social Organizer Miss Nazima Irshad, Secretary Local Government Abid Hussain and Nusrat Ara of Women Development Organization.

The event was attended by community members, youth, councilors, minorities, men and women. On the instructions of Mayor Mardan, the Stalkot delegation was visited the district council hall, church, cremation ground, Darul Aman in addition to different areas of Mardan and the local governments. Informed about the importance,

performance, besides this, the delegation was given a briefing regarding the various development projects of Mardan.

In his address, Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar informed the delegation regarding the meetings, bylaws and other issues of City Local Government Mardan. Similarly, Mayor Mardan Himayat Ullah Mayar informed about the financial and administrative problems faced by the local governments in the province. The guests presented special footballs and gifts prepared for the European League to Mayor Mardan. Mayor Mardan presented commemorative shields to the guests.

Public servants accountable before masses: Commissioner Mardan Shaukat Ali Yousafzai said that administration is accountable to people. We are the servants of people, not the rulers. The stability of economy in the world is related to trade. He expressed those views while addressing the Executive Council and other members of the Chamber on the occasion of his visit to Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry along with Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayyaz Khan Sherpao.

On the occasion, Zahir Shah, president of Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry along with his cabinet and other trading community members

warmly welcomed them. While delivering the welcome speech, Zahir Shah thanked Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Mardan for coming to the chamber office.

He said that the Mardan Chamber has a unique position at the national and international level and has the honor of representing the province and Mardan in many countries including the United States. He said that the traders and industrialists of Mardan have always cooperated fully with the administration and this atmosphere of cooperation will be maintained.

Later speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Mardan Shaukat Ali Yousafzai mentioned the development of China and said that China has enriched the people with the wealth of education and created productivity by teaching the workforce various skills and making energy cheaper, resultantly today it is ruling the world economy. We can move forward here too by promoting skills and education. He said that our region is rich in minerals and we should take advantage of the vast tourism opportunities available here.

He said that the economy cannot develop without giving opportunities to the private sector. He assured full cooperation from the administration to the business community. He asked

the business community to discourage the use of polythene bags saying it is environmental terrorism and cooperate with the administration in its elimination.

Similarly, cooperate with the administration in removing encroachments and keep footpaths clear for pedestrians. Zahir Shah and other members presented shields and souvenirs to Commissioner Mardan and Deputy Commissioner Mardan.

Girl student selects for Summer camp at USA: Belonging to district Mardan, Abeera Shah, a student of O' level was selected for Summer Camp in the USA. Abeera Shah is an O' level student in Beacon House School and her parents are teachers by profession. The family sources of the relevant student said.

Dr. Zahir Shah, father of Abeera Shah is Dean Faculty of Social Sciences at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. He was very happy about the selection of his daughter for a summer Camp study trip to Genesis Academy of Chicago, and she is the only candidate who was selected from the whole country.

He added that Abeera Shah is engaged in preparations for the departure and wanted her to be a role model for students. She will stay for 14 days in Chicago, US and will represent Pakistan and its dynamic culture. In addition to her credit, she has secured

2nd position in Intra Beacon House Schools game of Badminton.

BISE kicks off matric exams: Under the auspices of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Mardan, the matriculation examinations have started. One hundred and fifty-five thousand students will participate in the examination for which 590 examination centers have been set up for prisoners in the Central Jail while separate examination centers for special students are in the board office have also been established.

In this regard, Chairman Farid Ahmed Khattak has said that all the preparations for the matriculation exams have been completed one hundred and fifty five thousand students will participate in the exam for which 590 exam centers have been established in which 260 centers for female students, special examination centers have also been made for prisoners in the Central Jail and for special persons in the premises of Mardan Board.

The examination halls will be monitored through CCTV cameras while special teams have been formed for monitoring. He expressed these thoughts in Pukhtunkhwa Radio FM 92.6 Mardan program Chapter Chal hosted by Junaid Yousafzai. Chairman of the board Farid Ahmed Khattak said that according to the vision of the Chief Minister of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa paperless environment is also on behalf of the board.

A step has been taken and this year the computer science paper will be conducted through computers in different halls except for the superintendent, no one will be allowed to bring or use mobile phones in the examination hall. He said that special arrangements have been made for paper marking and an online marking system has been made. The reporting time is fixed at 8:30 AM and no one will be allowed to enter the examination hall after 9:00 PM.

Admin crackdowns against bakers: On the orders of the provincial government the district administration of Mardan cracked down on bakers selling underweight bread inspection of the weight of bread in bakers' shops in Mardan district. 18 bakers were arrested and fined 50,000 while inspecting different markets of Mardan for selling less weight bread and more than the government price.

The assistant commissioners issued strict instructions to the tandoor owners that they will be obliged to give bread according to the price list issued by the district administration. Fines will be imposed for violation and display price list / rate list at every non-shop and do not exceed the official rate otherwise strict action will be taken.



Spy scandal revives fears of Austrian exposure to Russia

SYDNEY (BBC): It is being called Austria's biggest espionage scandal for decades, which began with the arrest of a former domestic security official and has led to a raft of allegations and accusations. Egisto Ott, 61, was detained at the end of March on suspicion of spying for Russia.

According to an 86-page Austrian police warrant, obtained by Austrian and German media, Mr Ott is suspected of passing information to Jan Marsalek, the fugitive executive of collapsed German payments firm Wirecard. Mr Marsalek, 44 and also an Austrian citizen, is wanted by German police for alleged fraud and is currently believed to be in Moscow, having fled via Austria in 2020. A recent report by a group of European newspapers said he was recruited by Russian agents in 2014. The Austrian police warrant reportedly alleges that the former Wirecard boss commissioned Egisto Ott and another Austrian security officer to pass on sensitive information to Russia for several years, from 2017.

Mr Ott denies any wrongdoing, and he is currently in custody. He was suspended in 2017 and then detained four years later before being released. He was arrested at the end of

last month after new evidence was supplied by British intelligence. He is suspected, reports say, of having passed phone data from senior Austrian interior or ministry officials to Russia. Austria's Standard newspaper says Egisto Ott apparently obtained the phones after they accidentally fell into the Danube on an interior ministry boating trip. He is alleged to have copied their contents and passed them on to Jan Marsalek, and Moscow. He is also suspected of obtaining under false pretences the Vienna address of Bulgarian journalist Christo Grozev. Mr Grozev is known for investigations into Russian intelligence activities such as the 2022 poisoning of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, who died in a Russian prison in the Arctic Circle this year.

Christo Grozev has since left Vienna. He told the newspaper Falter that he did so for security reasons. Austria's Chancellor, Karl Nehammer, has described the Egisto Ott case as "a threat to democracy and our country's national security". He's called for a swift investigation into the affair. The spy scandal has revived fears that Austria remains a hotbed of Russian espionage activity. Austria's Green Party, the junior

party in the ruling coalition, has called Egisto Ott "the tip of the Russian iceberg" in Austria. The Greens have accused the far-right Freedom Party of enabling Russian espionage, of acting as "an extension of Russia's arm" in Austria. The Freedom Party (FPÖ) is now in opposition but leader Herbert Kickl was interior minister from 2017 to 2019.

"We have the potential infiltration of our secret services by Russian agents. This is very, very serious and the Freedom Party and... Kickl are directly linked to it," said Greens parliamentary leader Sigrid Maurer. Mr Kickl and the Freedom Party have denied all allegations related to Jan Marsalek and Egisto Ott. The Freedom Party opposes EU sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. In the past, it struck a co-operation agreement with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. It is currently leading in the opinion polls and Austria is due to hold parliamentary elections this year. Several parties have called for a parliamentary committee to investigate the affair, including the Freedom Party. In a statement, Mr Kickl said it would be "in the interest of actual clarification instead of an election campaign show".

Volcano in Indonesia has several big eruptions

JAKARTA (AP): Indonesian authorities issued a tsunami alert after eruptions at Ruang mountain sent ash thousands of feet high. Officials ordered more than 11,000 people to leave the area. The volcano on the northern side of Sulawesi island had at least five large eruptions in the past 24 hours, Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation said. Authorities raised their volcano alert to its highest level.

At least 800 residents left the area. Indonesia, an archipelago of 270 million people, has 120 active volcanoes. It is prone to volcanic activity because it sits along the "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines around the Pacific Ocean. Authorities urged tourists and others to stay at least 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) from the 725-meter (2,378 foot) Ruang volcano. Officials worry that part of the volcano could collapse into the sea and cause a tsunami as in a 1871 eruption there. Tagulandang island to the volcano's northeast is again at risk, and its residents are among those being told to evacuate. Indonesia's National Disaster Mitigation Agency said residents will be relocated to Manado, the nearest city, on Sulawesi island, a journey of six hours by boat. In 2018, the eruption of Indonesia's Anak Krakatau volcano caused a tsunami along the coasts of Sumatra and Java after parts of the mountain fell into the ocean, killing 430 people.

Defense and security are on citizens' minds

BRUSSELS (AP): Russia's invasion of Ukraine is at the forefront of European Union citizens' minds, with defense and security seen as key campaign issues ahead of the June elections, according to a study published. At national level, the EU's defense and security is mentioned first in nine countries, in contrast with sentiments five years ago when the last EU Parliament elections were held.

"The EU's defense and security was far from a prominent topic in 2019, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022," the latest edition of the EU Parliament's Eurobarometer said. The report, a collection of opinion surveys across the 27 EU nations, showed that defense and security - alongside the economy and jobs - now come in third place (31%) behind poverty and social exclusion (33%) and public health (32%). Climate change and the future of Europe follow closely. The Eurobarometer also noted that EU citizens put defense and security as first priorities in reinforcing the EU's global position, ahead of food security and agriculture.

Looking at the next legislative mandate, peace and democracy are considered the main values to defend in the coming years, ahead of the protection of human rights, freedom of speech and thought and the rule of law. Peace is the most valued goal in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. In the Baltic states, Russia's belligerence toward Ukraine has led some to worry that they could be the next target, while Finland's relationship with Russia has significantly deteriorated due to the Nordic country's membership in NATO and over Russia's invasion of Ukraine and related sanctions. The report also highlighted a surge of interest in the June 6-9 elections. Some 60% of Europeans said they are interested in the next European elections, an 11-point increase since 2019, and 71% said they are likely to cast a ballot.

The majority of respondents said voting is even more important considering the global situation. The survey was carried out between Feb. 7 and March 3 in all 27 EU countries. In total, 26,411 interviews were made.



TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied shaking hands with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

How South Africa's former leader Zuma turned on his allies

JOHANNESBURG (AP): South Africa faces an unusual national election this year, its seventh vote since transitioning from white minority rule to a democracy 30 years ago. Polls and analysts warn that for the first time, the ruling African National Congress party that has comfortably held power since Nelson Mandela became the country's first Black president in 1994 might receive less than 50% of votes.

One big reason is Jacob Zuma, the former president and ANC leader, who stepped down in disgrace in 2018 amid a swirl of corruption allegations but has emerged in recent months with a new political party. It intends to be a major election player as the former president seeks revenge against former longtime allies. Here is what you need to know about the 82-year-old Zuma's return to the political ring and how it might play a significant election role.

Zuma has long been one of South Africa's most recognizable politicians. He was a senior leader in the ANC during the liberation struggle against apartheid. A former ANC intelligence chief, he has repeatedly threatened to reveal some of the party's secrets. While Zuma was not one of Mandela's preferred choices to succeed him, Mandela trusted Zuma to play an influential role in ending deadly political violence that engulfed KwaZulu-Natal province before the historic 1994 elections.

The province has remained a vocal base of support for Zuma ever since, and members of Zuma's Zulu ethnic group make up its majority. Zuma became deputy leader of the ANC in 1997 and was appointed South Africa's deputy president in 1999. Zuma's path to power included legal challenges. In 2006, he was found not guilty of raping the daughter of a comrade at Zuma's home in Johannesburg. A year earlier, he was fired as South Africa's deputy president after his financial advisor was convicted for corruption for soliciting bribes for Zuma during an infamous arms deal. Alleging a political witch hunt, Zuma launched an aggressive political campaign that saw him elected ANC president in 2007. His campaign appealed to widespread discontent with then-President Thabo Mbeki, who was often described as autocratic and aloof. The corruption charges against Zuma were later dropped, amid controversy, and he was elected South Africa's president in 2009. Zuma's presidency was often under fire. His close friends and allies, the Gupta family, were accused of influencing appointments to key cabinet positions in exchange for lucrative business deals. The allegations of corruption in government and state-owned companies eventually led the ANC force Zuma to resign in 2018. A judicial commission of inquiry uncovered wide-ranging evidence, and Zuma in 2021 was con-

victed and sentenced to 15 months in jail for refusing to testify. Zuma remains aggrieved with the ANC and his successor, President Cyril Ramaphosa. But few South Africans expected the break to go so far.

Zuma shocked the country in December by denouncing the ANC and campaigning against a party that had been at the heart of his political career. His new political party, UMKhonto WeSizwe, was named after the ANC's military wing, which was disbanded at the end of the struggle against white minority rule. The ANC has launched a legal case seeking to stop the new party from using a name and logo that are similar to those of the military wing. The charismatic Zuma continues to crisscross the country, delivering lively speeches, and an image of his face will represent the party on ballots. The ANC already had been facing pressure from other opposition parties. But Zuma's new party threatens to draw support from within the often divided ANC. South Africa's electoral body has cleared him to run for a parliament seat, despite his past conviction. Polls suggest the new party may emerge as one of the country's biggest opposition parties and could play a significant role if the weakening ANC must form coalitions to run the country. Addressing his supporters at a recent rally, Zuma declared that "I need to return so that I can fix things."

Italy's leader keeps focus on migration

TUNIS (AP): The head of Italy's right-wing government acknowledged that Tunisia cannot serve as a dumping ground for migrants, days after Tunisia's president reaffirmed his unwillingness to let Europe outsource migration problems by sending those not welcome there to his country.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni said during a visit to Tunisia - her fourth in the past year - that the North African nation "cannot become the arrival point for migrants coming from the rest of Europe." However, she sidestepped tensions over how to manage migration via the Mediterranean Sea and instead praised Tunisia and Italy's shared priorities in fighting human traffickers and repatriating African migrants back to their home countries. Meloni and Tunisian President Kais Saied signed new accords as part of Italy's "Mattei Plan" for Africa, a continent-wide strategy aimed at growing economic opportunities and preventing migration to Europe.

They included education initiatives and 50 million euros (\$53 million) in a budgetary aid package earmarked for renewable energy projects. Meloni also promised to expand efforts to repatriate migrants to their home countries and expand legal migration pathways for Tunisians to work in Italy. "It is essential

that we work together to continue to fight the slavers of the third millennium, the mafia organizations that exploit the legitimate aspirations of those who would like a better life," Meloni said, referring to smugglers who facilitate migrants' perilous sea journeys. European leaders often frame migration as a human trafficking issue, though migrants are known to make the trip in various ways and for a variety of reasons.

Nearly 16,000 migrants have made the treacherous journey from North Africa to Italy so far in 2024, travelling hundreds of kilometers (miles) from the shores of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, mainly to islands off the Italian mainland. Arrivals tend to increase through spring and summer. As weather warmed early this year, more migrants arrived with each passing month - a trend that's on track to maintain its pace through April. Less than half as many migrants had arrived in Italy as of April 15, compared to the same period in 2023, according to figures from the UN refugee agency. That's in part because of Tunisia's border patrol force, which this year intercepted about 21,000 migrants before they crossed into European waters.

Despite the interceptions, Saied has long insisted he is unwilling to let his

country become Europe's "border guard" or accept migrants that Europe wants to deport. Earlier this week, he said he had no intention of opening detention centers for migrants in an agreement similar to Italy's deal with Albania on asylum seekers. "We will not accept the presence of people outside the law, and Tunisia will not be a victim," Saied said. North African countries, from Morocco to Egypt, enjoy some leverage in their relations with Europe due to their role in helping control the flow of migrants. Italy and its European Union counterparts have pledged substantial financial support to countries on the other side of the Mediterranean to help prevent migration and trafficking.

But most of the more than 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) promised to Tunisia as part of an EU agreement brokered in July is contingent on the country reaching an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on a stalled bailout package that could require painful spending cuts. The broader EU package includes 105 million euros (\$112 million) earmarked for migration. Romdhan Ben Amor, a spokesperson for the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, which closely follows the migration assistance, said much of it has yet to be disbursed.

Human smuggling: 10 detained in Germany

BERLIN (AP): German authorities conducted a large-scale raid against an international human smuggling gang, police said in a statement. More than 1,000 police officers searched dozens of homes, stores and offices across western and southern Germany and detained 10 suspects, including two lawyers.

