

Lightning kills three
F.P. Report
MANSEHRA: Three including a child were killed when lightning struck Katalo Kerry area of Oghi on Friday, rescue sources said. According to details, heavy rain followed by hail-storm lashed different areas and lightning fell over three people As a result, Muhammad Shafique 28, Ahmed Umer 40, and 10-year-old Shakeel Umer were killed.

Govt extends stay of registered Afghan refugees until June 30

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The government has extended the validity of the Afghan refugees' Proof of Registration Cards (PoRs) that expired on April 1, 2024, to June 30, 2024, to facilitate those who have yet not left Pakistan voluntarily as it presses ahead with its push to boot out illegal foreigners, a statement said on Friday.

A decision to this effect was taken in the federal cabinet meeting held at the PM House under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The cabinet was told that this extension would enable the PoR cardholders to have access to schools, bank accounts, and other facilities during their stay in Pakistan.

It must be noted that these PoR cardholders will be forcibly sent back to their country in the third phase of the programme of repatriation of illegal foreign nationals living in Pakistan for ages. Pakistan has

expelled over half a million undocumented refugees in the repatriation programme's first phase from November 1 till date. The second phase was aimed at driving out refugees holding Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC).

The ACCs were provided by the Pakistan government to Afghan refugees in 2017, after processing and registering them with Pakistan's National Database and Regulation Authority (NADRA). On the advice of the Ministry of Law and Justice, the federal cabinet approved the establishment of an additional special court in Makran Division to deal with anti-narcotics cases in Balochistan province.

The jurisdiction of this special court will be extended to the districts of Panjgur, Kech, Gwadar, Hub and Lasbela. The cabinet also directed the authorities to appoint the best judge in the special court and ensure effective prosecution. Moreover, during

the meeting, the Federal Secretary for the Interior briefed the cabinet on the progress of the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) operations.

The Secretary of Aviation, filled in the meeting on the recent measures taken to improve the facilities at Pakistan's airports, particularly Lahore and Karachi. The meeting was informed that the service counters at the airports had been increased and the facilities were being upgraded.

The meeting was told that the advertisements inviting expressions of interest were published in national and international newspapers on April 2, with the last date being May 3, and so far several companies had expressed keen interest in PIA. The meeting also gave the go-ahead to the appointments of four ex-officio members of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants (ICMA) and approved the decisions taken by the Cabinet Committee on Legislative Cases on April 18, 2024.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing meeting of federal cabinet.

KP appoints Sonia as first woman AIG police



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sonia Shamroz, known for being the only Muslim woman to win the International Association of Women Police Award, has made history again.

She has been appointed as the Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) Establishment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, becoming the first woman to hold this position. Originally from Abbottabad district, Sonia Shamroz has worked in different roles, including as DPO Chitral and DPO Battagram. She joined the police service in 2013 and has served as ASP and DPO in various districts.

Sharing her thoughts on this achievement, Sonia Shamroz talked about the important responsibilities that female officers now have in the province. She mentioned how women are being given equal rights compared to men in the police force. She also emphasised the importance of choosing people for positions based on their skills and qualifications rather than personal recommendations.

CPPA seeks another electricity tariff hike

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) today sought a Rs2.94/unit hike in electricity tariff in terms of monthly fuel charge adjustment (FCA) for March 2024.

Electricity consumers are expected to bear another massive hike in tariffs in the coming days. The CPPA submitted a plea to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) to approve a Rs2.94/unit hike in electricity tariff for March FCA. The NEPRA's approval would increase the financial burden worth Rs22.80 billion on the power consumers. According to the CPPA, over 7 billion units were sold to consumers in March 2024. The recent hike includes adjustments of over Rs7 billion.

In February, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) notified a massive hike of Rs7.5 per unit in the price of electricity as part of the fuel price adjustment (FCA). According to NEPRA notification, the power sector's regulatory authority approved increase in the electricity tariff by Rs7.5 per kilowatt hour (kWh) under the head FCA of January 2024 and this hike in power tariff was charged to power consumers during the month of March 2024. The hike in the power tariff caused the Rs66 billion worth of additional burden on the already burdened power consumers.

Pak in contact with US on energy requirements: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Friday said Pakistan was in contact with the United States regarding the country's requirements for energy.

Addressing her weekly media briefing in Islamabad, the spokesperson said she had seen the US's statement on Pakistan's willingness to get energy from Iran. "We advise anyone considering business deals with Iran to be aware of the potential risk of sanctions," the spokesperson said.

Baloch, on the other hand, maintained that cooperation for trade on preferential basis was present between Pakistan and Iran to fulfil the former's crucial necessities. She said during President Raisi's three-day visit, the matter of Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline was discussed and it was also reflected in the joint statement later. Both countries cogitated about energy and electricity trade, she

added.

The FO's statement came a day after the US State Department had hinted at the risk of sanctions in light of the business deals between both nations. Baloch also said that talks with Iran on free trade agreement were underway. "We think that controlling export has become political," she said.

The FO spokesperson said Pakistan discussed about the trade route between Gwadar and Chabahar ports with the Iranian president. She said the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran were strong.

On Israel's atrocities in Palestine, Baloch said Pakistan condemned Israel's barbarism in Palestine and sought international investigation of Palestinians' ethnic cleansing by the apartheid state. She said Pakistan and Iran had the same stance on the issue of Gaza and Kashmir. She rubbished the "2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices" issued by the

US State Department. She said a suitable procedure was not adopted in preparation of the report.

During the presser, Baloch also informed journalists that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will be attending the World Economic Forum Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from April 28 to 29. The prime minister will be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to participate in the high-level forum where they will present Pakistan's priorities specifically in global health architecture, inclusive growth, revitalising regional collaboration and the need for striking a balance between promoting growth and energy consumption.

On the margins of the main event, both the premier and Dar will also hold bilateral meetings with world leaders, heads of international organisations bodies and other leading personalities participating in the event.

CM says no compromise on legitimate rights of KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of the Climate Change Council was held at Islamabad on Friday with Prime Minister in the chair. Chief Ministers of the provinces also attended the meeting via video link.

Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, while protesting against the injustice and unfair attitude of incumbent federal government towards Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has reiterated his commitment not to compromise on the legitimate rights of the province and made it clear that we will go all out to ensure protection of our resources and rights of the people.

He said that the federal government wants to take control of the carbon credit of the province, which is the right and asset of the province; we cannot allow anyone else to take it over. He maintained that 45 percent of the country's forests is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and similarly 50 percent of the country's total carbon

credit is generated by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which is the right of the people of this province; we will never let anyone else to usurp it.

Ali Amin Gandapur further clarified that 80 percent of the forests in the province are under private ownership of the people, so it is his responsibility to ensure the protection of the rights of his people. By obstructing the appointment of the new chief secretary to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, if the federal government thinks that we will give up our constitutional rights, then it is just their delusion.

He also asked the federation to make payment of the arrears of the province as early as possible and expressed his concerns that raids are being conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the issue of electricity and FIRs are being filed against consumers, adding that it would be much better for them to sit down and discuss this matter with us; we want to know clearly how much is the province's

deficit in terms of electricity. "We want to give relief to our people through deduction in our arrears owed to the federation, but in return, load shedding in the province and injustice to the people should be stopped once and for all", he remarked.

The Chief Minister further said that the federal government receives a tax of Rs.300 billion per annum on tobacco being produced in the province. This tax is also the right of the province and province should have the right to receive this.

However, we will definitely provide the legitimate share of the federation, but we cannot let them to usurp the money of the people in that way, he stated. We should be taken into confidence in all these matters and the way forward must be decided through mutual discussion on the issues regarding constitutional rights of the province and "Nadir Shahi" order should not be imposed on us, he concluded.

