

Two terrorists killed F.P. Report

BHAKKAR: Two terrorists who entered Punjab from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were killed in an exchange of fire with the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), sources said on Wednesday. According to a CTD spokesperson, two terrorists who entered Punjab from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were killed in an exchange of fire near Bhakkar.



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Focus on to double exports' volume: PM

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed the confidence that the country's exports volume would be doubled over the next five years with the support of business community.

He said the government, in consultation with the business community, would chalk out a comprehensive policy framework to increase the exports that would ultimately help ensure sustained economic growth. The exported growth would also help resolve the country's foreign exchange reserves' issue, he added.

"You are actually the backbone of the national economy as without your support, the government cannot bring the country out of economic crisis," the prime minister said while addressing the business community. He asked the business community to sit with the government to resolve their issues and challenges as it was the only way to move forward, and bring development and prosperity to Pakistan.

"We should get together in the larger national interest. The brilliant minds should together find ways to overcome the challenges and problems hindering the country's development and prosperity." It was the only way to regain the country's lost glory, the prime minister said.

PM Shehbaz highlighted that the government was fully focused on bringing revolution in sectors of agriculture, mines & minerals, information technology and industry. He also expressed the government's resolve to work for reducing unemployment, poverty and inflation in the country, which, he said, could not be possible without the support of the business community.

As regards the sugar situation in the country, the prime minister said the government might opt for export of the commodity in case its stock was in surplus. He said the government was also focusing on curbing smuggling of the commodity. PM Shehbaz

highlighted that due to the efforts of interim and current governments, positive news were being received about macro economic indicators.

"The current account is in surplus, remittances are increasing, inflation is moving down, and the stock exchange is showing record progress," he remarked. The prime minister assured that the privatization process would be carried out in a transparent way without any bureaucratic hurdles. The government would consult the business community before finalizing any transaction in that regard.

He said it was not the government's job to run the businesses, rather the private sector was there for the purpose, which could play their due role in the country's development and prosperity. The prime minister pointed out that the government paid rebates of Rs 65 billion soon after taking over the office.

He asked the business community to bring in modern techniques and technologies and high quality marketing in their businesses. He said an amount of Rs 2.7 trillion of tax money was stuck in litigation, and the government was trying to get the court decisions as soon as possible.

Federation, provinces to jointly overcome biggest challenge of economic stability: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the economic stability was a biggest challenge for the country at the moment that could be overcome with the coordinated efforts of the federation and the provinces.

"We should work together to serve the country and for the development of the provinces as with the joint efforts we can solve problems of the people of Pakistan," the PM said in his remarks at meeting with Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and his cabinet here at the CM House. PM Sharif emphasized that the federation and the provinces could work in collaboration towards the improvement of national economy.

Shehbaz Sharif called upon federal and the provincial governments to keep very close relationship to make

our country developed nation. He said development of Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, was in fact the development of Pakistan. Prime Minister hoped that the big investment opportunities will benefit to all provinces equally.

He stressed the need of forging unity and harmony among each other so that positive results could be achieved. He said the purpose of his visit to Sindh was to create mutual understanding. Referring to foreign investment, the Prime Minister made a special mention of recent visits of the delegation of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the president of Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan and hoped that in coming months, many foreign delegations would visit Pakistan.

As a result of February 8 election, the people of Pakistan gave mandate to Pakistan People's Party in Sindh while in Punjab, they gave opportunity to Pakistan Muslim League (N). However, he said, "in federation there is a split mandate and we have to respect it." Shehbaz Sharif mentioned his camaraderie developed with CM Murad Ali Shah and said that in case of any problem, they talked and sorted out things immediately.

"Due to such relationship, today federal and the provincial ministers are sitting together and discussing ways to face the challenges confronted by our country," he said. He expressed gratitude to the CM Sindh and his cabinet for their warm welcome with great enthusiasm.

He said after arrival in Karachi he visited Mazar-e-Quaid and paid rich tribute to the father of the nation. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on assuming office of the prime minister for second term. Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarrar, Federal Ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Jam Kamal, Qaiser Shaikh and members of the provincial cabinet also attended the meeting.



KARACHI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing business community during his visit to Port City.

SC moved to form full court bench F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court was moved on Wednesday to constitute a full-court bench to examine the allegations against intelligence agencies regarding interference in judicial affairs.

The petitions, submitted by the Balochistan Bar Council and the Balochistan High Court Bar Association, urge the apex court to establish guidelines preventing such occurrences in the future and to impose strict punishment on those found guilty. The legal bodies also sought the dissolution of the government-formed single-member commission tasked with investigating the allegations.

This development coincides with the resumption of the hearing on April 29 by a seven-member SC bench of the suo motu case initiated following a letter from IHC judges to the SJC regarding the pressing matter. The seven-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, took notice of the judges' letter under Article 183 (3) of the Constitution after former chief justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani reassured himself from heading the one-member commission.

IMF board to meet 29th on \$1.1b Pakistan funding

NEW YORK (Reuters): The executive board of the International Monetary Fund will meet on April 29 to discuss the approval of \$1.1 billion funding for Pakistan, the fund said on Wednesday.

The funding is the second and last tranche of a \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) with the IMF, which it secured last summer to avert a sovereign default and which runs out this month. The South Asian nation is seeking a new long-term, larger IMF loan. Pakistan's Finance Minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, has said Islamabad could secure a staff-level agreement on the new program by early July.

Islamabad says it is seeking a loan over at least three years to help macroeconomic stability and execute a long-due and painful structural reforms, though Aurangzeb has declined to detail what seize of programme the country seeks. Islamabad is yet to make a formal request, but the Fund and the government are already in discussions.

If secured, it would be the 24th IMF bailout for Pakistan. The \$350 billion economy faces a chronic balance of payment crisis, with nearly \$24 billion to repay in debt and interest over the next fiscal year - three-time more than its central bank's foreign currency reserves.

Pakistan's finance ministry expect the economy to grow by 2.6% in the current fiscal year ending June, while average inflation is projected to stand at 24%, down from 29.2% in fiscal year 2023/2024. Inflation soared to a record high of 38% last May.

Blome optimistic on Pak-IMF talks: US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome on Wednesday expressed optimism about ongoing negotiations between

Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), saying that positive feedback from the Fund would serve to encourage investors, according to a statement from the Senate chairman's office.

Blome visited Senate Chairman Yousuf Raza Gilani today at the Parliament House for a "constructive dialogue aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and fostering mutual interests". "Ambassador Blome commended the new economic team of Pakistan and expressed optimism regarding the ongoing discussions between Pakistan and the IMF. He praised the efforts of the Pakistan economic team and emphasised the potential for further economic cooperation between Pakistan and the US.

"Acknowledging the positive economic indicators of Pakistan, Blome noted the downward trend in inflation and high dollar reserves, stating that the IMF's positive feedback would encourage investors," said a post from the X account of the Senate chairman's office. Mentioning the important economic partnership between the two countries, Gilani said that the US was Pakistan's largest trading partner and thanked its government for cooperation with Pakistan in various fields. He also emphasised the need to increase trade links and trade volume between the two countries.

Blome also highlighted the "flourishing gaming industry" in Pakistan and called for enhanced cooperation in the digital sector. The ambassador congratulated Gilani on his election as the Senate chairman and expressed his best wishes for him. Various aspects of the "lasting friendship" between Pakistan and the US were also discussed in detail in the meeting.

IHC raises question over accountability in agencies

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) conducted the hearing of a petition filed for the recovery of missing Baloch students on Wednesday. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani presided over the proceedings.

During Wednesday's hearing, Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan presented a report on the recovered missing Balochs. The judge inquired about the

allegations of human rights violations detailed in the petition.

The petitioner's lawyer, Imaan Mazari, informed the court that on the same day, the caretaker prime minister [Anwarul Haq Kakar] appeared before this court, a Baloch student was abducted, and the following day he was released in Rawalpindi. Upon this, the court questioned if there was anyone accountable in intelligence agencies and if there were any intelligence agencies

where there was self-accountability, noting that police officials often faced suspension for instances where they went beyond the law since they did not act clandestinely. "My reservation against the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances is because they work with those [agencies] who are accused," the judge stated, observing that those departments that operated under the law got regulated, but what about those which acted beyond the law.

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INF P 786/24



Delegation from Air Asia Aviation Group calls on President Zardari

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from Air Asia Aviation Group called on President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad. During the meeting, President Asif Ali Zardari emphasized the importance of promoting Pakistan's air links with other countries.

During the meeting, President Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan's tourism sector's potential could be fully realized by enhancing public relations.

He said that Pakistan, being a large market, holds immense potential for tourism, particularly religious tourism. Additionally, there are excellent investment opportunities available in the Pakistani stock market. President Asif Ali



Zardari encouraged investors to take advantage of the investment opportunities available in the Pakistan Stock Exchange. The delegation briefed the President on AirAsia Aviation Group and its flight operations.

Anonymous allegations against PR chairman rejected

LAHORE (APP): Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Pakistan Railways Aamir Ali Baloch has strongly condemned the negative propaganda, being spread against the chairman of Railways, stating that anonymous allegations hold no legal significance.

In a statement issued here on Wednesday, he emphasised that neither could any anonymous letter of allegations disrupt the sequence of policies nor could such baseless propaganda be entertained. He asserted that the Railways reform agenda would be pursued relentlessly, ensuring the achievement of all other targets, just as revenue generation of up to Rs 66 billion has been made possible. He also mentioned that cases of misconduct against certain individuals had been opened and would be brought to logical conclusion. He expressed confidence in the transformation of the Railways, stating that progress is inevitable.

The statement comes in response to a recent anonymous letter, written to the prime minister with allegations against the chairman of Railways.

Japanese cultural counsellor visits Alhamra

LAHORE (APP): Japanese Cultural Counsellor Takana visited Alhamra Arts Centre on The Mall, here on Wednesday. Alhamra Executive Director Tariq Ali Basra welcomed the guests. The meeting between Alhamra Executive Director and the Japanese cultural counsellor paved the way for discussions on potential collaborations between Alhamra and the Japanese embassy. One of the key outcomes of the meeting was the decision to explore avenues for joint cultural initiatives to foster greater understanding and appreciation of each other's cultural heritage.

During the discussions, Takana expressed fondness and admiration for the Alhamra Arts Council, acknowledging it as a splendid venue for showcasing cultural richness and diversity. He emphasised the importance of such platforms in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and strengthening bilateral ties between nations.

In response, Tariq Basra reiterated Alhamra's commitment to promoting cultural exchange and welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with the Japanese Embassy. He emphasized the significance of embracing diverse cultures and traditions, believing they enrich societies and contribute to global harmony. The visit underscored the mutual interest of both parties in fostering cultural diplomacy and exploring opportunities for future collaboration. It laid the foundation for a potentially fruitful partnership that could further enhance cultural exchanges between Pakistan and Japan, enriching the cultural landscape of both nations.

Five killed, 1,351 injured in Punjab road accidents

LAHORE (APP): Five persons were killed and 1,351 others injured in 1,234 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

As many as 607 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 744 with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams. The data analysis showed that 711 drivers, 47 underage drivers, 151 pedestrians, and 494 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics show that 271 accidents were reported in Lahore, which affected 297 persons, placing the provincial capital at top of the list, followed by 80 accidents in Faisalabad with 84 victims, and at third Multan with 71 accidents and 74 victims.

According to the data, 1,061 motorbikes, 87 auto-rickshaws, 123 motorcars, 30 vans, 12 passenger buses, 29 trucks and 119 other types of vehicles and slow-moving carts were involved in the road traffic accidents.

Punjab CM reviews housing project

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday reviewed the 'Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar' [Own Roof, Own Home] project.

Chairing a special meeting on the construction of model low-cost housing units for homeless low-income segments of society, the CM ordered for constructing the best houses at minimum cost near cities. She ordered to consult Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners to get best of the best maps for these houses.

Earlier, the CM was briefed that 519 kanals of state land have been identified in five major cities including Lahore for construction of low-cost housing units for the homeless people.

Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Senator Pervaiz Rashid, Information and Culture Minister Azma Zahid Bukhari and MPA Sania Ashiq attended the meeting. Chief Secretary, SMBR, Chairman P&D, Secretary Housing,

Secretary Finance, Commissioner Lahore and other relevant officers were also present in the meeting.

CM seeks report on hospital roof collapse: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has taken notice of a roof collapse incident in Aziz Bhatti Shaheed Teaching Hospital, Gujrat.

The CM said that action should be taken against all those who committed negligence and ordered Secretary Health to submit a report after thorough inquiry into the incident.

'Flags, panaflexes removed from roads, streets for beautification of city'

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab Wednesday said that there will be no compromise on the beauty of the city, therefore flags and panaflexes are being removed from various streets and roads without any discrimination so that the beauty of the city can be restored.

Following the directives of the Mayor Karachi, the City Wardens department of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation has removed all kinds of flags and panaflexes from the Sharea Faisal from the airport to the Governor's House, from nursery on Sharah e Quadeen to Quaid-e-Azam's mausoleum, from Clifton 2 talwar round about to Clifton Bridge and

Metropole and from the Cantt Station to the PIDC.

The KMC officials also carried out this work at the Kashmir Road, near IBA city campus, Numaish and the People's Chowrangi. Flags, banners and panaflex are now removed at other main corridors of the city under the directive of the Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab.

The Mayor has said that this initiative is part of the process of restoring the beauty of the city and in this regard, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation is fulfilling its responsibilities, additionally the process of removing all sorts of wall chalking around the main streets is

also going on and these places are being improved by coloring them.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab has instructed the Municipal Services Department that all the entrances of Karachi should be painted with beautiful carvings so that visitors to the city can get a pleasant sight.

The citizens of Karachi have this responsibility to cooperate in the cleaning works in their areas and to make the neighborhoods clean like their own home, he added. He said that beautification work is already going on at Sharah-e-Faisal and other important highways and roads of Karachi which will also be made green and beautiful.

IGP takes notice of student's rape

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has taken notice of an incident of the rape of a BSc student on the pretense of marriage in Muzaffargarh and directed the Dera Ghazi Khan regional police officer to submit a report on the incident.

He directed DPO Muzaffargarh to form a special team for immediate arrest of the accused. He directed that all aspects of the incident should be investigated and the accused should be arrested as soon as possible and brought to justice. The IGP Punjab said that justice should be ensured to the victim student on priority basis.

FIA arrests two human smugglers

LAHORE (APP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Wednesday arrested two human smugglers in separate operations in Lahore and Sheikhpura. According to a spokesman of the agency, under the directives of Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi, crackdown has been initiated against human smugglers, and suspects Arshad Hussain and Sajid Hussain apprehended from Jandiala Road Sheikhpura, and Lahore. Both the suspects were involved in defrauding innocent citizens by promising employment opportunities and extorting millions of rupees. Suspect obtained 5 passports and Rs. 1 million from the complainant, said official.

MQM-P demands long-term strategic master plan for Karachi

KARACHI (INP): The Muttahida Qaumi Movement - Pakistan (MQM-P)—a coalition party in the federal government—demanded a long-term strategic master plan for Karachi from the centre.

According to the details, the MQM-P delegation called on Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ashan Iqbal and tabled a list of complaints regarding the lack of civic facilities in the city.

The MQM-P's spokesman said in a state-

ment that the party asked the federal government to complete major uplift projects in Karachi including K-IV designed to provide 650 million gallons of water to the city daily at the earliest.

The MQM-P delegation comprising Senior Deputy Convener Dr Farooq Sattar, Syed Mustafa Kamal, Syed Aminul Haq, Javed Hanif and Syed Hafeez Din informed the federal minister about the acute shortage of water in Karachi.

The MQM-P, a coalition

party in the federal government, maintained that Karachi is the biggest city and economic hub of Pakistan, yet 'deprived' of transportation facilities.

The delegation also asked the government to complete other development projects including Green Line Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) and Karachi Circular Railway at the earliest.

The party spokesperson said that Ashan Iqbal endorsed the MQM-P's position on Karachi's economic importance.

US Institute of Peace delegation meets IGP

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that under the 'Police Awam Saath Saath' project of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), measures would continue to be taken for community policing and help, protection and support of vulnerable groups.

He expressed these views during a meeting with a USIP delegation, which met him at the Central Police Office here on Wednesday.

The IGP said with the support of the USIP, the establishment of Women Police Council and modern training of victim support officers were successfully completed. With the USIP support, measures would continue to increase the capacity of women police officers. He said that Punjab police

were creating a legal framework for establishment of trust in the name of 'Tahaffuz' for effective supervision of community policing projects.

The IGP said more steps had been ensured to provide medical facilities and easy medical diagnosis of transgenders in all hospitals; a quota had been allocated for recruitment of transgenders as senior station assistant and police station assistant.

The USIP delegation was informed about Tahaffuz Manzil Foster Home, other welfare projects. During the meeting, it was agreed to increase mutual cooperation and take steps for modern training of Punjab police.

Program Managers USIP Sadia Sabir and Rana Hamza Ejaz, Senior Analyst Maryam Kayani were part of the delega-

tion. During the meeting, joint measures were discussed for protection of vulnerable sections and to solve their problems.

CTO Lahore Ammara Athar said that MoUs had been signed with 387 organisations and institutions to promote community policing and help citizens suffering from social problems. She briefed that registration of children living in Foster Home is complete, dashboard is also being created. On behalf of the Punjab Police, CTO Lahore Ammara Athar gave an honorary shield to the head of the USIP delegation.

DIG Headquarters Humayun Bashir Tarrar, AIG Operations Punjab Dr. Asad Ijaz Malhi, AIG Welfare Ammara Shirazi, SP Muanzza and other officers were present.

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER C&W DIVISION KARAK

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE E-BIDDING SYSTEMS

C&W Division District Karak Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites electronic Bids from eligible firms / bidders in accordance with KPPRA Procurement rules 2014 on single stage single envelope procedures for the following works.

S#	Name of Work	Required Category of PEC & Estimated Cost (in Millions)	Bid Security	Period of Completion	Last date of Submission of bid and Time	Date of Opening of Financial bid Time
1	AOM&R/Special Repair to all Metalled Roads in District Karak 2023-24. (Nov to Feb 2nd Quarter)	C-6 & above 23 100 (M)	2% on Estimated Cost i/c stamp duty & 0.03% of tender fee.	As per Work Order	14 05-2024 12.00 PM	14 05-2024 12.30 PM
2	AOM&R/Special Repair for Residential Buildings of District & Sessions Judge at Banda Daud Shah District Karak (2023-24). Sub Head (i) Residence of AD&SJ BD Shah	C-6 & above 3.770 (M)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
3	Sub Head: (ii) Residence of Civil Judge-I	C-6 & above 3.460 (M)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
4	Sub Head: (iii) Residence of Civil Judge-II	C-6 & above 3.650 (M)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
5	Sub Head: (iv) External Drain/ Nullah.	C-6 & above 2.200 (M)	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-

NOTE: 1- (Bid documents and instruction to bidders can be downloaded up to the opening date & time from C&W website (www.cwd.gkp.pk). 2- The contractors quoting their bids upto a limit of 10% below Engineer's Estimate shall submit Bid Security to the extent of 2% Engineer Estimate only. 3- The contractors quoting their bids more than 10% below upto 20% below on Engineer's Estimate shall submit alongwith their bids 8% additional security of Engineer's estimated cost in addition to 2% bid security. If the bid, is not accompanied with the required amount of additional security then it will be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the second lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. 4. [Similarly, a contractor security on quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer's Estimated cost equal to differential amount of submitted bid and Engineer's Estimate along with detailed rate analysis]. In case of more than 20% below bids if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and / or required amount of additional security, then the said shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. 5- In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is, in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing, the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reasons thereof. 5- In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is, in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture securities and record reasons thereof. 6- The procuring entity may offer the contract to next lowest bidder after due diligence in the context of financial difference between such to bids or may advertise procurement opportunity afresh. 7- After commencements of work by the successful bidder the Procuring Entity may replace the Additional security with a Bank Guarantee of the same amount from the scheduled bank; if the already deposited security is not in the form of bank guarantee. 8- The bidders must attached the enlisted with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue authority, enlisted document with C&W Department and fresh registration with PEC. 9- The competent Authority reserves the right to reject any OR all bids by assigning cogent reasons.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER

C&W DIVISION KARAK (Phone: 0927-210783)

INF(P)759/24

درخواستیں مطلوب ہیں

ڈپٹی کمشنر نوشہرہ کے آفس میں پٹواری (BPS-09) کے مندرجہ ذیل خالی آسامیوں کے لئے مطلع نوشہرہ کے ڈویژنل رکنے والے درج ذیل قابلیت کے حامل افراد سے درخواستیں مطلوب ہیں۔

سیریل نمبر	نام آسامی بحسب سکین	عمر کی حد	تعداد آسامی	تعلیمی قابلیت
1	(پٹواری سکین 09)	18 تا 35 سال	02	1- پٹواری امتحان پاس کیا ہو۔ 2- انٹرمیڈیٹ یا مساوی امتحان پاس کیا ہو۔ 3- ڈسٹرکٹ کلرک کے رجسٹرڈ میڈاوارن پٹواریں نام درج ہو۔

قواعد و ضوابط

- (1) مذکورہ بھرتی کے لئے خواہشمند افراد درج ذیل پٹواریں دے سکتے ہیں، جس کے ساتھ امیدوار کا مکمل پتہ اور نوٹ نمبر درج ہو۔
- (2) بھرتی ایک سال کی مدت کے لئے کی جائے گی، جس میں ملحقہ کارکردگی پر مدت ملازمت میں ترقی کی جائے گی۔
- (3) درخواستیں، تعلیمی اسناد کی مکمل تفصیل، تھمب پرنٹ، شناختی کارڈ، دو بعد پانچھوٹ سا مائز، تصاویر اور مکمل کوائف کے مصدقہ نقول کے ساتھ شہنشاہی رائج ہونے کے چندہ ایم کے اندر زیر دستی کے پیشکش پائی جائے۔
- (4) سبٹ، انٹرویو کے لئے کوئی TA/DA نہیں دیا جائے گا۔
- (5) مکمل اور مقررہ وقت کے بعد وصول شدہ درخواستوں پر غور نہیں کیا جائے گا۔
- (6) مجاز اتھارٹی کو کیا اختیار حاصل ہے کہ بغیر وجہ بتائے کسی بھی وقت اپنی جائز دی طور پر سبٹ یا انٹرویو منسوخ کرے۔
- (7) تقرری حکومت خیر بخت کو تھو کر مزید قوانین کے مطابق کی جائے گی۔

انستشہر

ڈپٹی کمشنر نوشہرہ

INF(P) 777/24

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed single stage two envelopes bids (Financial Proposal and Technical Proposal) in separate envelopes to avoid confusion are invited from Government approved (G.S.T registered authorized dealers/Agency) alongwith samples for the supply of various items for the year 2023-24. These must reach this HQRS. on 08/05/2024 at 11:00 hours, which will be opened on the same date at 11:30 hours in the presence of bidders by purchase Committee in conference room of CHQ Peshawar. Tenders with CDR for one item will be given instead of all items recorded in the tender. Bid security @ of 3% of total value must be submitted with tender (Financial Proposal) in the name of Commandant, Frontier Constabulary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Peshawar.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-

1. Bidding documents/technical specification alongwith list of Wireless Communication Equipments can be obtained from the office of the undersigned and specified samples can be seen at CHQ stores on any working day (Except Saturday & Sunday) from 09:00 AM to 04:00 PM. Tender documentation fee only Rs. 2,000/-
2. Initially only one envelop (TECHNICAL PROPOSAL) shall be opened;
3. The envelop marked as "financial proposal" shall be retained in the custody of the procuring agency without being opened.
4. The procuring agency shall evaluate the technical proposal/samples in a manner prescribed in advance, without reference to the price and reject any proposal which does not conform to the specified requirements.
5. During the Technical evaluation, no amendments in the technical proposal shall be permitted.
6. After evaluation and approval of the technical proposal, the procuring agency, shall at a time within the bid validity period, publicly open the financial proposals of the technically accepted bids only.
7. The financial proposal of bids shall be opened publicly at a time, date and venue announced and communicated to the bidders in advance.
8. Under the clause 33 (1) in the PPRA Rules 2004 "The procuring agency may reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid or proposal.
9. The rates approved shall remain valid till 30th June, 2024. Only typed on original letter pad, sealed in a manner that cannot be known until opened and signed (every page) should be submitted. The bidders will have to submit their address, land line phone/Mobile number. Taxes will be charged as per rules.
10. A certificate and affidavit that the firm is not blacklisted shall be attached with the documents.
11. Bidding documents received through fax and mail will not be acceptable. Tender with incomplete supporting documents will not be entertained and furnishing of incorrect/false information shall be liable to legal action. This tender is also available on PPRA website www.ppra.org.pk as well as on Frontier Constabulary Headquarters Peshawar website www.fc.gov.pk.