A total of 38 suspected gang members, as well as 147 other people who allegedly paid to be smuggled by it, are being investigated, German news agency dpa reported. The two lawyers, 42 and 46 years old and from the Cologne area, are the main suspects, federal police in nearby Sankt Augustin said. The names of the suspects were not given, in line with German privacy rules. The suspects are accused of having illegally taken advantage of special German immigration rules reserved for skilled foreign workers to obtain residency permits for around 350

mostly Chinese nationals - who don't meet the needed criteria - in exchange for hundreds of thousands of euros (dollars). Through their law firms, the two main suspects are said to have recruited wealthy foreign nationals for smuggling - mainly from China but also from Arab countries. Police said clients paid the law firms from 30,000 to 350,000 euros for illegal help with visas. The suspected lawyers and their helpers allegedly used the money to set up fake companies, finance alleged residences and falsify alleged wage payments, keeping "not" considerable amounts "to enrich themselves, dpa reported.

The false residence permits were obtained from immigration offices in the western towns of Kerpen and Solingen, as well as Rhine-Erft and Dueren counties. One of the ten detained suspects is an city employee from Dueren, who was allegedly bribed to

participate in the scam, dpa said. Raids were carried out in the states of North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria, Hamburg and Berlin where police seized assets and collected evidence. "So far, extensive evidence and not inconsiderable assets have been secured, including around 210,000 euros in cash," the authorities said. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser thanked police and prosecutors for the "massive strike against international organized migrant smuggling."

"In the fight against smuggling gangs, we need precisely this high level of investigative pressure and this consistent crackdown," the minister added. "We will continue this tough approach against organized migrant smuggling." The investigation focused on North Rhine-Westphalia, where the 10 suspects were detained.

HALLE (AP): One of the most prominent figures in the far-right Alternative for Germany party is going on trial Thursday on charges of twice using a Nazi slogan, months before a regional election in which he is running to become his state's governor.

Björn Höcke, 52, is the leader of the regional branch of Alternative for Germany, or AfD, in the eastern state of Thuringia and a powerful figure on the party's hard right. While never formally a national leader of AfD, the former history teacher has been consistently influential as the 11-year-old party has steadily headed further right and ousted several comparatively moderate leaders.

At the trial at the state court in Halle, he is charged with using symbols of unconstitutional organizations. He is accused of ending

a speech in nearby Merseburg in May 2021 with the words "Everything for Germany!" Prosecutors contend he was aware of the origin of the phrase as a slogan of the Nazis' SA stormtroopers. They allege that he repeated the offense at a party event in Gera last December, "in certain knowledge of the punishability" of the slogan. Prosecutors allege that Höcke said "Everything for ..." and encouraged the audience to shout "Germany!" Using symbols of unconstitutional organizations can carry a fine or a prison sentence of up to three years. Four court sessions have been scheduled through May 14.

Höcke has led AfD's regional branch in Thuringia since 2013, the year the party was founded, and its group in the state legislature in Erfurt since it first won seats there in

2014. He once called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a "monument of shame" and called for Germany to perform a "180-degree turn" in how it remembers its past. A party tribunal in 2018 rejected a bid to have him expelled. Höcke's regional branch of AfD is now one of three that the domestic intelligence agency has under official surveillance as a "proven right-wing extremist" group. Wolfgang Schroeder, a political science professor at the Berlin Social Science Center, said Höcke has become an increasingly important figure in AfD and the front man of a "radicalization project" in the party. He said that people vote for the party "in part out of protest, in part out of conviction."

AFD is particularly strong in the formerly communist east and is in

first place in polls in Thuringia ahead of a state election on Sept. 1, with recent surveys showing support of 29-to-31%. It's unlikely that any other party will agree to work with Höcke and put him in the governor's office, but AfD's strength has made forming governing coalitions in the state enormously complicated. Höcke insisted in a debate with a conservative rival last week that he wasn't aware "Everything for Germany!" was a Nazi slogan and claimed that many others have used it. "Everyone out there knows it's an everyday saying," he said on Welt television.

He also faces a second trial, for which dates haven't yet been set, on charges of incitement related to a 2022 post on Telegram about a crime in the western city of Ludwigshafen.

Homes demolished in Ivory Coast's city over alleged health concerns

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (AP): Dame Touré rushed to quickly gather what she could as bulldozers rolled into her neighborhood in Ivory Coast's fast-growing economic hub of Abidjan. Her three children joined her, stuffing plastic bags with clothes and whatever other items they could grab, before their home was reduced to rubble as armed security forces looked on.

The Touré home was among hundreds crushed in a February wave of demolitions targeting Abidjan's underdeveloped areas. The government says it's because of public health concerns as the poor areas - built along a lagoon in this port city of 6.3 million on West Africa's southern coast - suffer deadly floods during the rainy season. More than 300 people have been killed since 2005 and officials say the deluges become breeding grounds

for water-borne and other diseases.

"My children and I now sleep under the sun," said Touré, 50. "We don't know where to go." Demolitions in low-income neighborhoods are nothing new in Abidjan, where rapid urbanization has led to a population boom and housing shortages, with nearly one in five Ivorians residing in the city. It's a challenge in many parts of Africa where economic woes pushed more people into cities in search of better opportunities, straining an already overstretched infrastructure. However, the latest Abidjan demolition - mainly in impoverished suburbs in the GESCO and Sebroko districts - is one of the largest in years, with an estimated hundreds of thousands of residents affected since it began in late January. Evicted families and rights groups say that

this time, it's being done without prior notice or compensation.

Analysts say many African governments struggle to manage population explosions in cities and meet growing infrastructure needs. Chimezie Anajama, a policy researcher and founder of Blooming Social Pen development nonprofit, says few administrations have managed to solve the developmental problem. "There must be a strong commitment by different African governments to come up with creative solutions to address the infrastructure gaps in African cities," Anajama said. Local authorities have defended the demolitions, and say relocations of families left homeless to safer areas has started. Some 35% of Ivorians are poor. Water shortages are a daily curse, with many forced to fetch water from streams for their

daily needs. The country has also had to contend with other challenges, such as jihadi attacks that have spread to coastal states in West Africa, including Ivory Coast.

"The aim is to provide a decent living environment for these people," the Ivory Coast's communications minister, Amadou Coulibaly, has said of the demolition campaigns. He claimed in February that some of those evicted in neighborhoods like Boribana are being resettled in at least 1,000 houses built by the government. Many families, however, remain homeless, stranded in several parts of the city. The demolitions are being carried out in "a brutal manner ... causing disastrous consequences for many families already vulnerable," the Ivorian League for Human Rights said in a statement. It urged authorities to halt the campaign.

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‘Overcapacity’ moves driven by need for votes

UNITED States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen complained about China's "overcapacity" in the production of such clean-energy goods as electric vehicles, power batteries and solar panels, on a recent trip to China. The Joe Biden administration has been keen to frame China's "overcapacity" as a global concern, with Yellen saying that the US was hearing similar concerns from other economies such as the European Union, as it has sought to justify protectionist moves in a bid to secure the backing of labor unions in a presidential election year.

According to a release by the US Trade Representative's Office on Wednesday, it has launched a Section 301 investigation into China's maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding sectors based on a "serious and concerning" petition by national labor unions accusing China of using "unfair, non-market policies and practices" to "dominate the maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding sectors". The very same day, the White House called for tripling the existing tariff rate on steel and aluminum imports from China. While it remains to be seen where the ongoing investigation will lead, the tariff rate on steel and aluminum would rise to 22.5 percent once the USTR follows through.

Considering the political atmosphere in an election year, the outcomes of such proceedings allow for little optimism. It is more likely than not they will further undermine the two countries' already fraught economic and trade ties. Beijing was correct in pointing out the decisive divergence between the two sides, which lies in how to define and address what may otherwise be normal between trading partners and hence be handled without much trouble following set rules.

Calling it full of false accusations, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said the petition that triggered the Section 301 investigation lacked factual basis and runs counter to common sense economics. It said the petition misinterprets normal trade and investment activities as being damaging to US national security and corporate interests, while blaming China for the US' industrial woes. The ministry also rightly pointed out that the US has provided hundreds of billions of dollars in discriminatory subsidies to its own domestic industries. And that multiple US studies have shown that US shipbuilding lost its competitive edge years ago due to the protectionist measures. It is because of the active participation of Chinese enterprises in market competition and their technological innovation that they now dominate the market.

The ministry thus called on Washington to return to the rules-based multilateral trading system. In the current circumstances, however, it is proving extremely difficult for the two sides to agree on exactly what are the rules for both to follow, a state of affairs that is likely to persist until after the US presidential election as the Democrats and Republicans are engaged in their own fierce competition over who gets to occupy the White House for the next four years. It is a tug of war in which China-bashing serves as the flag on the rope.

Provocations show Washington lacks sincerity

THE Chinese People's Liberation Army is tasked with defending national sovereignty and the country's territorial integrity. Beijing will exhaust all means possible, including having talk-for-talk's-sake with the US side, to resolve the Taiwan question peacefully, as well as the maritime disputes with its neighbors. But if forced to act, the PLA will do so.

Previously, exchanges between the Chinese and US defense chiefs have been opportunities to ease tensions and deepen mutual trust. Yet the United States' provocative moves raise questions about its sincerity in engaging in such exchanges. One day after the defense chiefs of China and the US had their first direct talks in 18 months, aircraft of the PLA Eastern Theater Command tracked a US Navy plane conducting a surveillance flight in the Taiwan Strait.

With the Taiwan question being a key topic of the defense heads' talks via video link, this was a clear provocation, demonstrating which side is to blame for the strained inter-military ties as well as the rising tensions in the Asia-Pacific. The US 7th Fleet, announcing the transit of a P-8A Poseidon aircraft from the north to the south of the strait took place on Wednesday, claimed that the move "demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open 'Indo-Pacific'".

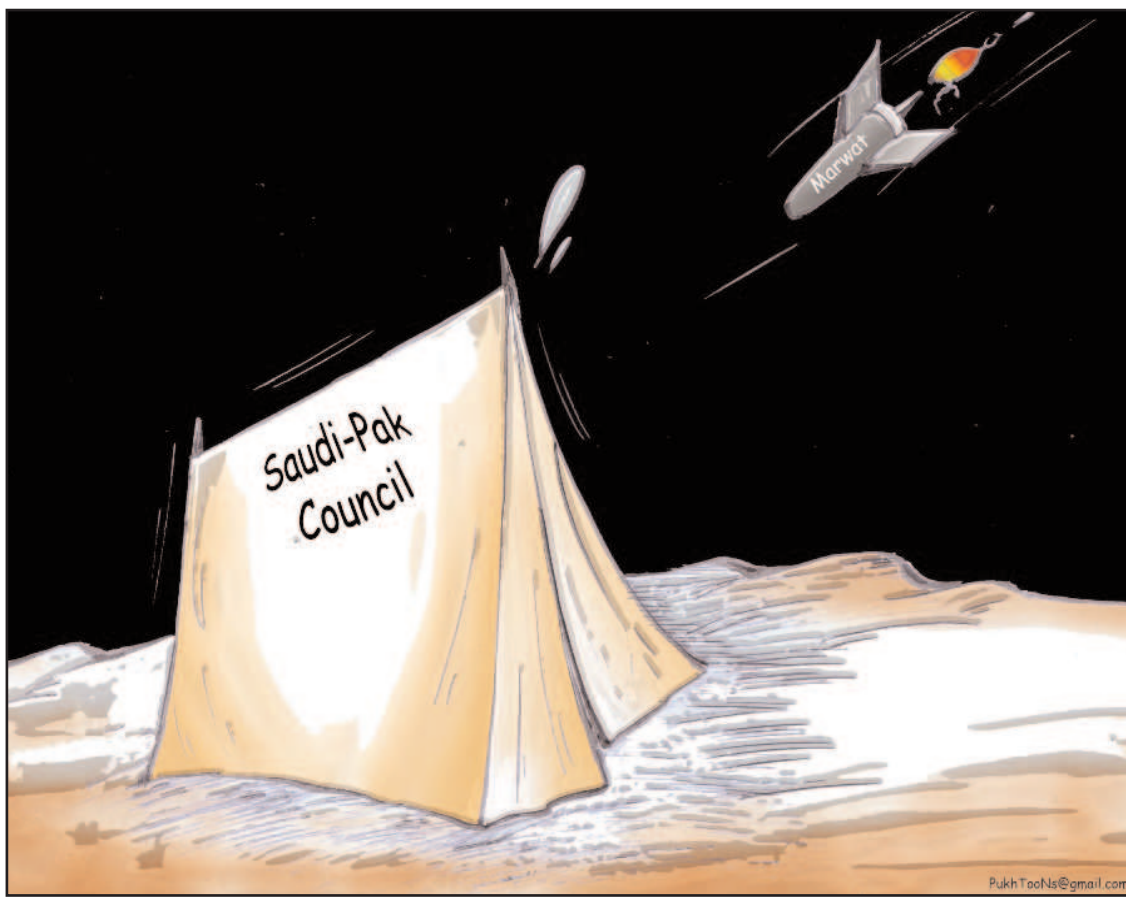
During his talks with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Defense Minister Dong Jun once again underscored that the Taiwan question is China's core interest, which brooks no compromise. Although clearly carried out to reinforce the point that as far as the US is concerned the US military can fly, sail and operate anywhere it likes, the timing risks sabotaging the direct communication between the two militaries that has only just been restored.

The US side has continuously expressed its desire to reopen the channels of direct communication between the two militaries, which were shut down due to previous egregious actions on its part. Its intention has been to create the impression that the US side is committed to easing the tensions and it is China that has shut the door on exchanges. But what the US military has just done, and what it has been doing, belie its claims to be acting with probity.

Just one day before the two defense ministers held their talks, the US military deployed a mid-range missile system to Northern Luzon in the Philippines. The missiles' range covers Taiwan island and surrounding waters as well as the southern coastal areas of the Chinese mainland. That being said, instead of mutual trust between the two militaries serving as a cornerstone for Sino-US relations, as the US leader said he wanted, the tensions between the two sides have been ratcheted up another notch.

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The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



Why Global South is rising for Gaza

Dr. Ramzy Baroud

THE distance between Gaza and Namibia is measured in the thousands of kilometers. But their historical experiences mean they feel much closer. This is precisely why Namibia was one of the first countries to take a strong stance against the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Namibia was colonized by the Germans in 1884, while the British colonized Palestine after the First World War before handing the territory to the Zionist colonizers in 1948. Though the ethnic and religious fabrics of the two are different, the historical experiences are similar.

It is easy, however, to assume that the history that unifies many countries in the Global South is only that of Western exploitation and victimization. But it is also a history of collective struggle and resistance.

Namibia has been inhabited since prehistoric times. This long history has allowed Namibians to establish a sense of belonging to the land and to one another, something that the Germans did not understand or appreciate.

When the Germans colonized Namibia, giving it the name German South West Africa, they did what all other Western colonialists have done, from Palestine to South Africa to Algeria and to virtually all countries in the Global South. They attempted to divide the people, exploit their resources and butcher those who resisted.

Although their country only had a small population, the Namibians resisted their colonizers, resulting in the German decision to simply exterminate the natives, literally killing the majority of the population.

Since the start of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, Namibia answered the call of solidarity with the Palestinians, along with many other countries of the Global South, including Colombia, Nicaragua, Cuba, South Africa, Brazil and China. Though intersectionality is a much-celebrated notion in Western academia, no academic theory is needed to explain why oppressed, colonized nations in the Global South exhibit solidarity with one another.

So, when Namibia took

a strong stance against Israel's largest military supporter in Europe - Germany - it did so based on its total awareness of its own history. The German genocide of the Nama and Herero people of 1904-1908 is known as the "first genocide of the 20th century." The ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza is one of the first genocides of the 21st century. The unity between Palestine and

decades earlier. The typical analysis of why Germany continues to support Israel is explained on the basis of German guilt over the Holocaust. This explanation, however, is partly illogical and partly erroneous.

Illogical because, if Germany has internalized any guilt from its previous mass killings, it would make no sense for it to add

The horrific crime of the Holocaust, along with other mass killings carried out by the German government against Jews and other minority groups in Europe during the Second World War, were a continuation of other German crimes committed against Africans decades earlier. The typical analysis of why Germany continues to support Israel is explained on the basis of German guilt over the Holocaust. This explanation, however, is partly illogical and partly erroneous. Illogical because, if Germany has internalized any guilt from its previous mass killings, it would make no sense for it to add yet more guilt by allowing Palestinians to be butchered en masse.

Namibia is now cemented through their mutual suffering.

However, it was not Namibia that launched a legal case against Germany at the International Court of Justice, but Nicaragua - a Central American country that is also thousands of kilometers away from both Palestine and Namibia. The Nicaraguan case accuses Germany of violating the Genocide Convention. It rightly sees Berlin as a partner in the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians.