Nawaz set to lead PML-N again, reveals Rana Sana

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is set take the reins of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz once again, former interior minister Rana Sanaullah announced on Friday. His declaration followed a crucial meeting of the PML-N Punjab chapter where party members and office-bearers unanimously passed a resolution to make Nawaz Sharif the president of the PML-N.

"Mian Nawaz Sharif ceased to be the president of the PML-N as the result of a controversial judicial order. All obstacles of suppression are over and he stands vindicated. The PML-N will move forward under his leadership," Sanaullah asserted during a media interaction. "Mian

Nawaz Sharif has been requested to reassume the charge of the PML-N."

Sanaullah said that the former prime minister had been forcibly separated from the party in 2017. He said that while [incumbent PML-N president] Shehbaz Sharif was attempting to rescue the country from economic crises day and night, Nawaz Sharif assuming the leadership role within the party would help overcome shortcomings and weaknesses.

Sanaullah, who was flanked by party leaders Javed Latif and Khurram Dastgir, said that the PML-N was a democratic and political party, adding that "there's no hindrance in expressing opinions within the PML-N". He further said that the PML-N would present its political mani-

fest to the people of Pakistan in next few weeks.

Sanaullah remarked that a leader's position was one of dignity and respect, and the operational leadership in the PML-N belongs to the president. Sanaullah said that Shehbaz Sharif carried out every task with Nawaz Sharif's permission. He mentioned that Maryam Nawaz was making efforts to win the hearts of the people of Punjab.

Earlier, PML-N leaders and office-bearers passed a resolution, wherein the party expressed full confidence in the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. The resolution details that Nawaz Sharif was disqualified under a conspiracy in 2017 and was forcibly deprived of the presidency of the PML-N.

PTI Senator puts forward conditions for talks with govt

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Opposition Leader in the Senate, Shibli Faraz on Friday said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is ready for conditional talks with Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) led coalition government.

In an informal conversation with media, Shibli Faraz expressed his willingness to engage in dialogue with anyone including federal government for the betterment of Pakistan, but only if the government creates a conducive environment for talks.

He emphasized that political cases must be withdrawn, and the rule of law and constitution must be upheld, demanding the release of PTI founder Imran Khan, women, and political prisoners, however, he stressed that legal cases should be pursued if they are genuine. The PTI senator further added that the government must allow political freedom and stop political victimization.

The opposition leader said that PTI held intra-party elections for the third time, but objections were raised on the party polls again. He warned that political stability cannot be achieved in such environment. Faraz lamented that there are differences and conflicting views even within the Pakistan Muslim League (N). He specifically mentioned Rana Sanaullah, who he claimed was speaking differently than others. Furthermore, Shibli Faraz emphasized that the uncertain situation regarding the PAC (Public Accounts Committee) chairmanship would soon be resolved.

PTI founder's interim bail extended

F.P. Report

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Friday extended the interim bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder and former prime minister Imran Khan in three cases including Jinnah House attack case till May 3.

As per details, the ATC duty judge Arshad Javed heard the interim bail pleas pertaining to attack on Jinnah House and three others. The court also ordered to mark the attendance of former prime minister Imran Khan in the three cases via video link from Adiala jail.

Its worth mentioning here that LHC was informed earlier, Punjab government allocated seven cells for convicted PTI founder Imran Khan in Adiala Jail, while 14 security personnel have been appointed for his security. "An accommodation of six cells had been made for Imran Khan in addition to his cell to ensure proper security for him," AGP Punjab Khalid Ishaq told the court.

Elements involved in graft to be held accountable: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said that the elements involved in the deep-rooted menace of corruption and criminal negligence for denting the national economy would be held accountable.

Referring to the track and trace system agreement made in 2019, the prime minister said this system was nothing but a cruel joke to the nation as no improvement was seen in the sectors of tobacco, cement, sugar and fertilizer. He said the agreement was totally a fraud as even no penalty clause was included in it.

Chairing a meeting of the Cabinet at the PM House, he said that he had ordered to form an inquiry committee in this regard that will present its report within 72 hours. As regards the macroeconomic indicators, the prime minister expressed satisfaction over the collective performance of both incumbent and the interim governments. He said according to a recently published report on Pakistan economy, many indicators including IT export, remittances, capital market were showing positive results due to the prudent policies of the government.

However, he maintained that lot of work needed to be done. The government will perform 'major surgical operation' to get rid of the deep-rooted flaws in the country's economy, he added. PM Shehbaz Sharif informed that he completed the power sector review in four phases in which important decisions were taken to minimize power theft and line losses, and to reduce prices of the electricity. Besides, he said the government had also decided in principle to divest the Distribution Companies (DISCOs).

He said the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had old and obsolete systems which needed to be replaced to increase the tax to GDP ratio. He pointed out that the FBR had the potential to earn extra revenues worth hundreds of billions of rupees by implementing reforms in its system. "We have to take tough decision in larger interest of the country and we will fully monitor the implementation phase," the prime minister remarked. As regards, privatization of the State Owned Entities (SOEs), the prime minister assured that the process would be done without delay and in a transparent manner.

PM directs formation of committee for consultation with provinces on carbon credits policy: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed formation of a committee for consultation with the provinces for policy making on guiding principles for carbon credits.

He was chairing the third meeting of Pakistan Council for Climate Change. The federal and provincial governments would work together for making policies regarding climate change, he said. "Our challenges regarding climate change are increasing with every passing day," he said, adding without the consultation of provinces, there was no question of policy making of any kind on the issue.

The participants discussed in detail policy guidelines for foreign trading in carbon credits. He instructed that a policy draft should be presented in the next meeting of the Council after consultation with the provinces. The chief ministers of the four provinces expressed their viewpoint regarding policy making and gave recommendations.

The prime minister directed that the provinces and other stakeholders should be taken into confidence regarding the important policy draft on climate change. He said Pakistan was one of the countries badly suffered from the adverse effects of climate change. It was gravely affected by the rains in 2022 and the floods caused by them.

As a servant of Pakistan, he said, he worked for the relief and rehabilitation of the flood affectees and fought the case of Pakistan all across the world regarding climate change. He said Ahsan Iqbal and Sherry Rehman and all the relevant institutions and ministries took important steps to take Pakistan out of that difficult time and to build infrastructure in the country regarding climate change.

He said he and the Pakistani nation were thankful to the friendly countries and the international community particularly Secretary General of the United Nations for coming to the aid of affected Pakistanis. Federal ministers including Ishaq Dar, Ahad Cheema, Muhammad Aurangzeb and Sardar Awaish Khan Leghari, Coordinator of Prime Minister on Climate Change Romina Khurshid Alam, high level officers and experts from the public and private sectors attended the meeting. The Azad Jammu & Kashmir prime minister and the chief ministers of provinces, including Gilgit Baltistan, attended the meeting through video link.

Nation united against country's enemies: COAS



F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) Conference was held on Friday in which Federal Minister for Planning and Development Mr. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for National Food Security Mr. Rana Tanveer Hussain and General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) graced the occasion. Civil and military officials, involved in the national undertaking also attended the conference.

The forum was briefed about the multi-faceted GPI

initiatives and significant benchmarks achieved in a short span of time. The initiatives presented before the forum included, inter alia, establishment of model farms, water management schemes, technology innovations and investment partnerships aimed at ensuring food security and enhancing agricultural productivity in Pakistan.

The Federal Ministers, while concluding the session lauded this transformative initiative and underscored that agriculture is the lifeline of Pakistan. They hoped that GPI would introduce con-

temporary best practices in Pakistan's agriculture sector. While addressing the conference, COAS remarked that "Pakistan is a blessed land with an industrious and resilient nation which needs to come together for national development".