Note: - Please do not bother bring mobile phone with you as using mobile phone is strictly prohibited.

**For Commandant, Frontier Constabulary,
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar**

PID(P)# 117/2024

CM asks for plan to promote tourism

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has instructed the relevant quarters to come up with a comprehensive plan for promoting tourism as an industry in the province, adding that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been gifted with diverse cultural heritage, enormous beauty and stunning landscapes, which needed to be utilized effectively by developing tourist friendly infrastructure, extending facilities and attracting local and foreign investment.

"The development of tourism sector on modern lines would not only generate employment opportunities for locals but would ultimately contribute to the provincial economy", he remarked. He was presiding over a meeting of the tourism department, held here at Chief Minister's House the other day.

Advisor to Chief Minister for tourism Zahid Chan Zeb, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

The participants were briefed about the administrative affairs of the department, development projects, future planning and integrated tourism Zones being established in Malakand and Hazara divisions.

The chief minister on this occasion, directed the quarters concerned to devise a comprehensive plan for promoting ecotourism in the province, and said that we need to have more concerted and result-oriented approaches not only towards preserving the natural beauty of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but for promoting responsible tourism as well.

He also directed them to set up alternate bazars in the congested tourist spots of the province and to

ensure car parking facility as a compulsory component of planning for new tourist sites. He further directed for providing recreational facilities, clean drinking water and sustainable sewerage system at tourist spots, besides rest areas and masjid at some distance on the roads towards tourist destinations.

Similarly, the chief minister has directed to devise a plan for effective and judicious use of properties owned by the tourism department and said that all such properties can be utilized not only for facilitating tourists but contributing to the provincial income.

He directed them to carry out classification of lease policy for government's tourist sites so as to provide investment opportunities to both the small and large scale investors. Local people should be preferred for investment in the relevant tourist site, he directed and made it clear that development of tourism sector is one of the priority areas of his government, considering its importance to provide employment opportunities to the people.

Ali Amin Khan Gandapur also directed the quarters concerned to speed up work on Integrated Tourism Zones projects in Abbottabad, Mansehra, Swat and Chitral, further directing them to attract foreign investment in this regard.

Furthermore, he has directed for installation of more camping pods of international standard at tourist spots in the province.

He has directed to increase the number of private members in the boards of semi-government entities administered by the tourism department, and added that the professionals should be included in the boards. Necessary amendments in the relevant legal framework be proposed for this purpose, he directed.



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

Huge quantity of non-duty, non-TTS cigarettes seized

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Regional Tax Office, Peshawar, has made the biggest seizure of non-duty/non-TTS Cigarettes in the history.

According to the details, the Inland Revenue Enforcement Network (IREN) team of Regional Tax Office seized 1,869 Packerites (18,690,000 sticks) of various brands having market value of approximately PKR 162,603,000/- (162.6 Million) during a raid at a godown located at Yar Hussain, Swabi.

Chairman Federal Board of Revenue Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana and Member Inland Revenue (Operations) Mir Badshah Khan Wazir commended the historical achievement and timely action by Regional Tax Office, Peshawar.

KP Services Tribunal orders promotion

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Services Tribunal has ordered promotion of class IV employee to the post of Junior Clerk, on Wednesday.

The two-member bench comprising of Chairman Khalim Arshad and Muhammad Akbar Khan heard the case and accepted the appeal.

The counsel Malik Shahbaz Khan argued that Mahboob Elahi serving at government school in Dir Upper as watcher and eligible for promotion under 33% quota reserved for class IV employees while others were promoted from the similar cadre.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Services Tribunal ordered the relevant authorities for promotion of petitioner to the post of Junior Clerk after conclusion of arguments.

KP to adopt fixed sales tax on services for lawyers and custom agents

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to adopt fixed sales tax on services for Lawyers and Custom Agents instead of percentage.

The decision was taken in a meeting held between Advisor to KP Chief Minister on Finance Muzammil Aslam and Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority Fouzia Iqbal here on Wednesday.

It was decided that KPRA will send recommendations to the Advisor for Finance to switch Lawyers and Customs Agents from percentage regime of Sales Tax on Services to fixed rates to make necessary amendments in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sales Tax on Services Act 2022 in the upcoming budget for the next financial year.

The decision has been taken to provide an easy way for the Customs Agents and Lawyers to efficiently pay their sales tax on services.

It was decided that rates for the fixed tax will be adopted as per the recommendations sent by KPRA team to the finance department for the budget.

The lawyers will be allowed to submit their one-time fixed sales tax on services at the time of filing their Wakalatnama or Power of Attorney for each case at the courts while for customs agents, a fixed amount on each GD or Goods Declaration will be paid to KPRA as sales tax on services. Currently, a 2 percent sales tax on services is levied on Layers while an 8 percent sales tax on services tax is levied on Customs

Agents.

"We want to make tax payments easier for everyone in the province and at the same time we have to bring them under the tax net as per law," said Advisor for Finance Muzammil Aslam in his statement adding that a fixed regime will also be adopted for wedding halls, beauty parlors as well.

"It will make tax payments easier for the business community and service providers in the province and will make a conducive environment for businesses in the province," he said. The DG KPRA Fouzia Iqbal said that her team welcomes the business-friendly policies of the new government and that her team will be available to assist every taxpayer in the administration of their sales tax on services.

Employees who are negligent in their work will face action: Speaker

F.P. Report

Peshawar: Meetings with different departments of the assembly secretariat continued for the third day today under the chairmanship of Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Babar Salim Swati.

During the meeting with the assembly staff, Babar Salim Swati emphasized that instead of becoming a burden on the treasury, we must work using our full potential.

He mentioned that different workshops will also be organized to enhance the capabilities of our staff.

The Speaker of the

Assembly issued instructions to all employees of the assembly secretariat to ensure their attendance and focus solely on office tasks during working hours.

Babar Salim Swati

added that they will provide all possible facilities to their employees, provided they see a positive attitude from the staff.

The Speaker of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Babar Salim Swati fur-

ther stated that they will promote talented individuals and will take action according to the rules against employees who are not serious in their work or deliberately neglect their duties.



Governor visits Khyber Girls Medical College

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali Wednesday visited Khyber Girls Medical College and formally inaugurated the Blossom Festa Fun Fair and Pet Show in the college premises. The Governor Haji Ghulam Ali inspected the various stalls set up by the students in the Fun Fair. The Governor encouraged the students to set up stalls containing food and drinks and other items. The Governor inspected the pets of various valuable breeds brought by the students in the pit show at the college. Haji Ghulam Ali appreciated the interest of the stu-

dents in the pet show and fun fair and lauded them for more care to the animals. The Governor also distributed medals, appreciation certificates and cash prizes to the first, second and third position holders besides giving away trophies and certificates to the position holders of the pet show. The Governor also invited the students of Khyber Girls Medical College to visit the Governor House. He said it is a great and happy moment to see students' love for pets. "I'm happy to see female students actively participating in such activities. He also appreciated the college management for organizing the Fun Fair and Pet Show.

In any educational institution, extra-curricular activities including art fair, pet shows are useful for students, Haji Ghulam Ali concluded.

Earlier, soon after the arrival at the Khyber Girls Medical College,

Peshawar, the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali was received by the management and students in a colourful Fun Fair and Pet Show program organized by the students societies inside college premises.



Mashal lauds China's unwavering support to Pakistan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Social Welfare, Special Education, and Women Empowerment, Mashal Yousafzai, has highlighted the profound bond between Pakistan and China, describing it as a source of immense pride.

He emphasized China's unwavering support to Pakistan, especially during challenging times, citing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a prime example of this enduring friendship.

Yousafzai expressed these sentiments during his visit to China Window, a Chinese cultural center in Peshawar, where he praised the Chinese Embassy for providing the people of Peshawar with an

invaluable opportunity to immerse themselves in Chinese culture.

During her visit, Mashal Yousafzai visited the various galleries of the cultural center, adding her remarks to the visitor's book and signing the friendship wall.

She lauded the CPEC as a testament to the strong ties between the two nations, celebrating the \$29 billion already invested and anticipating further investments in the project's second phase.

Mashal Yousafzai also commended China's successful efforts in lifting millions out of poverty, even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, citing it as a valuable lesson for Pakistan. Looking ahead, Mashal Yousafzai expressed confidence in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gov-

ernment's commitment to following the example set by China in promoting social welfare and economic prosperity.

She welcomed the Chinese government's initiatives to provide higher education opportunities and scholarships to Pakistani

students, expressing hope for continued cooperation in social welfare projects.

Mashal pledged the full support of the Social Welfare Department to China Window, recognizing its pivotal role in fostering friendship between the people of Peshawar and China.



Meena Khan emphasizes on quality education and skill development

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Higher Education, Archives and Libraries Meena Khan Afridi has said that in the realm of transnational education, the concept of quality assurance expands beyond conventional boundaries, saying it serves as a dynamic catalyst, propelling us into a domain where education transcends the mere acquisition of knowledge and instead focuses on refining skills with precision.

"This emphasis on quality skill development is the bedrock of progress, foster-

ing innovation and nurturing an entrepreneurial ethos among our students, empowering them to thrive in a globalized environment," he said while addressing on the occasion of his visit to Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute Haripur.

On the occasion UK delegation, faculty members and a large number of others were present.

He added that in today's interconnected world, collaboration across borders, cultures, and disciplines is not just beneficial but essential for success.

He maintained that embracing international-

ization opens up a plethora of opportunities for our students, faculty, and institutions alike and it exposes them to diverse perspectives, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and cultivates a global mindset crucial for navigating the complexities of the contemporary world.

"Similarly our leader Imran Khan has put more emphasis on getting higher education so to equip our youth with latest skills set and market oriented degrees in order to make them more employable in global arena in the same footing," Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute is

providing the easy platform to the youth of our province and country in order to make them employable in this competitive world and make this province a hub of knowledge economy " Mr Meena Khan said.

He said that the unwavering dedication of the KP government, in tandem with the Higher Education Department, underscores the significance of this mission. "Together, we acknowledge the pivotal role of higher education institutes as engines of progress and knowledge hubs" Mr Meena Khan added.



In brief

Two shot dead in Charsadda F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Unidentified armed men gunned down two cousins and injured another here on Wednesday and escaped the scene of crime. According to details, unknown gunmen sprayed bullets at three people in Yousaf Khan Qila area of Charsadda. As a result of firing, two people stated to be first cousins were killed on the spot while another was critically injured. The attackers sped the scene after committing dual murder. The bodies and injured were shifted to Tehsil Headquarter (THQ) Hospital Tangi. Police said that incident seems to be outcome of personal enmity. However, a case has been registered against unidentified attackers and investigations were underway.

50 scholarships for tribal students F.P. Report

WANA: Wana Welfare Association (WWA) has announced a 3-year "Bobri Gul Scholarship" for male and female students from class 5th to class 7th having domicile of lower Waziristan. WWA sources confirmed to this scribe that their cabinet members would arrange very soon tests at various places for the selection of 50 students. After the selection, 50 students will be given 10 thousand scholarships for three years annually. On contact, a senior member of the association said that successful students would get their annual scholarship's money this year in 2024, and 10 percent quota has been reserved for female students. And the remaining 90 percent students will be entitled to scholarship on merit. This healthy competitive tendency among children would prove an important step towards getting quality education. Elders, politicians and people of walks of life lauded the financial help in the form of scholarships Dr Bobri gul to local deserving students of lower Waziristan.

Ban imposed on gas in plastic bags F.P. Report

BANNU: The Bannu district administration has banned carrying gas in plastic bags to avoid any eventuality. According to a notification issued by deputy commissioner office, the ban has been slapped on carrying plastic bags filled with natural gas under Section 144. The administration says that plastic bags filled with gas are walking bombs and police should arrest the people violating the law. The natural gas is put into the bags through a small valve inserted into the mouth of the bags to prevent leakage. The Bannu district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is known for its rich resources of natural gas and oil, but the government has yet to develop any proper infrastructure system to supply gas to local residents and surrounding areas. Local people have developed ad hoc methods such as extracting gas from a main supply line with a hose – instead of proper drilling – and then filling plastic bags like helium balloons to transport them from the field for use in home cooking.

2 coal miners die

HARNAI (PPI): Two coal miners perished from suffocation after toxic gas engulfed the Shahrg Coal Mines in Balochistan's Harnai district on Wednesday, according to rescue officials. The incident, attributed to toxic gas accumulation in the coalmine, claimed the lives of Bari, son of Syed Gul, and Lali, son of Shawali, both residents of Pashin district.

Education dept commits to enroll 12000 students in Dir

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Lower Dir education department kicked off enrollment drive by arranging awareness walks in parts of the district. District Education Officer, ADEOs, parents, students and area elders participated in the event. More than 120,000 students including 74000 girls, according to a survey, are out of school in the district which will be the main focus to enroll them.

The district education officer Mahboob Ilahi led an awareness walk in this regard at Timergara which was attended by Schools' teachers, students and members from the civil society participated in the event. The DEO while speaking on the occasion urged parents and area elders to play their active role in making the government enrollment drive a success. He said that students at the public sector schools were being provided with free education including free textbooks, uniforms, scholarships and the most accessible buildings so the public should take its benefits.

The education department and the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) on the directives of district administration jointly held an awareness walk regarding the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's ongoing enrollment campaign at Chakdara here on Tuesday. The additional assistant commissioner Adenzai Syed Sardar Badshah, sub divisional education officer Zaheerud Din, NCHD assistant director Muhammad Asad Khan, ASDEO Kalimullah, school leaders, teachers and students participated in the walk. Carrying banners and placards, the participants walked on the road in Chakdara bazaar and gathered in front of the Chakdara press club.

Speaking on the occasion AAC Sardar Badshah, SDEO Zaheerud Din and Muhammad Asad Khan asked parents to get enrolled their out of school children. The speakers highlighted the importance of education and said that no nation could develop without quality education. They said the KP government was providing free textbooks, qualified teachers and furniture to students at all public sector schools, therefore parents should get their children enrolled.

They said the walk was aimed to bring out-of-school children to schools. "About 120,000 children including 74000 girls in the Lower Dir district were not attending schools", one of the speakers said, adding that the education department had focused on bringing them to schools. He said that there were 827 primary schools for boys in the district which was the third highest number of schools in the KP districts.

Residents foiled girl abduction: Locals foiled a bid to kidnap a 10th grader girl who was on way to school to attend the annual examination paper at Alimast Chakdara in the jurisdiction of Chakdara police station, residents said. The residents said that a youth identified as Suliman resident of Dheri Juligram tried to kidnap a girl Aneela 17 when she was going to attend her 10th grade annual examination. The locals present on the occasion resisted

the move and foiled the bid.

The accused sustained minor injuries on his foot during a fire from a pistol in the scuffle. He was taken to the THQ hospital Chakdara. Local police registered a case and started investigations. According to some sources, both the girl and the youth were relatives and they had tied the knot a year ago but the girl's parents were reluctant to marry her.

Meanwhile a youth identified as Syed Nawab, a resident of Ziarat Talash was killed when a pressure cooker exploded at his house. He was taken to the Category D hospital Talash but succumbed to injuries. The deceased was laid to rest at his ancestral graveyard.

Five persons injured in firing over a land dispute: Five persons were injured when two groups quarreled over a land ownership dispute at Juro village in the jurisdiction of Asbanr police station here on Wednesday, residents and police said. They said that three persons from one party including Rehmat Gul, Iqbal Hussain and Ahmad Hussain, and two from the other side including Saleem Khan and Fayaz Khan, all residents of the same village, were injured in firing and shifted to the tehsil headquarters hospital Chakdara from where one Iqbal Hussain was referred to the DHQ hospital Batkhela in Malakand district due to his critical condition. The Asbanr police registered a case and started investigations.

Meanwhile the Rescue 1122 divers recovered a car from the river near Toormang that was washed away by flash floods in the Panjkora River four days ago. A four year old child riding in the car was still missing and a search and rescue operation for his recovery continued on the fourth consecutive day.

Roti price: The district administration after decrease in the price of wheat flour and directives issued by the provincial government on Wednesday fixed Rs 15 for 100 gram of roti and Rs 30 for 200 gram of roti in parts of the district. Officials of the administration told local journalists that the official price was being followed by naanbais in some areas of the district while customers were being overcharged in some areas. The district food controller Kashif Ihsan continued to check the weight and prices of roti. Talking to local journalists he said that so far about two dozen naanbais had been booked under the food act and an amount of Rs 167,000 had been received as fines from them. Local residents have complained that naanbais were not following the official price despite a sizable decrease in flour prices.

Supervisory staff: The Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Malakand's deputy controller of examinations along with board assistant Yasir Arafat on Wednesday paid a surprise visit to examination centers at Khall and Wari and inquired about the ongoing secondary school certificate examinations. The official suspended Samiullah, an invigilator at Khall center for his poor performance in the examination. Another invigilator Imranullah was also suspended as he did not fulfill the board criteria for performing the duty due to his distance.

Admn signs MoU with TEF for IT Lab upgradation

Saqib Mushtaq

KHANEWAL: The signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Tareen Education Foundation (TEF) and District Administration held for upgradation of an IT laboratory and the construction of two new classrooms at the Khanewal Public School and University College (KPSUC), on Wednesday.

The MoU was signed by Deputy Commissioner Waseem Hamid Sindhu and the CEO TEF Akbar Khan. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Revenue (Khanewal) Azubah Azim and Principal KPSUC



Professor Hafiz Rashid Saeed Rana were also present on this occasion. Deputy Commissioner expressed gratitude to

Admn turns blind eyes towards fast-food outlets

F.P. Report

MARDAN: In the name of fast food, diseases are being spread among the people in Mardan, which is a threat to human lives. Unhealthy burger and Shawarma points have opened in many places in the city and its surroundings. In the name of fast food, diseases are being spread among the people, which are a threat to human lives the responsible officers of the Food Authority Department are silent spectators, demanding to take notice from the higher authorities.

With the alleged connivance of the Food Authority Department, burger and shawarma points have been opened at various places in the inner city and adjacent areas and by selling non-standard burgers and shawarma made from substandard materials

at these points at favorable rates, people are being spread diseases in the name of fast food which are extremely dangerous for human lives. At these burger and Shawarma points, lean chicken meat is bought for huge sums of money and used in fast food items. Countless people are suffering from the struggle of life and death due to the consumption of such ready-made fast food items.

Other things including mayonnaise and ketchup are being used very poorly which are causing stomach ailments. Despite this, the responsible officers of the Food Authority Department are sitting as silent spectators, the dignitaries of the area have strongly demanded from the higher authorities that strict legal action should be taken against those who play with human lives in the name of fast

food so that the public will not suffer from diseases.

Press club delegation visits Governor House: A delegation of 13-Member of Mardan Press Club journalists under the leadership of Mardan Press Club President M. Bashir Adil visited Governor House Peshawar. Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali warmly welcomed the delegation.

The delegation included Vice President Faqir Hussain Hoti, General Secretary Fazal Haq, Joint Secretary Khurshed Wahab, Senior Journalist Musrat Aasi, Hidayat-ur-Rehman Hoti, Falak Sher, Prevaiz Khan, Abdul Sattar, Shah Hussain, Shahab Khan Manzoor Hussain and Fazal Haq Yousafzai. While Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Zahir Shah was specially included in the delegation.



QUETTA: Commandant West Pakistan Navy, Rear Admiral Adnan Majeed called on Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

Poppy crops destroyed in Bara F.P. Report

BARA: Poppy crops (opium) cultivated on dozens of acres of land in the jurisdiction of the police station, Bara were destroyed by the security agencies here on Wednesday. Station House Officer (SHO) Bara police station Hardum Gul Afridi said that the anti-opium poppy farming operation was concluded and dozens acre crops of the contraband cultivation was disposed in the Kamber Khel, Malikind Khel, Sipah and Shalober areas of tehsil Bara, district Khyber.

The Frontier Corp, Anti-Narcotics Force, Excise, police, district administration, forest department and Tehsil Municipal Administration took part in the joint anti-poppy crops campaign, carried out in Bara. According to health exports, besides eating and smoking it as a drug, opium is the main ingredient of making Heroin and other narcotics products.