This accusation alone should terrify the German people, the whole world in fact, as Germany has been affiliated with genocides since its early days as a colonial power. The horrific crime of the Holocaust, along with other mass killings carried out by the German government against Jews and other minority groups in Europe during the Second World War, were a continuation of other German crimes committed against Africans

yet more guilt by allowing Palestinians to be butchered en masse. If such guilt does exist, it is not genuine. And erroneous because it completely overlooks the German genocide in Namibia. In fact, it took the German government until 2021 to acknowledge the horrific butchery in that poor African country. It then apologized and agreed to pay merely 1.1 billion (\$1.17 billion) in "community aid," which will be allocated over the course of three decades.

The German government's support of the Israeli war on Gaza is not motivated by guilt, but by a power paradigm that governs the relations among colonial countries. Many countries in the Global South understand this logic very well; thus the growing solidarity with Palestine. The Israeli brutality in Gaza and the Palestinian "sumoud" (resilience and resistance) are inspiring the Global South to reclaim its centrality in anti-colonial libera-

tion struggles.

The revolution in the Global South's outlook - culminating in South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the world court and the Nicaraguan lawsuit against Germany - indicates that the change is not the outcome of a collective emotional reaction. Instead, it is part and parcel of the shifting relationship between the Global South and the Global North. Africa has been undergoing a process of geopolitical restructuring for years. The anti-French rebellions in West Africa, demanding true independence from the continent's former colonial masters, in addition to the intense geopolitical competition - involving Russia, China and others - are signs of the changing times.

With this rapid rearrangement, a new political discourse and popular rhetoric is emerging, often expressed in the revolutionary language emanating from Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and others. But the shift is not happening on the rhetorical front only. The rise of BRICS as a powerful new platform for economic integration between Asia and the rest of the Global South has opened up the possibility that alternatives to Western financial and political institutions are very much possible.

In 2023, it was revealed that BRICS countries were responsible for 32 percent of the world's total gross domestic product, compared to 30 percent for the G7 countries combined. There is much political value to this, as four of the five original founders of BRICS are strong and unapologetic supporters of the Palestinians. While South Africa has been championing the legal front against Israel, Russia and China have been battling the US at the UN Security Council and attempting to institute a ceasefire. Beijing's ambassador to the UN went as far as defending the Palestinian armed struggle as legitimate under international law. Now that global dynamics are working in favor of the Palestinians, it is time for their struggle to return to the embrace of the Global South, where common histories will always serve as a foundation for meaningful solidarity.

Would a Netanyahu exit really solve his critics' problems?

Kerry Boyd Anderson

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces intensifying criticism from Israeli opponents and from some senior Democrats in Washington, who are laying the blame for many problems at Netanyahu's feet. But would new leadership solve those problems?

In Israel, Netanyahu faced significant opposition before Oct. 7 due to allegations of corruption and his efforts to weaken the country's judiciary. The Hamas attack and subsequent war in Gaza lifted some of that pressure, but Israeli protests against Netanyahu have been growing in recent weeks. Netanyahu's critics blame him for many things, including the failures to prevent the attack, free all Israeli hostages held in Gaza, address growing economic problems and more.

In Washington, senior Democratic leaders who have long provided strong support to Israel are increasingly frustrated with Netanyahu. In a speech in March, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer expressed his support for Israel while criticizing Netanyahu for rejecting the idea of a future Palestinian state. Schumer said Netanyahu had "lost his way" and called for new elections in Israel. President Joe Biden has also been growing annoyed with Netanyahu and has criticized him for not doing more to facilitate humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Netanyahu will try to avoid early elections. Public opinion polls have found declining support for Netanyahu, with Benny Gantz, the leader of the National Unity alliance and a member of the current war Cabinet, receiving much more support. It can be difficult to predict outcomes in Israel's parliamentary system, but polls suggest that Gantz would very likely be able to form a ruling coalition if elections were held now. Netanyahu and his far-right allies have a significant base of support but would be unlikely to prevail in new elections.

There are multiple figures hoping to replace Netanyahu. Potential candidates include Gantz, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Yair Lapid, the head of the Yesh Atid party, Gadi Eisenkot, an official observer in the war Cabinet, Gideon Sa'ar, founder of the New Hope party, and Economy Minister Nir Barkat. Far-right figures like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich would like to have the job but appear unlikely to be in a position to form a coalition.

If Israel were to hold new elections, and if Netanyahu and his allies lost power, would the prime minister's critics get what they wanted from new leadership? Many of Netanyahu's Israeli critics would likely be much happier. With the exception of the most far-right potential candidates, a new leader would be more likely than Netanyahu to ensure the independence of Israel's judiciary, smooth over relations with the Biden administration and be willing to consider the type of compromise that might be necessary to secure the

hostages' release.

For Biden, Schumer and other Democrats who adhere to America's traditional pro-Israel position, a new leader in Israel might offer some advantages. A new leader might be less openly defiant of US requests and might blunt some of the criticism that Biden faces within his party for his continuing support for Israel. Senior Democrats would be keen to present a change in leadership as a reason for maintaining US support for Israel.

However, if senior Democrats are serious about wanting real progress toward a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are likely to be disappointed. Several of the potential next leaders - including Gallant, Sa'ar and Barkat - openly reject the idea of a Palestinian state and support Israeli settlement in the West Bank. Others - such as Gantz, Lapid and Eisenkot - have been reluctant to take a clear position on the issue after Oct. 7; they tend to talk about a Palestinian "entity" or "autonomy" and have suggested that any such hopes must be years in the future.

There is no firm proponent of a two-state solution likely to replace Netanyahu. Furthermore, the Israeli public does not support the idea; an October Gallup poll found that 64 percent of Israelis oppose the "existence of an independent Palestinian state."

The reality is that, while the Biden administration has renewed calls for a two-state solution, Israeli leaders and the Israeli public are not interested and Palestinians have learned to distrust any such promises. Netanyahu's departure from power on its own would not resuscitate any practicable long-term peace process.

Biden and other Democratic leaders might at least hope that new Israeli leadership would lead to a different approach to the war in Gaza. Eisenkot, for example, has called for a temporary ceasefire in exchange for hostage releases and has emphasized the need to wrap up the war and prepare a postwar plan for Gaza. However, several others have advocated for an even more hard-line approach toward Gaza.

For example, Barkat has criticized Netanyahu for allowing any aid into Gaza and for easing military operations. Sa'ar has called for an even more forceful response and keeping parts of Gaza for Israel permanently. As defense minister, Gallant has played a major role in directing the war and drew global attention in October when he said that Israel was fighting "human animals."

If Netanyahu is pushed out of power, his opponents in Israel will welcome a change in leadership. Biden, Schumer and other traditionally pro-Israel Democrats will want to believe that a new prime minister and coalition will listen to their requests for a different approach in Gaza and will be open to a two-state solution. However, new leadership would either reject a two-state approach outright or continue to prevaricate on the creation of a Palestinian "entity."

US politics is awash with crude and misleading attack ads. Now it's the UK's turn

Jonn Elledge

ONE of my favourite jokes in The Simpsons concerns the unhinged nature of US political advertising. "Mayor Quimby supports revolving-door prisons," a growly voice narrates over footage of exactly what you imagine. "Mayor Quimby even released Sideshow Bob, a man twice convicted of attempted murder." And then, a final disclosure at a noticeably faster pace: "Vote Sideshow Bob for Mayor."

This was a great joke - but it wasn't entirely a joke. The real revolving door ad, which featured similar imagery, had been used by the George HW Bush campaign to tar his 1988 opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, as soft on crime. That in turn was a sort of sequel to the "Willie Horton" ad, in which other Republican operatives had

tried to pin the violent crimes of the eponymous African American on Dukakis, governor when Horton was released on furlough. The entire campaign was widely condemned as one long racist dog-whistle intended to terrify white people into voting Republican. It also, upsettingly, worked.

If we ever believed British politics was above such tactics, then the past few years, of Brexit and everything that's followed, has surely dissuaded us of the notion. The real thing that's protected us from attack ads when we're trying to watch Corrie is, instead, the Television Act 1954 ("no advertisement shall be permitted which is directed towards any religious or political end"), leavened with just a pinch of our much tougher libel laws. It isn't culture or moral fibre that's historically given British political campaigns a

different tone to American ones. It's regulation.

Now, though, a number of factors are conspiring to bring this halcyon age to an end. One is that the ad-free subscription model used by the streamers has started to wobble: on certain platforms, the ads are creeping back in. The 1954 act was also designed for a world of broadcast TV, not one where you're just as likely to encounter ads on streaming or social media: the latter were not included in the ban, on the not unreasonable grounds that, in 1954, they didn't exist. Even the last law to amend the rules in this area, the Communications Act 2003, dates, hilariously, from seven months before the birth of Facebook.

Another issue is the government's decision to raise the amount political parties can

spend nationally during a general election campaign, from £19.5m in 2019 to £35m next time. Much of this increase is inflationary - the cap has not been raised in some time - but it nonetheless means the two biggest parties, at least, will likely have huge war chests. They'll probably spend much of those on video ads, which are cheaper and easier to make than ever and also, thanks to the internet, much easier to distribute.

Put all that together, and the result is a world in which the parties are poised to invest unusually heavily in video ads, and streamers and social media platforms are poised to take their money. This newspaper reported that even ITV was considering running political ads on its streaming platform, ITVX. If it didn't, someone else probably would. The prospect of an AI-powered

Rishi Sunak popping up to address billpayers by name in the middle of Love Island surely can't be far away.

In retrospect, the parties have been limbering up for this for some time. In 2019, the Tories used YouTube to publish a baffling 72-minute animation of Boris Johnson apparently reading some notes on a train, all set to chill out music ("lo fi boriswave beats to relax/get brexit done to"). More recently, the party has used X to publish ads claiming to highlight the state of Labour-run hellholes such as London and Birmingham, and which, complete with growly American voiceover, owe a direct debt to the 1988 Bush campaign. On Tuesday, Labour published horror-film style footage of Liz Truss telling the British electorate that she had "unfinished business". And the only thing standing between us and footage of Ed Davey doing

something embarrassing in front of a giant, misleading bar chart is the fact the Lib Dems are unlikely to have the budget.

Politicians should be careful what they pump into our homes, however. Those recent Tory ads may have done more damage to the party that produced them than Labour. And one factor in the almost complete destruction of the Canadian Tories in the now infamous election of 1993 was their own attack ad, which showed a picture of the partially facially paralysed Liberal leader Jean Chrétien and posed the question, "Is this a prime minister?" "It's true that I speak on one side of my mouth," Chrétien responded. "I'm not a Tory: I don't speak on both sides of my mouth." Before embracing attack ads, the parties should remember that they don't always hit their target.

Lebanon’s fragility highlighted ahead of civil war anniversary

Mohamed Chebaro

WITH all the clouds of instability, war and direct and indirect escalatory confrontations gathering above the Middle East, Saturday's 49th anniversary of the outbreak of Lebanon's civil war passed unnoticed. This is despite the country's permanent precariousness, which puts it at the mercy of any winds or storms, whether they blow domestically or are linked to the Palestinian crisis, the Syrian crisis or any crisis linked to the agenda of the so-called axis of resistance formed and controlled by Iran.

Two killings last week could summarize this precariousness, ironically falling as they did just days before the anniversary of the start of Lebanon's bloody civil war - April 13, 1975 - which all Lebanese would wish to forget. What these events point to is that Lebanon as a state continues to teeter on the brink. And many of its people, the regional powers and international community have long since resigned themselves to accepting its status: as a nation often just a step away from becoming a failed state.

But nobody should make the mistake of ignoring this small, perennially teetering country, as its complete collapse would no doubt reverberate and impact its immediate neighbors, as well as many other countries, such as those on the European shores of the Mediterranean, should droves of Syrian, Palestinians and dispossessed Lebanese decide to take matters into their own hands and seek a better life elsewhere. They could even be pushed into doing so by malicious actors, with weaponized migration waves, as witnessed elsewhere in the world, aiming to disrupt and pressure

Western nations.

One day before the anniversary, thousands of Lebanese gathered in the Christian heartland of the north to mourn a Christian political official who was slain earlier in the week. The authorities said he was killed by a Syrian gang in a carjacking incident, but many were not convinced by this official version of events. Although Hezbollah's chief denied that his party had anything to do with the killing, the Lebanese Forces - the party to which the slain Christian leader belonged - said that it considered his death a "political assassination until proven otherwise." It blamed his death on the Lebanese state's failure and "illegal weapons," a veiled reference to Hezbollah.

Iran-backed Hezbollah is the only party in Lebanon that has kept its weapons arsenal since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war and the implementation of the Taif Agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia. Through Syrian and Iranian-backed political and violent maneuvering, Hezbollah gradually became the party that wielded the most influence over the country's political, social and economic life. And since Israel's war on Gaza began on Oct. 7, Hezbollah has traded near-daily cross-border fire with Israeli forces - actions opposed by the majority of Lebanese, especially the Lebanese Forces.

Also last week, a Lebanese man under US sanctions for allegedly funneling money from Iran to Hamas was killed just outside Beirut. The slain man, Mohammed Sarur, served as a middleman between the Quds Force and Hamas and had worked

with Hezbollah operatives to ensure funds were provided to Hamas' armed wing, according to the US Treasury Department. Lebanese security sources stated that Sarur was shot five times and an undisclosed sum of cash was found in his possession, which the killers did not touch. These two events, though different in nature, were both broad daylight assassinations and were not the work of petty criminals, whether from Syria or elsewhere. They point to the complex security landscape in Lebanon and the fact that such incidents could tip the country toward renewed communal strife.

Attention is needed so that things do not become even worse in the country, if such a thing is still possible. Lebanon has been without an elected president for a year and a half. Its caretaker government is next to idle, as it does not have the will, the funds or the constitutional mandate to take reformist steps, which are seen as essential to receiving an International Monetary Fund lifeline, as its discredited political elite fail to put in the work needed to rescue the country's future.

Since October 2019, Lebanon's banking system has been marginalized after it used people's deposits to fund its day-to-day financing. Capital control was applied to depositors to prevent the banking institutions from going bankrupt. The national currency, meanwhile, has lost nearly 90 percent of its value. One of the world's largest explosions hit Beirut port in 2020 and the culprits remain at large, amid a divided, politicized judicial

system that was once independent. And as 80 percent of Lebanese find themselves living below the poverty line, as per World Bank figures, the country's services are starved and close to caving under the pressure of close to a million registered Syrian refugees and more than half a million long-term Palestinian refugees.

And as if all that were not enough, visitors to Lebanon could hardly fail to notice the great void on the political and security levels while, to a great extent, the country's internal security enjoys a bizarre stability that is difficult to fathom. Last week's incidents were most probably political and remain an anomaly. But what lurks beneath the surface are adversities that could befall the nation if no remedies are urgently found.

Nearly 50 years since the civil war broke out, communal coexistence in Lebanon remains fragile and could be malignantly invested into. Previously, it was the Palestinian presence that irked sections of Lebanese society, nowadays it is the presence of Syrians, refugees and non-refugees alike. Who knows, tomorrow an extremist group might invest in the many fertile grounds for discord that exist among Lebanon's despairing communities.

Since the start of the Gaza war six months ago, the Lebanese have been wondering whether this neighboring conflict will engulf the south of the country. The fear remains that Lebanese divisions could also create many scenarios that might tip the fragile peace and stability of the country over the edge, such as was witnessed last week.

Arab News

World is on the brink of a nuclear holocaust

Allister Heath

solve itself.

It won't. The West's refusal to face reality means that it is increasingly likely that Iran will eventually gain a nuclear weapon, and quite possibly use it against Israel, itself a nuclear power, with the explicit view of triggering a millenarian moment. The world is careering towards a three or four-pronged third world war involving Iran, Russia, China, and North Korea: the Islamic Republic is the weakest link, the least difficult one to deal with today, if we had the sense to act.

Instead, the Iron Dome makes it easier for the West to turn a blind eye to endless attempted war crimes by Iran's proxies. If an Iran-funded missile fired at Israeli civilian centres is intercepted and doesn't kill anybody, we can pretend it never happened. If Israel strikes back at rocket launchers and kills some Hamas fighters, it can be blamed for a "disproportionate response", demonised as the real aggressor, making it even easier for the West to downplay Iranian aggression. It's a Kafkaesque state of affairs, where actions and intent don't count.

This madness has been pushed to new extremities this week: in what would ordinarily be deemed a historic act of war, Iran fired off hundreds of ballistic and cruise missiles on Israel. Yet because 99 per cent were shot down, the official line is that the attack must have been merely "performative", and can be committed to the memory hole. Tehran warned various countries that it was about to strike - not least because it would be violating their air space - but telling somebody in advance that you are going to attempt to murder them is no defence.

Many commentators also pretend that Iran's act of war was mere "retaliation", and that the Israelis started it all by bombing a building next to Iran's Syrian consulate in a supposed violation of international rules. The truth is that those killed were top figures in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (the IRGC, an organisation rightly sanctioned as terrorist by the US but, scandalously, not the UK), and no diplomats were harmed.