COAS assured that "Pakistan Army will continue to provide all possible support for the economic development of Pakistan and underscored that the Army's efforts would contribute towards comprehensive national security and collective good of the nation".



Lahore police conducted 1,213 search & combing operations this year

LAHORE (APP): Lahore police conducted 1,213 search and combing operations so far this year to ensure peace and security.

The Lahore police spokesperson said on Friday that during these search operations, 33,047 houses, 16,121 tenants, and 115,522 individuals were checked. Under the Tenancy Act, actions have been taken against 286 individuals. During the operations, 85 proclaimed offenders were apprehended, 21 drug cases registered, and 44 individuals taken into custody under the 55/109 CrPC.

The spokesperson further mentioned that 52 cases of illegal weapons and 9 of gambling had also been registered. The record of individuals was checked at 30 hotels, 74 hostels, 65 factories, and 1,837 shops during the search operations.

Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana said that the series of search and combing operations are ongoing. He directed police teams to increase patrolling in sensitive areas and supervise officers to oversee the operations.

The CCPO added that search operations will be conducted around cricket stadiums and residential areas of international cricketers on a daily basis. He issued directions to curb gambling, illegal weapons, street crime and apprehend individuals involved in committing crimes in accordance with the zero-tolerance policy.

11 dead, 1295 injured in road accidents

LAHORE (APP): Eleven people were killed and 1295 injured in 1236 Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours. Out of these, 564 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 731 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams thus reducing the burden of hospitals.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that 736 drivers, 51 underage drivers, 160 pedestrians, and 410 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes.

The statistics show that 252 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 260 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by 85 in Multan with 79 victims and at third Faisalabad with 82 RTCs and 90 victims.

Keamari police bust major gutka smuggling attempt

KARACHI (APP): The District Keamari Police on Friday successfully thwarted a nefarious attempt to smuggle over 18 mounds of hazardous Gutka/Mawa and betel nuts in the Mochohko area.

According to SSP Keamari, the police operation unfolded, culminating in the seizure of a vehicle laden with contraband, while the perpetrators managed to evade arrest.

In a swift and decisive action, police officials confiscated the vehicle and its illicit cargo.

Name correction

My father correct name is Muhammad Tariq while mistakenly written in my documents as M Tariq please make the required correction in it. Madiha Sonam D/o of Muhammad Tariq.

Clamp down on tax evaders and drug dealers: Sharjeel



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has decided to clamp down on tax evaders and drug dealers, and to publish the names of tax evaders in newspapers.

A high-level meeting was convened in Karachi under the chairmanship of Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon. Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control Secretary Saleem Rajpoot, DG Aurangzeb Panhwar, directors, and other officers were present at the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, Provincial Minister

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that tax evaders pose a threat to the country's prosperity and will face consequences. He declared that the names of tax evaders will be publicly disclosed in newspapers, and their accounts will be frozen, with further actions to be taken against them.

During the meeting, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon commended the ongoing efforts to combat drug dealers throughout the province. He instructed authorities to intensify the crackdown and praised the officers who demonstrated exceptional performance during the operation.

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that drug ped-

dlers pose a threat to the future of the country and its people. He stressed that no leniency will be granted to them, and urged for sustained actions against drug peddlers throughout the province under the zero-tolerance policy.

He mentioned that competent police officers and personnel will be seconded to the Excise Department for operations against drug dealers and tax evaders. Initially, officers from Karachi and Hyderabad will be seconded to the Excise Department.

He emphasized the need to intensify operations against drugs, with ongoing cooperation from relevant institutions. He directed the concerned authorities to bolster the prosecution and investigation of drug dealers.

In the meeting, it was also decided to award prizes to the best-performing officers and informers. Additionally, a proposal was made to implement biometric registration and transfer of vehicles. Measures were also decided upon to address the complaints of all stakeholders related to the Excise Department.

‘Need to develop definitive accounts of novel economic technologies

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: 'We must develop definitive accounts of novel economic technologies.' This was the core message of a book launch for the edited volume titled 'Non-Fungible Tokens: Multidisciplinary Perspectives', held at the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad.

Dr Usman W. Chohan, Advisor for Economic Affairs and National Development, CASS, and the book's editor, presented the key findings of the edited volume, and urged all stakeholders in Pakistani society to be aware of emerging economic technologies for Pakistan's development. Focused on the blockchain-based technology known as Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs), the edited volume brought together 14 renowned authors from 10 countries spanning 8 academic disciplines, including economics, technology, mathematics,

law, and sociology, among others.

Dr Chohan's presentation was accompanied by remarks from contributors to the edited volume Dr Hong Bao (China), Alesha Serada (Finland), Drs. Thapeli Matima & Nyane Mofokeng (South Africa), and Dr Carlos Yebra López (Spain). The speakers covered key aspects relating to the economics, technology, semiotics, and sociology of NFTs as contained in their chapters.

Senior Director Air Marshal Farooq Habib (Retd) congratulated Dr

Chohan on this seventh book at CASS and emphasised the role of innovation and technology in economic development. He urged young researchers to remain abreast of economic technologies and to make contributions to their advancement. Given the scope and detail covered in the collective research endeavour, he lauded the comprehensiveness of the book and expressed hope that the edited volume would serve as the definitive account of NFTs internationally for many years to come.



LESCO detects 74,621 power pilferers in 220 days

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) detected a total of 74,621 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) in 220 days of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told the media here Thursday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 71,165 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 30,015 accused have been arrested. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 90,277,640 detection units worth Rs 3,361,854,942 to all the power pilferers.

Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted

on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice.

The spokesman added, the LESCO found 313 customers stealing electricity through various means and 124 cases have been registered against the accused, while five accused were arrested during the last 24 hours. On the 220th consec-

utive day of the anti-power theft campaign, he mentioned that large commercial consumers were found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units.

Among the seized connections, he explained, 07 were commercial, 02 agricultural, 01 industrial and 303 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 316,062 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 6.621 million. Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he mentioned that LESCO charged Rs 300,000 detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Kahna area.

UNIVERSITY OF PESHAWAR CORRIGENDUM – CANCELLATION OF TENDER NOTICE

Invitation to Bid for Civil Work at the Business Incubation Center & Central Library, University of Peshawar (ITB No.32/UoP/MP-IV/CW)

Reference subject Invitation to Bid, it is for the information of all concerned that the Invitation to Bid for the Civil Work at Business Incubation Center & Central Library, University of Peshawar (ITB No. 32/UoP/MP-IV/CW) is cancelled.

Project Director

Strengthening of Academic and Professional Facilities at University of Peshawar; Email: mp4@uop.edu.pk
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LAHORE: A beautiful view of historical Shalamar Bagh in the Provincial Capital.

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT.

(Single Stage Two Envelop E-Bidding System)

C&W Department (Division, District Battagram), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites Electronics Bids from the eligible firms / bidders in accordance with KPRA procurement rules 2014 on single stage two envelope procedure for the following works.