It is to be stated here that most parts of upper and lower Bara areas of Tirah valley is traditionally known for poppy cultivation. Poppy is considered the most prized crop with the local environment suiting its cultivation however with fruitful initiatives conducted by the District Agriculture Department motivating the local farmers who are gradually adapting to cultivation of alternate crops, agriculture official said.

Cop protests against private lender F.P. Report

LARKANA: Mutahar Ali Lund, a policeman resident of Usman Lund village area of Ratodero, taluka, Larkana district said that I was forced by Haji Mazhar Ali Bhutto borrowed Rs 20 lakhs from Bangal Dero Rahwasi in which I gave him Rs 15 lakhs including interest but still the influential businessman is harassing me and asking for another Rs 52 lakhs.

He alleged that 3 months ago the influential leader Mazhar Ali Bhutto came to the village with his armed associates and locked the house from outside in the presence of my family, while still the influential moneylenders were threatening to kill me. are Taking possession of my house, which is cruelty and abuse. He has appealed to the Chief Justice Sindh High Court, People's Party Chairman, Chief Minister Sindh, IG Sindh, DIG Larkana and SSP Larkana to take notice of the matter and take action against the influential usurer. Protection should be provided.

Police recovers hostage: During a search operation in the Kacha area under the leadership of Larkana Range Police Deputy Inspector General Nasir Aftab Pathan, the abducted hostage Babu Pahor was recovered from Jacobabad district.

The hostage Babu Phod, who was abducted by a gang of dacoits near village Jalil Bajarani in the suburbs, has been recovered from Dodaiti Kacha within the limits of Karampur police station. DIG Police Larkana has issued orders to continue the actions.

Achievement of anti-polio drive's targets directed

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Commissioner Zafarul Islam on Wednesday said that all efforts should be made to ensure the achievement of the targets during the upcoming anti-polio drive across the division.

He issued these directions while chairing a meeting held to review the arrangements regarding the upcoming anti-polio campaign. The meeting was also attended by Regional Police Officer (RPO) Nasir Mehmood Satti, Deputy Commissioner of Dera Ismail Khan, District Health Officers and representatives of other departments concerned including health, local government, police, WHO, EPI and others. Besides, Deputy Commissioners of Tank, South Waziristan (Upper) and South Waziristan (Lower) participated in the

meeting online.

During the meeting, a detailed briefing was given regarding the arrangements for the upcoming anti-polio campaign besides the performance of the previous campaigns was also reviewed. It was informed that the campaign will be started from next week keeping in view the security situation and all the arrangements including team training, micro-planning and security arrangements have been completed.

About the problems faced regarding the anti-polio campaign, it was said that there were various challenges which include security, lack of staff and others. On which, the commissioner ordered immediate steps to resolve all issues including lack of staff.

Likewise, the Commissioner said, adequate measures should be

taken for the protection of anti-polio teams so that they could perform their services without fear and danger. He directed the police department to ensure the full implementation over the security plan prepared for the anti-polio campaign.

He said all the officials concerned should perform their duties diligently to ensure not only the achievement of targets during the anti-polio campaign but also maximum coverage so that each child up to the age of five years must be administered anti-polio drops in order to protect them from the crippling disease. Zafarul Islam also appealed to all the parents to get their children up to five years of age administered anti-polio drops during every anti-polio campaign so that they could be protected from life-long disability.

Delay on uplift works can't be tolerated: Commissioner

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Mega projects of public interest should be completed without any delay. Commissioner Kohat. In order to review progress of work on the ongoing mega projects in Kohat Division and provide hygienic cleanliness condition, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Muhammad Abid Khan Wazir at his office.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner Kohat Shahryar Qamar Khattak, Assistant Commissioner Kohat Usman Ashraf, TMO Kohat Muhammad Shoaib, WSSC Operations Manager Tahir Afif and Chief Officer TMA Muhammad Waqas. A detailed briefing was given to the Commissioner on ongoing mega projects and hygienic cleanliness conditions.

Commissioner Kohat Division on this occasion

directed the authorities concerned to speed up work on the public welfare projects and initiate steps to provide best sanitation facilities to the people. While assigning responsibilities to the authorities concerned, the Commissioner said that they should regularly submit the progress in this regard. He clarified that unnecessary delay or negligence in projects of public interest will not be tolerated and those responsible will be brought to justice.

Meanwhile, the role of Deputy Commissioner Kohat Azmatullah Wazir and his entire team in the recent by-elections is commendable. Due to the responsibility he performed as District Returning Officer, there was no unpleasant incident in all the polling stations of constituency PK 91.

The performance of Assistant Commissioner Kohat Usman Ashraf who was part of his team was also excellent. This is the

reason why the by-elections in PK 91 ended successfully. Deputy Commissioner Kohat's performance was appreciated by political, social and religious circles.

BISE controller continues action against booty mafia: Kohat Controller Board Malik Maqsood Anwar's strict action against booty mafia. On the occasion of the annual examinations of class 9th and 10th, continuous rounds of various examination halls are going on.

Talking to the media in a statement, Malik Maqsood Anwar said that the increasing copying. The trend will make our society hollow. And will lick the ability of the new generation like a termite. Therefore, the perpetrators of such heinous act will not be forgiven in any case. These students are our future and it is our legal and moral duty to guide them in the right direction. But in all the parents' have to support us fully.

President greets Sardar on his daughter wedding

F.P. Report

PABBI: President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari congratulated former Pakistan People's Party provincial president Sardar Ali Khan on his daughter wedding while forwarded his wishes for new couple.

PPP former president daughter married with Muhammad Sheraz Khan, the son of senior politician and social personality Senator Talha Mahmood. The ceremony was attended by a large number of guests, including politicians, bureaucrats, and social per-



sonalities from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Punjab, and Balochistan.

President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, was scheduled to attend the ceremony but had to cancel his visit at the last minute due to his

meeting with Iranian President Dr. Ibrahim Raisi at the President's House in Islamabad.

However, President Zardari will visit Sardar Ali Khan's residence in Islamabad to congratulate him on the wedding.

Land owners protests against section 4 on Agriculture land

F.P. Report

BUNER: The land owners of village Elai protested against the imposition of section 4 on their agriculture lands for the construction of a judicial complex. The protestors carried placards demanding the immediate withdrawal of section 4. The protestors were held walk from Mullah Tor Baba

to the gate of Dr Qadir Khan Colony Daggar.

Addressing the protestors, the General Secretary of Elai Welfare Organization, Mumtaz, Wajid, Sharif and other speakers said that the government has imposed section 4 for the construction of a judicial complex on 138 kanals of land. They termed it extreme oppression and abuse with them

because these lands are their total capital, on which they feed their children by farming.

They added depriving them of their agricultural lands in this way is starving everyone for which they are not ready at all. They are not ready to accept this decision of the government in any way, they made it clear.



UNRWA: Restart aid to Palestinian UN agency, EU urges

BRUSSELS (BBC): The EU has called on international donors to resume funding to Gaza's largest UN agency. It comes after a review found that Israel had not provided evidence for its claim that thousands of UNRWA staff were members of terror groups. Several nations halted funding to the agency after allegations that some employees took part in the Hamas attacks on Israel.

The US says it will not restart its aid until UNRWA makes "real progress". UNRWA, which provides healthcare, education and humanitarian aid to Palestinians, employs 13,000 people in Gaza. EU humanitarian chief Janecz Lenarcic welcomed report for "underlining the agency's significant number of compliance systems in place as well as recommendations for their further upgrade". He called on donor nations to support UNRWA, describing it as "the Palestinian refugees' lifeline". This was echoed by Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide, who hailed countries including Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Japan and Sweden for already resuming their funding. The US, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Austria and Lithuania have not yet done so. "In terms of our funding of UNRWA, that is still suspended," White House security spokesman John

Kirby said. "We're gonna have to see real progress here before that gets changed." The deputy spokesman of the US State Department, Vedant Patel, said the government was looking closely at the report, adding "we of course continue to support UNRWA's important work, and it must continue".

Israel has accused more than 2,135 of the agency's staff of being members of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad - proscribed terror organisations in Israel, the UK, US and other countries. But the UN's independent review, led by a former French foreign minister, said Israel was yet to provide "supporting evidence" for this claim. While the report acknowledged UNRWA's "robust framework", it said it needed to do more to improve its neutrality, staff vetting and transparency. The agency insists it carries out detailed reference checks on all employees, and shares staff lists with Israel. Israeli authorities suggest the report ignores the severity of the problem, and claim UNRWA has systematic links to Hamas.

The EU's plea came as the US humanitarian envoy to Gaza, David Satterfield, repeated warnings that the risk of famine throughout the Palestinian territory - especially in the north - was very high. The catastrophic situation has been

caused by the siege Israel imposed after the 7 October attacks. Around 500 trucks of aid were previously entering Gaza each day, but the figure collapsed following the start of the war. Israel has also been accused of slowing deliveries by subjecting trucks to complex and arbitrary checks, and last month the UN's top court ordered it to enable the unhindered flow of aid into Gaza.

Israel has pledged to gradually increase aid back to pre-war levels, and UNRWA figures show that 316 trucks entered Gaza, the highest number since the war began. The average over the previous seven days, however, was 190. Mr Satterfield said Israel needed to do everything possible to stop a famine and called on more to be done to deliver aid to those in need. So far, more than 34,000 Palestinians - mostly women and children - have been killed during Israel's military campaign in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. A separate UN investigation is looking at Israeli allegations that 12 UNRWA staff took part in the 7 October attacks on Israel, which saw around 1,200 people killed and about 250 taken hostage. UNRWA fired 10 of the 12 accused staff members who were still alive in the wake of the allegations.

Musk targets Australian senator, gun laws in dispute

SYDNEY (Reuters): Elon Musk said an Australian senator should be jailed and suggested the country's gun laws were meant to stop resistance against its "fascist government", escalating his battle over a court order to remove video posts of a bishop being stabbed.

After Australia's federal court told Musk's platform X to temporarily stop showing video of a knife attack on an Assyrian bishop during a church service in Sydney a week earlier, Musk accused the country's leaders of trying to censor the internet, prompting an outpouring of condemnation from lawmakers. One senator, Jacqui Lambie, deleted her X account to protest publication of the footage and called for other politicians to do the same, saying Musk had "no social conscience or conscience whatsoever". She added Musk should be jailed.

When an unnamed X user posted overnight that it was Lambie who "should be in jail for censoring free speech on X", Musk replied to his 181 million followers, "Absolutely. She is an enemy of the people of Australia". A representative for Lambie, an independent senator for the small island state of Tasmania, declined to comment.

Targeting individuals is a regular strategy of Musk, the world's third-wealthiest person, as he goes after governments which try to exert more oversight of content on social media. In Brazil, Musk has been singling out a judge who told X to block some accounts as part of an investigation into digital militias, calling him a "dictator".

Musk widened his attacks on Australia, including promoting a post from an unnamed but verified X user which said the country "disarmed all of their citizens in 1996 so that they cannot resist their fascist government", a reference to a gun buy-back and registration scheme after the country's worst mass shooting. Musk responded with an exclamation mark. Another anonymous, verified X account posted a screenshot of a text message purporting to be from a "friend living in Sydney", saying "Evil has penetrated Australia's government hard". "Whoa!" Musk replied.

Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neill said social media companies created "civil division, social unrest ... and we're not seeing a skerrick of responsibility taken". "Instead, we're see-

ing megalomaniacs like Elon Musk going to court to fight for the right to show alleged terrorist content on his platform," she added. Police have charged a 16-year-old with a terrorism offence in the church attack. Videos online showed the youth, restrained by the congregation, shouting at the bishop for insulting Islam. X and Musk have said they complied with the temporary takedown order by blocking it for Australians, but that they would appeal it. The footage remained visible on X in Australia on Wednesday.

At a hearing to decide whether the order should be permanent, a lawyer for regulator the e-Safety Commissioner said X appeared to have failed to comply with the temporary order but "the consequences of any non-compliance are for another day". A lawyer for X said the global takedown order involved "exorbitant jurisdiction", and added that the company had received a statement from the Assyrian bishop attacked in the footage who wanted the video to remain online. The federal court judge, Geoffrey Kennett, extended the temporary takedown order until another hearing on May 10.

Five die in attempt to cross English Channel to UK

LONDON: Five asylum seekers, including a child, have died while crossing the English Channel from France to Britain in an overcrowded small boat, just hours after the British government approved a bill to deport some asylum seekers to Rwanda. The boat carrying 112 people set out from Wimereux, about 32km (20 miles) southwest of the French port of Calais, to cross one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

Rescuers picked up 49 people, and four were taken to hospital, but others stayed on the boat and continued their journey to Britain. "A tragedy occurred on a boat overloaded with migrants early this morning. We deplore the deaths of five people, a seven-year-old girl, a woman and three men," local prefect Jacques Billant told reporters. "The engine stopped a few hundred metres away from the shore, and several people fell into the water." The French coastguard said 58 people stayed on board and it was still searching for

any other survivors. "They did not want to be rescued. They managed to restart the engine and headed towards Britain," Billant said. More than 6,000 people have arrived in Britain this year on small, overloaded boats that risk being lashed by waves as they try to reach British shores. The United Kingdom's government has spent two years working to get approval on a divisive policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. The UK Parliament finally passed legislation overnight to allow the deportations.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he expected the first flights to take off in 10 to 12 weeks, giving time for further legal challenges from charities, campaigners and unions. Sunak told reporters that the government was acting out of compassion, wanting to prevent people smugglers from pushing vulnerable people out to sea.

"They are packing more and more people into these unseaworthy dinghies. You've seen an enormous

increase in the numbers over the past few years," he said. "This is what tragically happens." Under the Rwanda scheme, anyone arriving in Britain in an irregular way after January 1, 2022, will be sent to Rwanda, about 6,400km (4,000 miles) away. More than 50,000 people have arrived since that date, according to official figures. Both the United Nations refugee agency and the Council of Europe called on the UK to rethink its plans over fears it could damage international cooperation on tackling the global migration crisis. The first planned deportation flight to Rwanda in June 2022 was blocked by European judges. The following year, the UK's Supreme Court ruled that sending asylum seekers on a one-way trip to Kigali was illegal and would put them at risk. Other European countries, including Austria and Germany, are also looking at agreements to process asylum seekers in third countries. — Aljazeera

Dozens of Ethiopians die after boat capsizes off

DJIBOUTI (BBC): At least 33 Ethiopian migrants - including an eight-year-old boy - have died after their boat capsized off the coast of Djibouti, officials have told the BBC. They were among 77 people crossing the Red Sea from Yemen to Ethiopia, the UN's migration agency reported.

Fishermen alerted coastguards to the tragedy after witnessing some of the migrants drowning. Rescuers managed to save more than 20 people but others remain missing. The survivors' shock and fear was clear to see as they were brought ashore in Djibouti to the town of Godoria and taken to hospital for treatment. They have since been repatriated to Ethiopia by the UN's migration agency, the IOM.

Isse Iyah, a senior Djibouti coastguard official, said those who were on the capsized boat had left Yemen because life had been a greater struggle there than in their home country. Ethiopia's ambassador to Djibouti, Berhanu Tsegaye, expressed his condolences over the deaths on X, formerly Twitter. "Illegal travel from Djibouti to the Middle East countries is extremely dangerous and we are constantly losing the lives of our citizens," he added. People fleeing the aftermath of civil war in landlocked Ethiopia frequently pass through Djibouti and Yemen towards Saudi Arabia and beyond, in search of better opportunities. Some get stuck in Yemen, which is also in the grip of war. Capsizing comes two weeks after another boat accident in the same waters saw at least 38 Ethiopians die. According to officials, nearly 1,000 people have been recorded as dead or missing in the same area in the past decade.

Russian court rejects US journalist appeal

MOSCOW: A Moscow court has rejected the latest appeal by American journalist Evan Gershkovich against his pre-trial detention in an espionage case that he and United States authorities have rejected as false. Gershkovich, 32, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal, has been in Moscow's Lefortovo Prison for more than a year after he was arrested while on a reporting trip.

He, his newspaper and the US government all deny he is a spy. No date has been set for his trial. His detention was extended last month by three months to June 30. In the courtroom, Gershkovich stood in a glass dock wearing dark trousers, a white T-shirt and a dark shirt. He smiled and gave a thumbs-up when a reporter asked him how he was doing. He is the first Western journalist since the Soviet era to be arrested by Moscow on spying charges. Moscow has not provided any public details of its case against Gershkovich, saying only that he was "caught red-handed" in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg in March last year. Russia has said there are discussions behind the scenes on a possible prisoner exchange involving Gershkovich. Russian President Vladimir Putin has publicly implied that as part of a deal to free Gershkovich, Moscow would like to see the release of a man who Germany says was working for the Russian state when he killed a Chechen rebel commander in Berlin. Beyond that hint, Russian officials have kept mum about the talks. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov repeatedly said that while "certain contacts" on swaps continue, "they must be carried out in absolute silence."

Washington has repeatedly accused Moscow of arresting US citizens to use them as pawns to secure the release of Russians jailed abroad for serious crimes. Gershkovich is the first US reporter to be arrested on espionage charges in Russia since September 1986 when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for US News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB. Daniloff was released without charge 20 days later in a swap for an employee of the Soviet Union's United Nations mission who was arrested by the FBI, also on spying charges. — Aljazeera

Massive protests against austerity shake Argentina

BUENOS AIRES (AP): Raising their textbooks and diplomas and singing the national anthem, hundreds of thousands of Argentines filled the streets of Buenos Aires and other cities to demand increased funding for the country's public universities, in an outpouring of anger at libertarian President Milei's harsh austerity measures.

The scale of the demonstration in downtown Buenos Aires appeared to exceed other massive demonstrations that have rocked the capital since Milei came to power. Students and professors coordinated with the country's powerful trade unions and leftist political parties to push back against budget cuts that have forced Argentina's most venerable university to declare a financial emergency and warn of imminent closure. In a sign of unrest was growing in response to Milei's policies, even conservative politicians, private university administrators and right-wing TV personalities joined the march, defending the common cause of public education in Argentina that has underpinned the country's social progress for decades.

"It is historic," said Ariana Thiele Lara, a 25-year-old recent graduate protesting. "It feels like we were all united." Describing universities as bastions of socialism where professors indoctrinate their students, Milei has tried to dismiss the university budget crisis as politics as usual. "The cognitive dissonance that brainwashing generates in public education is tremendous," he said. At the University of Buenos Aires, or UBA, halls went dark, elevators froze and air conditioning stopped working in some buildings last week. Professors taught 200-person lectures without microphones or projectors because the public university couldn't cover its electricity bill.

"It's an unthinkable crisis," said Valeria Af  n, a 50-year-old literature professor at the university, known as UBA. "I feel sad for my students and for myself as professor and researcher." In his drive to reach zero deficit, Milei is slashing spending across Argentina - shuttering ministries, defunding cultural centers, laying off state workers and cutting subsidies. He had something to show for it, announcing Argentina's first quarterly fiscal surplus since 2008 and promising the public the pain would pay off. "We are making the impossible possible even with the majority of politics, unions, the media and most economic actors against us," he said in a televised address.

The footfall of protesters resound-



ed in the city center. "Why are you so scared of public education?" banners asked. "The university will defend itself!" students shouted. "We are trying to show the government it cannot take away our right to education," said Santiago Ciralo, a 32-year-old student in social communication protesting. "Everything is at stake here."

Since last July, when the fiscal year began, the state has provided the University of Buenos Aires with just 8.9% of its total budget as annual inflation now hovers near 290%. The university says that's barely enough to keep lights on and provide basic services in teaching hospitals that have already cut capacity. The university warned last week that without a rescue plan, the school would shut down in the coming months, stranding 380,000 students mid-degree. It's a shock for Argentines who consider a free and quality university education a birthright. UBA has a proud intellectual tradition, having produced five Nobel Prize winners and 17 presidents.

"I've been given access to a future, to opportunities through this university that otherwise my family and many others at our income level could never afford," said Alex Vargas, a 24-year-old economics student. "When you step back, you see how important this is for our society."

President Milei came to power last December, inheriting an economy in shambles after years of chronic overspending and suffocating international debt. Brandishing a chainsaw during his campaign to symbolize slashing the budget, he repeats a simple catchphrase to compatriots reeling from budget cuts and the peso's 50% devaluation: "There is no money." Overall, Argentina puts 4.6% of its gross domestic product into educa-

tion. Public universities are also free for international pupils, drawing legions of students from across Latin America, Spain and further afield. Critics of the system want foreign students to pay dues.

"Where I'm from, high-quality education is unfortunately a privilege, not a basic right," said Sofia Hernandez, a 21-year-old from Bogota, Colombia studying medicine at UBA. "In Argentina there is a model that I wish more countries could have." The government said it was sending some \$24.5 million to cover maintenance costs at public universities and another \$12 million to keep medical centers operating.

"The discussion is settled," presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni said. University authorities disagreed, saying the promised transfer - which they still have not received - covers a fraction of what they need. For UBA, that means a 61% annual budget cut. The teachers also need attention, said Matias Ruiz, UBA's treasury secretary. They have seen their income decline in value more than 35% in the past four months. Staff salaries can be as low as \$150 a month. Professors juggle multiple jobs to scrape by. "We've had funding and salary freezes under previous right-wing governments but these cuts are three times worse," said Ines Aldao, a 44-year-old literature professor at UBA. The angry students, teachers and workers snaked through the capital's streets just hours after Milei declared economic victory from his presidential palace. "We are building a new era of prosperity in Argentina," Milei told the public, boasting that Argentina had posted a quarterly fiscal surplus of 0.2% of gross domestic product. A huge banner hanging over downtown Buenos Aires presented a choice: Milei or public education?

As more bodies found, UN's Turk horrified by Gaza mass graves reports

NEW YORK: Volker Turk, the United Nations human rights chief, has said he is "horrified" by the destruction of Nasser Medical Complex and al-Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip and reports of mass graves found in and around the hospitals amid Israel's war on Gaza.

In a statement released, Turk called for independent and transparent investigations after Palestinian authorities said this week they had recovered hundreds of bodies at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis following the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the southern city earlier this month. "Given the prevailing climate of impunity, this should include international investigators," Turk said, noting that hospitals are entitled to special protection under international humanitarian law and called "the intentional killing" of civilians and detainees a war crime.