In any case, Iran has been

at war with Israel for years. The real escalation came on October 7. Far from respecting diplomatic sanctity, Iran and Hezbollah were behind the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina in the 1990s, as a court confirmed this week. Yet Westerners who should know better find it convenient to swallow Iran's fake narrative.

They instruct Israel that it should turn the other cheek, that the matter should be closed, that - as Lord Cameron put it - they should "think with their head as well as their heart", that - in Biden's phrasing - they should "take the win". Since when is being attacked with ballistic missiles, something that has never happened to any Western country, a "win"?

Israel will be slammed for "escalating" when it responds. There will be more victim-blaming, blatant double-standards, rewriting of history, special rules that apply only to Israel, and yet more normalisation of extreme behaviour towards the only Jewish state, all in order to allow the West to avoid acting against Iran.

Biden's "strategy" has been to suck up to Tehran since he was elected. He handed over billions of dollars in ransom payments. He renewed a sanctions waiver which allows the regime to access a \$107-billion pot from selling electricity to Iraq. He has permitted Iran's oil output to surge to a five-and-a-half-year high by failing to properly enforce the sanctions regime and allowing sales to China. There is no deterrence left at all: Iran can do anything it wants, and can even count on Biden putting pressure on Israel not to hit back.

America has no meaningful long-term plan to contain Tehran, or to destroy Hamas, the Houthis or Hezbollah, or to deradicalise the Palestinian territories to ensure that, in time, a new leadership emerges, willing to recognise Israel's existence, paving the way for a viable two-state solution. It's head in the sand stuff. The message, telegraphed to every other dictator, is that the West is so desperate to avoid any further confrontations that it will turn a blind eye to almost anything. Yet those who seek peace at all cost inevitably end up at war.

The Telegraph

US, EU steps against Chinese EVs defy rules

Ma Yingying

CHINA'S auto industry has developed by leaps and bounds in recent years - in particular, the export of new energy vehicles has shown rapid growth. China exported more than 2 million and 3 million vehicles in 2021 and 2022, up 95.4 percent and 56.7 percent respectively.

In 2023, China even surpassed Japan to become the world's largest automobile exporter, with exports reaching 5.22 million vehicles, a 57.2 percent increase, and the export revenue reaching \$101.61 billion, a 68.9 percent increase. And in the first two months of this year, China's auto exports reached 831,000 vehicles, up 21.8 percent year-on-year.

However, to prevent China from dominating Western markets, the United States and the European Union are trying to restrict China's auto exports by imposing trade protectionist measures. After launching a trade war against China in 2018, the US has imposed high tariffs on Chinese automobiles, restricted government procurements, and introduced discriminatory subsidy policies to suppress and/or weaken China's auto industry. Now, using national security as a pretext, the US seems intent on building non-tariff barriers to restrict the import of "smart vehicles" and related components from China, and expand the scope to include all third-party Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) and parts.

Moreover, the European Commission, to protect the European Union's EV industry, launched an anti-subsidy investigation into pure EVs imported from China in October 2023 and is considering raising import tariffs. Behind the continued growth of China's auto exports are multiple factors including advanced technologies, costs, markets and government support. First, China's

auto industry continues to improve in technology and production efficiency, with advancements in electrification and intelligence which will transform into unique advantages. The technological advancements in new energy vehicles, the advantages of industry and supply chains, and innovations and applications in intelligence have strengthened the position of China's auto industry in the global market.

Second, China's auto-manufacturing industry enjoys significant cost advantages. Compared with developed countries, China has relatively low labor and production costs, which allows Chinese auto-makers to sell their products at much lower prices than their Western competitors. The Glory edition of BYD Seagull, for instance, was officially launched with a price of about \$9,700, which is \$5,000 less than the average price of a US-made EV. Given the increasing frequency of climate change-related disasters such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss, countries across the world have reached a broad consensus of pursuing green and low-carbon development, which has led to an explosive growth in the new energy vehicle market. China's affordable new energy vehicles are selling well not only in the domestic market but also have been welcomed in overseas markets.

Additionally, the Chinese government has been promoting the development of the auto industry, issuing favorable policies, and supporting automakers, thereby promoting the auto exports. The efforts of the US and the EU to check the growth of China's auto-manufacturing industry are both unreasonable and counterproductive for their own industrial development. Such US efforts will harm the welfare of their con-

sumers. Chinese-made EVs have become popular in global markets due to their cost-effectiveness. Imposing tariffs on and building non-tariff barriers against Chinese-made vehicles will limit consumer choice and increase prices, without addressing the major challenges facing their auto industries.

In addition, protectionism goes against the principles of free trade and market economy. In short, it is detrimental to the stability and development of the international trade system. Faced with the rapid development of China's automotive industry, the US and the EU should adopt an open and cooperative attitude and address the challenges using mutually beneficial means. Cooperation promotes technology exchanges, market sharing and resource integration, and can help enhance the competitiveness and innovation capability of the auto industry. In contrast, protectionism exacerbates trade frictions and is detrimental to the healthy development of the auto industry and the stability of the global economy.

China is one of the world's largest auto markets, and crucial for US and EU automakers. If the US and Europe persist in taking measures that violate market economy norms and fair competition principles, China will take strong countermeasures, if necessary, which will negatively impact the business and profits of US and EU automakers, as well as the research, innovation and development of the US and EU automotive industries. Through open cooperation, the auto industries of the US, the EU and China can jointly explore new technologies, develop markets, achieve mutual benefit, and propel the global automotive industry toward a more sustainable and innovation-driven direction.

The China Daily

Basic problem with putting Trump on trial

Patrick T. Brown

IN his 1987 novel about a high-profile criminal trial in New York City, author Tom Wolfe has one of the lead characters, Assistant District Attorney Larry Kramer, share an open secret about how juries are selected: "You get people who come into the jury box with their minds - how should I say it? - set in a certain way. There's a lot of Us versus Them."

In "The Bonfire of the Vanities," the big dividing line was race. In this week's mammoth New York trial of former President Donald Trump on charges of falsifying business records in connection to hush money paid to an adult film star, the yawning gap between "Us" and "Them" is along partisan lines. That dynamic has already reared its head, as at least 50 jurors - representing more than half of the first group of prospective jurors - were dismissed on the first day of jury selection Monday because they said they couldn't be impartial. The mass dismissal underscores the difficulty of finding acceptable jurors and is just the first obstacle facing the unprecedented prosecution of a former president that will leave a bad taste in many voters' mouths from the unmistakable political undertones.

It should come as no surprise that it will be hard to find jurors who don't bring strong political predispositions to bear given that the motivation for bringing this case looks to be so transparently political. The circus that is the first-ever criminal trial of a former president illustrates why this particular case may have been a poor choice to break that precedent.

Though seven were sworn in on Tuesday, there were still illustrations of the problems of a politicized jury pool. One potential juror who underwent questioning, for instance, was

subsequently struck for cause after Trump's team found social media posts from the juror referencing Trump that say, "Get him out" and "Lock him up."

Indeed, it seems unlikely that this case would be being prosecuted with the same vigor and creative legal theorizing if Trump were an everyday citizen. After all, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg came into office promising to focus on the ongoing investigation of Trump, and would have likely felt political heat from New York Democrats had he decided to close the investigation without bringing charges.

In the end, as The New York Times reported in March 2023, Bragg's office took a "circuitous and sometimes uncertain road" to filing criminal charges, reviving a dying investigation that originally focused on Trump's business practices with a renewed focus on hush money payments. To Bragg's supporters, it's a mark of his diligence and fortitude that he left no stone unturned. To his detractors, the drawn-out investigation, seeming to pivot from one potential crime to another, gives the impression of a DA looking for a crime to pin on an unfavored individual. (Trump has pleaded not guilty.)

After all, making hush money payments, as Trump is alleged to have done with former adult film actress Stormy Daniels, isn't illegal. Instead, the case is built around a rather aggressive interpretation of the relevant statutes: In his records, Trump recorded his reimbursement to former "fixer" Michael Cohen, who handled the Daniels payment, as a legal expense. This deception would normally be considered a misdemeanor offense in New York state.

But Bragg, unwilling to let Trump

off the hook easily, is hinging his case on the allegation that this misdemeanor offense was in service of a violation of federal campaign finance laws. The Federal Election Commission opted not to charge Trump with a violation of election law on this front, with two Republican commissioners noting that Cohen had already pleaded guilty in relation to the alleged violation, and further government action "was not the best use of resources."

Another problem, as National Review's Andrew McCarthy has pointed out, is that Bragg, a state prosecutor, is seeking to enforce a federal statute, bringing this case against an offense "that the feds themselves did not believe Trump committed, and that Bragg is politically engineering into a new election law of his very own." Not that Trump is blameless in this. Trump's manifest character flaws and history of shady dealings are being highlighted, once again, by a trial that includes the phrases "hush money" and "porn star." And even while this case faces significant legal scrutiny from lawyers and legal commentators, his other pending trials, such as his handling of classified materials at his Mar-a-Lago home or his attempt to bully Georgia election officials in 2020, do run a much stronger risk of placing him in serious legal danger.

In a sense, it's hard to blame the jurors who feel they can't be impartial. For decades, Trump has been a fixture on our airwaves, social media sites and political coverage. And his well-documented celebrity, outrageous social media posts and charged political rhetoric make him a challenge for even the most sober-minded juror to treat as an individual rather than a politician. Trump also

has an unquestioned ability to push his supporters to defend the indefensible, even as he induces his opponents to stretch the envelope in their attempts to derail his candidacy. As such, no matter how the current trial is resolved, it will emphasize yet again how Republicans could - and, I would argue, should - have picked a presidential nominee with less baggage.

But they didn't, and now many are feeling a rally-round-the-flag effect in what is likely the first and potentially only Trump criminal case that's going to trial before Election Day. If Democrats are so willing to come up with creative legal theories to keep him out of office, some voters may think that all their rhetoric about "constitutional norms" wasn't as high-minded as it sounded.

The recent Supreme Court decision unanimously striking down Colorado's attempt to remove Trump from the ballot was a reminder that too-cute attempts to keep Trump out of the White House can backfire. And the flimsiness of the hush money case will allow Trump's supporters to downplay the seriousness of the other charges against him, making it less likely that they will have a significant political impact in November. Bragg's decision to bring this case, with its attenuated connection to an actual crime, can't be taken out of its political context. The weakness of this case muddies the water for future efforts to attack Trump's more egregious conduct. The jury selection and following court maneuverings will highlight how strong the disagreements are between "Us" and "Them." And Trump's ability to push both his supporters and his detractors past the bounds of normal political battles, and to pull out all the stops to win, will remain unparalleled.

CNN

Xi’s message to US side is clear and positive

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping's recent meeting with US business leaders and academics rightly caught the attention of the international media. Among the factors on which the peace and prosperity of the world depends, two of the biggest are the state of US-China relations and the prospects for China's economic development - both of which were the primary themes of Xi's carefully planned message to the US side.

The setting counts. It was right after the annual China Development Forum, where the CEOs of foreign corporations come to engage with China's policymakers. China's top leader, who met with the CEOs, thereby elevated the meeting's importance with the highest authority. In the new era, with the Communist Party of China directly responsible for leading all sectors of the country, the fact that the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee himself held the meeting is itself the first important message to the US side.

The readout of the meeting, as reported in China's media, is a fascinating probe of the current way of thinking of China's leaders. Although the top leader is always well prepared for his meetings and speeches, he seemed extraordinarily well prepared for this timely meeting. The structure and specificity of his remarks combined to form the clearest, most incisive, most direct and in-depth expression of his views on China-US relations, and on China's economy.

One can infer two big themes from the meeting: China is committed to seeking improved relations with the US, and China is determined to more comprehensively reform and open up its economy. Although the two themes are

hardly new, there was something about the top leader's remarks this time that seemed different, something that signaled intensified commitment.

On US-China relations, his message was unambiguous. The fact that he chose to meet with the China experts and CEOs from the US is a neon-flashing sign that China seeks to stop the cascading slide in relations, stabilize relations, and carefully build relations back up. The top leader placed his trust in the people in general and in people-to-people exchanges in particular, which is a long-standing foundation of his approach to foreign policy, broadly speaking.

Referring to China-US relations, he said: "The future will of course be created by the people." And he expressed the hope that "people from all sectors of Chinese and American societies will have more mutual visits and exchanges". What I found striking was that while calling for cooperation, not confrontation, and mutual respect and win-win results, he acknowledged that "the relationship cannot go back to the old days", a powerful and realistic recognition, which counter-intuitively gives credence to his follow-on exhortation, "but it (China-US relations) can embrace a brighter future". Only an honest assessment of the present can enable a hopeful vision of the future.

What was no surprise was that Xi was optimistic about China's economy - which is the No 1 topic on everyone's mind - by reminding his listeners that China's growth rate in 2023 was among the highest of the major economies and accounted for more than 30 percent of global growth, much as in previous years. What was somewhat of a

surprise was that he told the story of China's economy in the context of two negative "theories": the "China collapse theory" of the past, which of course did not happen, and the "peak China theory" of the present, which he said will not happen.

China, he said, "will continue to advance high-quality development and Chinese modernization, enable the Chinese people to live a better life, and contribute more to sustainable development in the world". These words were not crafted as smooth talk for the foreign visitors but are the overarching strategic policy of Chinese leaders and the day-to-day operational guidelines of Chinese officials. The new mantra for China's economic growth is "high-quality development", which is driven by "new quality productive forces". Everyone who counts in China gets the message.

On reform and opening-up, his words were weighed judiciously, as they always are. There has been concern among foreign businesses, and even among some domestic entrepreneurs, that reform and opening-up have stalled. In response, the top leader said "reform and opening-up hold the key to contemporary China's catching up with the times in great strides", and "China's reform will not pause, and its opening-up will not stop", but he has made similar remarks in the past. That's why I focused on what he said next: "China is planning and implementing a series of major steps for comprehensively deepening reform, and steadily fostering a market-oriented, law-based and world-class business environment." The operative word here is "planning", which means there are new structures,

new regulations and/or new measures on the horizon that will be sufficiently different from the present ones, to justify the phrase "major steps for comprehensively deepening reform".

Had he stated only the general principles, his words might not have instilled high confidence. But by putting the world on notice and creating widespread expectations, he has given credence from the top that China is serious about a new round of economic reforms. This is why I expect, and most foreign analysts do not, significant economic reforms, the most in a decade or so.

The proof, of course, will be in the specifics of the plan, and then its real-world implementation. For example, in recent days, the government has been shortening the negative list for foreign investment, and lifting restrictions on market access for foreign investment in manufacturing, while opening up the medical and telecommunications sectors.

Moreover, China's cybersecurity regulator has relaxed restrictions on outbound data flow so foreign businesses operating in China can feel more secure in conducting their normal business.

To me, a major motivating factor for President Xi is that to truly achieve his grand vision for China - "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" - the country must become a world-class business center, and to become that, the country must develop a "market-oriented, law-based and world-class business environment". Who can deny the world would benefit from stable US-China relations? Who can deny the world would benefit from China's economic growth and development? Both sit on the global center stage in these tense mid-years of the third decade of the 21st century.



WASHINGTON: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb in a Round Table Meeting with Bloomberg.

SBP Governor holds crucial meetings with key investors in Washington

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Jameel Ahmad, held a crucial meeting with key international investors in Washington, D.C. The gathering coincided with the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, drawing representatives from major financial institutions including JP Morgan, Citibank, and Jefferies.

During the meeting, Governor Ahmad briefed the investors on the significant improvement in Pakistan's economic situa-

tion, attributing it to the implementation of prudent monetary policies. He highlighted the country's strong performance under the IMF program and expressed optimism about signing a letter of intent for a long-term IMF program in the future.

Governor Ahmad emphasized that the IMF program will facilitate essential structural reforms to address Pakistan's long-term economic challenges. He pointed out that inflation has notably decreased, reaching its lowest level in March 2024 at 20.7 percent, down from a peak of 20 percent in the

previous year. This reduction, he explained, is primarily due to tight monetary policy, fiscal consolidation, ease in income transfers, and improved agricultural production.

Moreover, Governor Ahmad highlighted that core inflation dropped to 15.7 percent in March, marking a significant improvement from the previous year's levels. He also noted a decrease in the current account deficit during the fiscal year 2024, which decreased to less than \$3.8 billion, remaining at \$1 billion. Efforts to redirect fund inflows towards formal channels have led to a

continuous increase in foreign exchange reserves of the State Bank, which reached up to \$8 billion despite a significant payment of \$1 billion in Eurobond interest in April. Additionally, Pakistani expatriates have contributed to increased income through digital accounts across borders, demonstrating the positive impact of digital technologies on financial services in the country.

Governor Ahmad expressed hope that the reforms to be implemented within the stipulated period will pave the way for sustainable economic growth in Pakistan.

Standard Chartered, British Asian Trust collaborates with SAFCO



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Standard Chartered Bank and the British Asian Trust, in collaboration with partners Shirakat and Sindh Agricultural & Forestry Workers Coordinating Organisation (SAFWCO), celebrated the success of their Agripreneurs project. This was the second phase of the project and focused on high-performing participants from the previous phase.