S#	Name of Work	Required Category of PEC	Bid Security (Rs)	Period of Completion	Last date Date and time of submission of E-Bids.	Date & time of Opening of Technical Proposals	Date & time of opening of Financial bids
I- CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL CLASS ROOM, WASH FACILITY, DRINKING WATER FACILITY IN 10 LAGGING DISTRICT, DISTRICT BATTAGRAM, UNDER ACTION TO STRENGTHEN PERFORMANCE FOR INCLUSIVE & RESPONSIVE EDUCATION (ASPIRE) SUB HEAD: CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL CLASS ROOM IN HIGHER SECONDARY, HIGH & MIDDLE (BOYS) SCHOOLS UNDER ASPIRE PROGRAM KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA FOR THE YEAR 2023-2024 SUB HEAD:-							
1	i GCMHS BATTAGRAM (2-ROOMS) =9.811 ii GHS BATTAMORI (1-ROOMS) =3.943 iii GHS SHALAI (1-ROOMS) =3.966 iv GHSS KUZABANDA (2-ROOMS) =9.846 v GHSS THAKOT (2-ROOMS) =9.775	C-5	0.747 (M)	12 Twelve Months	22-05-2024 At 12:00 hours	On same day at 12:30 hours	After approval of Technical Bid
2	i GHS BANNA (2-ROOMS) =9.775 ii GHS HUTHEL BATKOOL (1-ROOMS) =3.943 iii GHS BATTANGI PASHTO (1-ROOMS) =4.381 iv GHS BIARI (1-ROOMS) =3.943 v GHS KANNAI (1-ROOMS) =3.999 vi GHS KARG (1-ROOMS) =3.943 vii GMS RABAT (1-ROOMS) =3.944 viii GHSS TAILOUS (1-ROOMS) =3.943	C-5	0.757 (M)	12 Twelve Months	22-05-2024 At 12:00 hours	On same day at 12:30 hours	After approval of Technical Bid
II- CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL CLASS ROOM, WASH FACILITY DRINKING WATER FACILITY IN 10 LAGGING DISTRICT, DISTRICT BATTAGRAM UNDER ACTION TO STRENGTHEN PERFORMANCE FOR INCLUSIVE & RESPONSIVE EDUCATION (ASPIRE) SUB HEAD:- CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL CLASS ROOM, WASH FACILITY DRINKING WATER FACILITY UNDER ASPIRE PROGRAM KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA FO RTHE YEAR 2023-2024 SUB HEAD:-							
1	i GHSS TIKRI KHARAI (2-ROOMS) =9.775 WASH FACILITY=0.828 TOTAL =10.604 ii GHSS BATTAGRAM (2-ROOMS) =9.775 iii GMS KARWAR (1-ROOMS) =3.943 DRINKING WATER FACILITY =1.392 TOTAL =5.335 iv GMS PORA (1-ROOMS) =4.013 v GMS MUHALA BAL DRINKING WATER FACILITY =1.392 vi GMS GUBORI (1-ROOMS) =4.058 WASH FACILITY=0.828 TOTAL =4.886 vii GMS BANDA BALA (1-ROOMS) =4.381 viii GMS AGASHORI (1-ROOMS) =4.037 WASH FACILITY=0.828 DRINKING WATER FACILITY = 1.392 TOTAL =6.257 xi GMS CHARBAGH (1-ROOMS) =3.943 x GMS AKHTAR ABAD (1-ROOMS) =3.943 ix GMS MATTA MAIDAN WASH FACILITY=0.828 DRINKING WATER FACILITY =1.392 TOTAL= 2.220	C-5	1.135 (M)	12 Twelve Months	22-05-2024 At 12:00 hours	On same Day at At 12:30 hours	After approval of technical Bid
2	i GMS HUTAL DESHAN (1-ROOMS) =4.037 WASH FACILITY=0.828 DRINKING WATER FACILITY =1.392 TOTAL =6.257 ii GMS BANDI RUPKANI (1-ROOMS) =3.943 GMS POKAL (1-ROOMS) =3.943 DRINKING WATER FACILITY =1.392 TOTAL =5.335	C-6	0.3107 (M)	12 Twelve Months	22-05-2024 At 12:00 hours	On same Day at At 12:30 hours	After approval of technical Bid
III- ADP NO 292/220271 (2022-2023) TO 2023-2024 ESTABLISHMENT OF 100-EXAMINATION HALL IN HIGH & HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA SUB HEAD:- 2 NOS IN BATTAGRAM DISTRICT.							
1	GHSS Thakot	C-6	0.410 (M)	(12) Twelve Months	22-5-2024 at 12:00 hours	On same day at 12:30 hours	After approval of technical Bid
2	GHSS Banain	C-6	0.410 (M)	(12) Twelve Months	22-5-2024 at 12:00 hours	On same day at 12:30 hours	After approval of technical Bid

- Bid documents and instruction to bidders can be downloaded from C&W web site (www.cwd.gkp.pk) and from the office of undersigned on demand before the submission date/time.
- A copy of the Technical Proposals in the required format is mandatory and to be uploaded as a *part* of E-Bidding before submitting Financial Bids.
- Scanned copy of bid security shall be submitted electronically along with the *bid* on E-bidding system.
- The bid security shall be kept sealed in the financial proposal, the bidder shall in *addition*, place an affidavit in the technical proposals stating that a bid security amounting 2 percent without indicating the figure in the letter, has been placed in the financial proposal or bid. Otherwise the technical proposal will be considered non-responsive and will be returned to the bidder after being examined by the procurement committee".
- Venue of Bids opening is office of the undersigned.
- i. In case the contractors quoting their bids more than 10% below upto 20% below on Engineers Estimate shall submit along with 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.
ii. [Similarly, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer's estimated cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineers' Estimate along with detailed rate analysis]¹. 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 bid shall be considered as non-responsive. All the securities submitted along with such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly, in light of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Notification No.S.R.O.(14)/Vol:1-24/2021-2216058-71 dated 10-5- 2022 which is available in the KPRA website.
- As per C&W Secretariat Notification No.SO(B)-102/CMD/PBC/2020-21/C&WD dated 12-04-2021 the bidding entry fee @0.03% of the tender cost must be attached in **CASH** which will be non-refundable at the time of bid submission.
- "All bidders are required to be register with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority, established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act,2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act No.XXI of 2013), for works consulting and non-consulting services as listed in schedule-II of the Act ibid.

**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
C&W DIVISION BATTAGRAM**

INF(P)/794/24

متنوع اشتہار نمبر 777/24 INF (P) مورخہ 25 اپریل 2024

ہر خاص و عام کو مطلع کیا جاتا ہے کہ ڈیپٹمنٹ نوشہرہ کی جانب سے
مشتہر شدہ اشتہار نمبر 777/24 INF (P) مورخہ 25 اپریل
2024 بابت بھرتی پٹواریان ناگزیر وجوہات کی بناء پر منسوخ کیا جاتا
ہے۔ لہذا خواہشمند امیدواروں کو بروقت مطلع کیا جاتا ہے کہ وہ مذکورہ
بالا اشتہار کو منسوخ شدہ تصور کریں۔

اشتہار
ڈیپٹمنٹ نوشہرہ

INF(P)
797/24

50% cut in subsidy of BRT service likely: CM's aide

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to KP CM on Finance, Muzzamil Aslam has hinted at 50% cut in the subsidy of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and rationalization of the fares of the BRT service to the extent to put no unnecessary burden on its commuters.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting of TransPeshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Urban Mobility Authority (KPUMA) here on Friday. Besides, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) KPUMA, Dr Tariq Usman, Additional Secretary Transport and Project Director (Solarization) Provincial Energy Development Organization (PEDO), other concerned authorities also attended the meeting.

The advisor while expressing anguish over the authorities of BRT asked them to increase their revenue and cut down expenses and bring the rent of its properties at par with market rate.

Muzzamil Aslam said that a proposal of increase in BRT fares on the basis of per kilometer is under consideration and also directed for adopting alternate means of energy to curtail its expenses in head of electricity. He further directed of bringing the rent of BRT shops at far with market rate to increase its receipts.

He appreciated the connotation that each fourth commuter of the BRT is a woman and its 10% employees are women.

Governor visits Global Conference on Health Research 2024 in RMI



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali Friday visited the Global Conference on Health Research-2024 in Rehman Medical Institute here as special guest and paid tribute to the management committee for organizing the World Conference on Research in the field of medicine.