As search operations continued, civil defence crews said they had recovered at least 17 more bodies, bringing the total so far to 310. Reporting from the

nearby city of Rafah, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said the bodies that were being retrieved included those of children, women, medical staff, wounded people and patients, according to Gaza's Civil Defence. He added that medical staff and evacuees who had managed to leave the hospital before the Israeli army's withdrawal had described scenes of "horror, mass killings and arrests to the point the entire hospital turned from a place of healing into a massive graveyard".

The Israeli army in a statement said the claim that it buried Palestinian bodies was "baseless and unfounded". It said that during its operation in the area of Nasser Hospital, corpses buried by Palestinians in the area "were examined" in accordance "to the effort to locate hostages and missing persons". "The examination was conducted in a careful manner and exclusively in places where intelligence indicated the possible presence of hostages," it added, saying that that the examined bodies which did not

belong to Israeli captives "were returned to their place". Zainah Haroun, a spokesperson for Al-Haq, an independent Palestinian rights organisation based in the occupied West Bank, said what was needed was "a proper investigative mechanism" to be given full and unrestricted access to the Gaza Strip as a whole, including the sites where mass graves have been uncovered.

"Most of the information that we're getting at the moment is from incredibly brave Palestinian journalists who are reporting these horrific atrocities on the ground and are also being targeted by Israel," she told Al Jazeera. At least 34,183 Palestinians, including more than 14,500 children, have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since October 7, when Hamas led a surprise assault inside Israel, killing more than 1,130 people. The death toll announced by the Ministry of Health in Gaza included at least 32 people killed in the past 24 hours. Another 77,143 have been wounded, while more than 7,000 others are assumed to be under

the rubble due to a ferocious Israeli campaign that has levelled most of Gaza. Turk, in his statement, condemned a series of Israeli strikes on Rafah in the past few days that killed mostly children and women, repeating his warning against a full-scale incursion on the overcrowded area of 64sq km (25sq miles), where more than 1.4 million Palestinians have been forcibly cornered.

"Every 10 minutes, a child is killed or wounded. They are protected under the laws of war, and yet they are ones who are disproportionately paying the ultimate price in this war," Turk said. "The latest images of a premature child taken from the womb of her dying mother, of the adjacent two houses where 15 children and five women were killed - this is beyond warfare," he added. At the same time, Turk criticised grave human rights violations that persist in the occupied West Bank despite international condemnation of increasing attacks by settlers, often in the presence of Israeli forces. — Aljazeera

Sunak promises to boost UK defence spending by 2030

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said he would lift defence spending to 2.5 percent of the country's annual GDP by 2030, saying the British arms industry must be on a "war footing" when the world is at its most dangerous since the Cold War.

Standing alongside NATO leader Jens Stoltenberg, Sunak said the United Kingdom would spend an additional 75 billion pounds (\$93bn) over six years to increase the production of munitions and drones, making the UK the second-largest defence spender in NATO. He said one of the central lessons of war in Ukraine was that countries needed deeper stockpiles of munitions, and the ability to replenish them more quickly.

"In a world that is the most dangerous it has been since the end of the Cold War, we cannot be complacent," he said. "As our adversaries align, we must do more to defend our country, our interests, and our values." His remarks came on the heels of a new pledge to send arms worth 500 million pounds (\$622m) to Ukraine, including missiles, armoured vehicles and ammunition. Sunak has been under pressure from his governing Conservative Party to boost defence spending more quickly after previously saying he could do so only "as soon as economic conditions allow". The rise, from about 2.32 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), could also weaken potential

leadership challengers who have championed defence, before an election this year which Sunak's party is expected to lose. The commitment would take defence spending for 2028/29 from approximately 73.8 billion pounds to 78.2 billion pounds, partly funded by a previously announced plan to cut the size of the civil service. The opposition Labour Party said earlier this month it would aim to hit the 2.5 percent target "as soon as resources allow". Sunak's commitment could help the UK if Donald Trump wins re-election to the US presidency this year. Trump has frequently taken aim at the failure of many of NATO's 32 members to spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence.

He made the announcement on one of his first international trips for months, where he met Stoltenberg and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. He will meet German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday. The UK has been one of the most vocal and active backers of Ukraine and the news followed Sunak's pledge to increase military support for Ukraine by 500 million pounds to take its total for this financial year to two billion pounds. He also said the UK's financial support would continue at least at its current level for the rest of the decade, or as long as needed. That was welcomed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, including in a call with Sunak. — Aljazeera

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A new era in Pakistan-Iran relations

IRANIAN President Ebrahim Raisi's recent visit to Pakistan marks a significant milestone in the burgeoning relationship between the two neighboring countries. His trip, characterized by high security and consequential discussions, aimed at fostering a deeper partnership through shared expertise in industry, science, and technology.

This visit underscores a mutual aspiration to transcend geopolitical complexities and leverage economic and cultural synergies for regional prosperity. During his speeches in Lahore and Karachi, President Raisi articulated a vision of collaboration that could reshape the economic landscape of both nations. His emphasis on overcoming "unfavourable conditions" to achieve technological and scientific advancements is not merely rhetoric but a call to action for Islamabad. The proposed increase in trade volume to \$10 billion over the next five years reflects an ambitious commitment to elevate bilateral ties to unprecedented levels.

However, the logistical challenges posed by the visit, such as the suspension of cellular services and the disruption of normal life in Karachi, highlight the delicate balance between security and public inconvenience. While security is paramount, the extent of disruption calls for a reevaluation of protocol to minimize impact on the daily lives of citizens in future engagements.

Moreover, the strong political statements made during the visit, including President Raisi's comments on geopolitical issues and the praise for Pakistan's stance against "Zionist forces," are indicative of the deeper political and ideological currents that influence these bilateral relations. These statements, while resonating with certain domestic and international audiences, also draw attention to the intricate dance of diplomacy and domestic politics that both nations must navigate.

The US State Department's caution regarding potential sanctions related to dealings with Iran adds another layer of complexity. This underscores the broader implications of Pakistan-Iran economic cooperation, suggesting that while both countries are eager to forge ahead, external pressures and geopolitical realities cannot be ignored.

President Raisi's visit is a testament to the potential for a strengthened Iran-Pakistan axis that could serve as a cornerstone for peace and development in the region. It also serves as a reminder of the challenges that lie ahead in actualizing the full potential of this partnership. Moving forward, both Islamabad and Tehran will need to craft careful, strategic approaches that not only respect their respective national interests but also contribute to the stability and prosperity of the region. In essence, this visit could well be the herald of a new era of cooperation, with both nations standing to gain immensely from a fortified alliance. However, the path ahead will require diplomatic finesse, strategic patience, and an unwavering commitment to mutual benefits. The leadership on both sides must now work diligently to turn these high-level discussions into tangible outcomes that can withstand the pressures of international scrutiny and domestic expectations.

US people know well what's going on

DEMONSTRATING students and faculty members on college campuses across the United States are calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, an end to US military assistance for Israel, university divestment from arms suppliers and other companies profiting from the war, and an amnesty for students and faculty members who have been disciplined or fired for protesting.

These demands are fully justified given the US' backing of Israel's "self-defense campaign" in Gaza, which was triggered by the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct 7, has resulted in the loss of more than 34,000 Palestinian lives, including those of women and children. Washington has seized on Israel's response to the attack as the opportunity to use Tel Aviv as its enforcer to advance its overall Middle East geopolitical agenda to reduce the influence of Iran and Russia in the region.

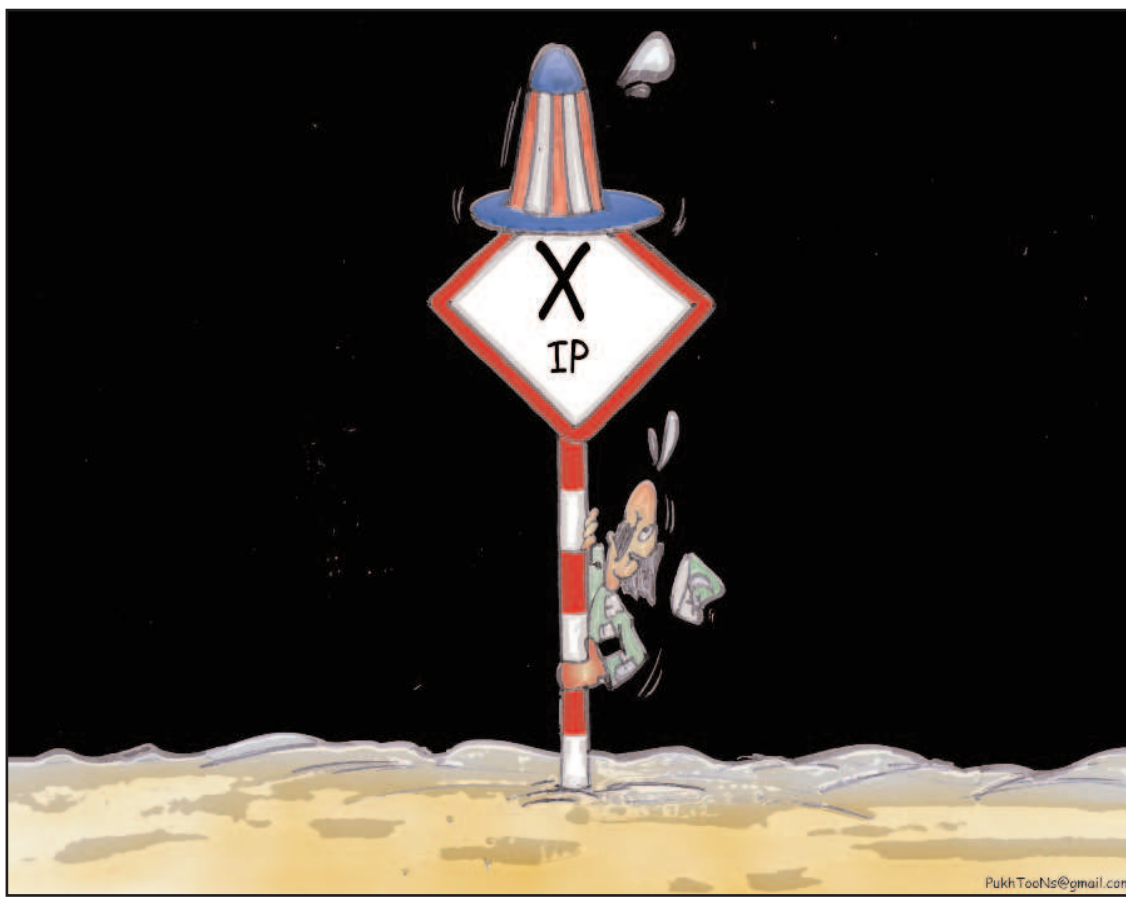
That being said, neither the Joe Biden administration nor the Benjamin Netanyahu government of Israel truly cares about the hostages it is believed that Hamas and other groups still hold, not to mention the plight of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Washington's veto of the State of Palestine's membership in the United Nations and the US lawmakers' approval of new military aid for Israel last week, which triggered the student protests in the US, have made it crystal clear that it is the real obstacle to peace in Gaza. US President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that he condemned both anti-Semitic protests and "those who don't understand what's going on with the Palestinians". But who is it that doesn't understand that? The protesters have a very clear understanding of what is going on. They are calling for a cease-fire and for the colleges to divest from the US weapons manufacturers that are providing arms for Israel.

As with the Ukraine crisis, the upcoming US presidential election has become a complicating factor making the situation in the Middle East an extension of the US' domestic political games. The US' stance on the two regional crises reflects the latest movings and shakings of interest exchanges at home rather than the real interests of the nation. The protests have also brought into the spotlight the influence of outside groups, influential alumni and big-money donors on colleges, who, having vested interests in the US' support of Israel, are pressuring the college administrators to silence the protesters.

The disconnect between the US elites and ordinary Americans, and the internal divisions within the two are reinforcing each other in a vicious cycle resulting in a series of contradictory foreign policies of the US. The US' aidrop of aid for Gaza, and the conflict between US law enforcers and the US students and teachers are both ugly shows of that. So are the US' schizoid three-in-one China policy of confrontation, competition and, supposedly, cooperation. The backlash against the widespread protests against the country's one-sided pro-Israel policy and the Biden administration's non-chalant response to them and to the law enforcement departments' crackdown on the protesters speak volumes about the root cause of not only the Gaza crisis but also the problems in US society.

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‘Fire and forget’ in Gaza

Ghada Ageel

EARLIER this month, the Israeli occupying forces withdrew from my hometown of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, presumably to prepare for an attack on nearby Rafah. Now, those civilians who won the lottery of life and death are on a trail of broken dreams back to Khan Younis. It is a pilgrimage - hajj in Arabic - but one of grief not of faith.

Danger still lurks in every corner, but my cousin Ikram and her husband, Awad, felt compelled to join the hajj and venture to the al-Qarara area in the north of Khan Younis to check on Awad's brother Mohammad and his family. What they discovered was beyond comprehension. Mohammed, his wife, Manar, and their seven children - Khaled, Qusai, Hadya, Said, Ahmad, Ibrahim and Abed, all under the age of 15 - had been brutally killed by an Israeli air strike on their home. Their house lay in ruins and their bodies lay decomposing, stray dogs and cats trying to gnaw at them. Ikram and Awad dug shallow graves and buried them.

This was the second time Ikram and Awad had to bury nephews and nieces. In October, they had to take care of the bodies of Tasneem, Yasmeen, Mahmoud and Ilyas, the children of Awad's other brother, Ibrahim, who were killed along with their mother, Nancy, by an Israeli bombardment. This time, the pain proved too unbearable. Upon her return home, Ikram, overcome by grief, suffered a sudden loss of vision. The cause of this tragic affliction remains unknown, leaving us all bewildered and devastated.

Meanwhile, in the west of Khan Younis, which now resembles a ghost town, some of my husband's family embarked on a similar journey of anguish. Their destination: the ruins of their homes, not far from what remains of al-Amal Hospital. The entire block, including the three multi-storey buildings where my brothers-in-law and more than 70 other people used to live, was destroyed. The young men of the family

took pictures, videos and salvaged what little remained of their former lives. Then they made the journey back to al-Mawasi, once a vibrant hub of life on the beach of Khan Younis, now transformed into a tent camp, a wasteland of desperation, where they have been displaced for the past four months. Upon returning to their tents, they shared the pictures and clips of the ruins

family - Iman; her mother, Ibtisam; her husband, Mohammed; and their four young children: Taleen, Alma, Lana and Karam. During this heavy bombardment, Suleiman made the decision not to inform Rabab, fearing for her and her children's safety. They buried Nima without her. The choice was devastating, but the risks of travelling to Rafah and back were too high. The drone strikes,

father, Suleiman thanked Allah and asked his children to recite Surah al-Fatiha for her.

Nima is just one of the more than 10,000 Palestinian women who have died so far in this war. She was an excellent host and a fantastic cook who dreamed one day of making the pilgrimage to Mecca, meticulously saving every spare shekel for the trip. Nima's death extinguished not only her dreams but also the warmth and generosity that defined her essence, the Palestinian essence. She leaves behind a void filled only with heartache and loss. Like my children, I started to wonder who will be there and what will be there when we visit Gaza next?

He endured the misery of life in Khan Younis camp for seven years before passing away the week after Suleiman's return to Gaza. Grateful that his wife, Nima, did not suffer the same prolonged pain as his father, Suleiman thanked Allah and asked his children to recite Surah al-Fatiha for her.

of their homes with their parents and siblings. For my sister-in-law Nima, the news and images of her home proved too much to bear. She kept weeping while looking at the images. The next morning, Nima was found unresponsive.

Her family rushed her to the nearest hospital, al-Amal, which ironically translates to "hope", only to find no hospital and no hope. One of the heroic doctors who remained there declared her dead. She simply could not withstand the anguish. Overwhelmed by grief and despair, Nima had suffered a stroke. Nima's husband, Suleiman, and his children struggled to complete the funeral arrangements, to wash the body in the correct way, to find material for a coffin and to reach out to Rabab, Nima's eldest daughter, who had sought refuge in Rafah.

As they cried and mourned, Israeli bombs continued to fall on residential areas in Rafah, Nuseirat refugee camp, Deir al-Balah, Maghazi refugee camp and Beit Hanoun, resulting in hundreds of casualties. In Rafah's Yibna refugee camp, a bomb killed members of the Abu Al Hanoud

shelling or ship bombardments were relentless. On the day they buried Nima, the Israeli army bombarded the market at Maghazi camp, killing 11 people, many of them women and children.

This was not the first time that immense pain had resulted in such an untimely death in the family. In 1967, Suleiman's father, Abdullah, suffered a stroke when the harsh reality of the Israeli military occupation dawned. Having lost his home in the Nakba of 1948, the terror that the Israeli army unleashed onto the Palestinian population of Gaza in 1967 came as another shock. But ultimately, what proved too much to bear was Israeli soldiers kidnapping his son, Suleiman, who was a 16-year-old child at that time. Knowing nothing about Suleiman's fate and unable to accept the thought of losing him, Abdullah succumbed to grief, and a stroke ravaged his body, leaving him paralysed. He endured the misery of life in Khan Younis camp for seven years before passing away the week after Suleiman's return to Gaza. Grateful that his wife, Nima, did not suffer the same prolonged pain as his

The missiles from an Israeli-made Hermes drone can pierce Gaza's unshielded airspace and destroy lives in seconds. The so-called "fire and forget" missiles can hit targets at a distance of more than 2.5km (1.5 miles) in the sky, so when they are fired, no one on the ground knows they are coming. Civilians going about their business are killed instantly because there is no one and nothing to protect them. Not one Jordanian, British, French or American warplane was deployed in defence of the 50 women killed every day for the past 200 days by Israel. But they all scrambled to protect Israel from Iranian drones that took eight hours to reach its territory, many did not even make it that far. The only slower method of delivery of the Iranian strikes would have been to transport the weapons by camels through the desert. But now the world has shifted its focus to Iran. Israel has been made into the victim again. No one speaks about the right to self-defence of Palestinian civilians living through genocide and crimes against humanity.

"Fire and forget" in Gaza appears to be a global policy. But my resolute cry is that the world must never forget. Good people the world over are working to ensure that those responsible for these crimes and those who supplied them the weapons will face trial and be haunted by the spectre of justice for the rest of their days.

Aljazeera

Jerusalem relatively quiet for now but a storm is close

Chris Doyle

VERY few areas of contention have not borne witness to alarming levels of tension in the Israeli-Palestinian arena over the last 200 days. Gaza is on life support, decimated by an unimaginable pounding that has produced an estimated 23 million tonnes of rubble. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers and a complicit Israeli army have laid waste to the West Bank in historically high levels of violence.

Yet one arena, typically the trigger point for major conflagrations between Israelis and Palestinians, has remained relatively quiet, at least for now. Jerusalem has sparked many conflagrations, not least the 2014 Israeli invasion of Gaza. So, how long will this last? Let's be clear. Jerusalem for Palestinians has been no fun since the beginning of October. Palestinians routinely report, as do human rights agencies, how much more brutal the Israeli police have been since the Hamas attack. They remain third-class residents, not even citizens, in what Israel portrays as a united city. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The pyromaniacs are all hovering, waiting to be unleashed. Chief among these is Itamar Ben-Gvir, the convicted criminal who is now Israel's national security minister. He has recently pushed for two decisions, neither of which have been approved. Firstly, he wanted to ban Palestinian citizens of Israel from accessing Al-Aqsa during Ramadan. The Israeli security services pushed back, arguing this would be inflammatory, as of course Ben-Gvir knew only too well. That was the point for him. The racist settler minister did not get his way.

Secondly, the Cabinet had decided to devolve the authority for the enforcement of construction laws from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of National Security. Ben-Gvir would have had a free hand to kick off his much-cherished demolition derby of Palestinian homes, which he has long threatened. For whatever reason, the Cabinet then dropped this from the agenda. This could, of course, be resumed as desired. As a result, this year's Ramadan in Jerusalem was surprisingly calm in comparison to recent years. This is deceptive and the storm could be just round the corner. Passover begins on Monday evening and many Israeli Jewish extremists are planning ever more dramatic ways of further altering the status quo on Al-Aqsa. These even include a plan to sacrifice a pure red heifer on the Mount of Olives in an attempt to get closer to the building of a so-called Third Temple to replace Al-Aqsa.

That Jerusalem may be calmer on the outside than usual is not accidental. Palestinians in the city, who constitute 40 percent of the population, are wary of providing even a scintilla of an excuse for the Israeli extremists to hammer them. They know their enemies just want a reason to smash them. They clearly decided not to rise up after Oct 7 and rejected the calls of the Hamas leadership to do so. But the Israeli authorities have also decided to be cautious and, as the Ramadan decision showed, the security services are acutely aware of the perils of opening up too many fronts at once. Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa were peaceful, with more than 100,000 Muslims in attendance. This was in

stark contrast to the run up to the May 2021 war on Gaza, when armed Israeli forces violated the mosque, shot at worshippers and used tear gas inside Al-Aqsa.

Yet everything is on a knife-edge. Israel's plans for evicting Palestinians and expanding settlements in Jerusalem are not on hold. Far from it. In the shadow of the Gaza atrocities, Israel's government has accelerated the construction of settlements across East Jerusalem, with more than 20 projects totaling thousands of housing units having been approved or advanced since the start of the war in Gaza six months ago. Last week, tenders for more than 1,000 units were published to expand a very dangerous settlement. The Lower Aqueduct project would link Har Homa and Givat HaMatos, completing the concrete settlement jungle that cuts off Jerusalem from neighboring Bethlehem. The whole plan, according to the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now, has been expedited in record time.

The lack of any international reaction shows how little politicians in American and European capitals understand how this further undermines any residual chance of a two-state solution. Demolitions and the forcible evictions of Palestinians have been running at a record pace over the last 12 months. Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that three Palestinian families who live in the Silwan district are to be evicted and their homes turned over to the East Jerusalem settlers of Ateret Cohanim. This extremist settler group is, for some reason, yet to be sanctioned by the US and the EU. The presiding judge was Noam Sohlberg, who just happens to be a West Bank settler himself. He too is yet to be sanctioned.

In the small Al-Bustan area of Silwan, just below the Old City, impending demolitions threaten 1,550 Palestinian families. Many will recall the massive protests over demolitions in Sheikh Jarrah when Israel threatened major evictions in 2021. Last week, Jerusalem Magistrate's Court ruled that the Diab family have to leave their home in Karem Al-Ja'uni in Sheikh Jarrah within three months. They can appeal, but what chance will the 23 members of the family have? At best, they may get more delays.