The project supported 700 participants with additional business growth, marketing, quality assurance and digital literacy training resulting in their revenues increasing by 25%. 300 new participants were also onboarded and provided with basic enter-

prise development training. The project worked with businesses catering to high demand products such as chillis, vegetable and fruit drying, fodder production in Sindh and Punjab.

Commenting on closing event, Rehan Shaikh, Chief Executive Officer, Standard Chartered Pakistan said, "We are excited to conclude this programme as part of our wider Futuremakers initiative to empower the next generation to learn, earn and grow. The project has developed a sustainable pathway for women and youth out of poverty by addressing key barriers to progress. In collaboration with our partners, British Asian Trust, we have enabled the young Agri entrepreneurs to further broaden their horizons and

play an integral role within the Agricultural eco-system and value chain. The programme will positively impact thousands of people and will have ancillary economic gains for the communities."

Sharing her experience of the project, Bilquis Tahira, Executive Director of Shirakat said, "The project has provided opportunities to rural women for increasing their income. Many participants can now do basic accounting and use digital wallets for savings and business."

Altat Hussain Nizamani, Executive Director of SAFWCO said, "Our project shows how powerful it is to help people and give them skills. These women not only change their own lives but also inspire others. It's a great example of how working together can make a big difference."

Notable guests attending included key market stakeholders representing food companies, grocery chains and restaurants. The event also provided an opportunity for industry leaders and the female Agripreneurs to form direct links, gaining valuable insights and feedback aimed at enhancing their product quality, marketability and growth plan.

the Agripreneurs Project with our partners. It was through the combined expertise of us all coming together that we positively impacted the livelihoods of 1,000 people. This experience will help them provide sustainable incomes for themselves, their families and communities."

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SBP slaps Rs775m fine on 8 banks, forex firm for violating rules

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has slapped fines totalling Rs775.5 million on eight banks and one foreign exchange company for rules violations.

According to a SBP statement, the penalties, levied in the first quarter of 2024, were for non-compliance with instructions related to foreign exchange transactions, customer due diligence and general banking operations.

Details of the enforcement actions by the SBP provided on its website show that Bank Alfalah Limited received the largest fine, totalling Rs187.652 million between

January and March, for the infringement of regulatory instructions about FX and general banking operations.

The bank has been advised to enhance its internal procedures to prevent such infractions from happening again. For violating regulatory directives related to foreign exchange, know your customer, customer due diligence, and general banking activities, the SBP imposed a penalty of Rs143.376 million on Habib Bank Limited.

The SBP has directed the bank to make sure that the regulatory requirements are strictly followed to prevent similar incidents from happening again in

the future. Bank Al Habib Limited was fined Rs117.239 million for breaking regulations regarding foreign exchange and customer due diligence.

Apart from facing penalties, the bank has been asked to enhance its systems and controls to guarantee strict adherence to the regulatory directive and prevent the recurrence of comparable violations.

Other banks that faced financial penalties included Meezan Bank Limited (Rs106.200 million), Habib Metropolitan Bank Limited (Rs70.915 million), MCB Bank Limited (Rs52.900 million), MCB Islamic Bank Limited (Rs38.544 million), the

Bank of Khyber (Rs30.741 million), and the Royal Exchange Company (Rs27.975 million). The State Bank stated that the enforcement measures are not a judgement on the financial stability of these entities, but rather are based on noncompliance with regulatory requirements.

The advances of the banking sector recorded muted growth during January-June 2023; private sector advances contracted while the public sector availed additional financing mainly for commodity finance operations, according to the SBP's mid-year performance review of the banking sector issued in September last year.

Mobilink Bank doubling its revenue

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's leading digital microfinance institution, Mobilink Bank, has reported a staggering 97% increase in revenue during Q1 2024 compared to the same period last year, marking a powerful start to the year.

The Bank's Profit before Tax (PBT) also witnessed 110% growth, said a news release.

The substantial increase in the revenue and PBT underscore the Bank's robust financial performance, heightened customer & stakeholder confidence, and the positive momentum within the country's economic and business environment at the outset of the year.

Mobilink Bank is part of the VEON group, a global digital operator that provides converged connectivity and digital services to nearly 160 million customers in six dynamic markets that are home to 7% of world's population.

Mobilink Bank champions financial inclusion and works to advance the growth and sustainability of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly those owned and run by women.

The Bank leverages microfinance and fintech to foster access to finance and facilitate the social mobility of underprivileged social segments.

Its initiatives have empowered thousands of women entrepreneurs by equipping them with vital skills and resources and strengthened a nearly equal number of MSMEs to catalyze inclusive growth and progress at the grassroots level.

The Bank's purpose-driven approach has cultivated remarkable customer loyalty and goodwill, as reflected in the significant surge in both revenues and deposits throughout the quarter.

In Q1 2024, the Bank's revenue rose to Rs 15,572 million, reflecting a substantial increase from Rs 7,901 million in Q1 2023.

During Q1 2024, Mobilink Bank achieved an 11% increase in total deposits compared to December 2023, with deposits growing from Rs. 119,286 million to Rs. 132,719 million. Core deposits saw an 8% growth, while branchless deposits surged by 15%.

DG CAA holds E-Kacheri

F.P. Report

KARACHI: 44th E-Kacheri, hosted by DG CAA and his team, received a total of 67 comments/queries covering a wide range of topics that included corroded trolleys, expansion of Allama Iqbal International (AIIP) Airport, alleged extortion and bribery at airports, HR-related issues, and UAE weather-induced flight cancellations among others.

The DG urged participants to provide specific details such as date, time, airport concerned, location, or any additional information to facilitate quicker issue resolution. Regarding Lahore's AIIP, the DG informed that although measures have been taken to meet the growing number of passengers at Lahore's AIIP, the fact is Lahore airport has reached its design capacity. The terminal building/infrastructure expansion work will recommence soon to alleviate issues like passenger congestion during peak hours, he added.

Regarding the housekeeping issue the DG mentioned that the housekeeping service is outsourced to a reputable international company to ensure improved results. The service is under close monitoring, and if it does not meet expectations, it will be replaced.

In response to an incident at Karachi Airport, the DG confirmed that ASF has taken action against the employee involved in the manhandling of a child, stating that PCAA is keenly following up the matter with the ASF. When asked about the presence of non-passengers at airports, the DG acknowledged cultural reasons for this phenomenon and issued instruction to Airport Managers (APMs) to explore measures that could be implemented, citing the successful implementation of a one non-passenger policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing query about recent flight delays to/from the Middle East, the DG attributed the disruptions to record rains in the UAE, which caused flooding at airports and chaos in flight operations. The DG described the situation as unprecedented and the challenges faced unavoidable.

The Director General promptly instructed APM Islamabad International Airport (IIAP) to investigate a complaint about money extortion in the parking lot, allegedly by police or police wardens. The DG mentioned that similar complaints led to the removal of police from the vicinity of airport's exit and that action against beggars in the parking lot is regularly taken, with five or six individuals handed over to the police daily.

He sought the Airport Manager's input on the issue as soon as possible. In response to another complaint, the DG emphasized that food prices at Islamabad airport must align with the price list, stating that any discrepancies are valid complaints and should be investigated. Regarding a suggestion for a separate



transit area at Islamabad International Airport as space is available, the DG acknowledged the potential for development but explained that long-term commercial concession contracts cannot be undertaken during the ongoing outsourcing process. He assured that significant improvements would follow the completion of the process. When asked about Air Blue and Air Sial not operating flights to Quetta, the DG clarified that airlines make such decisions based on commercial viability assessments of routes.

The Director General addressed the issue of extended immigration queues at Karachi's JIAP by stating that CAA has allocated over 20 counters to FIA. He explained, failure to adequately staff these counters will lead to lengthy queues. Additionally, he informed that this matter has been raised at the Prime Minister level and with FIA earlier. He also mentioned that according to FIA once it addresses its staffing problems, the queues will significantly decrease, leading to an improved situation. Responding to a query, the DG stated that Air Sial would only fly to the UAE once designated by the Emirates' authorities.

Regarding an environment of enhanced security at airports, the DG highlighted that unfortunately ours is an area from where regular attempts are made to smuggle out narcotics, with passengers daily caught at our airports. A notable portion of individuals facing penalties in the Middle East happen to be of Pakistani origin, causing a sense of shame at the national level, he regretted. He emphasized the importance of airports maintaining a high level of vigilance, stating that it is crucial as any lapse would prove detrimental to national prestige.

At the conclusion, the Director General emphasized commitment to resolving passenger complaints promptly. In order for effective resolution to occur, complainants must furnish specific details such as the date, time, and location of the incident, he stressed. While generalized complaints are acknowledged, practical assistance can only be offered when specific information is provided. He added that it is undeniable that there are flaws in the system, but these issues can only be addressed if detailed complaints are submitted at this platform.

KP Govt to establish Gem Processing, Export Centre

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to develop gemstone sector as formal export sector and for this purpose the gemstone cluster at Namak Mandi would be developed in the shape of Gems Processing & Export Centre.

The Gem Export Center will be redesigned and shifted to a spacious and suitable building equipped with all international standards. In this regard, a high-level meeting was held on Thursday in the committee room of the Industries Department here at Civil Secretariat, Peshawar with Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commerce and Technical Education Abdul Karim Tordher in the chair.

Besides, Secretary Industries, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Special Secretary Muhammad Anwar Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company

(KP-EZDMC) Javed Iqbal Khattak, Executive Director of Federal Export Development Fund (EDF) Samiullah Khan and Director Zafar, PDA and Local Government Officers, representatives of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) Gemstones Association and officers of other relevant departments also attended the meeting.

In the meeting, several policy level decisions were taken for the development of the gemstones sector, under which a Gems Processing and Export Centre equipped with advanced facilities for Gemstones will be established in Peshawar. The facilities of Certification Lab, International Mail Office (IMO), Bank and Customs Office will also be available, while efforts will be doing for easing the provision of NOC for the arrival of investors from abroad.

Likewise, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran Desk will also be set up at this Gems Centre, which will be completed and formally inaugurated

in next four months. It was decided in the meeting that with the Federal Export Development Fund, the annual Gems Show will also be organized in the province, while the representative of EDF assured in the meeting that the availability of facilities in the proposed centre will be provided through the fund.

Speaking on this occasion, the Special Assistant to the Chief Minister said that the establishment of a modern Gems Centre in the province will prove a milestone for the economic development of the country and the province. This will also increase exports beside providing employment opportunities to thousands of people related to this sector and bring substantial increase in revenue.

He said that Peshawar is very important for the business of precious stones in this region and the establishment of this new centre will further develop this sector which will further the economic development of our province.

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COURT NOTICES

BUNER
IN the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I /Alaqa Qazi Bunar at Daggar. Suit No 601/1. Institution 18/12/2023. Date of hearing. 14/5/2024. Waqar Aalam Khan VS Mohamad Ayub. Notice to No 8/2.Ghulam Nabi. 4/8.Gul Zeb. 11.Juma Khan s/o Qasim Gul. 16.Said Bakshshad s/o Nasar Dullah. 18.Afzal Khan s/o

Said Farooq resident of Balokhan tehsel Gadezai Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 am dated 14/5/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

NAME CORRECTION
My Father correct name is Muhammad Hanif Khan but mistakenly written in my Engineering University Peshawar record as Muhammad Hanif please make the required correction. Yasir Hanif S/o Muhammad Hanif Khan R/o Jamma District Kohat.



LAHORE: Labourer shifting bundle of sugarcane for supply at the bank of River Ravi near the Vegetable Market in Provincial Capital.



In brief

Two Pak coaches complete UCI course

ISLAMABAD (APP): Two Pakistani cycling coaches have completed the UCI Level 1 cycling coaching course at the renowned World Cycling Center (WCC) in Korea. According to the President of the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF), Syed Azhar Ali Shah, this remarkable achievement would help them (Nisar from Pakistan Wapda and Fahad from Punjab) with significant advancement in their coaching journeys. A substantial number of coaches from Pakistan have attained their coaching qualifications from WCC in Korea since 2015, with an impressive tally of 13 coaches having excelled in both the Level 1 and Level 2 cycling courses. Among the recent cohort of accomplished candidates, Nisar from Pakistan Wapda and Fahad from Punjab have earned their completion certificates from the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), further elevating Pakistan's presence in the global cycling community. This milestone serves as a testament to the unwavering dedication and relentless commitment of Pakistani coaches towards honing their expertise and expanding their knowledge in the realm of cycling coaching.

Raman Subba Row dies aged 92

LONDON (AFP/APP): Former England Test batsman Raman Subba Row has died at the age of 92, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Thursday. At the time of his death, he was England's oldest living men's Test cricketer. Subba Row played first-class cricket for Cambridge University and then joined the powerful Surrey side of the 1950s, which won seven successive County Championships. Unable to secure a permanent first-team place at The Oval, he moved to Northamptonshire, where he was appointed captain in 1958. In that year, Subba Row won the first of his 13 England caps and in 1961 he scored a century in both his first and last Tests against Australia. In all, he scored 984 Test runs at an average of over 46. After retiring to pursue a business career, he was the manager of England's tour of India and Sri Lanka in 1981. Subba Row also served five years as chairman of the Test and County Cricket Board, the forerunner to the ECB, from 1985. He later became one of the International Cricket Council's first match referees, overseeing 160 fixtures. ICC general manager of cricket Wasim Khan said: "It is sad to hear of the passing of Raman and I would like to extend deepest condolences on behalf of everyone at the ICC."

Injured Conway out of IPL, CSK add Richard

MUMBAI (Cricinfo): New Zealand and Chennai Super Kings wicketkeeper-batter Devon Conway has been ruled out of the entire IPL 2024 with injury. CSK have added England fast bowler Richard Gleeson to their squad as his replacement. Conway had suffered a fracture in the joint of his left thumb during the second T20I against Australia in Auckland in February. He subsequently underwent surgery and CSK were originally hopeful of having Conway back in May for the second half of the IPL, but he has now been sidelined from the whole season. Conway was central to CSK winning the IPL title in 2023, scoring 672 runs in 15 innings at an average of 51.69 and strike rate of just under 140.

Matthews' all-round dominance puts West Indies 1-0 up

KARACHI (Cricinfo): An authoritative all-round display from Hayley Matthews gave West Indies a winning start to their tour of Pakistan, their 113-run victory in Karachi stretching their run of successive wins in the country - dating back to 2004 - to seven ODIs. Matthews followed up an unbeaten 140 with figures of 3 for 17; it was the seventh time a player had scored a century and taken three wickets in a Women's ODI, and the second time Matthews had achieved the feat.

Matthews batted from start to finish of West Indies' innings after she had opted to bat first, hitting 15 fours and a six in a 150-ball effort. She lost her opening partner Rashada Williams early, but stitched together a stand of 102 with

Shemaine Campbelle for the second wicket to lay a solid base for her team. There was no partnership of a similar magnitude thereafter, but Chedean Nation, Chinelle Henry and Aaliyah Alleyne combined with Matthews in stands of 32, 40 and 42 for the fourth, fifth and sixth wickets to help West Indies achieve a 50-overs total of 269 for 8.

Matthews' 140* was her fifth ODI hundred and her highest score in the format. Left-arm spinner Sadia Iqbal, who opened the bowling, and legspinner Tuba Hassan were Pakistan's most successful bowlers with two wickets apiece.

Pakistan began their innings needing to overhaul their previous highest successful ODI chase - of a target of 243 - by a consider-

able margin. They didn't make the ideal start, losing Sidra Ameen and Bismah Maroof within the first five overs, but their hopes grew as Muneeba Ali and Nida Dar took the score to 59 for 2 in the 12th over. That's when Matthews made her next big contribution, getting Dar caught behind to start a slump that Pakistan never recovered from. There were no further partnerships of note besides a brisk 37 between Najiha Alvi and Tuba for the seventh wicket as Pakistan folded for 156 inside the 36th over.

Apart from Mathews' three-for there were also two wickets each for legspinner Afy Fletcher and left-arm spinner Zaida James. Karachi will also host the second and third ODIs, on April 21 and 23.

Rohit on India vs Pakistan Test series overseas: ‘That will be awesome’

MUMBAI (Cricinfo): India captain Rohit Sharma has said it will be 'awesome' to play against Pakistan in a Test series overseas.

In a chat with Club Prairie Fire podcast, co-hosted by Adam Gilchrist and Michael Vaughan, Rohit said he would "love" India and Pakistan to resume playing bilateral cricket on a regular basis, something that has been put on hold since Misbah-ul-Haq's team crossed the border to play a three-match ODI series in 2012-13.