Speaking on this occasion, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali said that research in the health sector is very important for a healthy society and rooting out diseases. In order to deal with global medical challenges in the world, modern research in the health sector has to be promoted, Haji Ghulam Ali said.

Rehman Medical Institute has undoubtedly done a great job on research to improve the field of medicine in this region, Haji Ghulam Ali said. RMI is a renowned medical institution of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which is popular all over the country, Haji Ghulam Ali added.

"I also advise the young medical students to make a name for themselves in research in the medical field," Haji Ghulam Ali said. "I hope that this conference will prove to be very useful for the improvement of the medical field," said Haji Ghulam Ali. Haji Ghulam Ali welcomed the researchers from Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Qatar and other countries participating in the conference to come to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Meanwhile, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali presided the 17th Meeting of KMU senate along with Minister of Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah. In recognition of exemplary service and dedication to health education and Public Health, the Senate conferred the esteemed title of Meritorious Professor BPS-22 upon Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq, Vice Chancellor of KMU, acknowledging his transformative leadership and unwavering commitment to excellence.

The senate also approved solarization of KMU campuses, HEC Institutional Affiliation Policy 2023 and establishment of the directorate of sports and youth affairs. The senate referred the changes recommended by the anomaly committee, the establishment of the KMU Hospital Finance/Management Committee, and a joint Medical and Dental College with private hospitals to the standing committee to be presented in the next senate meeting.

Food Safety Authority raids hospital canteens

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has launched a two-day special drive against the canteens of major hospitals across the province.

According to the spokesperson while releasing details, told that inspections were conducted at district headquarters hospitals along with other public and private hospitals in Peshawar, Mardan, Malakand, Hazara, Kohat, Bannu, and DI Khan divisions.

The details further exposed that a significant number of complaints were received from various cities across the province regarding the sale of substandard food products and kebabs in the premises of hospitals, and unhygienic conditions in hospital canteens in Peshawar.

In response, surprise raids were conducted on canteens of government and private hospitals, including Lady Reading Hospital and Sifat Ghayoor Shaheed Memorial Hospital, as well as hospitals on Warsak and Ring Road.

The canteen at Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar was found to have extremely poor hygiene conditions during the raid, leading to its immediate sealing and imposition of heavy fines. Additionally, after inspections of hospital canteens province-wide, improvement notices were issued.

Director General of the Food Authority, Waseef Saeed, while applauding the efforts of inspection teams, emphasized that there would be no compromise on health standards and vowed to eradicate malpractices across the province.

Provincial Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru directed food safety teams to ensure regular inspections of school and hospital canteens to maintain strict compliance.

The minister extended that those who are found involved in adulteration should be dealt with iron hands.

Saif flays Maryam for wearing police uniform

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif has said that Maryam Nawaz, the drama queen of Punjab, has released a new episode in the form of a police officer. The fake Chief Minister of Punjab is entertaining the people.

He expressed these views while reacting to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's wearing of police Uniform through a video.

The Information Advisor has said that the fake Form 47 heroine's dramas are becoming super hit and she is providing good entertainment to the people of Punjab. He has said that dramas do not fill people's stomach, she should also take some practical measures along with dramas.

Barrister Dr. Saif said that wearing the uniform of law enforcement agencies is a violation of the law and in this context, FIR on Maryam Nawaz must be lodged.

Information advisor added that Maryam Nawaz should focus on public projects like Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur while not releasing dramas in comparison to him and now she has added a new drama by appearing as a police woman officer in the new episode.

When the clown enters the palace, he does not become a sultan, and the palace becomes a circus.

Frequent leaks of papers make matric exams controversial in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Frequent leaks of matric exam papers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have made these exams much controversial, where intelligent and hardworking students have shown strong reservations over the process and outcome of the ongoing exams in the province.

Ironically, on Friday both parts of the paper of the annual matric exam from biology discipline was leaked. The leaked paper was for the 9th class of Mardan Board.

Chairman Mardan Board, Farid Khattak in response to the matter said, the department was looking into the matter of paper leak. He said the leaked paper was not clearly pictured causing difficulty in carrying out the inquiry. A statement by secretary education KP in this regard said details were being collected if the paper was leaked or not. Further information, he said, was being acquired from the board concerned.

Monthly review meeting of Population Welfare Dept held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting was held at the District Peshawar office to review the monthly performance of the Population Welfare Department District Peshawar.

The meeting was chaired by District Population Welfare Officer Samiullah Khan Khalil. Deputy Director Kashif Fida, Demographer Shahid Murad, along with family welfare assistant members from all agricultural centers of District Peshawar, attended the meeting.

District Officer Population Welfare Samiullah Khan Khalil presented the objectives of his department regarding monthly performance and family planning, reviewing the monthly performance of family welfare assistant members from all agricultural centers of District Peshawar to ensure further improvement. Practical wisdom was emphasized.

In addition, the family planning assistant members from agricultural centers briefed about their respective performances. District Population Welfare Officer Samiullah Khan Khalil issued instructions to the participants of the meeting to ensure better performance and attendance, stating that family welfare assistants should fulfill their responsibilities in the best possible manner, disseminating the objectives and messages of family planning to every household in their respective areas.

He said that scholars, doctors, and social workers should highlight the objectives of family planning in rural areas in collaboration with the Population Welfare Department.

Steps urged to stop domestic violence

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Mashal Azam Yousafzai visited the Directorate of Social Welfare in the merged districts, detailed briefing regarding social welfare in the merged districts.

Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mashal Azam Yousafzai has issued instructions that the Directorate of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Marged districts should take practical measures to prevent domestic violence in the Marged districts. Free legal aid should be given to women victims of domestic violence. Shelter established in Khyber tribal district should be shifted to a suitable place in Landi Kotal. A detailed report of the last year of the non-governmental organizations should be compiled and submitted.

She issued these instructions while presiding over the meeting on the occasion of his visit to the Directorate of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Marged districts. The meeting was attended by the relevant officials including Director Social Welfare Marged districts Tariq Khan, Deputy Director Obaid ur Rehman, Deputy Director Abrar Ahmed and other relevant officials.

In the meeting, Advisor to Chief Minister Mashal Azam Yousafzai was given a detailed briefing on the organizational structure, objectives and ongoing projects of the Directorate of Social Welfare of the merged districts.

Addressing the meeting, Advisor to Chief Minister Mashal Azam Yousafzai said that Rehabilitation of drug addicts, children and women are among our top priorities.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur attending a meeting of Climate Change council via video link. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

Secretary health stresses on dengue prevention

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Secretary Health, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mahmood Aslam led a Dengue Awareness Walk on Friday.

In the sermon of Friday prayers at Gul Bahar Number 1, Secretary Health conducted an awareness session himself, where pamphlets regarding dengue awareness were distributed among the public by health department officials including those from Civil Defense and WSSP.

Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam, along with District Health Officer Dr. Idris, Focal Person for Dengue Dr. Ikramullah and officials of Civil Defense, WSSP, and other relevant authorities also led a Dengue Awareness Walk in Gul Bahar.

Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam conducted an awareness session himself during the Friday sermon at Gul Bahar Number 1. He appealed to the locals to ensure the disposal or covering of stagnant water inside and around their homes.

He personally visited various streets in Gul Bahar, distributed awareness pamphlets to shopkeepers and locals, providing them with instructions regarding dengue prevention.

Secretary Health praised the efforts of the Civil Defense officials, applauding their role in the success of last year's dengue campaign, stating that the civil 'defense is our workforce and their role in dengue prevention is commendable.

Secretary Health issued directives to relevant authorities on this occasion, instructing them to report the progress of dengue prevention activities on a regular basis.