Other projects still proceeding apace include settler efforts to take over Armenian properties in the Old City. This is part of an attempt to Judaize the Old City and, in this case, threaten the 1,600-year-old Armenian presence there. Armenians are taking it in shifts to guard their properties, but they face settlers armed with clubs and who have police backing. The Armenians are part of the wider Christian presence in Jerusalem. Alarming, Christians in the city have witnessed an alarming rise in settler hate crimes committed against them, including the desecration of graves. Jerusalem needs not only careful observation, but also preventive action. Peace-makers, wherever they are hiding, need to be pressing for action now, before the crisis re-erupts in this most contested of cities. Israel needs to know there will be meaningful consequences. The forcible evictions, the demolitions and the land grabs increase the tensions, as does the Israeli police brutality. If matters do explode, precedent suggests it will be at Al-Aqsa.

‘Decoupling’ cannot make US stronger

Harvey Dzdoin

WHILE not much is expected from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit from Wednesday to Friday, especially because this is US presidential election year when the only issue uniting the Democrats and Republicans is frenzied anti-China paranoia, the fact that the visit is even happening is a positive sign. The same can be said about the visits of US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo last year and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in early April, and the resumption of the high-level military-to-military video meeting between US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun - earlier this month.

Surely, talking is better than fighting, but too many aggressive and provocative US moves and veiled (and not so veiled) threats negate the nice words the administration's representatives have said recently.

Much work remains to be done to shore up damaged bilateral relations and avoid continuing lose-lose economic and political "decoupling". Here the picture is less rosy as exemplified by the ongoing US persecution of Huawei, China's top telecommunications company. I attended Huawei's Analyst Summit in Shenzhen of Guangdong province last week.

The US, unwilling or unable to cooperate with China in the high-tech sector, continues its policy of restricting China's access to advanced computer chips. The US' stated position is "a small yard and high fence", highly targeted restrictions against China for the most advanced dual-use computer chips on the pretext of safeguarding national security, but in reality it is intended to prevent China's continued economic rise, because Washington fears Beijing could challenge its global domination. Harvard professor Graham Allison says that

in the past 500 years, a rising power spooking the established power has resulted in a conflict in 12 out of 16 cases. That's a frightening thought.

From what I learned at the Huawei Analyst Summit, the sanctions of the US and its allies against Huawei, although dealing a blow to the company, have not only made it stronger but also expanded its horizons, from making better telecom equipment to ambitiously moving into artificial intelligence, cloud computing and a host of new-horizon, all-inclusive "fifth industrial revolution" services for consumers and businesses alike.

It is a case of necessity being the mother of invention, first to stave off what could have been a fatal blow due to US pressure and then to move from being debilitated to prosperity by building an ecosystem unimaginable when Huawei was a small manufacturer of telephone

switchboards at its birth in 1987. It's no less a remarkable story than that of Shenzhen, which from being a small fishing village a little more than four decades ago has developed into a metropolis of 17 million people with GDP of \$500 billion, similar to that of Sweden or Thailand. Blinken, a guitarist who loves the work of blues genius Muddy Waters, must also know Cole Porter's famous Western/cowboy song Don't Fence Me In. Instead of fencing China in, he should be razing fences and engaging with China and other countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind where national interests overlap, that is if, and it's a very big if, we are going to have a future at all.

Talking about the future brings us to Dubai. On April 16, the United Arab Emirates' city received more rain in one day than it normally gets in one full year. On the other

hand, last year was the hottest in 100,000 years, according to meteorologists, which prompted UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to say "the era of global warming has ended" and "the era of global boiling has arrived". Yet globally, we are stumbling on a straight path to extinction unable to give up fossil fuels, especially because of the energy giants in the US and other countries and their army of lobbyists promoting short-term profits at the cost of human existence. As for the US, although it has professed to have gone green for half a century, it has done little to prevent this catastrophe. As a matter of fact, it is resisting more fuel-efficient and clean-energy vehicles in favor of continuing producing huge gas-guzzlers. It doesn't want to accept that the world has changed.

The US, however, could have been the global leader in clean energy but, due to political pressure from the farm

lobby, opted to promote biofuels which are costly, raise global food prices and have negative environmental impacts like water pollution. At a time when the US was indulging in such activities, China was still a relatively poor country but realized that it had to plan for a sustainable future. Today, China is the global leader in renewable energy, especially in solar and wind energy. But instead of applauding China for its green achievements, the US is trying to check its peaceful rise, just as it tried to strangle Huawei.

The smart, green and logical choice is to join forces with China when the alternative is extinction. But no, the US' response is the opposite. To me, it's a no-brainer that the US and its allies should join forces with China and the Global South, because their national interests and very future depend on it. Sadly, I don't think they will, but they really should realize that "decoupling" cannot make the US stronger.

Wars cannot conceal rifts in Israeli society

Yossi Mekelberg

TO argue that utter malaise has spread across Israeli society would be an understatement in light of the deep rifts and fragmentation that have taken hold of it. This is probably the greatest threat Israel currently faces, much of it cynically orchestrated by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This may sound like a precarious argument only a fortnight after Iran launched 350 drones and missiles at Israel, while the war in Gaza has not ended and the hostilities with Hezbollah on the Lebanon border have only intensified - but please bear with me. These conflicts only highlight the fact that the Israeli experiment in state and nation-building has hit an extremely bumpy road.

Wars tend to conceal differences in society and, for a short time after Oct. 7, Israeli society came together, partly due to shock and trauma, but also because the need to respond required putting differences aside. However, it soon became apparent that the people in power who had brought this calamity upon Israel, above all the prime minister, were arrogantly refusing to take responsibility. And, as time elapsed, they began audaciously blaming the liberal and progressive forces that they conveniently and derogatorily call the "left" (the Israeli right's code word for "traitors") for the country's lack of war preparedness.

This meant the default lines were clearly marked between the defenders of Israel as a liberal democracy and those in the current coalition government who are determined that the country become a democracy in name only and to live by the sword in perpetuity. The intensity of the events of the last six months might have

quickly suppressed the memory of the months leading up to Oct. 7, when regular mass demonstrations took place in Israel. These protests galvanized the progressive-liberal forces into resisting attempts by the newly formed sixth, and hopefully last, Netanyahu government - comprised of some of the most ultranationalist, messianic and religious elements in Israeli politics - to weaken the independence of the judiciary in an attempt to ensure that the government and its activities would not be subjected to its scrutiny.

It was a clear assault on the principles of checks and balances and the separation of powers, which are the pillars of any liberal democracy. When coalition members in the Knesset and the Cabinet were warned about these objectionable actions, which legitimize bad governance and corruption and make a mockery of accountable government, they shrugged it off. Instead, they embarked on venomous attacks on their critics and increasingly unleashed police violence against the protesters.

In its ignorance and bigotry, this coalition government refuses to understand that, without an independent judiciary, Israel as a state, politicians and members of the security forces would long ago have faced international courts for the acts they committed in the Occupied Territories after 1967. The early days of the present war found Israel united in grief and a determination to go after Hamas. But grief is a powerful emotion that, on this occasion, led to an overwhelming, soul-destroying desire for revenge, which distorted strategic thinking and consequently inflicted indiscriminate

killing and destruction upon Gaza.

Israel's unity was to be short-lived and followed by widespread criticism, even anger, at the government's failure to avert the Hamas attack and for not prioritizing the release of the hostages. Consistently, polls now suggest that voters are longing for new leadership, although this does not mean a shift in support toward the left or to the peace camp; in fact, many would support a move in exactly the opposite direction. Every day provides further evidence that the current government is stuffed with self-serving and corrupt, not to mention incompetent, ministers. Hence, despite the continuing war in Gaza and the ever-present danger of escalating clashes with Iran and its proxies, protests have returned to the streets of Israel.

This time, the uniting theme is to demand the release of the hostages and for the government to take responsibility for the worst six months in the country's history and resign, in spite of Netanyahu's desire to see out the entire term of this Knesset until late 2026. His desperate attempts to cling to power for at least the duration of his corruption trial eclipses any other considerations. To achieve this, he and his supporters are prepared to intimidate witnesses and prosecutors, attack protesters - including family members of the hostages - both verbally and physically and prolong the war, while claiming that there is no time for elections or an investigation into the Oct. 7 failures while the country is embroiled in a multi-front conflict.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Fresh elections and a state commission to investigate the failures of Oct. 7, which left

1,200 people dead and 250 taken hostage, are vital steps for Israel to take in order to begin a healing process and liberate itself from the current wretched government. The protesters are rightly demanding truth and accountability.

And it is worth recalling that the current prime minister is someone who, together with other senior members of his then-government, was last month found by a state commission to be personally responsible for the 2021 Mount Meron disaster, which claimed the lives of 45 men and children during a crush at a public religious celebration. Needless to say, Netanyahu has not apologized or taken responsibility for that either. Instead, he was busy trying to persuade the state to pay for the renovation of his private home's swimming pool or, in his cowardice, hiding on the night of Iran's recent attack in his billionaire friend's nuclear bunker. At the same time, most Israelis do not have access to any kind of shelter from incoming missiles and drones. However, the most powerful demonstration of his government's moral bankruptcy and inability to achieve the objectives it set for itself is the unscrupulous attack on the families of the hostages. If there is a cause that unites those who oppose this government regardless of their political persuasion, it is the deep conviction that Israel should have been unwavering in its commitment to the release of the hostages. In this litmus test of the covenant between a people and their government, the latter has failed, deliberately and cynically so. For this, above almost everything else, ordinary citizens in Israel cannot forgive Netanyahu and his government and are demanding their removal.

Watching the watchdogs: Media downplays a big legal story at its peril

Rami G Khouri

few weeks later, Law for Palestine, supported by the Independent Commission for Human Rights - Palestine and 15 Arab and international groups sent a communication to the ICC demanding the court investigate accusations of Israeli war crimes and genocide. In most cases, only local news outlets covered these novel developments, which collectively represent a dramatic new phase in what has become a global battle between pro-Israel states and anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activists in the Global South. In parallel, legal challenges in national courts across the Western

case brought by Oxfam Novib, Pax Nederland and The Rights Forum, a Dutch court of appeals ordered the government to stop the delivery to Israel of spare parts for the F-35 fighter jet, citing a clear risk of violations of international law. In early April, Berlin-based lawyers filed an urgent application on behalf of Palestinian families in Gaza to stop the German government from approving contracts for weapons sales to Israel, which they believe uses them in violation of laws against genocide and war crimes, including the terms of the German Arms Control Act. Meanwhile, Palestine

They sought a court decision to order the US government to end military and diplomatic support to Israel while the genocide continues. The court found that Israeli actions "plausibly constitute genocide" and implored Biden to examine the unwavering US support for it but decided it was unable to rule on the matter because foreign policy is an executive branch prerogative. In March, CCR filed an appeal supported by more than 100 attorneys, experts and human rights organisations, arguing that stopping genocide is legally mandatory, not optional, in US and international law. The appeals court is set to hold an initial hearing in June. CCR Senior Staff Attorney DIALA SHAMAS, who works on the organisation's anti-genocide cases and was in The Hague for the ICJ sessions, told me in an interview last week that different parties are exploring using a variety of legal avenues to halt the genocide as quickly as possible.

world highlight the growing links between human rights advocates in the West and the Palestinians.

In November, the respected Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a lawsuit in a California court on behalf of Palestinian families in Gaza and the United States, accusing President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin of failure to prevent and complicity in the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza. They sought a court decision to order the US government to end military and diplomatic support to Israel while the genocide continues. The court found that Israeli actions "plausibly constitute genocide" and implored Biden to examine the unwavering US support for it but decided it was unable to rule on the matter because foreign policy is an executive branch prerogative.

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The law's promise is precisely to stop this kind of criminal action. What's significant about the genocide issue is how states are required to act on the fundamental international norm," she said. Belief in this promise and this legal requirement to act has driven other actors to file legal challenges aimed at halting Western support for the Israeli genocide. In December, the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq and the UK-based Global Legal Action Network asked the UK's High Court to prohibit the granting of licenses for weapons exports to Israel because it commits atrocities in Gaza. The court dismissed the case, but Al-Haq vowed to seek another court hearing on the issue. In February, in a similar

Speaks and Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East filed a lawsuit against former German parliamentarian Volker Beck, the head of the German-Israeli Society, for suspected incitement of hate and denial of war crimes in Israel's war on Gaza. What this moment reveals, Shamas told me, is how national and international legal systems operate in parallel, not in a hierarchy. The genocide charge is so significant that it opens up new legal and other avenues of action to stop it, such as public demonstrations, petitions, lobbying in Washington, and activism. "The intersection of politics, law, and activism is on full display," she said.

Also important to note is that there is no statute of limitation for the crime of genocide. So as facts are unearthed and verified in Gaza or in foreign capitals that support the charge of genocide against Israel, legal cases can be initiated around the world at any time. "We may be only seeing the beginning of litigation against governments, individuals or corporations. Weapons manufacturers, energy companies and others could be charged, and many individuals associated with the genocide accusations should be worried," Shamas said.

Legal cases are one of the most powerful means of bringing facts to the attention of the world, exposing criminal behaviour and seeking redress for gross injustices. This arena should be a natural ally to the media, which ideally should disseminate facts and credible analysis. As the legal challenges to Israel's genocide keep growing around the world and implicate Western governments, officials and companies as accomplices, it is no surprise that the mainstream Western media continues to ignore or downplay them. But a time will come when Western complicity in the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians will become impossible to cover up. Media organisations would do well now to at least report honestly on the surge of global litigation against Israel's genocide. Otherwise, they run the risk of being swept up in the tide of the many political and corporate accomplices now being named in courts around the world.

US, not China, adds fuel to Ukraine crisis

Zhao Huirong

IT has been widely reported that during his trip to China from Wednesday to Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will once again accuse China of "aiding Russia" in the Ukraine crisis. Absurdly, on Tuesday, the Senate passed a \$95 billion bill to provide military aid to Ukraine, Israel, and even China's Taiwan island, with the House having approved the package on Saturday.

If the State Department's statement is indeed true that Blinken will discuss how to fulfill the commitments made by the Chinese and US presidents in November last year, the US Congress should refrain from blatantly interfering in China's domestic affairs and cease exacerbating the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East. As for the Ukraine crisis, China neither created the crisis nor is a party to the crisis. In fact, China has been working to promote talks between the Russia and Ukraine, and released a document, titled "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" to help end the conflict. And Chinese special envoy has traveled across the region to mediate among different parties, which shows China is playing a constructive role in helping resolve the Ukraine crisis.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a zero-sum game because it is not only the result of disputes between Russia and Ukraine but also a geopolitical showdown

between Russia and the US-led West. So when the conflict will end depends on Russia, Ukraine, the US and NATO. Actually, the Russia-Ukraine conflict would have ended, if not prevented, had the US prioritized peace instead of being obsessed with maintaining its global hegemony. On the other hand, despite building a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, China and Russia are not military allies, and China advocates for the two sides to adhere to the principle of non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party.

The sustainable development of Sino-Russian cooperation not only stems from their historical ties, but also benefits from their geographical proximity and strong economic complementarity. China-Russia goods trade had been growing at a fast rate before the Ukraine crisis, with bilateral trade rising by 35.9 percent in 2021, according to Chinese official data. Besides, Russia has been expanding trade with Asian countries since the Western countries imposed sanctions on it following the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2022. Yet Sino-Russian trade grew by only 29.3 percent and 26.3 percent in 2022 and 2023 respectively after the Ukraine crisis broke out.

China has reiterated that it is not supplying weapons to either side in Russia-Ukraine conflict,

and has nothing to do with the "Russian defense industrial base". Its relationship with Russia is one of normal economic cooperation, which no country has the right to interfere in. Hence, China will not tolerate any snide remarks against its normal relations with Russia. The US needs to look inward, at US companies' activities in many other countries. According to Federal Customs Service of the Russian Federation, trade between Russia and the US was only \$5.5 billion in 2023, while the trade between Russia and Japan, and Russia and the Republic of Korea reached \$9.7 billion and \$15 billion respectively. And while Russia-India trade hit \$64.9 billion, Russia-Turkiye trade was worth \$56.5 billion. It should also be noted that Russia is still supplying gas to Europe via pipes through Ukraine and Turkiye.

Sino-Russian trade, meanwhile, is focused on traditional goods rather than weapons or defense equipment. Coal, oil and natural gas accounted for the largest percentage of China's imports from Russia, with the import of Russian crude rising by 24 percent in 2023 to 107 million metric tons. The other products China imports in bulk from Russia include copper, copper ore, timber and seafood, with the import of Russian agricultural and food products rising significantly. China, on its part, mainly exports vehicles, smartphones, toys and computers to

Russia, with the export of buses and trucks soaring over the past years. This should make it more than clear that China has nothing to do with the "Russian defense industrial base".

In the San Francisco summit in November last year, the Chinese president told his US counterpart that for two large countries like China and the US, turning their backs on each other is not an option. It is unrealistic for one side to try and remodel the other, adding that confrontations and conflicts will have unbearable consequences for both sides. It is necessary therefore for the two countries to develop mutual respect and engage in win-win cooperation. But some US politicians, fearing that other countries might replace the US as the global hegemonic power, are desperately trying to conceal the US' failure to address domestic problems by hyping up external threats. They have also been trying to divide countries into rival camps, which is not conducive to improving Sino-US relations or US development. China attaches great importance to, and is committed to, developing friendly relations with the US. It is willing to hold candid and constructive discussions with the US to normalize bilateral relations. But the US needs to take true actions to improve bilateral ties, because that would benefit the people in not only the two countries but also the rest of the world.

The China Daily

Is a two-state solution feasible in wake of US veto?

Kerry Boyd Anderson

THE US last week vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have recommended that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership in the United Nations." The veto - the only "no" vote on the council - defeated the resolution. Current US policy supports "Palestinian statehood in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement" negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. President Joe Biden has emphasized his position that "the only real solution is a two-state solution."

Years of rhetoric about a two-state solution, combined with the political effects of the Oslo Accords, created the false impression among many people around the world that the Palestinians basically have a state. Many people see maps listing the entirety of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as "Palestinian Territories." They hear about the Palestinian Authority and President Mahmoud Abbas. To many casual observers, it can appear that the Palestinians have something approximating a state with their own government. The reality is that the Palestinians have never had anything close to a sovereign state.

The definition of sovereignty varies depending on the context but, in practical terms as it applies to most people's lives, sovereignty means that a state has a defined territory, a population and a government that develops and implements policies within the territory and engages in relations with other states. Self-governance is a key

part of the idea of state sovereignty. Most people would assume that the ability to defend the state's territory and people from outside actors is another crucial component.

There has never been a defined territory for Palestinian governance that would be remotely recognizable as a state. Setting aside the separation of the West Bank and Gaza, for which there once were potential solutions, the PA has never been granted authority over the West Bank. It has never governed any sort of contiguous territory. A look at a map that shows how the Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into Areas A, B and C makes that clear; the PA officially has authority over various dots spread around the West Bank, which are divided by areas under Israeli control. A glance at maps that also include the wall that Israel built deep into the West Bank and the expansion of Israeli settlements clearly demonstrates that there is no current territory that the PA could feasibly govern. Additionally, Palestinians have little or no effective recourse when Israel takes Palestinian land to build roads, a separation wall or Israeli settlements.

The PA can make economic and other policies but it has no realistic ability to implement many of them. The reality is that Israel controls the Palestinians' economy. In the West Bank, Palestinians need Israeli permission to move goods or people through checkpoints (often more than one) or to construct infrastructure or buildings. Crucially,

Israel controls the West Bank's water resources and ensures that Israeli populations have disproportionate access to that water. Israel even collects taxes from Palestinians for the PA and sometimes withholds the funds, which contributes to the authority's fiscal challenges. For decades, Israel had significant control over Gaza's economy and, after Hamas took over in 2007, Israel imposed severe restrictions that choked the economy.

Despite security cooperation with Israel, the PA has had limited control over security in the areas it is supposed to govern and Israeli forces regularly enter Palestinian-governed areas without any type of Palestinian permission. Israeli forces can hold Palestinians in administrative detention indefinitely. Furthermore, even US leaders who call for a two-state solution seldom imagine a Palestinian state capable of defending itself. For example, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer recently gave a speech arguing that a two-state solution is the "only real and sustainable solution," with the caveat that a future Palestinian state would be "demilitarized."

The PA has many flaws, but even a perfectly competent, democratic and transparent authority would have failed without the basic components of sovereignty. If a two-state solution has any future viability, then its advocates should recognize that the Oslo process, as implemented, failed to make real progress toward a Palestinian state. Any new peace

efforts should start by recognizing several key realities. First, no Palestinian state is possible without contiguous territory and real sovereignty over both the land and the people.

Second, the Palestinians have learned that promises of a state are hollow at best and deceitful at worst, and they will no longer embrace that hope without very clear, practical steps forward - steps that few Israelis today would be willing to take. Third, economic-focused approaches that fail to understand the link between economics and sovereignty - such as ideas that the Trump administration proposed - will not work.

Fourth, few, if any, Israeli leaders ever accepted the idea of a fully sovereign Palestinian state. In the 1993 Oslo I Accord, Israel recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the Palestinians' representative but did not recognize Palestinian statehood. The Israeli leaders who sincerely wanted real peace envisioned, at most, a demilitarized Palestinian state with limited independence. Indeed, many Israeli leaders promoted the idea of "autonomy" for the Palestinian people with ongoing Israeli control over the land and security.

Other leaders, like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, never honestly supported even that. Those realities might make a two-state solution seem impossible. But rather than ignoring reality, a better approach would be to adjust policy, which means an entirely new approach to a two-state solution or another resolution to the conflict altogether.



ISLAMABAD: Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Sohail Aman deliver closing remarks during the ‘Leaders in Islamabad Business Summit 2024’ Collaborating for Growth.

PCJCCI keen to boost Peach industry in Swat

LAHORE (APP): Peach of Swat is one of the most famous fruit of Pakistan, the mango may be Pakistan’s preferred fruit heavyweight, but the peach is no slouch either, at least in the country’s northern and northwestern regions.

Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) President Moazzam Ghurki, President expressed these views during a think-tank session held here at PCJCCI Secretariat on Wednesday.

Ghurki said that in recent years, Swat had done a great job in boosting tourism.

However, the peach industry was not developed as fast. “The benefit that we get from tourism is very little, which is not more than four or five per cent. It will be beneficial if the government gives some packages to the farmers and set up factories etc.,” he observed.

Fang Yulong, Senior Vice President of PCJCCI, said that before Swat Motorway was built here, it took five to six hours to reach Rawalpindi, now the vehicle can reach in 3.5 to four hours, which means that two hours have been saved, and in this way to Faisalabad, Lahore and

Karachi.