"I totally believe that," Rohit responded to Vaughan's question on whether for the sake of the health of Test cricket it would be beneficial for both India and Pakistan to play overseas, considering the chances of playing in either country remain uncertain due to the political stasis, which has lasted for close to two decades. Since Pakistan toured India in 2007, a series Rohit still remembers, both teams have not played a complete bilateral series involving Tests and white-ball cricket. Rohit said Pakistan are a "good" Test team with a strong bowling unit, which India



would be keen to be pitted against. "They're a good team. They have got a superb bowling line-up. So it'll be a good contest especially if you play overseas conditions. That'll be awesome."

There have been several attempts made by administrators from both boards to resume bilateral cricket, including playing overseas in neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the UAE. In the recent years the England Cricket Board and Cricket Australia, too, have publicly voiced their interest in hosting the marquee series.

Rohit is the first major name in Indian cricket to publicly share his opinion on a topic that Indian crick-

et administrators have previously responded to by saying the call of resuming bilateral ties with Pakistan was subject to permission from Indian government. "Yeah, I would love to," Rohit said responding to Vaughan's query on whether as India Test captain he would want to play regularly against Pakistan outside of ICC tournaments. "At the end of the day, we want to be in contest and I think it will be a great contest between the two sides. We anyway play them in ICC trophies, so it doesn't really matter. It's just pure cricket that I'm looking at. I'm not interested in anything else. It's pure cricket, game between bat and ball. It'll be a great contest."



RAWALPINDI: Ground workers struggling to dry the pitch as rain interrupts first T20 Cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at Pindi Cricket Stadium.

Momota retires from international badminton at 29

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Two-time world champion Kento Momota said Thursday he is retiring from international badminton aged 29, admitting he had never been the same since a serious car crash four years ago.

Japan's Momota was once badminton's undisputed king, winning 11 titles in 2019 and losing just six of the 73 matches he played that year. But in January 2020 the vehicle taking him to Kuala Lumpur airport crashed hours after he won the Malaysia Masters. The driver was killed and Momota needed surgery to repair a fractured eye socket. When he returned after a year out Momota suffered double vision and failed to regain the scintillating form that had taken him to world number one, although he did win two more titles.

"At the time of the acci-

dent I'd be lying if I said I didn't think to myself, 'Why me?'," Momota told reporters in Tokyo on Thursday. Now ranked 52 and having missed out on a place at the Paris Olympics, Momota will retire from Japan's national team after playing at the Thomas and Uber Cup in China later this month. After that he will play only in domestic competitions in Japan and not on badminton's World Tour. "There were a lot of tough times after that traffic accident," Momota added. "I tried to get back to the way I used to play through trial and error, but there was a gap between my feelings and my body." That continued and I knew I wouldn't be able to get back to a level where I was competing with the world's best. "- 'A lot of hardship' - Smiling broadly throughout his 45-minute

press conference but pausing often to choose the right words, Momota said he had no regrets about retiring from top-level badminton. "There was a lot of hardship and it wore me down, but I didn't want to blame the tough times on the accident," he added. "I wanted to bounce back from it and that attitude along with the support of people around me at least allowed me to get a foothold." Viktor Axelsen, who supplanted Momota as the best men's player in the world, said "it has been an absolute pleasure sharing the court with you." "I feel lucky to have been able to compete with a player of your calibre," the reigning number one wrote on X. Momota had targeted this summer's Paris Olympics but his national ranking was not good enough to earn him a spot in Japan's team.



KARACHI: West Indies batter celebrates her century score during First ODI cricket match playing between Pakistan Women's Cricket team and West Indies Women's cricket team at National Bank Stadium.

Gauff, Raducanu shine in Stuttgart

STUTTGART (AFP/APP): World number three Coco Gauff was pushed hard by American compatriot Sachia Vickery before overcoming the qualifier 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 at the WTA Stuttgart clay-court tournament on Wednesday.

The US Open champion needed two hours 27 minutes to silence her second round opponent, ranked 134th in the world. Gauff began brightly, rattling off the first three games, but from then on it was to become an error-strewn struggle.

She double-faulted 15 times, enabling Vickery to get 19 break points, of which she converted seven.

Gauff converted six with the most important one coming in the seventh game of the deciding set.

Trailing 0-2, Vickery fought her way back to take a 4-2 lead, with Gauff then clinching the crucial game on her fourth break point.

"She gets a lot of balls back and I was just trying to be patient and also be aggressive. I think I got passive. She played well and I think I did a good job of staying in the match," said Gauff. Gauff will face the winner of the match between Zheng Qinwen and Marta Kostyuk in the quarter-finals. Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu defeated three-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one Angelique Kerber 6-2, 6-1 in her first round match.

At the weekend Raducanu led Britain past France and into the finals of the Billie Jean King Cup in November and she continued that clay-court form in Germany.

Raducanu hit 26 winners to 11 unforced errors while two-time Stuttgart champion Kerber was undone by 29 unforced errors.

The British player will next face the Czech Republic's Linda Noskova where a win would put her into her second Stuttgart quarter-final.

Ninth-ranked Ons Jabeur snapped a five-match losing streak by beating Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) in the second round. "I have thought about withdrawing from this tournament so many times because I couldn't take another loss," said Jabeur.

"It was very, very difficult."

The victory over 16th-ranked Alexandrova was just Jabeur's third win of 2024 and first since beating Raducanu in Abu Dhabi.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, runner-up in the German city for the last three years, advanced when close friend Paula Badosa retired from their second round clash with a left thigh injury in the final set.

Sabalenka has taken the first set 7-6 (7/4) but dropped the second, 6-4.

The Belarusian was a break down at 3-1 in the decider before clawing her way back to 3-3 when her Spanish opponent retired.

Sabalenka will face either Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova or Anastasia Potapova in the quarter-finals.

Rybakina beats Kudermetova to reach last eight in Stuttgart: Elena Rybakina beat Veronika Kudermetova 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 6-4 in

the last 16 of the WTA Stuttgart clay-court tournament on Thursday, continuing her strong form in 2024.

The Kazakh fourth seed and world number four, who has already recorded victories at the Brisbane International and the Abu Dhabi Open in 2024, beat the Russian in two hours 33 minutes.

"I know I have my weapon. My serve. I know I can always serve it out in tough moments. Not always. But this is a strength," Rybakina said after the match. "I just wanted to say thank you guys for coming. That's the most important." Rybakina came through a hard-fought first set, winning a tie-break (7/3) but Kudermetova romped through the second set, losing just one game.

Kudermetova, who had just seven wins in 16 matches in 2024 heading into Thursday's meeting, fought back from 3-0 down in the final set to level 4-4.

Rybakina responded, breaking Kudermetova again to qualify for her seventh quarter final of the season, where she will face either Jasmine Paolini or Ons Jabeur.

Kudermetova has not beaten Rybakina in four meetings.

Later on Thursday, world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland faces Belgium's Elise Mertens, while former US Open champion Emma Raducanu will take on Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic.

Raducanu beat former world number one Angelique Kerber 6-2, 6-1 in her first round match on Wednesday.

Hamilton says he plans to race ‘well into’ his 40s

LONDON (BBC): Lewis Hamilton says he will join his old rival Fernando Alonso in racing in Formula 1 "well into my 40s". Alonso's new Aston Martin deal will keep him in F1 until at least 2026, past his 45th birthday.

Hamilton will be 40 next year when he starts his career with Ferrari, in what is at least a two-year commitment. "I am not the oldest driver here. I am going to be racing for quite some time still so it is good [Alonso] is still around," Hamilton said.

"Fernando is one of the best drivers we've had in the sport so for him to continue to be here and continue to have the output he's had just shows what is possible. And shows the new era of athlete, what the human body can do and continue to do if you nurture it." Speaking before this weekend's Chinese Grand Prix, the seven-time champion added: "I never thought I would be racing into my 40s. I'm pretty sure I said I wouldn't. But life is such a crazy trip. I don't feel 40. I generally feel great." McLaren driver Lando Norris said Alonso's achievements in competing for so long at the highest level in Formula 1 might never be seen again.

Norris said: "He is one of the oldest guys competing at the top in any sport."

"And to be able to do that at the level he has done and continues to do, you could potentially never see that again in F1. And if you do, it is going to be extremely rare." Norris, who races for McLaren, said he had "a lot of respect" for Alonso's ability to continue to perform at the highest level for so long. "It takes a lot of dedication," the 24-year-old Briton said. "I don't think anyone thinks Fernando lacks that in any way."

Athapaththu: ‘I want to see my team in the semi-finals of the World Cup’

COLOMBO (Cricinfo): Sri Lanka are yet to qualify for either the T20 or ODI World Cup but their captain Chamari Athapaththu has already set a goal for them if they get there.

"I want to see my team in the semi-finals of the World Cup," she said after Sri Lanka ended their tour of South Africa with a six-wicket win in the third ODI. "I've worked so hard in the last 15 years and I've achieved a few things as a player but as a captain, I want to do more. I want to see my team in the semi-final of this World Cup. That's my wish."

It's only fair to allow Athapaththu some licence to set targets like these, especially after her scintillating 195 not out against South Africa on Wednesday evening. Not only did she achieve the third-highest individual score in women's ODIs but she also

led Sri Lanka to the highest successful chase in the format to underline both her own dominance and the growing pedigree in her national team.

In the last 12 months, Sri Lanka have won T20I series against Bangladesh, in England and South Africa and reached the final of the Asian Games. They've also won ODI series against Bangladesh and New Zealand and took a game off South Africa to keep themselves in the running for automatic qualification for the 2025 ODI World Cup, a must for Athapaththu after they missed out on the 2022 tournament. To get there, they must do well against West Indies, who are languishing in ninth place on the ten-team Women's Championship table, and Ireland, who are tenth. So Athapaththu has every reason to think her team can

get the points they need to finish in the top five, especially after contributions like Nilakshika Silva's unbeaten 50 against South Africa.

Before they turn their attention to the ODI World Cup, there's the T20 version in Bangladesh later this year to think about. Sri Lanka's campaign to qualify for that event starts next week in the UAE, where they enter the qualifiers as favourites. They take the form of nine T20I wins in their last 15 matches into it and are grouped with Thailand, Scotland, Uganda and USA, and must reach the tournament final to qualify for the T20 World Cup.

"I know it is a very big task for us," Athapaththu said. "Every team is really good and every game is really important for us. We will focus on one game at a time."



SARGODHA: A view of cricket match played between Government Women College Farooq Colony and Iqra Girls College teams during Inter Girls Collegiate Cricket Tournament organized by Education Board Sargodha.



In brief

Death anniversary of Khursheed Bano

ISLAMABAD (APP): Death anniversary of famous singer and actress of the '40s, Khursheed Bano was observed on Thursday. Born in Chunian, district Kasur 1914, her birth name was Irshad Begum. Khursheed Bano commenced her film career with the screen name of Shehla in the film titled Eye for an Eye in the year 1931, when the first talkie film, called Alam Ara of the sub-continent, was released. Some of her movies released during this period were Laila Majnu in 1931, Mufliis Aashiq in 1932, Naqlee Doctor in 1933, Bomb Shell and Mirza Sahiban in 1935, Kimiagar in 1936, Iman Farosh in 1937, Madhur Milan in 1938, and Sitara in 1939. From 1931 to 1942, she appeared in films made by the studios in Calcutta and Lahore, but as a singer-actress, the movie did not affect her. She did various films in the 1940s were Musafir in 1940, Holi in 1940 ("Bhigoi Moree Saree Ray"), Shadi in 1941 ("Hari ke Goon Prabhu ke Goon gavan mein" and "Ghir Ghir Aaye Baderia"), Pardesi in 1941, ("Pehley Jo Mohabbat Sey Inkaar Kia Hota" and "Mori Aterika Hai Sooni"). In Bhakta Surdas in 1942, "Panchee Bawra," whose author was Gyan Dutt, became a popular song of the 1940s.

Police arrest 13 lawbreakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police on the directives of Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations Rawalpindi conducted raids in different areas and netted 13 accused for possessing weapons, ammunition, drugs, operating illegal petrol and LPG agencies. According to a police spokesman, Westridge police in their operation arrested two accused namely Fahad and Abuzar and recovered LPG cylinders, petrol and other items. Pirwadhai, Taxila, Airport, Bani and Rattamral police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and arrested five accused namely Ghulam Adeel, Sohaib, Muhammad Bashir, Shahid Mehmood, and Shakeel and recovered over 4 kg charras. Meanwhile, Civil Lines, Taxila, Pirwadhai, and Sadiqabad police netted six accused namely Nabras, Khurram, Amjad, Rizwan, Wahidullah and Farhan and recovered 35 liters liquor, a liquor bottle, a 30 bore pistol, ammunition and a dagger. The SSP said that strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against the law-breakers and operations against aerial firing, drug peddlers, illegal weapon holders and illegal petrol and LPG agencies would continue.

IRSA releases 182,100 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 182,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 263,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1431.38 feet and was 33.38 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 43,500 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1122.70 feet, which was 72.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 58,200 cusecs and 15,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 108,300, 74,500, 35,300 and 7,800 cusecs respectively.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi chairing a meeting at NADRA Headquarters.

Govt chalks out concrete road-map for reforms in power sector: Awais Leghari

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Power Division Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari on Thursday said that on the directives of Prime Minister, a concrete road-map had been chalked out bring comprehensive reforms in country's power sector to control power pilferage, over-billing and circular debt.

Addressing a pressing conference, he said after assuming charge of the ministry, short comings of the power sectors were reviewed to address chronic issues permanently.

The government was committed to bringing improvement in the energy sector, he added.

He reiterated that no leniency would be given to the power pilferers irrespective of their status and position adding that over-

billing would also not be tolerated at any cost.

Solid strategy had also been devised to eliminate menace of power theft in the country, he said.

The minister said lower-middle class had been suffering from the power theft and we had to rectify existing shortcomings in the power system.

He went on to say that accumulative loss of power distribution companies (DISCOs) would surge to Rs 560 billion by June.

Electricity units worth over Rs 300 billion were consumed by the power pilferers, he added.

He said it was the need to hour to deal such power pilferers and officials involved in this illegal practices strictly.

The country could not afford such misappropriation of billions of rupees to

the economy, he added.

He vowed not sparing even higher officials such as XENs, SDOs, Chief Engineers involved in patronage of power pilferage. He claimed that around 20 per cent officials of power sector were involved in this dirty practice.

Awais said that all CEOs had already been directed to remove 'kunda' before April 23 failing which strict action would be taken against the responsible officials.

The minister appreciated the support of Interior ministry and FIA for supporting the DISCOs to eliminate power theft.

Replying to a question, he said that solar panels having 6800 megawatts capacity were imported in current year adding that mostly the people were shifting on off grid.

Govt making all-out efforts to provide relief to citizens

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab government was making all-out efforts to provide relief to the citizens, said members of the Punjab Assembly, Ch. Naeem Ijaz and Ziaullah Shah on Thursday. Ch. Ijaz informed that the MPAs along with district administration officers were visiting markets and checking implementation of the prices of Roti and Naan fixed by the provincial government.

Members of the Provincial Assembly were active in ensuring the implementation of the prices of Roti and Naan, he added. The Punjab government had fixed the price of 100 grams Roti at Rs 16, while the price of 120 grams Naan at Rs 20. The implementation of the new rates of Roti and Naan would be ensured at all cost, Chaudhry Naeem Ijaz said. Teams had been formed in Rawalpindi district on the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, Ch. Naeem Ijaz added.

Naqvi orders to block Sims issued on invalid CNIC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday directed the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to block mobile SIMs issued on invalid and expired identity cards.

During his visit to the NADRA headquarters, the minister visited all sectors and instructed the authorities to set up NADRA offices across the country on the pattern of model police stations established in Punjab. He said that establishing a model NADRA office will improve service delivery and provide convenience to the public.

NADRA Chairman Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar welcomed Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on his arrival at NADRA Headquarters.

During the meeting, the minister ordered to waive off the fee on the death certificates convenience of the public. The minister directed to ensure complete security of citizens' data.

He said that Model offices of NADRA should be built to provide fast service to the public.

He said that more facilities should be provided on mobile platforms for the convenience of the people and social media

should be used effectively to promote the institution's initiatives.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi praised the excellent performance of the current Chairman NADRA Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar. He said that the chairman NADRA has made the organization a public-friendly institution.

The minister planted saplings in the lawn of NADRA headquarters as part of the plantation campaign.

Chairman Nadra presented NADRA's Roadmap 2024- 25 in a briefing which included modern and phased security architecture, cyber security audits and employee cyber security awareness and the NADRA Strategic Plan.

Upgradation of NADRA technology and infrastructure and online platforms of registration centres will also be improved by which Pakistanis living abroad including local citizens will also efficiently get access to these facilities, the chairman briefed the minister.

He said that NADRA plans to set up self-service kiosks at registration centres and provide mobile registration services.

He also briefed that plans are underway to extend the shift hours at selected centres and provide service on weekly holidays.

PHA striving to make ongoing plantation campaign a success: DG PHA

RAWALPINDI (APP): Director General (DG), Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Rawalpindi, Ahmad Hasan Ranjha has said that the authority was striving to make the ongoing plantation campaign a success.