He further stated that He would be monitoring dengue activities in the field every week and leading the efforts to combat dengue.

UET Peshawar and KIU ink MoU

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Peshawar, entered into a collaboration with Karakoram International University (KIU), Gilgit-Baltistan here Friday.

Prof. Dr. Qaisar Ali, Vice Chancellor, UET Peshawar and Prof. Dr. Attaullah Shah, Vice Chancellor of KIU, Gilgit-Baltistan signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The aim of the MoU is to establish a framework for academic collaboration. Through this MoU, both universities aim to promote mutual understanding, facilitate joint initiatives, encourage faculty and student visits, explore commercialization opportunities and ensure equitable partnerships.

Prof. Dr. Qaisar Ali, Vice Chancellor of UET Peshawar appreciated the initiative and urged that through this partnership we should enrich our academic environment, empower students and make significant contributions to society. Prof. Dr. Attaullah Shah, Vice Chancellor of KIU, Gilgit-Baltistan said, the MoU underlines our commitment to fostering academic excellence and mutual growth.

Together, we'll enhance student experiences, drive research, and contribute to societal development. Prof. Dr. Sahar Noor, Dean, Faculty of Mechanical, Chemical, and Industrial Engineering, Dr. Syed Waqar Shah, Dean, Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering; Prof. Dr. Misbah Ullah, Advisor Finance, Dr. Nasru Minallah Director ORIC and other senior faculty members witnessed the MoU signing ceremony.



Federal Ombudsman decides to extend awareness campaign

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Ombudsman Regional Office has decided to extend awareness campaign to educational institutions of Peshawar to appraise students about its functions and responsibilities in dispensation of cost-free and speedy justice.

Badshah Gul Wazir, In-charge Adviser Federal Ombudsman Regional Office Peshawar told APP during an interview here that the awareness campaign was extended to educational institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said that next week a grand awareness function would be held at Islamia College Peshawar where students would be informed about the role, functions and responsibilities of the Federal Ombudsman Office in dispensation of quick and free justice to complainants.

Badshah Gul said that 10,386 complaints were disposed of against 10,389 complaints received against alleged malpractices of Federal Government's departments last year.

In 2023, he said that 10,389 complaints were filed out of which 10,386 complaints were disposed of swiftly.

Besides 7,047 implementable findings, he said that his office has taken quick action on complaints filed against alleged malpractices of federal government's organizations and has successfully implemented 5,201 findings with over 73.8 percent success ratio. Federal Ombudsman Office was established on January 24, 1983 and later its regional office in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then NWFP) was setup in 1985.

To provide prompt justice to masses at their doorsteps, he said that later its regional offices were established at Peshawar, DI Khan and Abbottabad besides complaints collection centres at Wana South Waziristan and Sadda Kurram tribal districts.

Peshawar's office was mandated to decide complaints received from Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, Kurram and Orakzai divisions and that any person having grievances against any Govt department can submit a simple application either personally or online along with CNICs, mobile numbers, address and name of the department, adding spot orders on some applications were also issued.

The complaints filed against alleged irregularities and mismanagement of public sector departments are being addressed within 60 days and our findings are also being shared with the Federal Ombudsman Office, Islamabad.

Federal Ombudsman Office's July -September 2023 report revealed that an application had been received by Federal Ombudsman Regional Office Abbottabad in which a complainant Muhammad Farooq Awan from Mansehra pleaded that his residential electric meter removed by PESCO and levied Rs 65,000 penalty without any legal ground.

After hearing the case, the Wafaqi Mohtasib Office decided to waive off this illegitimate penalty amount. PESCO has challenged the decision to the President. However, the President upheld the decision of Wafaqi Mohtasib.

Badshah Gul Wazir said the confidence of masses on the Federal Ombudsman Office has been increased after the online facility, adding that his door was open for all.

Qasim inaugurates anti-polio drive

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah inaugurated the Polio Eradication Campaign by administering polio drops to a child at the Police Services Hospital Peshawar on Friday.

The inauguration ceremony was also attended by Special Secretary Health/Coordinator EOC KP, Mr. Abdul Basit, UNICEF Program Manager KP, Dr. Wisam Hazem, Presented-Elect PPA KP, Dr. Syed Bawar Shah, Team Lead NSTOP, Technical Focal person PEI, Communication officer UNICEF and EOC officials.

While talking to the media personnel Minister for Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Qasim Ali Shah said that all paediatricians, religious and political leaders and other relevant quarters are being taken onboard to implement this campaign. All arrangements for five-days Sub-National Immunization Days (SNIDs) campaign have been finalised in selected districts of the province in two phases from April 29 wherein more than 4.42 million children under the age of five will be administered with polio drops.

"During the first phase of this campaign, which will be carried out from April 29 to May 03, polio drops will be administered to approximately 2.83 million children in 13 districts of the province, while over 78,198 children will be vaccinated in specific union councils on Pak-Afghan border and Afghan Refugee Camps situated in District Nowshera, Swabi, Buner, Malakand, Chitral Upper, Haripur, Mansehra and District Mohmand. During the second phase of the campaign, commencing from May 02, polio drops will be administered to around 1.51 million children in District D.I Khan, Charsadda, Mardan, Chitral Lower and Lower Dir" Minister Health added.

He furthered that for the implementation of this campaign, 21,038 teams of trained polio workers including 18,926 mobile teams, 1,092 fixed teams, 920 transit teams and 100 roaming teams have been formed to administer polio drops to the children.

He informed that 3,969 area in-charges have also been appointed for the vigilant supervision of these teams to make sure that all children in the target areas are administered with polio vaccines. In order to ensure foolproof security of the polio teams during this campaign, 32,700 security personnel have been deployed in the target areas.



In brief

Three killed in Kashmore clash

KASHMORE (INP): Three including a woman were killed as armed men of two rival groups traded fire here on Friday, police said. According to details, members of two opponent groups if 'Shar' tribe which were in old dispute traded fire in Gabhalpur Kacha area of Kashmore. The area turned into battle field resulting in dead of Raeeso Shar, Dalo Shar and Nazeeran Bibi were killed in exchange of fire. Sources said that due to kacha area police could not approached the area of the fire exchange.

Woman strangles daughter to death

SIALKOT (INP): A woman strangled her only daughter to death after dispute over matrimonial issue in Sialkot on Friday. According to police, 21-year-old Zalekha Kanwal, a resident of Moradpur police station area, got married in Faisalabad one and a half month ago against her will on the desire of her mother. When Zulikha Kanwal came back to her home after a month and a half, she eloped with her lover. The mother and the girl's husband lodged a case of kidnapping at the concerned police station. However, the victim gave a statement against her husband in the court. Later, the girl's mother tried to convince her daughter but failed which caused a quarrel between mother and daughter and the heartless mother strangled her daughter to death. After the incident, the police registered a case and arrested accused Shama Kausar and further investigation was going on.

18 of a family hospitalised

JAMPUR (INP): As many as 18 members of a family were rushed to a hospital as their condition deteriorated after having a toxic during on Friday. The family members had a meal and later suffered with upset stomach in Basti Chhina of Tehsil Jampur of District Rajanpur. According to one of the affected persons, their condition turned worse after taking meal. The family members were shifted to the THQ hospital where they were treated well. All the doctors and medical staff emergency ward of the hospital declared the condition of the 18 affected persons out of danger after the treatment. The affected persons included 60-year-old Muhammad Afzal, 55-year-old Jameela, 27-year-old Zahid, 24-year-old Najma, 24-year-old Shahid, 24-year-old Umme Habiba, 22-year-old Saba Javed, 22-year-old Sarfaraz, 20-year-old Iqra, 14-year-old Saqlain, 10-year-old Nirma, 8-year-old Mah Parah, 7-year-old Samra, 6-year-old Ali Haider, 5-year-old Miss Parah, 5-year-old Adil, 3-year-old Hasan and 2-year-old Sahrish.