To combine peach industry with local tourism, Swat may get some inspiration from a small township in Xinjiang, China, where a Peach Flower Festival is held and it attracted many tourists.

For tourists who came to see peach blossoms, most of them came back to buy peaches when they were ripe.

The economic benefits are particularly good. He added that Pakistani government should initiate such festivals to promote tourism and tap potential in fruit and farming sector.

PCJCCI Vice President

Hamza Khalid said, “We should seek help from China’s technological advancements to further growth in this sector. The second phase of Swat Motorway project is a part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With that, Swat peaches can reach more cities.

Secretary General Salahuddin Hanif said, “We plan to build a platform for peach sales, combining peach production with e-commerce and rural tourism to make this industry stronger and bigger which can also enhance farmers’ income.”

Major financial, administrative scam unearthed at SCCI

PESHAWAR (APP): Major financial and administrative irregularities have been unearthed at Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), resulting in suspension of secretary general of the chamber Sajjad Aziz and recovery of a hefty Rs5 Million from deputy secretary of visa section Amjad Ali and besides suspension of deputy secretary Abdul Nasir for their involvement in the scam.

A press release issued here on Wednesday stated that president of the SCCI Fuad Ishaq unmasked a massive financial scandal at the chamber level and took prompt action by suspending the secretary general Sajjad Aziz following the decision of the executive committee of the chamber.

In the aftermath of this major scam, a high-pow-

ered inquiry committee was constituted headed by the SCCI president Fuad Ishaq. Other members of the probe body include vice president of the chamber Ejaz Khan Afridi, former president FPCCI Ghazanfar Bilour, former presidents Haji Muhammad Afzal, Zahidullah Shinwari, former vice president Inayat Khan.

The inquiry committee conducted a thorough investigation into the financial and administrative irregularities at the chamber level.

According to the details, an emergent meeting of the executive committee of the SCCI was held under the headship of Fuad Ishaq chair.

The meeting was attended by the chamber’s senior vice president Sanaullah Khan, vice president Ejaz

Khan Afridi, executive members Javed Akhtar, Muhammad Arshad Siddique, Syed Minhajuddin, Farhad Asfandyar, Naeem Qasmi, Abdul Hakim Shinwari, Affaf Ali Khan, Hamza Ibrahim Butt, Javed AHmad Khan, Muhammad Ismail Safi, Monawar Khurshid, Kashif Amin, Qurtul Ain.

Leader of the businessman forum former senator Ilyas Ahmad Bilour, former presidents Riaz Arshad, Zahidullah Shinwari, Haji Muhammad Afzal, Sherbaz Bilour, former vice president Inayat Khan, and trader’ leader Shaukat Khan and Haji Amanullah Mohmand, Nadeem Rauf participated in the meeting as observer.

Fuad Ishaq, the head of the probe committee and president of the SCCI in the executive body meeting

presented an initial probe report regarding financial irregularities and informed the house about the recovery into the scam.

During the meeting, members of the executive committee and other participants gave full authority to President Fuad Ishaq and other members of the inquiry committee to carry out a complete scrutiny of all the matters and make recovery from involved persons. Apart from that, the executive committee has given powers to the inquiry committee to take legal actions and termination from services.

On the occasion, the executive committee unanimously announced to award gold medals to President Fuad Ishaq, senior vice president Sanaullah Khan and vice president Ejaz Khan Afridi for this major success.

Farmers should preferably complete cotton sowing by May 15: experts

MULTAN (APP): Agriculture experts have advised farmers to complete cotton sowing preferably by May 15 by using certified seed varieties carrying tags to get higher production.

Agriculture officials expressed these views at a cotton seminar organized by agriculture department in collaboration with fertilizers companies to provide production enhancing tips and guidance to farmers at

Makhdoom Rasheed Wednesday.

Director agriculture extension Shahzad Sabir said that 945,000 acre area would be brought under cotton cultivation in Multan division and extension officials were reaching out to cotton farmers to extend guidelines on sowing, water and fertilizers application besides pesticides.

Director Cotton Research Institute Dr

Ghulam Sarwar asked farmers to sow only certified seed carrying tags adding that approved Bt cotton varieties should be sown. However, before sowing, seed should be treated with some suitable pesticides.

He also advised farmers to delay first chemical pesticides spray for at least two months after sowing and prepare the land properly by breaking its hard layer.

Plant population in cot-

ton fields sown from Apr 1 to 30 be maintained at 17500 per acre, however, in case of sowing till May 31, plant population should go up to 23000 per acre.

Fertilizers companies officials provided guidelines to farmers on how to apply need-based fertilizers to the soil. Assistant director agriculture Allah Rakha, Imran Hameed, other officials besides farmers were present at the seminar.

LCCI for deferment of SROs hurting businesses

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has sought the government’s help for deferment of amendments that are bound to bring businesses to a halt.

A LCCI spokesman told media here Wednesday that in a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, LCCI President Kashif Anwar attracted his attention towards recently introduced SROs 457(I)/2024, SRO 350(I)/2024 and SRO 1842(I)/2023 and said that they were disproportionately affecting the businesses compliant with tax regulations and have brought the whole system to a halt.

The SRO 350 links the buyers’ ability to file tax returns to the compliance of their suppliers. Due to this measure, a reaction has been set in motion.

The potential chain reaction of non-compliance among suppliers will undoubtedly bring the system to a grinding halt, affecting businesses at every stage of the supply chain.

The LCCI president said that the business community in Pakistan was confronted with multi-dimensional economic challenges, including inflation, devaluation, rising energy price, high interest rate and MDI charges etc.

He said that these perti-

nent issues were hampering the private sector growth and creating problems for the tax compliant persons. He said that the buyers should not be penalized if the sellers have not filed their Sales Tax returns.

To deal with the issue of fake and flying invoices, checks should be incorporated in the FBR’s internal system and actions should be taken against the specific parties involved in the practice of fake invoices rather than causing inconvenience to all the compliant taxpayers.

It will create undue hardships for the compliant taxpayers and force them to move out of the tax net.

“The LCCI fully sup-

ports the efforts of the government to promote documentation and broaden the tax base. However, the aforementioned measures are squeezing the existing compliant taxpayers in the tax net by limiting their sales.

This is not good for the already stressed economy and Taxation System in Pakistan as these measures are discouraging the documented sector,” the LCCI president added.

Kashif Anwar hoped that the prime minister would take immediate action and defer the implementation on these aforementioned SROs till conclusive discussions with the stakeholders.

Soyabean, palm oil imports rise

ISLAMABAD (APP): Edible oil imports including soyabean and palm into the country during the first three quarters of the current financial year increased by 53.07 per cent and 28.55 per cent respectively as compared to the imports of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period under review, about 200,191 metric tons of tea worth \$495.217 million were imported in order to fulfil the local requirements as compared to the imports of 177,553 metric tons valued at \$434.938 million of the same period of last year.

During the period from July-March 2023-24, the country spent \$2.084 billion on the import of about 2.263 million metric tons of palm oil as compared to the imports of 2.381 million metric tons valued at \$2.197 billion of the same period of last year.

Meanwhile, 107,705 metric tons of soyabean oil worth \$116.069 million were imported as compared to the imports of 173,020 metric tons valued at 247.302 million, according to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

During the first three-quarters of the current financial year, the food group exports from the country grew by 48.17 per cent as food commodities worth \$5.651 billion were exported as compared to the exports of \$3.814 billion in the same period of the last year.

On month on month basis, the food group exports from the country grew by 16.35 per cent in month of March 2024 as compared to the exports of the same month of last year. In March 2024 food commodities valued at 685.025 million were exported as compared to the exports of \$588.759 million of the same month of last year.

On the other hand food group imports into the country during the period under review went down by 14.23 per cent as food imports came down from \$7.333 billion in the first three quarters of the last financial year as compared to the \$6.290 billion in the first 09 months of the current financial year.

Dubai gold prices dip

DUBAI (Khaleej Times): Gold prices dropped slightly at the opening of the markets in the UAE on Wednesday.

According to the Dubai Jewellery Group, the 24K was trading at Dh281.75 per gram on Wednesday morning, down from Dh282 per gram at the close of the markets on Tuesday. The other variants, 22K, 21K and 18K, were trading at Dh260.75, Dh252.5 and Dh216.5 per gram, respectively.

Spot gold was trading at \$2,326.76 per ounce at 9.05am UAE time, up 0.13 per cent.

The yellow metal fell for two consecutive days this week as concerns about the Middle East crisis eased among global investors.

Vijay Valecha, chief investment officer at Century Financial, said Iran’s decision to not retaliate against Israel lowered some of the war risk premium that has permeated the markets since the conflict began.

“This somewhat dented gold’s haven demand. It also triggered a round of profit-taking, considering gold has rallied nearly 16 per cent since mid-February despite a stronger greenback and buoyant treasury yields,” he said.

NEW YORK (Reuters): Boeing (B.A.N.), opens new tab on Wednesday reported its first quarterly revenue drop in seven quarters, but the U.S. planemaker beat Wall Street expectations that were lowered after a January mid-air blowout of a cabin door prompted it to slow production of its strongest-selling jets.

After the report, Boeing’s Chief Executive Dave Calhoun told CNBC that a deal to acquire its key supplier Spirit AeroSystems (SPR.N), opens new tab is more than likely during the second quarter. The two have confirmed tie-up talks, although pricing remains a challenge in the complex deal.

Boeing said first-quarter cash burn, a metric closely watched by investors, was \$3.93 billion, better than average analyst expectations of a cash burn of \$4.49 billion.

In March, Boeing indicated it would use between \$4 billion and \$4.5 billion due to a crisis following the Jan. 5 accident involving a nearly new 737 MAX 9 jet.

Boeing’s shares, which have sunk 35% year to date, were up 1% in early trading after its loss per share was narrower than expected. Spirit Aero’s shares rose 1%.

“Well it could have been worse. While the loss and the cash outflow are not as bad as feared, the company is still clearly facing some serious challenges in the Commercial Aircraft division that will take some fixing,” Vertical Research Partners analyst Robert Stallard said in a note.

Since the Jan. 5 accident

on an Alaska Airlines-operated jet, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has imposed a cap on production of Boeing’s strong-selling 737 MAX jets. The FAA also has told Boeing to develop a comprehensive plan to address “systemic quality-control issues.”

Before the report, Calhoun, who will step down around year end, said in a letter to employees on that Boeing was “in a tough moment”, slowing the system to improve quality and safety.

“Lower deliveries can be difficult for our customers and for our financials. But safety and quality must and will come above all else,” he added.

Quarterly revenue was \$16.57 billion, down from \$17.92 billion a year earlier but beating expectations of \$16.23 billion.

While Boeing has not named a successor, Calhoun told CNBC he believes commercial airplanes boss Stephanie Pope has potential to run the company.

Reuters reported this month that output of Boeing’s cash-cow 737 MAX had fallen sharply as U.S. regulators stepped up factory checks.

Analysts have warned the slow pace of deliveries could delay Boeing’s financial and production goals. Boeing’s CFO said last month the company needs more time to hit a goal outlined in 2022 for an annual cash flow of about \$10 billion by 2025 or 2026.

That goal is seen as key as Boeing works to accelerate its recovery from an

Switzerland says UBS may need more cash

LONDON (CNN): A year after the failure of Credit Suisse, the Swiss government says UBS may have to find as much as \$27 billion to absorb potential losses and protect taxpayers from ever having to bail out a major bank.

Now, the giant Swiss lender is hitting back, saying its finances are robust and warning that the proposal could harm Switzerland’s standing as a global financial center.

Speaking at the bank’s annual shareholder meeting Wednesday, UBS chairman Colm Kelleher said he was “seriously concerned” about current discussions that could force the bank to hold much more cash and other liquid assets.

“Additional capital is the wrong remedy,” he said.

“There can be no regulatory solution for a broken business model,” he continued, referring to Credit Suisse. UBS bought its stricken rival last March in a government-orchestrated rescue aimed at preventing a global financial crisis.

The deal has proved controversial in Switzerland, which is now home to a bank with assets almost double the size of its annual economic output.

Kelleher argued the deal “reinforced Switzerland’s position as a leader in wealth management.”

He emphasized that UBS was “not too big to fail” and was “one of the best-capitalized banks in Europe,” with financial resources to absorb losses in excess of \$200 billion.

“Trust cannot be regulated. It was not too-low capital requirements that forced Credit Suisse into the historic weekend rescue,” he added.

The regulatory proposals, unveiled earlier this month, give analysts and shareholders reason to reconsider the potential benefits that UBS will derive from the biggest banking deal in history. Shares in the lender closed almost 3% lower in Zurich Wednesday.

The stock has tumbled 10% since the Swiss government published its recommendations as part of a report on banking sector stability, trimming some of the extraordinary gains notched since the deal was announced a year ago.

Asked whether the proposed measures would require UBS to hold additional capital of between 15 billion and 25 billion Swiss francs (\$16.4 billion-\$27.3 billion), Swiss finance minister Karin Keller-Keller Sutter told the country’s Tages-Anzeiger newspaper this month that such estimates were “plausible.”

The Swiss government will publish more detailed proposals in the first quarter of next year.

In a note Tuesday, Anke Reingen, a banking analyst at RBC Capital Markets, wrote that UBS shareholders’ concerns were “justified.”

Investors are anxious because, in general, the more capital a bank has to hold in reserve the less it can return to shareholders

or deploy to boost earnings.

UBS is enjoying a lofty market valuation, with its shares up almost 40% over the past year. But that leaves the stock more vulnerable to declines as a result of “execution risk in the Credit Suisse integration,” suggested Citi analyst Andrew Coombs. He added that the new regulatory proposals injected “greater uncertainty” over the stock’s value.

Kelleher on Wednesday again highlighted the merits of the deal, while acknowledging that there was still “a long way to go” to make it a success.

He noted that the transaction added client assets equivalent to seven to 10 years of organic growth and “cements” UBS’s status as the “pre-eminent global wealth manager.”

“However, to maintain this competitive edge, it is imperative that our regulatory policies ensure a level playing field,” he added. “In other words, Switzerland’s regulation must remain broadly aligned with global standards.”

Kelleher also defended UBS CEO Sergio Ermotti’s pay package for 2023, which drew considerable criticism from shareholders. “He arguably has the toughest job in the financial services industry globally and he has delivered,” he said.

Ermotti earned 14.4 million Swiss francs (\$15.9 million) in 2023, making him the highest-paid bank CEO in Europe, according to Reuters.



In brief

Rizwan, Irfan out of New Zealand series

LAHORE (APP): Wicket-keeper batsman Mohammad Rizwan and all-rounder Irfan Khan Niazi have been rested due to hamstring injuries for the remaining two matches of the five-match T20I series against New Zealand in Lahore. According to the team Media Manager Raza Kitchlew on Wednesday, players have been rested after thorough evaluation of the radiology reports by the PCB medical panel and in consultation with the team management. Mohammad Rizwan and Irfan Khan will not take part in the last two matches on April 25 (Thursday) and April 27 (Saturday) at the Gaddafi Stadium and work on their rehabilitation with the PCB medical panel.

UCP wins Judo Championship

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Intervarsity Judo Championship 2024 held at the Islamia University Bahawalpur was won by the University of Central Punjab. Superior University Lahore got the second position and the University of Punjab got the third position. Seven universities from across the country participated in the championship including the University of Central Punjab, Punjab University Lahore, Sindh Agriculture University Tando Jam, the University of Gujarat, Superior University Lahore, the University of Veterinary and Animal Science Lahore, and the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. During the competition, the young players performed brilliantly. Dean Faculty of Management Sciences and Commerce IUB Prof. Dr. Jawad Iqbal along with Director of Sports Amjad Farooq Warraich gave the trophy to the winning team.

Two Premier League players arrested

LONDON (Agencies): Two Premier League footballers have been arrested in connection with an alleged rape. The pair – both aged 19 – were released on bail after being interviewed by police. The players are at the same club, which declined to comment on the allegations. "Officers have arrested two men following a report of a rape," a police spokesperson said. "A 19-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of assault and aiding and abetting a rape. A second 19-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of rape. "Both men have since been released on police bail." The allegations were first reported by The Sun newspaper, which said the alleged attack took place on Friday. It is not known if the players have been suspended pending the outcome of the police investigation.

WAPDA-KRL match tied

KARACHI (PPI): The President's Cup 50-over tournament commenced with a thrilling tied match between Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) at the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Wednesday. Batting first, WAPDA posted 258 for six in their allotted 50 overs. In turn, KRL needed two runs off the final delivery for victory, but managed only one run to finish at 258 for eight. As there was no Super Over, points were equally shared between the two sides. The other match at the Abbottabad Cricket Stadium was rained off without a ball being bowled.



LAHORE: Pakistan players warm up with football.

Cycling delegation calls on Chief Minister KP Adviser on Sports, Youth Affairs

PESHAWAR (APP): A cycling delegation led by President Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cycling Association Engr. Syed Shayan Ali Shah with other members called on the Adviser to the Chief Minister on Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhre Jahan at his office on Wednesday.

Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir Khan Mohmand, Chairman KP Cycling Association Nisar Ahmad, and Secretary KP Cycling Association Muhammad Ali were also present.

The delegation recalled the announcement made by the Directorate General of Sports to construct a cycling velodrome at an approximate cost of Rs100 million in the city but the project was still pending.

"We are sending a summary to Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur for the construction of a cycling velo-

drome in Peshawar," said Adviser to the Chief Minister on Sports and Youth Affairs.

Around 72 kanals of land has already been acquired in two different locations including Charsadda Road and Agriculture University Peshawar, he said, adding that The only other velodrome in Pakistan exists in Lahore, that too in a dilapidated state.

Syed Fakhre Jahan expressed the hope that the velodrome will not only attract international-level cycling events but will also provide opportunities to the youth. "It was a long awaited demand of the ever-rising cyclists of the province," he added.

The project, Director General Sports Abdul Nasir Mohmand said that the velodrome, if constructed in Peshawar will be the second City of Pakistan after Lahore to have such a facility which was constructed

some 50 years back. He said that it will be included in the next-year Annual Development Program.

Engr. Shayan Shah highlighted the efforts made for the promotion and development of cycling in the province to Adviser for Sports Syed Fakhre Jahan. He said that the cycling association organizes its events throughout the year which include club, district, provincial, national and international level competitions.

He said cycling is the best sport for which joint efforts are needed for its promotion and development.

Syed Fakhr Jahan while appreciating the efforts of KP Cycling Association assured that the promotion and development of cycling strong measures will be taken for this and joint efforts will be made for the promotion and development of this sport along with the association.

Shaheen Afridi excels in ICC T20I Rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi has made notable gains in the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings after their Player of the Match performances in the ongoing five-match series which was level 1-1 after three matches.

Meanwhile, New Zealand left-handed batter Mark Chapman's unbeaten 87 off 42 balls in the third match has lifted him 12 places to 33rd position in the latest weekly update while left-armers Shaheen's haul of three for 13 in the second match has helped him move up two places to 17th position, said a press release. Wicketkeeper-batter Tim Seifert is another New Zealand batter to gain in the rankings, moving up from 27th to 24th while leg-spinner Ish Sodhi has progressed from 23rd to 18th position.

Meanwhile, Dipendra Singh Airee has become the fourth player from Nepal to reach the top 50 in the Men's T20I Batting Rankings after scoring an unbeaten 44 against Hong Kong in the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Men's Premier Cup. The others to reach the top 50 from Nepal are Kushal Bhurtel (27th in March 2022), Paras Khadka (42nd in September 2019) and Rohit Paudel (45th in March 2024).

Airee's 11th position in the all-rounders' rankings is the highest for Nepal, with the next best being Kaushal Malla's 25th position.

Hong Kong's Anshuman Rath (up seven places to 70th) and the United Arab Emirates' Alishan Sharafu (up 29 places to 88th) among batters, and Nepal's Sompal Kami (up 16 places to 92nd) among bowlers, have also progressed following their performances in the ACC Men's Premier Cup.

Osaka seals first win on clay since 2022 in Madrid

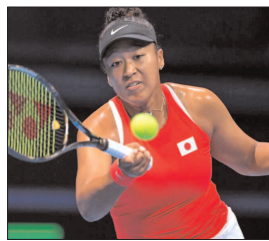
MADRID (AFP): Naomi Osaka says she is "embracing the clay a lot more now" as she captured her first victory on the surface since 2022 in the Madrid Open first round on Wednesday.

The Japanese former world number one grew up playing on hard courts in the United States and has mostly struggled on the red dirt over the years.

But back at the Caja Magica for the first time in two years, Osaka looked comfortable during her 6-4, 6-1 win over Belgian lucky loser Greet Minnen to book a second-round meeting with 15th seed Liudmila Samsonova.

It was just the fourth victory on clay for Osaka since the start of 2021 and the four-time Grand slam champion is hopeful it won't be her last in Madrid this fortnight.

"I've had several 'incidents' on clay but I'm embracing it a lot more now," the 26-year-old Osaka told reporters in the Spanish capital. "I feel like there's definitely beauty to it. I'm taking a lot of inspiration from people that do very well



here. I'm not expecting to be like, Iga (Swiatek), or something, but I just want to do the best with what I have."

On Arantxa Sanchez stadium on Wednesday, Osaka was breezing through her service games in the opening set but couldn't convert any of her first three break point opportunities before she finally got the break she needed in the 10th game to take a one-set lead.

The second set was a stroll compared to the first as Osaka built a 5-0 advantage and secured the win with a backhand winner on the 79-minute mark.

"I think I slid a couple of times to my forehand pretty well, so I was excited about that," explained Osaka.

"She was hitting really good drop shots but I think I got to a couple quite well. "I think just movement-

wise I'm feeling a lot more comfortable. I think short-wise, I hit a couple of heavy balls. Hopefully I'm able to continue that."

Osaka has extra motivation to do well on clay this season due to the fact the Olympic Games will be played on the red dirt at Roland Garros this summer. "The Olympics are a really big goal for me. I would really love to play them," she said. Next up, fellow former US Open champion Emma Raducanu was not as fortunate as the Brit fell 6-2, 6-2 to Argentinian qualifier Maria Lourdes Carle in one hour and 25 minutes.

Fresh off a title run in Rouen last week, 2017 US Open champion Sloane Stephens picked up a sixth consecutive win on clay with a hard-fought 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 success against Italian Martina Trevisan.