During a visit to Gorakhpur Nursery, he informed that with the cooperation of the citizens, PHA would make all-out efforts for the success of spring and monsoon plantation campaigns. On the direction of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, PHA

Rawalpindi would make all possible efforts to plant maximum saplings under the ongoing spring plantation campaign, he said. The DG during the visit reviewed the preparations for the spring and monsoon plantation drives. Ahmad Hasan Ranjha said that this year, the target of planting thousands of saplings in Rawalpindi City would be successfully achieved with the support of the public and departments concerned.

In Rawalpindi city, a large number of saplings were being planted near Swan Bridge, Gorakhpur,

Chakri Road, Mesa Kiswal, Gujjar Khan and Kallar Syedan and along with this, the public was also taking steps to ensure the success of the plantation drive. Free saplings would also be provided to the citizens by PHA, he added. Gorakhpur Nursery established in Rawalpindi is the largest nursery in the region which is playing an important role in promoting plantation and from here plants are being provided for the parks and plantation campaign of Rawalpindi, he informed.

ANF recovers 60 kg drugs in six operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 60 kg drugs and arrested five accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday.

He said that 960 grams Ice was recovered from a parcel booked for Saudi Arabia at a courier office in Rawalpindi.

515 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel booked for the UK at the cargo office at Islamabad Airport.

24 kg opium and 30 kg hashish were recovered from the possession of two accused netted from M-2 Sargodha.

2.4 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested on Express Highway Islamabad.

1 kg hashish was recovered from Khyber.

In another operation, 1 kg of hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Cantt station in Karachi.

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

Entrepreneurship curriculum introduced in FDE schools

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has introduced an entrepreneurship curriculum in schools working under the ambit of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE). The official sources told APP that as per the declaration of the education ministry, from the next academic session, students from grades 6 to 10 will have an opportunity to venture into the world of entrepreneurship.

This curriculum reflects the successful model imple-

mented in Gilgit-Baltistan in the last two years, they informed. The curriculum is carefully designed to develop entrepreneurial skills in students, equipping them with the necessary tools and mindsets for innovation and creativity. According to the declaration, unlike traditional assessment-based learning, this curriculum will focus on project-based learning. This will help the students to apply the theoretical knowledge to real world scenarios, it added.

The sources further stat-

ed that to ensure the successful implementation of this initiative, training will be provided to 200 teachers in FDE (ICT).

Meanwhile commenting on this declaration, the Secretary Education said that introducing entrepreneurship at an early age, not only fosters entrepreneurial spirit but also inculcates valuable skills like critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork.

He further said that the move marks a significant departure from traditional education methods.

British High Commissioner calls on Maqbool Siddiqui; discussed challenges, opportunities in edu sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms Jane Marriott, here on Thursday called on the Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui to discuss the challenges and opportunities being faced by the country in the education sector.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary of Education Mr Mohyuddin Wani and the Country Director British Council Mr James Hampson. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said that the Ministry of Education is working on a programme that aims to declare education emergency in Pakistan. He said that the number of out-of-school children in Pakistan is ballooning and the only way to address this issue is by making it a national agenda. The minister said that due to rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation slums in major cities are popping up.

He said that these slums are ignored in every education policy. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that no child should be left behind. He encouraged the UK to provide support in the cause of eliminating out-of-school children.

We need to bring all the stakeholders especially donors on the same platform so that all the effort can be channelled and streamlined, he added. "We are burning the midnight oil in ensuring that the cause of education becomes one of the main agendas of national effort towards

progress". Ms Jane Marriott, British High Commissioner to Pakistan said that UK and Pakistan are the oldest partners and have been shoulder to shoulder since 1947. She informed the minister that the UK encourages expansion of its green programme which can lead to an increase in enrolment of Pakistani students in UK universities via distance learning.

She also informed the minister that Google Education is highly interested in supporting Pakistan in its bid to address the issue of access to education. British High Commissioner and the education minister also discussed the challenges and opportunities that come with the devolution of education to the provinces.

Secretary of Education Mr Mohyuddin Wani highlighted that the Ministry of Education is developing a comprehensive plan which will declare an education emergency in the country and will furthermore align all the stakeholders on the same page. He said that all the donors and NGOs operating in Pakistan are working in silos and compartments.

He said that there is a concerted effort on the way to ensure that a single platform can align and channel the efforts of all stakeholders in the education sector of Pakistan.

Khalid Maqbool said that we have set a target to train one million youth in the IT sector.

He said that he hopes that in the medium term, Pakistan will become

one of the biggest suppliers of IT professionals to the world. He asked the UK to help in attaining IT certification for this IT-trained professional that would be recognised globally.

Furthermore, he said that the mental health of our students must be also catered to by professionals.

He said that the education ministry aims to establish mental health awareness and support desks in all of the colleges in Islamabad.

He said that efforts have been underway to address the education woes of Pakistan however, more effort and more focus is still required.

He told the British High Commissioner that a National Nutrition Program in Islamabad has also been launched to increase enrolment. He said that expense on education is not expenditure but investment. James Hampson, Country Director British Council told the minister that after China the biggest British Council Programme is in Pakistan. He requested the minister that the Global Chief Executive of the British Council visit Pakistan in May and would like to visit him.

The Federal Minister welcomed the initiative from the British Council and expressed a deep desire to enhance collaboration between the British Council and Pakistan, especially concerning increasing educational outreach programmes for slums in the metropolitan cities of the country.



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner Ms. Jane Marriot called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House.

Medical entrance exam for girls

KABUL (Khaama Press): The National Examination Committee of the de facto administration has announced that the entrance exam for female volunteers in medical fields at Ghazanfar Institute's branches in 11 provinces will be held on Friday, April 19th. In a statement released on Thursday, April 8th, the committee stated that female volunteers in medical fields who have previously registered at Ghazanfar Institute's branches should be present at the designated exam venue on Friday at 8:00 AM.

UN builds 470km of water canals

KABUL (Ariana News): The United Nations has built 470 kilometers of much needed water canals in Afghanistan in the past year in cooperation with local communities, the WFP confirmed. WFP said that the canals were built in order to provide access to water to more people across the country. The agency said the people "in Afghanistan cannot continue their lives without access to water," adding that the canals help farmers irrigate crops, which allows them to feed their families and sell surplus produce.

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

Beijing hosts Afghan delegation for talks on a wide range of issues



KABUL (Ariana News): The third meeting of the China-Afghanistan working-level liaison mechanism on humanitarian assistance and economic reconstruction was held in Beijing this week where in-depth talks were held on numerous issues relating to Afghanistan.

Liu Jinson, Director of the Asian Department of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Jalali, Director of the Third Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, co-chaired the Beijing meeting.

Also in attendance were representatives from various Chinese commissions, government departments, international aid organizations, as well as the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, the Ministry of Disaster Management, and the Ministry of Refugee Affairs. Quoting an Afghan proverb, Liu said at the meeting that "friends come and go, but neighbors always remain."

He pointed out that since 2021, China has implemented a diplomatic concept of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness that was proposed by President Xi Jinping in terms of Beijing's dealings with Afghanistan.

China has also adhered to a friendly policy towards all Afghan people, and adhered to the principle of respect for the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

He also said that during the different regimes in Afghanistan, China has always provided support and assistance for Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction and economic development.

The Afghan delegation meanwhile stated that the Islamic Emirate attaches great importance to developing relations with China, and thanked China for taking the lead in sending a new ambassador to Afghanistan and accepting the appointment of an ambassador to China.

The Islamic Emirate said

Afghanistan is willing to deepen friendly relations with China, maintain traditional friendship, and will, as always, support China in safeguarding its core interests and achieving national reunification.

The two sides agreed in the meeting that Afghanistan is currently facing multiple challenges such as floods, droughts, and refugee resettlement, among other issues.

They also noted that the freezing of Afghanistan's foreign assets by the United States has "aggravated the suffering of the Afghan people." The IEA stated however that it was "very grateful to China for its humanitarian assistance over the years and hopes to continue to receive help from China in refugee resettlement, disaster prevention and mitigation, improvement of medical and health conditions, and treatment of children with congenital heart disease."

On the Belt and Road initiative, the IEA delegation said Afghanistan is

deeply satisfied with the progress in practical cooperation between the two countries. They also said Afghanistan is willing to learn from China's experience in modernization and development, and hopes that China will help Afghanistan cultivate more professional talents.

China meanwhile urged the international community to step up humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and said Beijing hopes the IEA will "actively respond to some of the international community's reasonable concerns about Afghanistan's inclusive governance."

Liu in turn acknowledged the IEA's efforts to promote economic reconstruction and said bilateral trade volume between China and Afghanistan reached US\$1.33 billion last year, a record high and a year-on-year increase of 125.4%.

The Islamic Emirate meanwhile said in posts on X that the issue of investment opportunities in Afghanistan was widely discussed and both sides welcomed moves to pave the way for the export of pomegranates.

"Also, both sides talked about the latest developments in increasing the level of oil extraction in Afghanistan and starting the extraction of Logar's Mes Aynak mine and it was emphasized that plans should be considered to speed things up," the IEA stated. "The Afghan side welcomed the capacity building training programs of civil servants in many ministries and agencies of the Afghan government with the support of China. In addition, the Chinese side promised to expand the range of scholarships to Afghan students according to the needs of Afghanistan," the IEA stated.

Deputy PM Hanafi meets Kabul Governor, praised works and activities of officials



KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs of the Islamic Emirate, met with Mullah Aminullah Obaid, the governor of Kabul. According to a statement from Arg, during this meeting, Mullah Aminullah Obaid provided information about the activities of the local

administration of Kabul province to the Deputy Prime Minister.

He said that the officials of Kabul province have always been striving to ensure securiprotected services, creating necessary facilitiesfor the residents of Kabul province, and they spare no effort in addressing the problems faced by the people.

Referring to the serious attention of the Islamic Emirate in all fields, the Governor of Kabul also requested that special attention be paid to the expansion of the coordination of the second units of the administrations.

The Deputy Prime Minister also praised the activities and functions of the Kabul province officials in this meeting.

Mr. Hanafi while expressing appreciation for the measures taken during the Eid holidays by the officials of the Islamic Emirate, also stated that officials must make more efforts regarding security provision, creating social welfare, and providing necessary facilities for citizens.

2023 marred by 'tremendous challenges' for Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): Last year, 2023, was a year of "tremendous challenges" for the people of Afghanistan, but it was also a year marked by resilience and determination, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Indrika Ratwatte, said in the UN's annual report on Afghanistan that was published this week.

Ratwatte said: "In the face of adversity and multiple concurrent shocks, the people of Afghanistan have demonstrated remarkable courage and strength."

Afghans now mention access to food as their most pressing need, he said adding that "unable to pay for or produce basic sustenance, millions face hunger and malnutrition."

In 2024, an estimated 15.8 million people will experience crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity. The majority of the population is unable to procure basic needs such as healthcare, food, livelihoods, and housing, the report stated.

The UN found that the country also remains vulnerable to climate change.

Following the worst drought in three decades, emerging El Niño conditions now threaten a new cycle of flooding and crop pests. In this context, life-saving humanitarian aid has been crucial in preventing the collapse of the social fabric. It has also served to underpin the stability of the economy. Despite growing humanitarian needs, relevant funding cuts have forced humanitarian actors to prioritize the most vulnerable further, the report stated. A Gallup poll found that 95 percent of the population consider themselves to be suffering. In addition

to living in poverty, the average life expectancy in Afghanistan has been falling for the past five years. The Herat earthquakes and unprecedented large-scale returns of refugees from neighbouring countries, including Pakistan and Iran, have shown the disruptive impact of recurrent shocks

a low equilibrium level following a period of significant contraction since 2021. The UN said in the report that growth barriers include severely restricted operations in the banking sector (including microfinance institutions), trade disruptions, and institutional issues hindering service delivery, including in the

US dollars into Afghanistan, and personal-remittances. Imports continued to surpass exports through 2023 and increased as the economy contracted.

"This appears to be a paradox: the currency appreciated while the trade deficit widened, suggesting that there might be other unidentified sources of



and underscored the need for sustained international engagement and support, the UN stated.

"As we embark on the next chapter, in 2024, it is imperative that we remain steadfast in our commitment to the principles of human rights, gender equality, and women's Empowerment," Ratwatte said. "We will continue to include women as key partners in our work, to provide assistance 'by women, for women', and to tirelessly work for equal access to education in line with the demands we hear from Afghans in all areas of the country," he said.

However, from an economic point of view, Afghanistan's economy appears to be stabilizing at

private sector.

"The sudden cessation of a significant amount of international aid and grants, which had accounted for 40 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), along with a freeze on international reserves amounting to about US\$9 billion and the imposition of international sanctions, caused a severe balance of payments, banking and payment systems crisis."

"Notably, financial restrictions have removed liquidity from the banking system," the report stated.

Despite the crisis and a period of devaluation towards the end of the year, the AFN is 20 percent stronger than it was in 2021 due to currency export controls, UN cash shipments of

financing besides US dollar cash shipments and remittances to support the account deficits," the report read. The UN also said that with its partners, it will work to initiate a dialogue with the Islamic Emirate on adjustments to regulatory frameworks and sustained public service delivery with the aim of creating a long-term and sustainable pathway to reduce aid dependency and put Afghanistan back on a path towards development

"In this regard, we reiterate our offer to the DFA for a dialogue and will work jointly with international partners, donors, and Afghans on how such engagement can be structured in a most productive way."

Turkish coast guard detains 40 Afghan refugees

KABUL (Khaama Press): Turkish Coast Guard recently announced the detention of 40 Afghan refugees by coastal guards on the shores of Ayvalik city.

Turkish media reported on Thursday, April 18th that these refugees, who were on board a boat, have been transferred to the Foreigners' Repatriation Center in Ayvalik after being detained by the Turkish coast guard.

Previously, the Turkish Coast Guard has reported the detention of Afghan citizens on the shores of the country. However, Turkish Coast Guard officials cite the lack of legal documents and illegal border crossing as the reasons for detaining these refugees.

Turkey serves as a primary route for refugees seeking to reach Europe, with individuals from various countries, including Afghanistan, paying thou-



sands of dollars and accepting the risks of death to travel to the country.

Many Afghan refugees choose Turkey as a gateway to European countries, driven by persecution, security threats, lim-

ited job prospects, and a dire humanitarian crisis back home. Once these refugees arrive in neighboring countries, they encounter significant challenges, especially due to their lack of legal docu-

mentation.

The migration from Afghanistan is not just a matter of reaching neighboring countries but also grappling with the harsh realities and uncertainties that come with the journey.

Life expectancy average declines in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations, in its annual report analyzing Afghanistan's situation in 2023, stated that despite the "tireless efforts" of the organization and its partners to address issues in Afghanistan, the country

continues to grapple with "complex and multifaceted challenges."

The report titled "UN Annual Results Report for Afghanistan in 2023" was released on Thursday, the 18th of April, revealing that in 2024, approximately

15.8 million people will face food insecurity and emergency levels of vulnerability.

Citing Gallup survey results and polls conducted by UN agencies in Afghanistan, the organization concluded that the

"average life expectancy in the past five years [in Afghanistan] has decreased."

The year 2024 is described as "highly challenging" for the people of Afghanistan, encompassing deep levels of need and emergency poverty levels. The UN report states: Afghans cite access to food as their most essential need. Millions who are unable to afford or produce basic sustenance face hunger and malnutrition.

The organization emphasizes the urgency of upholding human rights principles in Afghanistan and stresses the importance of remaining committed to human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment in 2024.

Balkh health officials report sharp increase in number of cancer patients

BALKH (Ariana News): Balkh Public Health Department officials say there has been a significant

increase in the number of patients with cancer in the province. "In 1401, about 2,613 OPD (out patient

department) cases were registered with us. In 1402, these figures were 4,912 cases," said Ehsanullah

Kaliwal, the head of the oncology department at Balkh Regional Hospital.

Some doctors say genetic factors, environmental pollution, arbitrary use of medicines, and excessive consumption of meat were reasons for the sharp increase.

One doctor said cancer was also hereditary.

However, a large percentage of cancer patients in Balkh have stomach cancer. Many of them have appealed for the government to improve treatment facilities.

According to health officials, in the first month of this solar year (April), 423 cancer patients visited this hospital for treatment.



KP CM directs wheat purchase plan for next season

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: First meeting of the provincial food department was held here at Chief Minister's House Peshawar on Thursday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur in the chair.

The chief minister was given a detailed presentation about the mandate of the department, its administrative affairs, procurement and supply of wheat, available wheat stock and different matters related to Food Safety and Halal Food Authority. Provincial minister for food Zahir Shah Toru, Additional Chief Secretary P&D Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan, Secretary Food Zareef-ul-Maani, Secretary Finance Amir Sultan Tareen, Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

The chief minister on this occasion, directed the concerned quarters to devise a detailed wheat procurement plan for the next season and submit the same for the approval of provincial cabinet further directing them to ensure wheat quality as well as transparency in the entire procurement process. Moreover, he directed them to ensure implementation of the provincial government's decision to reduce the price of wheat bread (roti) adding that if Tandoor owners compliance this order, the matter regarding providing them relief would also be considered seriously.