Notorious robber killed

KHANPUR (INP): A notorious robber was killed, arms and motorcycle recovered after exchange of fire while his accomplices managed to escape. According to details, the robbers started firing at police party on patrolling in Ruanpur police station jurisdiction in Zahir Pir of tehsil Khanpur of Rahimyar Khan. In cross firing, a notorious robber identified as Hidayatullah was killed while his accomplices managed to escape from the scene. Illegal weapons and a motorcycle were recovered from possession of killed robber wanted by police in more than 18 cases of murder, robberies and other crimes. The body was shifted to hospital.

Land ownership dispute leaves one dead, six injured

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A man was killed while six others were injured when two groups clashed and opened fire on each other over a land ownership dispute at Chinargi Jabagai village in the jurisdiction of Lal Qila police station here on Friday, police and residents said. They said that the families of Jawdar Malak and Islamud Din Malak had a land dispute that led to cross firing when both the parties faced each other.

As a result Islamud Din 60 was killed on the spot while his brother Awal Khan and son Maoz, all residents of Chinargi village were injured. Four others from the second party including Umar Hayat, Amir Rehman, Alamgir Khan and Bunir Gul also sustained bullet injuries. The dead and the injured were shifted to the tehsil headquarters hospital Lal Qila for postmortem and medical care. Local police led by SHO Salim Shah reached the spot and started investigations.

Scholar defence: Mr. Sana Ullah, an MPhil Scholar in the Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand (UoM) on Friday successfully defended his thesis titled 'Analysis of fractional order delay differential equations with Robin boundary conditions' at the varsity. His thesis was supervised by Dr Kamal

Shah, Associate Professor and Dr Amanullah, Assistant Professor of the said department.

The External Examiner was Dr Zia Bashir, Associate Professor at the department of Mathematics, Quaid e Azam University Islamabad who appreciated the hard work of the scholar. The Chairman department of Mathematics, Dr Imtiaz Ahmad and all the teachers congratulated the scholar on achieving the milestone and motivated him for further exploration of the same area.

Police officers urged to protect human lives, properties: Regional Police Officer Malakand Muhammad Ali Khan has said that protection of human life, property and maintenance of law and order in society was the prime task of the police department and no effort would be spared to ensure it. He was addressing a meeting of police officers at Timergara during his visit here the other day. The district police officer Lower Dir Rasheed Khan, DPO Upper Dir Wigar Khan, SDPOs and SHOs were in attendance.

The RPO was briefed about circle wise police performance, overall law and order situation in both the districts and comparative analysis of crimes. The RPO visited the Dispute Resolution Council (DRC)

office and police Khidmat markaz and met with members of the DRC. He laid floral wreaths on the Yadgar e Shuhada and offered fateha for the departed souls.

The RPO asked police officers to further improve their performance and behave well with complainants and visitors. He directed the police officers to ensure security of foreigners, crackdown on proclaimed offenders and drugs' smugglers in their respective areas. He said that police should also ensure search and strike operations on a daily basis. He lauded the services of DRCs and said that its members had dedicated themselves for dispute resolution, which was a highly valued job. Later the RPO also visited the site of Koto Hydro power station, University of Malakand and the under-construction Timergara police lines.

Students's protest: Dozens of the students of Pakistan Studies department, Postgraduate College Timergara staged a protest rally at Timergara here the other day. Led by a students' leader Muhammad Bilal walked on the road. The protesters were demanding allocation of 4 rooms for the PS students and arrangement of separate rooms for female students. The Balambat SHO Mahboob Shah held talks with them and they dispersed peacefully.

Distribution of 'Bardana' empty sacks begins

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Limited (PASSCO) has started distribution of 'Bardana' empty sacks among farmers to procure wheat and PASSCO has established 20 procurement centres in the district Hafizabad whereas PASSCO has fixed target to purchase 14 lakh bags of wheat from district Hafizabad this year.

This was stated by the Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad while visiting Iqbal Nagar PASSCO procurement centre. District Manage PASSCO Mukaram Ali Javed and AC Hafizabad Munawar Hussin were also present on

the occasion. DC Sundas Irshad witnessed process of distribution of 'Brdana' and to review to different arrangements made to provide different facilities to farmers at the procurement centre.

She directed the PASSCO officers and officials to ensure transparent distribution of 'Bardana' among farmers and to purchase wheat from growers on merit and ensure transparency in percurrent process. The government has fixed Rs. 3900 per 40 kg price of wheat, she added.

Meanwhile, Local Government Department Hafizabad taken out walk to create awareness among people about ban on use of plastic bags and hazards of

plastic led by Assistant Director Local Government Hafizabad Syeda Tashan Fatim. The employees of different union councils and prominent personalities participated the walk.

While addressing the participants of the walk, Syeda Tashan Fatima said that plastic was eating fertility of our agriculture land and damaging natural beauty as well as causing environmental pollution. She said that use of plastic was harmful for human lives that is why the Punjab government was imposed ban on use of plastic shoppers from June, 5 next. She stressed the need to contain use of plastic shoppers and to promote tree plantation to combat challenges of climate change.

DPO assures solution of citizens problems

Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: District Police Officer Asad Sarfaraz Khan conducted an open court in his office to address the issues and concerns of citizens. More than 25 citizens presented their problems before the DPO.

DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan aims to solve the problems of the citizens on a priority basis. He issued orders to submit reports soon in recovery cases. He heard the problems of the citizens in detail and individually issued orders to the concerned officers through phone calls for timely legal action and return report. He also called several SHOs in open court and demanded a direct response.

During the open court, DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan ordered inquiries on the



requests of several civilians. He ordered the SHOs and investigating officers to appear in open court in the presence of the concerned citizens and brief them on the progress of the cases. In recovery cases, DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan ordered the investigating officers to recover the cases and submit the report within a week.

The purpose of the open court, according to DPO Asad Sarfaraz Khan, is to ensure that there is no gap between the citizens and the police officers. He wants all legitimate issues to be resolved on merit

and in a timely manner. He further said that accountability is being demanded from the officers for not settling the cases in time as per the prescribed rules and not providing justice to the citizens.

The officers in the circles and police stations should provide justice to the citizens at the earliest opportunity. He issued instructions to the SDPOs and SHOs and said that the problems of the people should be solved at their doorsteps so that they can avoid travel addiction. This is the first duty of the police.



SUJAWAL: A doctor examining patient at a free medical camp arranged by Pakistan Navy at Jungo Jalbani.

KKKUK holds productive 4th board of studies meeting

F.P. Report

KARAK: The Zoology Department at Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak convened its 4th Board of Studies meeting, chaired by the department's Convenor and Head, Dr. Abdul Aziz. The meeting, held today, was attended by prominent academicians including Dr. Syed Ishtiaq Anjum, Dr. Noor Ul Haq, Dr. Muhammad Inam ul Haq, Dr. Muhammad Zubair, Dr. Siddiq ur Rehman, Dr. Hizbullah, Dr. Saadullah Khan, and Director QEC, Dr. Muhammad Anwar.

The BoS deliberated upon the BS course for Zoology, ensuring alignment with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Undergraduate Education policy 2023. The distinguished members of the Board engaged in insightful discussions and recommended certain modifications to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness and relevance.

Chairing the BoS Dr. Abdul Aziz, the Head of the Zoology Department, lauded efforts of the members for their valuable contributions and active participation in shaping the future direction of the department's academic schemes. The collaborative efforts of the Board of Studies reflect Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak's commitment to academic excellence and continuous improvement in its educational programs.