Home favourite and former world number two Paula Badosa, who is struggling with long-term back pain since she sustained a stress fracture last year, crashed out 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 to Spanish qualifier Jessica Bouzas Maneiro.

Selection committee named girls & boys for PM National TT League

PESHAWAR (APP): A joint selection committee of

Islamia College University Peshawar and Higher Education Commission (HEC) Wednesday named two girls and boys teams to represent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National League.

He said the PM Youth Talent Hunt program, which was actually launched in 2013 by then PM Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, would give ample opportunities to the upcoming players to play at provincial, national and international level.

He said through this league, the youth could actively take part in 12 boys and 10 female games. He said they organized trials in all five regions of the KP including Swat, Mardan, Hazara, Bannu and Peshawar in the first phase with both girls and boys turned up participating in the trials. After the trials, the provincial league was conducted and now teams have been short-listed for the National League.

It is very encouraging that two of the female players of KP, which have been spotted in Table Tennis through PM Youth Talent Hunt program. Hiba Iqbal and Alisha have been selected from KP to represent Pakistan in the International Junior Table Tennis championship to be held in Sri Lanka this month. Ali Hoti also thanked

ing them.

He said two girls teams – A&B and as many boys teams have been selected to represent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National League.

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Director General sports, KP, Director Pakistan Sports Board coaching center for extended all out support in holding the Provincial League jointly by the Directorate Sports Islamia College University Peshawar and HEC in befitting manners.

Following are the four teams, two girls and two boys selected for the National League: -

Team Girls-A
Alishba (Peshawar), Hooria (Peshawar), Hiba Iqbal (Swabi), Aina (Peshawar), Sunaina (Peshawar), Maryum (Bannu) and Insha (Bannu).
Team Girls-B
Khadija Mobeen (Swat), Safeera Ali (Peshawar), Zainab (Peshawar), Sana Gul (Mardan), Haya Noor (Swabi), Wajaha (Bannu) and Safina (Mardan).

Team Boys-A
Syed Obaid Shah international (Peshawar), Owais Jamshed (Peshawar), Usman Khalil (Peshawar), Areeb Khan (Peshawar), Muhammad Haroon (Peshawar), Umaar Amjad (Swat), Huzaifa Zahid (Hazara).
Team Boys-B
Muhamamd Jawad Khan (Mardan), Kashif Bacha (Swat), Mudasir Khan (Mardan), Muhammad Hamza (Mardan), Shayan Bacha (Swat), Azhar Khan (Hazara), Huzaifa Khan (Bannu).

Haaland ruled out of Man City's crucial trip to Brighton

LONDON (AFP): Manchester City's Premier League title bid suffered a blow after Norway striker Erling Haaland was ruled out of Thursday's crucial clash at Brighton.

Haaland missed City's 1-0 win over Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on Saturday due to a muscle injury sustained in the Champions League quarter-final exit against Real Madrid last week.

City's leading scorer, who has 20 Premier League goals this season, is yet to recover and will not make the trip to the Amex Stadium as the champions look to close the gap on leaders Arsenal. City boss Pep Guardiola insisted Haaland's injury was not serious and he could come back into contention in time for Sunday's game against Nottingham Forest.

While Haaland is sidelined, Guardiola was boosted by England internationals Phil Foden and John Stones getting the green light to face Brighton after their own fitness concerns.

"Erling is not ready for tomorrow, the other two, they are ready," Guardiola told reporters on



Wednesday. "I know it is not a big issue, but he is not allowed for this game."

As a gripping title race approaches the final furlong, third-placed City are four points behind leaders Arsenal, who thrashed Chelsea 5-0 on Tuesday.

Guardiola's men have two games in hand on Arsenal and have played one match fewer than second-placed Liverpool, who face Merseyside rivals Everton at Goodison Park on Wednesday. City will be crowned champions for an unprecedented fourth successive season if they win their last six games.

But Guardiola warned his players not to underestimate Brighton, whose manager Roberto De Zerbi has earned his City counterpart's respect. "Brighton away, if you put it in my calendar, is one of the toughest ones for the way

we play," he said.

"My admiration is growing every season. They have a lot of injuries and play three competitions, but the way they play is always there. He (De Zerbi) is doing an incredible job at Brighton."

If City hold off the challenges from north London and Merseyside, it would extend a spell of dominance from Guardiola's men, who face Manchester United in the FA Cup final in May.

Guardiola has bemoaned the hectic schedule that he believes has put his players' health at risk, yet he has no intention of resting his stars with the title in his sights.

"Every person has their (preferred) starting XI, but everyone has their contribution. Now we've had three or four days since the last game against Chelsea and tomorrow is one of the toughest games of the season," he said. "Every game is adrenaline and important, but this is decisive."

"Now every mistake or step back makes it more difficult but it is what it is. We have been here these last years, fortunately many times, so that's how we know what we are playing for."

Blanch, 16, 'obviously nervous' ahead of Nadal match

Madrid (AFP): American teenager Darwin Blanch will play just the second ATP Tour match of his career against Rafael Nadal on Thursday at just 16 years old in the Madrid Open first round.

Nadal was also 16 when he played the event in the Spanish capital for the first time, in 2003, four years before Blanch was born.

The youngster admitted it will be daunting to face one of the game's greatest ever players at his home tournament, even if his fellow left-hander Nadal is seemingly close to ending his career. "I'm really excited, obviously a little bit nervous," said Blanch, ranked at 1,028 in the

world.

"But I'm just really happy to be playing against Rafa. I'm ready to go out and just enjoy every moment. "I know there's going to be a lot of people and they're going to be against me." Despite his youth, Blanch has already lived in four different countries and can speak English, Spanish, Chinese and Thai.

"I was born in Boca, but when I was one week old, I moved to Thailand for my dad's work," Blanch told attour.com. "So I trained there until I was eight years old, with a tennis court in my backyard. I would practise there with my brothers."

"We brought a coach from Argentina, and then eventual-

ly I moved to Argentina. "I trained there for four years, and then I went to the USTA (in Orlando), and then eventually now to Ferrero (Tennis Academy in Alicante, Spain). So, it's been a wild journey."

Blanch made his ATP debut at the Miami Open last month, losing to Czech Tomas Machac. "Obviously, Miami helped me (get used to the big stage) a bit, but it's always been a thing that I've liked playing with a crowd and I've always enjoyed that."

But he has been practising with Carlos Alcaraz in Alicante and impressed the two-time Grand Slam champion, who faced Nadal on his 18th birthday at the Caja Magica in 2021.

Sana named ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier ambassador

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has named Pakistani legend, Sana Mir, as ambassador for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifier.

Sana, who represented her country in 226 internationals – 137 as captain – would be keeping a close eye on the 10 participating teams and their players in the two-week long tournament, said a press release.

The former skipper was looking forward to an intense battle for the two finalist spots for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in Bangladesh later this year, as the action in Abu Dhabi gets underway from April 25 to May 7.

Sana who was delighted with her role said, "Other than the big qualification opportunity for two teams, the tournament will provide excellent exposure to the Associate Member teams and their players. The women's game has become more and more competitive in recent years and the 10 nations involved in the Qualifier possess a number of quality players."

As a captain and player, she has experience in participating in a number of qualifying events for Pakistan, particularly the 2008 edition of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup Qualifying Series where her 70 runs and nine wickets bagged her the joint Player of the Series award.

"My aim is to talk to the various teams and players during the Qualifier and help guide them on how to deal with the pressure of these events and what it takes to succeed. Pakistan had a great record in these events, and I in particular have fond memories of the



2008 edition of the 50 over World Cup qualifier event that I played," Sana continued.

As Pakistan's star all-rounder and go-to performer in her 14-year career, she scored 2432 international runs while her off-break bowling earned her 240 international wickets.

"For women's cricket to grow further, the regional events and the Qualifier are incredibly important. While Sri Lanka and Ireland will probably be favourites to qualify alongside Thailand, teams like Scotland, Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, Uganda and Zimbabwe surely have the potential to cause major upsets and make their way through to the semis and eventually to the final as well."

"I am particularly keen to see the progress of some of the Zimbabwe players whom I worked with in my mentorship role during the inaugural ICC Women's U19 T20 World Cup in South Africa last year."

Sana has rich experience of the T20 World Cup with a total of 24 matches played, she also captained Pakistan in five editions. In these

fixtures, Sana scored 234 runs and took 18 wickets.

Sana feels that the T20 format continues to evolve, with the players in the women's game also looking at scoring faster and batting more aggressively than before.

"The T20 format continues to grow in terms of tactics and playing style and the format remains tough to predict. The batters continue to raise the standard of the game while the bowlers have also developed some great skills at combatting the big hits and bigger hitters."

"The power game has surely become important in women's cricket as well and players like Sri Lankan captain Chamari Athapaththu have created a big legacy with their swashbuckling style. I am looking forward to seeing her unleash some big hits and big scores in the tournament. It will also be interesting to see how the teams cope with the conditions in Abu Dhabi, the pitches in the UAE can help slow bowlers at times and the hot weather will also need to be taken into consideration."

The 10 teams competing in the Qualifier have been divided into two groups of five each, the top two from each group would enter the semi-finals with the semi-final winners confirming their trip to Bangladesh.

Scotland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda and the USA feature in Group A, while Ireland, the Netherlands, the UAE, Vanuatu and Zimbabwe make up Group B.

The tournament begins at the Tolerance Oval and Zayed Cricket Stadium Abu Dhabi on Thursday, April 25.



In brief

Ahmed Rushdi remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned playback singer Ahmed Rushdi, who mesmerized audiences with his beautiful songs was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Wednesday. Born on April 24, 1934, in Hyderabad, he was considered the first pop singer of Pakistan. He started his career by singing in Radio Pakistan Karachi's program "Bachon Ki Dunya." He recorded his first song for the film "Anokhi" and went on to achieve fame with a song filmed by actor Alauddin. Ahmed Rushdi lent his voice to films made in the 70s and 80s and won the Nigar Award for three consecutive years for his work in the films "Spiran," "Mehtab," and "Aanchal." He was also awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz in addition to the Artist and Millennium Awards. His voice had a profound impact on the chocolate hero Waheed Murad, who was one of the most popular actors of his time. April 11, 1983 at the age of 49, leaving behind a legacy of music that continues to be cherished by his fans.

Police carry out search operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Division Police here on Wednesday carried out search operations in 'Baraf Khana Chowk', 'Thata Khail' and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of Race Course and Taxila Police Stations. According to a police spokesman, the search operations were conducted to maintain law and order and flush out suspects following the directions of the City Police Officer (CPO). He informed that senior police officers and police personnel including women police took part in the search operation. Police checked as many as 52 houses, 15 shops, five tenants and 68 individuals during the search operations. The spokesman said that police were fully prepared to shield the lives and property of the public and combing and search operations were being done to flush out the suspects and hardcore criminals. He said that police were more vigilant to keep an eye on suspects and maintain law and order in Rawalpindi.

Suspect apprehended in double murder case

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a significant breakthrough, Police have apprehended a wanted criminal allegedly involved in a double murder case in the jurisdiction of Airport police station here on Wednesday. The suspect, identified as Shah Rukh had shot dead his sister, Kainat, and Mohammad Ramzan suspecting an illicit relationship. The tragic incident occurred in 2016 and case was registered on the complaint of the deceased's brother. Superintendent of Police (SP) Potohar Nasir Nawaz has commended the efforts of the Airport Police in apprehending the suspect.

PNCA hosts artist talk, workshop

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) on Wednesday hosted an artist talk and workshop on paper cutting as a part of the ongoing "The Guiding Light" exhibition led by acclaimed artist Tusif Ahmed. The event took place at PNCA, attracting a diverse group of artists and students eager to explore the intricacies of paper-cutting art. Tusif Ahmed, renowned for his expertise in paper cutting, facilitated an engaging and insightful session that spanned two hours for participants from the twin cities. He brought a mesmerizing collection and beautifully showcased the essence of Islamic art that was an inspiration from his mentor and the esteemed artist Sadequain.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar in a meeting with International Parliamentarians Congress Delegation.

Vietnam hails Gandhara Corridor project for cultural tourism promotion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Vietnam in Pakistan, Nguyen Tien Phong on Wednesday hailed the proposed Gandhara Corridor Project as a major vehicle of regional connectivity, inter-faith harmony and cultural tourism. While delivering the keynote address on 'Envisioning Comprehensive Pakistan-Vietnam Cooperation: Prospects and Opportunities' organized by the NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS), a leading g think-tank of NUST, said a press release. The ambassador said that Gandhara tourism is a symbol of the shared Buddhist heritage, and could attract Vietnam tourists. He said that several historical archaeological

ical Gandhara sites located in different parts of Pakistan's cities including Taxila, Peshawar, Mardan, and Swat are sacred holy places in the eyes of Buddhists and have potential to attract international tourists from Vietnam and other countries. He emphasized that devising a joint strategy in this regard could generate multiple opportunities for mutual cooperation.

On cultural connectivity, he said that there is an urgent need to encourage increased cultural contacts and trade exchanges between young Pakistanis and Vietnamese for a sustainable, long-term bilateral partnership.

It is worth mentioning that Member National Assembly (MNA) Dr

Ramesh Kumar Vankwani recently introduced a bill in the National Assembly to establish the Gandhara Corridor to connect Pakistan with the Buddhist majority countries, including Vietnam.

Recalling the bilateral diplomatic relations, the envoy said, "Vietnam and Pakistan have celebrated 50 years of relations," and "Pakistan has always supported Vietnam in all the international forums."

While elaborating on the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, he said that Vietnamese professionals can help Pakistani counterparts in value addition in many business areas, leading to exports reaching EU markets under the free trade agreements.

Young officers visit PID for briefing

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of young probationary officers from the Information Service Academy visited the Press Information Department (PID) in Islamabad to receive a briefing on the roles, functions, and operational procedures of the government's principal public relations agency.

Arshad Munir, Executive Director General of the Information Service Academy, led the delegation. Upon their arrival at the PID headquarters, they received a warm welcome from Ms. Tahira Saeda, Director General Advertisement, and Ms. Ambreen Gul Shahid, Director General Administration.

As part of their exposure to government media operations, the probationary officers received detailed presentations from PID officials on journalist engagement, advertisement management, publication of official materials, and administrative procedures. They had the chance to engage in discussions and interact with experienced professionals from the department. Arshad Munir expressed gratitude to the PID leadership for accommodating the visiting delegation and offering valuable insights into the operations of the nation's leading media communications agency.

Law Minister meets IPC delegation

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation from the International Parliamentarians Congress (IPC) met with Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar here on Wednesday.

The delegation was led by IPC President Abdel Rahim Maaia and included Secretary General Sitara Ayaz, Assistant Secretary General Ijlal Ali Khan and Deputy Speaker Jordan.

The IPC delegation briefed the Law Minister on the organization's work and mission. The IPC is a global platform that unites individual members of

national parliaments from around the world to collaboratively address global and regional challenges. The delegation also discussed the formation of IPC's human rights committees. Minister Tarar commended the IPC's efforts to expand its membership and foster cultural exchange among parliamentarians worldwide.

He expressed his appreciation for the organization's work in addressing critical issues related to Human rights.

The IPC President concluded the meeting by presenting a report on road safety.

COMSTECH organizes Certificate Course on Neurology in Kampala, Uganda

ISLAMABAD (APP): COMSTECH in collaboration with Equator University of Science and Technology, Masaka, and Habib Medical School, Islamic University in Uganda, Kampala organized a two-day certificate course on Neurology.

The course was arranged at Islamic University in Uganda, said a news release.

Speaking on the occasion, Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary said that in Africa, where the weight of neurological diseases is significant and often made worse by socioeconomic factors, the significance of neurology in healthcare provision is particularly crucial. He emphasized the need for specialized knowledge and resources to confront neurological diseases effectively.

He said that this course is aimed to equip healthcare professionals with fundamental expertise and competencies in neurology. The High Commissioner of Pakistan in Uganda, Muhammad Hassan Wazir addressed the gathering as a chief guest. He commended the efforts of the organizers of the course on neurocritical

care and said this course will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration and innovation which are essential to address challenges.

He said that Pakistan and Uganda share a deep bond of friendship and cooperation.

He invited Ugandans to visit state of the art medical facilities of Pakistan and the embassy would fully facilitate your medical tourism endeavors.

Prof. Dr. Ismail Simbwa Gyagenda, Rector, Islamic University in Uganda commended the efforts of the Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary in organizing the important course at the Islamic University of Uganda. He urged the participants of the course to make strong networking with the relevant experts for future knowledge and expertise exchange. The course was led by a world renowned Neurologist and COMSTECH Distinguished Scholar, Prof. Dr. Mohammad Wasay. His team of experts included Prof. Dr. Foad Abd-Allah from Egypt and Prof. Dr. Dilraj Singh Sokhi from Kenya.

Qaiser, delegation discuss investment potential

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of Hutchison Group, a globally renowned network in port and logistics operations called on Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh on Wednesday and discussed investment potential expansion projects in Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and possibly other strategic ports across the country.

The meeting was attended by Federal Secretary

Maritime Affairs Dr Iram, Chairman Karachi Port Trust (KPT), Chairman Port Qasim Authority and other senior officials of the Ministry. The delegation consisted of senior executives of Hutchison Ports, Regional Head of Hutchison Ports Andy Sui, Country Advisor HP, GM SAPT Unit Chansu Key, GM KICT, Alvin Chu, said a press release.

The proceedings began with welcome remarks by

Federal Minister Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, who emphasized the importance of the visit and mutual commitment to strengthen Pakistan's maritime infrastructure. The minister urged the participants to give concrete shape to the potential projects that would facilitate concrete deliberations for actionable results. He stressed the indispensable role of port development in driving overall economic growth.

Book 'Physics and Cosmology' exploring science, spirituality conduits launched at IPRI

ISLAMABAD (APP): The book on 'Physics and Cosmology' written by former CSP officer Sardar Shaheen was launched on Wednesday here at Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI).

The book talks about creation of the universe in the light of science and philosophical spirituality, and has been published in the United States, a news release said.

Sardar Shaheen, a CSP, worked in the Inland Revenue Service, FBR and he was also appointed as Advisor to Federal Tax Mohtasib. He claims that right from his school days, he was inquisitive about writing about nature, the universe and life.

The book launch was participated by notables of the federal capital and included senior parliamentarian Farhatullah Babar and former Inspector General of Police and Chairman One-man Commission on Minorities' Rights, Dr Shoaib Suddle.

The book is a thoroughly researched work, citing over 800 references, and talks at length about the emergence of the universe, concepts in science as well as ways and beliefs held by different religions.

But the author has exclusively penned it not on the premise of religion but on what science has to say on the creation and sustenance of the universe, and the concept in the unitary of Almighty.

This is why the book frequently quotes the Holy Quran in relevance of thought process, and not as a religio-motivational aspect. It refers to Sufism and the teachings of the holy men and carves out rationality in the limelight of science and practical theories. It did not ever refer to religion as a word or concept, but glued itself to spirituality, per se.

The trend of mysticism in the West, he said, evaluates it from the perspective of Quantum theory, and draws parallels between the East and West based on scientific theories. He exclusively quoted the sermons of Imam Hussain ibn Ali in 'Miratul Arifeen', which go on to establish the origin of the universe and the existence of the Almighty.

He also referred to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who narrated the existence of God in Hadees-e-Qudsi, saying, "HE was

there since time immemorial, and made Himself known as he wanted his Manifestations to be known..."

The book explores the interconnectedness between modern physics and mystical cosmology. It delves into the works of prominent figures such as German philosopher Hegel and Muslim mystic philosopher Ibn al Arabi, highlighting their profound insights into the nature of existence and the universe.

The introductory chapter outlines a chronological journey through key scientific theories like the Big Bang theory, the expansion of the universe, and the formation of galaxies, while also delving into Sufi perspectives on creation and the relationship between humanity and the cosmos.

The text aims to bridge the gap between science, philosophy, and spirituality, offering a thought-provoking exploration of the fundamental questions surrounding human existence and the universe. Through a synthesis of diverse disciplines and perspectives, the book sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the intricate connections between science and spirituality at deeper levels.

Zero tolerance against illegal encroachments. RCB Chief

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Rawalpindi Cantonment Board Ali Irfan Rizvi said that there would be no compromise against illegal encroachments in cantonment areas.

The CEO said this regarding a comprehensive anti-encroachment operation which was carried out in various parts of the cantonment on Wednesday.

All temporary or permanent encroachments outside shops will be removed and strict action will be taken against those obstructing the flow of traffic including pedestrians, he said.

Those creating hurdles for public and traffic will not be tolerated, he added.

Spokesman RCB, Rasheed Saqib informed

that encroachments on footpaths and pedestrian areas were being removed for public convenience.

He informed that a large number of encroachments were removed from footpaths, roads and bazaars during operation carried out by anti-encroachment cell of RCB. Four truckloads of goods were seized in the operation, he said.

EPA organize interactive World Environment Day

RAWALPINDI (APP): Environment Protection Agency organized an awareness interactive session with students regarding World Earth Day celebration. The session was aimed to educate students about the need for environmental protection.

During the session themed "Plastic vs Earth," speakers shed light on prevailing environmental issues, causes and their effects on life. Deputy Director Environment Protection Agency, Maria Safer in her address emphasized the individual responsibility to opt for cloth bags over plastic ones and to choose steel or other environmentally friendly alternatives for food consumption.

She informed that a comprehensive ban has been imposed by the government not only on the sale of plastic bags less than 75

microns but also on various plastic items, including disposables and multi-layer packaging plastic products, under Punjab Single-Use Plastic Products Regulation 2023. Students were informed that all plastic manufacturers, collectors, and recyclers throughout the province were mandated to register with the Punjab Environment Protection and Climate Change Department to ensure accountability and regulation.

Under the directive of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a complete ban on the use of all types of plastic bags and polythene bags will be enforced on June 05 this year, she said.

Besides students, the session was attended by EPA Officials, civil society reps and others.



ISLAMABAD: CDA workers busy in digging the place for plantation in greenbelt along IJP Road.

2,000 Afghan migrants deported

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations states that over 2,000 Afghan migrants have been expelled from Iran. On Wednesday, April 24th, the ministry announced in a statement that a total of 2,783 Afghan migrants returned to the country after being expelled by Iran. According to the statement, these migrants entered Afghanistan through the Islam Qala border crossing on Monday.

Regional meeting in Uzbekistan

KABUL (Ariana News): Hamidullah Akhundzadeh, acting Minister of Transport and Aviation, headed a delegation to Uzbekistan for a 'Six-Party Corridor' meeting that included representatives from Afghanistan, Russia, Belarus, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. On the sidelines of this meeting the Afghanistan delegation discussed trade through the corridor with the other five relevant countries.