He also ordered establishment of Model Bazaars and Food Streets at all divisional headquarters of the province so that citizens can buy required items on government's fixed rates and they do not have to face any problem or artificial inflation in this regard. He also directed them not to compromise on the quality of food items at any cost.

In order to ensure quality, the rate of fines should be increased substantially and classification of hotels and restaurants be carried out to impose fines, he directed and added that the fines should be increased in accordance with the size of business; the bigger the business the greater the fine; and necessary amendments be proposed in the relevant legal framework for this purpose.

He also directed the authorities concerned to have a vigilant eye on the import of adulterated milk and to increase numbers of mobile food testing laboratories adding that products of the factories producing defective food items should be tested by a certified laboratory. He directed all the relevant departments to install CCTV Cameras on their check posts adding that Finance department would provide required funds for this purpose.

IHC reinstates Bushra Bibi's request

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has approved the miscellaneous application for the transfer of Bushra Bibi, wife of former prime minister and ex-PTI chairman Imran Khan, from Bani Gala Sub Jail to Adiala Jail. IHC Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the petition, while Usman Gill, the former first lady's counsel, appeared in the court. The court of Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb called the parties for final arguments on the petition on Monday, April 22.

It is worth mentioning that the court of Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb dismissed the application two days ago. Two months back on Feb 22, the administration of Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi refused to shift Bushra Bibi from her Bani Gala residence in Islamabad to the jail.

In his report submitted to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) during the hearing of Bushra's petition, seeking the court order for shifting her to the jail, the superintendent of Adiala Jail said that the petitioner could not be shifted because of security concerns. Furthermore, the superintendent wrote in his report, pace in Adiala Jail was already limited as 250 females were crammed into it.

Israel bombs Gaza as Middle East tense after Iranian attack

JERUSALEM (AFP): Israel launched more deadly strikes on besieged Gaza on Thursday as world powers watched nervously whether the country would retaliate against a weekend attack by its arch enemy Iran. The Israeli army said it had bombed dozens of targets in the Palestinian coastal territory of 2.4 million people, more than six months into the bloodiest ever Gaza war.

Weeks of talks toward an Israel-Hamas truce and hostage release deal have stalled, according to Qatar's prime minister who said the Gulf emirate was now "reassessing our role as mediator." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has vowed to destroy Hamas over its October 7 attack on Israel, also stressed on Wednesday that Israel "reserves the right to protect itself" against Iran.

The Islamic republic last weekend carried out its first ever attack to directly target its regional foe but Israel, backed by its allies, intercepted most of the 300 missiles and drones and suffered no deaths. Iran's attack was retaliation for an April 1 air strike, which it blamed on Israel, on the consular annex of its embassy in Damascus. The international community has urged de-escalation since Iran's attack on Israel which came after months of high tensions and violence involving Israel and Iran-backed groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and

Yemen.

"We are on the edge of a war in the Middle East which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said ahead of a G7 meeting in Capri, Italy. Iran has warned of "a fierce and severe response" if Israel launches any further attacks after seven of its Revolutionary Guards died in the consular strike. However, Tehran had also sought to calm tensions through indirect diplomatic channels with its other major adversary, the United States, which is Israel's top ally and military supplier.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in New York for a UN meeting, said Iran had "tried to tell the United States clearly" that it is "not looking for the expansion of tension in the region." Washington has made clear it won't join any Israeli attack on Iran, but has pledged to instead impose new punitive sanctions against Iran. The European Union on Wednesday said it would impose new sanctions on Iran's drone and missile producers.

Israeli public broadcaster Kan said Netanyahu, after discussions with US President Joe Biden, decided not to proceed with pre-arranged plans for retaliatory strikes on Iran. "Diplomatic sensitivities came into play," a senior Israeli official told Kan, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Tarar condemns PTI for irresponsible statements

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, criticized Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Thursday, stating that individuals involved in last year's May 9 attacks are now jeopardizing national interests.

Speaking to the media, Tarar emphasized that those who undermined the country's interests were adversaries of Pakistan. He expressed dismay at prioritizing political agendas and ego over national interests, highlighting the regrettable pattern of PTI leadership disowning statements against the country's interests.

Tarar noted that PTI leaders were embroiled in corruption cases, lamenting that enemies of Pakistan struggle to accept investments in the country. He prayed for divine guidance for such individuals to speak in the country's favour. The minister con-

demned the actions stooping to anti-national levels, stressing that while criticism of the government and its policies is acceptable, criticizing Pakistan is intolerable. He acknowledged the support of friendly countries in investing and cooperating with Pakistan, expressing optimism for progress with Allah's grace.

Attaullah Tarar also affirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthen relations with friendly countries. Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday stressed the need for enhanced collaboration between the public and private sectors to fast track the process of economic development of the country.

Addressing the First Pakistan Semiconductor Summit, he said that the Special Investment Facilitation Council had been set up to attract investment in Pakistan and ensure 'ease of doing business'. He said it was main thrust of

the government policy to encourage innovation and investment in the country. He said that Pakistan, as the fifth largest democracy in the world, was endowed with great natural resources and its biggest resource was its human resource. "We are blessed with a huge population of youth which constitutes 68 per cent of its population". That is a huge potential which we can offer to the world, he added.

He said Pakistan was strategically located at the crossroads of the world which was a source of pride for the nation. He said that the Government of Pakistan as a policy encouraged innovation and investment in the country which this summit was offering precisely - a collaboration between public and private sector. He said that the federal cabinet meeting on Wednesday had approved a public private partnership policy framework to eventually facilitate investment in the country.



RAWALPINDI: General Metin Gürak, Chief of Turkish General Staff called on General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, at Joint Staff Headquarters.

Common consumer didn't steal electricity: PHC

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A two members bench of Peshawar High Court comprised of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah annulled the Peshawar Electricity Supply Company (PESCO) attitude toward residential consumers during a hearing on a petition filed by residents of Matni area who have been facing electricity cuts for a year, on Thursday.

Justice Shakeel Ahmed pointed out that instead of targeting ordinary consumers for non-payment, PESCO should focus on curbing large-scale theft by industrial units. He questioned the company's lack of action against such theft, which ultimately leads to power shortages and hardship for everyday citizens.

"Electricity theft is not done by the common consumer," Justice Ahmed remarked. "Don't you know people from your department are involved in electricity theft? Institutions do not work because of which there is loss." Justice Shakeel Ahmad further emphasized the importance of providing uninterrupted electricity to those who pay their bills. "Take action against those who do not

Govt must legislate to empower administrative officers

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court comprised of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah observed that provincial government must return powers administrative officers by legislation for controlling inflation as well as adulteration, on Thursday.

The petition filed by Abbas Sangeen Advocate against the rising prices of essential commodities, including edible items. During Justice Shakeel Ahmed expressed concern over the increasing prices and suggested that the government should empower administrative officers to take actions against price hike. He also mentioned that the court will issue a detailed verdict on the matter, providing directions to the government.

The inflation and outlaw activities have been increased in the society after curtaining Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners, Justice Shakeel Ahmad remarked. He further observed that no one is taking responsibility as adulteration is violating both religious as well as law of the land. The Advocate General informed the court that two reports have been submitted, and a fine of over Rs12.3 million has been imposed. He added that 9 thousand two hundred and 37 raids have been conducted against profiteers across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

pay bills, but give electricity to those who are paying bills," he said. "What do you say to those who pay bills? You are punishing them."

Justice Sahibzada Asadullah echoed these concerns, highlighting the counter-productive nature of power cuts. "When you provide electricity, people will collect the bill," he

stated. "When you don't provide electricity, people will not pay the bill." The petitioner, facing immense difficulties due to the prolonged power outage, expressed his desperation and even mentioned feeling suicidal. PHC directed PESCO for submission a report on the matter by the next hearing, scheduled for 30th April.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting regarding power sector.

Turkish General calls on CJCSC

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Metin Gürak, Chief of the Turkish General Staff called on General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, at Joint Staff Headquarters, Rawalpindi.

During the meeting, matters related to enhancing the level and scope of bilateral military engagements and cooperation were discussed. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to forge deeper strategic ties. The dignitary lauded the professionalism of the Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. Earlier, upon arrival at Joint Staff Headquarters, a smartly turned-out tri-services contingent presented 'Guard of Honour' to the visiting dignitary.

India goes to polls today

NEW DELHI: India will begin its crucial general elections on Friday (today) amid hopes and fears for its troubled democracy.

According to report, fascist Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a hardcore Hindu nationalist leader to head the country, has his eyes on third consecutive term in power, the first time since Jawaharlal Nehru, while his rejuvenated rivals say he could lose. Modi is of the view that he is confident of getting more than 400 seats in the 18th Lok Sabha, a brute majority of in the 545-seat lower house, a feat achieved only once by Rajiv Gandhi, the then prime minister who was killed by Tamil militants.

The Hindi fanatic BJP is optimistic to increase its tally from 303 to 370, the rest coming from other members of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). It is widely feared that Modi would seek to use the majority to change the constitution to align with his idea of Hindu Rashtra.

Modi's hitherto fractious rivals comprising regional parties plus the Congress, recently cobbled the India National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc. They are pitching for the removal of the NDA from power for its "whimsical policies, narcissistic hegemony, communal avowal as well as violence against the minorities and the fear factor against any dissent".

Ground reports reveal that there was no Modi wave evident in any part of the country, but these are early days. The biggest chunk of seats will be in the fray on Friday, covering 102 seats in 21 states. The remaining six phases of the polls, including the last leg on June 1, will make these the longest elections in memory. Security is cited as the reason, and it would involve the deployment of 3.4 lakh paramilitary forces in rotation. West Bengal, where the Bharatiya Janata Party is hoping to expand from the 18 of 42 seats it won last time, would see polls in all seven phases. A maximum of 92,000 Indian forces' personnel are likely to be deployed there. The BJP had just two seats in the state in 2014.

The NDA is banking largely on the so-called Modi magic together with the Ram Mandir and the illegal abrogation of Article 370 in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Every BJP leader is reinforcing Hindutva, which offends the Muslims. The BJP's manifesto is personalised as 'Modi ki Guarantee', with the programmes of a decade-long rule listed. — Agencies

Quetta, Gwadar submerged Social life paralyzed as rains continue

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Continuous heavy rains have submerged Quetta and Gwadar, affecting social and business life, rescue officials said on Thursday. The continuous rainfall has been reported in Quetta and Gwadar regions since last night, leading to water entering houses, roads being closed for traffic, and disrupting daily life.

Due to the unprecedented downpour in Gwadar regions, highways also washed away and ground connectivity with Karachi and other Sindh areas was disturbed. The SP Coastal Highway confirmed that traffic between Gwadar and Karachi has been suspended at Makran Coastal Highway near Princes of Hope as the road has been blocked by flood and other routes were also washed away.

In Quetta, it has continued to rain since last night and water entered the houses while highways and linked roads were closed for any traffic. The downpour also badly affected the areas of Turbat, Panjgur, Noshki, Pishin, and Chaman as well.

Reportedly, flooding caused roads to wash away in Chaman and rain waters entered into houses. Intense rainfall in Ziarat, Pasni, Ormara, Jiwan, and Jhal Magsi has led to flash flooding in streams and nullahs. According to the report, numerous settlements in these areas have been submerged, and the roofs of many houses have collapsed while ground connectivity has also been disrupted in several villages.

Karachi was also affected by the westerly rain system as it experienced downpour in areas like Metrowell and SITE, Orangi Town, and Sher

33 people died, 46 others injured in KP rains, floods

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As many as 33 people have died and 46 others have been injured so far due to heavy rains in various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the report issued by Provincial Disasters Management issued here Thursday said.

According to the report, 17 children, 8 men and 8 women are among the dead, while the injured include 6 women, 32 men and 8 children, the PDMA report said. A total of 1932 houses were damaged due to the collapse of walls and roofs in different districts, in which 326 houses were completely damaged and 1606 houses were partially damaged, the PDMA report said.

Due to heavy rains, life and financial accidents occurred in various districts of Khyber, Dir Upper and Lower, Chitral Upper, Swat, Bajaur, Shangla, Mansehra, Mohmand, Malakand, Karak, Tank, Mardan, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Bunir, Hangu, Battagram, Bannu, North and South Waziristan, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Orakzai districts. On the special instructions of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PDM has released Rs. 50 million. Since March 29, PDMA has released 8.1 million rupees to the administration of various districts to deal with emergency situations. In addition, PDMA has provided relief materials to the affected districts of Swat, Chitral Lower, Bajaur, Kohistan Lower, Peshawar, Nowshera, Mohmand, Dir Upper and Lower. Relief supplies include tents, mats, kitchen sets, blankets, beds, tarpaulins, solar lamps and other daily life items, the PDMA report said. The PDMA and all related organizations are continuing relief activities in the rain-affected districts and rains are likely to continue intermittently till April 21, PDMA has issued a letter to all district administrations to be alert and take precautionary measures.

Shah. In the early morning in Lahore, the weather became pleasant due to rain in different parts of the city.

The Meteorology Department has predicted heavy rains in Sindh and Punjab for the next three days as a spell of rains is expected from April 18 to 21. As per the met office report, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan will also receive rain during next three days. The met office also confirmed that another spell of rain is expected from April 25 to 29.

As per the report, there are falling rains at nearly twice the historical average rate in April this year and at

least 65 people have died in lightning and heavy rain incidents in Balochistan and other parts of the country. Pakistan is increasingly vulnerable to unpredictable weather patterns, as well as often destructive monsoon rains that usually arrive in July.

"In April, we have observed highly unusual rainfall patterns," Zaeer Ahmad Babar, spokesperson for the Pakistan Meteorological Department, told AFP. "From April 1st to April 17th, we experienced precipitation levels exceeding the historical average by 99 per cent," he added, citing data from the past 30 years as a comparison.

Will personally monitor

(Continued from Page 1)

a delegation of prominent Saudi businessmen to Pakistan was welcoming and that further investment opportunities would also be explored during his visit to Saudi Arabia to attend the World Economic Forum to be held in the Kingdom. He said both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoyed cordial brotherly ties and the Kingdom always supported Pakistan in every hour of need.

Prime Minister Shehbaz thanked the Saudi King and Crown Prince for their keen interest in promoting cooperation and partnership with Pakistan. He reiterated his government's resolve to take all possible measures aimed at the country's progress and prosperity.

The meeting was briefed about the Saudi delegation's interest and offer for different projects as both sides had discussed investment prospects in the fields of mining, agriculture, energy, information technology and infrastructural development. Both sides had also deliberated on making Pakistan part of global supply chain and value chain which was highly appreciated Pakistan's preparedness in this regard.

The participants of the meeting viewed that the visit of delegations from friendly nations to explore investment opportunities was welcoming and termed it as the success of the current government on the diplomatic front. The prime minister directed all the concerned ministries and departments to also

pay special attention to the government-to-government agreements and business-to-business projects and in this regard the local business community should be taken in confidence.

The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Jam Kamal Khan, Ahad Khan Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Ahsan Iqbal, Salik Hussain Chaudhry, Sardar Awaish Khan Leghari, Abdul Aleem Khan, Dr Musadik Malik, Minister of State Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Muhammad Jehanzeb Khan, members of National Assembly Bilal Azhar Kani and Rumina Khursheed Alam, Coordinator of the prime minister Rana Ehsan Afzal and other relevant authorities.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the relevant authorities to accelerate the process of privatization and outsourcing of the power distribution companies (Discos). Chairing a high-level meeting regarding power sector here, the prime minister said the assistance of private sector experts and globally accepted models should be taken to improve the management affairs of the distribution companies (DISCOs). He also directed to prepare and present a comprehensive plan in the next meeting to improve the power system in the country.

The prime minister said reforms in the power sector would help reduce the country's circular debt. He also vowed not to allow electricity thieves and other elements to harm the country's treasury.

PM witnesses signing of letter of intent between PMYP, UNICEF: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday witnessed signing of a letter of intent regarding the United Nations Generation Unlimited (GenU) programme between Prime Minister's Youth Programme and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

GenU was launched by the Secretary General of the United Nations in 2018 with the aim to empower the youth through education, technical training and entrepreneurship and working towards early education and training. GenU is planning to start its full operations in Pakistan with an initial investment of 20 million Euros in youth related projects.

Signing the document will help provide equal opportunities to education and training to the youth. GenU and the PM Youth Programme will work together on operational strategic framework in this regard. Earlier the UNICEF delegation headed by representative of UNICEF in Pakistan Abdullah A Fazil called on the prime minister. Chairman PM Youth Programme Rana Mashhood was also present in the meeting.