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

Afghanistan and Malaysia strengthen ties, paving the way for enhanced cooperation



KABUL (BNA) The country's Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, held a productive meeting with a delegation from the Malaysian government, signaling the deepening relationship between the two nations.

The meeting, which took place during the delegation's visit to Kabul,

emphasized Afghanistan's expanding global relations and its positive rapport with neighboring and regional countries.

Led by Mrs. Shazlina, the representative of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the delegation conveyed a message from Datuk Seri Hishammuddin bin Hajji Hassan, the Malaysian Foreign

Minister, to the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate.

This message highlighted Malaysia's goodwill and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, particularly in the aftermath of the recent earthquake in Herat.

Expressing gratitude for Malaysia's support, Mawlawi Muttaqi acknowledged the growing diplo-

matic, religious, cultural, and economic ties between the two nations. He emphasized Afghanistan's balanced foreign policy and its commitment to strengthening relations with Southeast Asian nations, in addition to fostering closer ties with neighboring countries and the wider region.

During the meeting, the Afghan Minister also called upon the Malaysian government to provide healthcare and educational facilities for the Afghan community residing in Malaysia, which currently consists of around three thousand individuals. In response, members of the Malaysian government delegation expressed their country's keenness to expand relations with Afghanistan across various sectors.

To end Mrs. Dato Doctor Shazlina, representing the Malaysian Prime Minister, portrayed the political situation in Afghanistan positively and expressed hope for an upcoming visit by a Malaysian trade delegation to explore further economic opportunities.

Acting Interior Minister holds key meeting with Russian special envoy for Afghanistan



KABUL (BNA) Alhaj Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Acting Minister of Interior Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, recently held a crucial meeting with Zamir Kamelov, the Special Envoy of the President of Russia for Afghanistan.

The meeting, which took place in an undisclosed location, saw both sides

engage in fruitful discussions pertaining to Afghanistan-Russia relations and regional political and security matters.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued a statement following the meeting, highlighting the key points of discussion.

The talks revolved around the deepening of

bilateral ties between Afghanistan and Russia, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and dialogue in promoting stability and peace in the region.

The discussions on regional political and security issues reflect the shared concerns of Afghanistan and Russia regarding the stability and security of the broader region.

Both parties expressed their commitment to addressing these challenges through collaborative efforts, including intelligence sharing and coordinated strategies.

The meeting also served as a platform for the exchange of perspectives on various issues of mutual interest, including counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and regional stability.

Acting Minister Azizi urges Malaysian investors to invest in Afghanistan

KABUL (BNA): Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, in a meeting with the representative of the Malaysian Prime Minister for Afghanistan, said, we want Malaysian investors to invest in Afghanistan.

According to a statement from this Ministry, Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, the Acting Minister, met with Ms. Shazlina, the representative of the Malaysian Prime Minister, who has come to Kabul as part of a delegation from that country. In the meet-

ing, the two sides discussed bilateral trade, holding a trade communication conference to strengthen trade relations between the two countries, the trade balance between Afghanistan and Malaysia, and creating a market for Afghan prod-

ucts such as carpets, cotton, and minerals. The Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce emphasized increasing investment from regional countries in Afghanistan and also asked Malaysian investors to invest in Afghanistan.

Acting Foreign Minister and Russian special envoy discuss bilateral ties and Doha meeting

KABUL (BNA) Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, met with Zamir Kabulov, the Special Envoy of the President of Russia for Afghanistan, in Kabul today.

The meeting focused on strengthening bilateral ties between Afghanistan and Russia, as well as discussing the upcoming Doha meeting on Afghanistan.

During the meeting, both sides engaged in constructive discussions pertaining to bilateral issues and regional considerations.

Muttaqi expressed appreciation for Russia's supportive stance towards the Islamic Emirate in various regional and international forums.

He called for further enhancement of political and trade relations between the two countries, emphasizing that Afghanistan's relations with regional nations were expanding, with active embassies established in nearly all neighboring countries.

Muttaqi emphasized

that Afghanistan would express its position on the Doha meeting after receiving sufficient clarification regarding its agenda and composition.

Zamir Kabulov, the Special Envoy of the President of Russia, voiced the importance of obtaining the Afghan government's agreement for any meeting

hosted in Afghanistan.

He emphasized that the upcoming Doha meeting required Afghanistan's consent to yield fruitful results.

Kabulov further urged countries to maintain their relations with the Afghan government through bilateral solutions instead of imposing unilateral sanctions. The Special Envoy

of the President of Russia emphasized the need for improved coordination between Afghanistan and Russia and expressed hope that the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan would visit Russia during the current year, thereby strengthening ties between the two nations.



OIC urges lift on Afghan women's education, employment restrictions

KABUL (Khaama Press): The media center announced the meeting between Tariq Ali Bakheet, the special representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the political deputy of the Taliban Prime Minister. They stated that Mr. Bakheet called for the lifting of educational and employment restrictions on women.

According to the report, Mr. Bakheet praised women's achievements in the economic sector during

the meeting and called for removing restrictions on women's education and employment.

The special representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation further added that some Islamic countries have concerns about Afghanistan that need to be discussed closely with the Taliban administration. However, the government media centre has not been reminded about these concerns. According to the media centre's report, the representative of the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation emphasized the value of education for Islamic countries and stated that these countries are ready to cooperate in women's education.

Taliban claim that their leadership's decree regarding "protecting" girls, banning forced marriages of girls, and addressing their inheritance is being implemented.

He also mentioned that female teachers and government employees receive their salaries at home while working in

government offices.

More than two years have passed since the closure of girls' schools and the suspension of education for women in Afghanistan, yet there is no sign of reopening educational institutions.

It is worth mentioning that the global community's important demands for more interaction with the current regime include the reopening of educational institutions and the allowing of women to work in government and non-governmental organizations.

US State Dept pressures Taliban to revoke discriminatory decrees against Afghan women

KABUL (Khaama Press): The U.S. State Department asserts it's pressuring the Taliban alongside allies and partners to rescind discriminatory laws against Afghan women and girls.

It states that any significant steps toward normalizing relations with the Taliban are contingent upon a profound change in their behaviour.

The State Department wrote in its annual report on the status of women in Afghanistan that the Taliban have effectively excluded women from the public sphere with their directives. The report high-

lights widespread violations of women's rights and sexual violence against them. In one section, it mentions that 16 women out of 90 imprisoned women in Jawzjan, Faryab, and Samangan became pregnant after being raped by Taliban members.

According to the report, the Taliban have executed at least four women in Samangan after repeated assaults.

The U.S. State Department added that in response to the Taliban's actions restricting women, in February 2023, it imposed restrictions on visa

issuance for some current and former Taliban officials and individuals involved in suppressing and depriving Afghan women and girls of education and work opportunities in non-governmental organizations.

The department stated that on December 8th of last year, the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on two Taliban members for their involvement in serious human rights violations, including restricting girls' access to secondary education.

According to the department, Khalid Hanafi, the Taliban Minister of Virtue

and Vice, was sanctioned for his involvement in serious human rights violations, including murder, kidnapping, lashing, and beating Afghan citizens, including women and girls.

The department mentioned that Mawlawi Faridudin Mahmood, the head of the Afghanistan Institute of Sciences, was sanctioned for his involvement in serious human rights violations related to regulating, publishing, and enforcing regulations to restrict access for all women and girls in Afghanistan solely based on their gender.



Pak-Iran agree to expand trade ties in diverse fields

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Iran have agreed to further expand their trade and economic cooperation and adopt collaborative approach to fight the menace of terrorism.

This has been stated in a joint statement issued at the culmination of Iranian President Dr. Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Pakistan. According to the joint statement, both the sides affirmed their commitment to transform their common border from 'border of peace' to a 'border of prosperity' through joint development-oriented economic projects, including setting up of joint border markets, economic free zones, and new border openings.

The joint statement reads that leadership of both the countries reiterated the importance of cooperation in the energy domain, including trade in electricity, power transmission lines and IP Gas Pipeline Project. The two sides agreed to boost their bilateral trade to ten billion dollars over the next five years.

Both sides underscored the imperative of a long-term durable economic partnership and collaborative regional economic and connectivity model, particularly for socio-economic development in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan Province and Pakistan's Balochistan Province. The two sides agreed to expeditiously finalize the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and hold the next sessions of Annual Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) and Joint Business Trade Committee (JBTC) as well as the 22nd round of the negotiations of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in the near future.

They also agreed to facilitate regular exchange of economic and technical experts, as well as delegations from Chambers of Commerce from both countries to intensify economic cooperation. The declaration of 'Reemdan border point' as an international border crossing point under TIR and opening of the remaining two border sustenance markets was also agreed. There was consensus to fully operationalize barter trade mechanisms between the two countries to facilitate economic and commercial activity, partic-

ularly under ongoing collaborative endeavours, such as border sustenance markets, which would contribute towards improvement of the economic situation of local residents, and further constitute a step towards enhancing border security.

The joint statement reads that both sides recognized that terrorism posed a common threat to regional peace and stability and presented a major impediment to the development of the region. It was agreed to adopt a collaborative approach to confront this menace and to leverage the existing bilateral institutional mechanisms to effectively combat and counter this threat, while fully upholding the principles of the UN Charter, particularly the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. Both sides highlighted the need to resolve the issue of Kashmir through dialogue and peaceful means based on the will of the people of the region, and in accordance with international law.

They called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access to the besieged people of Gaza, return of the displaced Palestinians, as well as ensuring accountability of the crimes being committed by the Israeli regime. They reiterated their support for a just, comprehensive, and durable solution based on the aspirations of the people of Palestine.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the development of Afghanistan as a peaceful, united, sovereign and independent state, free from the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking. Noting that the existence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to regional and global security, the two sides reaffirmed their willingness to enhance cooperation on counter-terrorism and security and to develop a united front against terrorism. The two sides condemned rising incidents of Islamophobia, desecration of the Holy Quran and sacred symbols in some countries. They also emphasized that advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence must not be allowed under the pretext of freedom of expression.

Israel, Ukraine granted billions as Biden signs bill

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Ukraine and Israel were granted massive financial relief after months of heated negotiation in Congress amid their respective wars as US President Joe Biden signed four bills that also included a military assistance package to Kyiv and Tel Aviv Wednesday.

The package was passed Tuesday by the US Senate and is cumulatively estimated at \$95 billion with \$61 billion for Ukraine, \$26 billion for Israel, and \$8 billion for the Indo-Pacific. "It gives vital support to America's partners so they can defend themselves from threats to their sovereignty," President Biden said, adding that the "flow of weapons to Ukraine would commence in the next few hours".

"They're a fighting force with the will and the skill to win," the commander-in-chief said referring to Ukraine and criticised Donald Trump's supporting legislators who tried to block the aid. The bills — which were signed by the President into law — also included the banning of the social media platform

Israel says it is poised to move on Rafah

JERUSALEM (Reuters): Israel's military is poised to evacuate Palestinian civilians from Rafah and assault Hamas hold-outs in the southern Gaza Strip city, a senior Israeli defense official said on Wednesday, despite international warnings of humanitarian catastrophe. A spokesperson for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government said Israel was "moving ahead" with a ground operation, but gave no timeline.

The defense official said Israel's Defense Ministry had bought 40,000 tents, each with the capacity for 10 to 12 people, to house Palestinians relocated from Rafah in advance of an assault. Video circulating online appeared to show rows of square white tents going up in Khan Younis, a city some 5 km (3 miles) from Rafah. Reuters could not verify the video but reviewed images from satellite company Maxar Technologies which showed tent camps on Khan Younis land that had been vacant weeks ago.

TikTok. After the law, the Byte-Dance-owned video-sharing application would be getting a nine-month window to sell its stakes in the US or face a complete ban.

The aid package for Ukraine did not come easy as President Volodymyr Zelensky rigorously lobbied causing a split in the House of Representatives, jeopardising the position of House Speaker Mike Johnson. Johnson met with

Donald Trump in Florida earlier in April where the former president said Johnson was "doing a really good job."

Several members of the House did not back the aid package to Ukraine and the way Johnson led the discussions on the matter. Legislators in Congress believe that it is an unwinnable war that started in February 2022 by the special military operation of Russia.

Media playing role of fourth pillar: Tarar

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Wednesday said media in the country was playing the role of fourth pillar of democracy.

In a meeting with a delegation of Karachi Press Club here at the Governor House, he said the government supported the freedom of media in the country. Tarar said incumbent government soon after assuming office took steps to clear outstanding dues of the media houses with the aim to provide much-needed relief to journalists and media workers.

The meeting discussed various matters pertaining to the welfare of journalists and media workers. Responding to their invitation, the minister assured the KPC office-bearers that he would visit the club soon to address their concerns directly. KPC President Saeed Sarbazi underscored the Karachi Press Club's significance saying that it was one of the country's largest clubs with a rich history of working for flourishing democracy.

The KPC president and General Secretary Shoaib Khan apprised the minister of the challenges and problems being faced by the workers of both print and electronic media. The minister handed over the cheque of Rs one million to KPC President Saeed Sarbazi at the Sindh Governor House.

Raisi wraps up visit to Pakistan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi wrapped up a three-day visit to Pakistan on Wednesday. During his visit to Pakistan, the Iranian president held meetings with the leadership of the country. He also paid a visit to the mausoleums of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah and Governor Kamran Khan Tessori bid goodbye to President Raisi at Karachi airport. The Iranian president also held meetings with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Syed Asim Munir, President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

Both countries had decided to increase the trade volume to \$10 billion. The Iranian president underlined the importance of the historical and religious ties between the two countries. "People of both countries would like to join hands for the sake of peace and prosperity in the region," President Raisi said. He said: "It is in the interest of the people of both countries to boost bilateral trade." "The closer ties will also pave the way for fostering the economic relationship between the two countries," the Iranian president maintained.

IHC reserves verdict on plea of Sh Rashid

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad high court (IHC) has reserved verdict on plea of former federal minister Sheikh Rashid regarding the dismissal of case on Wednesday.

According to the details, justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri heard the registered cases against Sheikh Rashid on one allegation in Islamabad and other cities. Sheikh Rashid appeared with his lawyer Sardar Abd-ur-Razaq and along with Sardar Shehbaz before the court. Justice Tariq Jahangiri inquired that the court had asked the report from police. Has the report come?

State council said that the report has come and submitted in the court. On which the court questioned that are the inappropriate words included in first initiative report (FIR).

The state council read the registered FIR on the court's direction. The court said that who is from Balochistan? In the last hearing it was stated to dismiss. Who is the plaintiff in it? There are no such inappropriate words in FIR.



ISLAMABAD: President of International Islamic University, Prof. Dr. Hathal bin Hamoud Al-Otaibi and Rector IIUI, Dr. Samina Malik called on President Asif Ali Zardari.

KP cabinet approve procurement of 600,000 metric tons of wheat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet which met under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur took several decisions about energy production, education, food security, procurement of wheat, and sustainable development and issues related to the day-to-day affairs of the Province.

The cabinet approved the rehabilitation and restoration of the 17-megawatt (MW) Ranolia Hydropower Project in Kohistan Lower. The Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) had already approved the project at a cost of Rs.8.1 billion with the condition that the same will be processed for the approval of the provincial cabinet for inclusion as non-ADP scheme. The cabinet approved its inclusion as non-ADP scheme and its financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank.

The cabinet also approved the acquisition of 327 kanal land for 88 MW Gabral Kalam Hydropower project being financed by the World Bank in District Swat. The provision of the revision already existed in the approved PC-1 of the project. On commissioning the project is expected to generate over Rs.7.4 billion incomes per year for the Province.

It also approved the additional compensation in respect of land and built-up property based on an independent valuation study for executing the 300 MW Balakot Hydropower project on Kunhar River Manshera. The enhancement of this compensation (Rs. 286.362 million) is in line with the recommendations of the consultant (M/S Anderson Consulting Services), the welfare of the people of the area, and ensuring a friendly environment for engineers and workers at the project site. It has been estimated that once commissioned this amount will be recovered within four days from the income generated from this project.

The cabinet approved the shifting of manual registration books to automated motor vehicle registration smart cards. The Excise and Taxation Department had already signed MOU with the National Security Printing

Company (NSPC) of the Federal Government for the provision of registration certificates and supply of smart cards in 2022. The rates of such registration and cards will be Rs. 574/- as compared to Rs. 1475/- of Islamabad, Rs.530/- Punjab and Rs. 1600/- Sindh.

The cabinet also approved the utilization of the funds of the defunct FATA Development Authority amounting to Rs. 500 million and the Rs. 43 million accumulated mark up over it under the accelerated implementation program in the merged districts. Small enterprises will be microfinance on an interest-free basis (Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance) from this revolving fund in the merged districts.

It also approved the acquisition of over 34 kanal land for the construction of the Judicial Complex at Panah Kot Upper Dir. The cabinet approved the enactment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Registration of Godown Rules 2022 as required by the KP Godown Registration Act 2021. The Act provides for the registration and regulation of Godowns ensuring a comprehensive system regarding the stable supply and availability of goods and for matters connected therewith.

The cabinet approved the provision of free and quality education from class 7th to 12th for talented students of government schools of the Province in Quality Education Institutions of the Province. On the proposal of the Chief Minister, the cabinet decided to double both the amount of monthly scholarship and the number of such talented but poor beneficiary students of the scheme from the next academic year. The cabinet also directed to ensure no student is left without education because of the nonavailability of textbooks and related facilities. It also directed that a study be conducted to compare the quality and cost of the textbooks published by the government and private sector. The utilization of old textbooks was also approved in the larger interest of the people of the Province.

The cabinet conditionally approved the proposal of establishing the National Industrial Development and Regulatory Authority (NIDRA)

as required under the constitution to enable the Federal Government to unify all the entities like Economic Zones - Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Tax Free Zones, Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs), Special Technology Zones (STZs) and Expert Processing Zones (EPZs).

It is worth mentioning that a working group set up by Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) for SEZs chaired by Chairman Privatization Commission had proposed the unification of all the above entities. However, such unification will as per the constitution require the provincial government's approval and entrusting its authority unconditionally to the Federal Government. After this approval, the aforementioned NIDRA will under the executive and legislative authority assume all roles to the extent of zones, required to establish, regulate, develop, operate, and manage them under the NIDRA law. All roles of federal entities will be shifted to NIDRA as per the provisions of its Law. Though almost all the above entities have been originally established under federal legislation but the present approval was given with the express condition that "the incentives extended under SEZ, EPZ, & STZA shall be brought under the umbrella of a single organization to facilitate investors. The operations, management & administrative control of the zones and industrial estate should remain with provinces for better facilitation of investors."

After a threadbare discussion, the cabinet approved the procurement of 600,000 Metric tons of wheat for the current year. The rate of 40 kg wheat was fixed as Rs.3900/- just like the rate of the Federal, Punjab and Baluchistan Governments. The cabinet strictly directed the concerned authorities that both the quality and quantity of the wheat so procured plus transparency at every step of the process be ensured. It was also decided that the interest of the local growers should be protected at all costs. For this purpose, a comprehensive work plan and SoPs starting from the district level to the divisional and provincial levels were also chalked out and approved.

ECP 'slaps objections on PTI intra-party elections'

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The recently held intra-party elections of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have once again been questioned by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), sources said on Wednesday.

The electoral authority has sent a notice to the former ruling party over alleged irregularities in the intra-party polls conducted on March 3, according to the sources. The Political Financing Wing of the ECP has asked PTI representatives to appear before the electoral watchdog on April 30. This is the third time that the poll organising authority has taken exception to the beleaguered party's internal elections.

The PTI filed the documents related to its intra-party polls to the ECP on March 4. The documents, submitted by PTI's Federal Election Commissioner Raouf Hasan, included details of the newly-elected party office-bearers, a certificate of the party chief

containing Form 65, names of the core committee members, and other relevant records. The party, which elected Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Omar Ayub as its chairman and secretary general on March 3, needs the relevant certificate to qualify for the allocation of its electoral symbol "bat" by the electoral body.

After being kicked out of the election race following the Supreme Court's verdict upholding the ECP's decision wherein the electoral body had revoked its "bat" symbol citing unlawful intra-party polls, the PTI conducted fresh polls last week. However, the recent intra-party polls have been once again challenged by PTI's founding member Akbar S Babar who had filed two separate pleas with the electoral body seeking annulment of the intra-party elections.

According to the Election Act (2017) all registered political parties in Pakistan must hold intra-party elections as outlined

in their constitution within a specific timeframe. The PTI, which had held its last intra-party elections in June 2016 — with the next one to be held on or before 13 June 2021 — failed to comply on time, citing the COVID-19 pandemic. The ECP warned the party to respond to the notices sent by the commission or lose its iconic electoral symbol.

The PTI held its intra-party elections twice, but the ECP raised objections and determined that the elections were not held according to the party's constitution. The party conducted its elections on June 8, 2022, but the ECP rejected the polls for the lack of a formal certificate for the same. The ECP in November 23, 2023 ordered PTI to conduct its intra-party elections within 20 days or it would be stripped of its electoral symbol. In response, PTI held its intra-party election again on December 2, 2023, which was also turned down by the electoral watchdog.

Royal' Saudi woman goes missing

ISLAMABAD (INP): A Saudi woman, reportedly linked with the royal family, has gone missing in Pakistan and the authorities have registered a kidnapping case against a man from the Lower Dir district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to the contents of the FIR and the family sources of the man.

The whereabouts of the man, identified as Abul Wahid in the FIR, also remain unknown. He has been booked under Section 365B of the Pakistan Penal Code (Kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel for marriage). Senior officials in the province are extremely concerned at the development because it involves a high-profile Saudi individual.

Pakistan has close economic ties with the Gulf nation which is second home to over two million Pakistanis working in the country. Sources told that the woman's alleged connection to the royal family is a cause of concern for the Pakistani authorities. The FIR was filed by a Saudi diplomat using an online FIR registration system at the Margalla Police Station in Islamabad.

It said Abdul Wahid Shahid Khan had kidnapped a Saudi citizen Hannan Abdullah Al-Bashir from Sector F-8 in Islamabad. The Islamabad DIG Operations is requested to arrest the accused to recover the kidnapee and punish the accused, the FIR said. The complainant Badar Al Haribi also provided the passport numbers of both Wahid and Hanan.

The Lower Dir acting District Police Officer (DPO) told that the woman was a 37-year-old bank officer while the accused, a 22-year-old, was serving with her as a driver.