Three killed in Shikarpur

SHIKARPUR (PPI): Three people, including a husband and wife, were shot dead in a tribal clash in the district of Shikarpur on Friday.

Group of armed men, purportedly belonging to the Marfani tribe, opened fire on a working family in the Paddy crop at village Darya Khan Bhayo near Jagan, within the jurisdiction of the Jahan Wah Police Station.

As a result, Naveed Ahmed Bhayo (20), his wife Fatima Bhayo (19), and sister-in-law Nana Khatoon (22) were killed. The assailants fled the scene following the attack. The bodies were transported to the RBUT Civil Hospital in Shikarpur for medico-legal formalities. In response to the killings, villagers and relatives of the deceased blocked the Sukkur-Shikarpur National Highway road at Zero Point near Jail Chorangi, staging a protest and burning tires on the road. Traffic was suspended from both sides during the demonstration, with demands for the arrest of the perpetrators.

Enrolment walk and campaign held in Drosh

F.P. Report

CHITRAL: An awareness walk function held in a series of enrolment campaign in the government schools in collaboration with Helotas and Education department. This walk was held at historical Government Primary School Drosh established in 1938. This school was established a century ago which has educated the most famous people of Chitral.

The walk was started from this historical educational institution and passes through old bazaar of Drosh and then enter in new Bazaar, which was converted in a function at Drosh Chowk. The walk was led by Field Officer Azhar Iqbal, DEO Chitral, ADEO Lower Chitral, Qari Jamal Nasir, former Chairman District Council Alhaj Khurshid Ali Khan, President Trader Union Drosh Haji Gul Nawaz, Village Council Damil Chairman Haji Sher Zamin, Principal Government Higher Secondary School Drosh Saleem Kamil, headmaster of the school and members of trade Union, social workers, as well as a large number of students

attended. Students were carrying banners and play cards in their hands, which listened to the slogan that knowledge was for all.

Besides it enrolment campaign were also held in different parts of lower Chitral by Helvetas in collaboration with Education Department Chitral. The campaign was attended by a large number of people involved in the Chitral Town, Kaisu and Kalkatak, in addition to the education department.

The campaign, which was chanting slogans that education for everyone, was aimed at ensuring the enrollment of children in schools upto 5 years and more. Azhar Iqbal said that they also trying of their best to enrolled children of Afghan refugees living in different camps at lower chitral. Addressing to the ceremony, the participants urged the parents to send their children to schools by the age of five years.

The District Education Officer said that parents should send their children to any school so that they do not deprived from education. VC Chairman Haji Sher Zamin expressed his concern that the academic year had started and after

four months, free books have not yet been sent to Govt schools, which causes children's valuable time to waste. On the other hand, the government is urging people to send their children to Govt schools, but even after four months in these schools, free books are not available yet, how can they give quality education to children?

President Trade Union Drosh Haji Gul Nawaz, Alhaj Khurshid Ali Khan, Azhar Iqbal and others also expressed their views on the occasion. In connection of enrolment campaign, walk and function was held this school which was in 1938.

A large number of students studying in this school achieved highest position even they serves as Ambassador of Pakistan in foreign countries, Chief Secretary,

Doctor, Professor, Civil, military and police officers are also among them. The purpose of holding function in this school was to attract attention of children that if they also with great enthusiasm, they could grow up and become a high officer. Assistant Education Officer Inamullah enrolled some children in this school.

Tribesmen hold protest for acceptance of demands

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: The local residents disapproved of what they said was an unnecessary Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) raid carried out in Khuga Khel area of Tehsil Landi Kotal district Khyber last day. It is to be stated here that last night CTD officials from Peshawar raided the house of one, Tawab son of Janbat, Ashraf Khel, Khuga Khel without prior informing the local police officials and the affected families.

Scores of political and social figures, holding placards inscribed with slogans in favor of their demands, gathered at Bacha Khan Chawk, main Landi Kotal Bazaar on Friday and condemned the CTD raid.

The speakers including Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid, Aftab Shinwari, Najeeb Khawrichan, Farman Shinwari, Israr Shinwari and others said that it was against the Pakhtun tradition and law of the country to conduct raid in the dark of night. The police officials staged fake dramas in the form of raids in Khyber to get promotion and other incentives, they blamed.

They maintained that if the CTD wanted any outlaw, they should approach the



tribal elders, and the local police who would hand him over to them with support of his relatives and family members.

Which law permits CTD to conduct raids that dishonor our homes without having a warrant, First Information Report (FIR) and other legal processes against an innocent citizen, they questioned. They warned that if the same kind of unlawful act was continued in the area then they would have no other option but to open fire on those who break-in their residents in the dark of night. They demanded of the Inspector General Police (IGP) and the provincial government to immediately stop illicit raids of CTD in Khyber otherwise they would come on roads to protest against it.

9th class student stabbed

F.P. Report

KOHAT: A student of 9th class was stabbed to death during a fight between students of a school in Kohat district on Friday.

Police said a fight took place between the students of Government Higher Secondary School No-3, Kohat. During the fight a student named Waqas stabbed another student of 9th class with a sharp knife. As a result, the student named Bilawal was critically injured and shifted to hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

dangerous levels. This is a very serious issue for Pakistan.

The eighth social issue is women's rights. Women don't have the rights they should have. Sometimes we see women subjected to domestic violence, cases of job harassment, and marriages performed against their will. Initiatives are also needed to improve them.

The ninth social problem is clean drinking water. Clean drinking water is not available. About 86% of Pakistanis do not have access to clean drinking water. If clean drinking water is not available, there can be a lot of health problems. Therefore, the government should ensure the supply of clean drinking water. The tenth social problem is the justice system. Pakistan's justice system is outdated and needs to be amended.

Social issues in Pakistan

THERE are many social issues in Pakistan at the moment on which the Government of Pakistan needs to take initiative. We will discuss some important social issues. First of all, let's discuss poverty. The poverty situation in Pakistan is alarming. According to a report submitted by the Ministry of Planning to the National Assembly of Pakistan, about 29.7% of Pakistanis live below the poverty line. The main reason for this is capitalism.

The second main issue is the literacy rate. Pakistan's literacy rate was about 58%, but recently it has improved. It still needs further improvement. The lower literacy rate may be due to class divisions, and the government

has not implemented any special policies. Wealthy families enroll their children in private institutions because private schools provide good education, while poor families get their children admitted to government schools. Yes, efforts are being made by the government; education has been made free. Uniforms and books are also free. But still, there is not the same standard of education as in private schools.

The third major social problem is overpopulation. Overpopulation is also becoming a big problem for Pakistan. No special planning campaigns are being run here. According to the 1998 census, the population of Pakistan was about 180 million. According to the

2017 census, the population is 220 million, with the largest population in Punjab, which is about 120 million.

The fourth social problem of Pakistan is unemployment. Unemployment is a serious problem in Pakistan. Pakistan's unemployment rate is about 4.457%. An estimated 1.5 million young people are unemployed in Pakistan every year. We don't see any policy from the government regarding this issue. One of the reasons for unemployment is the lack of investment, due to which people are going abroad.

The fifth important social issue is health. Even in the health sector, the basic health

facilities that should be available here are not available. According to an estimate, there is 1 doctor for every 1250 people. The condition of government hospitals is critical. Additionally, private hospitals have taken this sacred work as a business, and only the rich people can get their treatment there. The poor people can't afford such heavy bills. To improve this, the government should build more hospitals, provide more facilities, repair existing government hospitals, and reorganize them. Restructuring this system is a huge responsibility of the government.

The sixth social problem is targeted killing. Target killing is

happening on religious, political, and provincial grounds. In Karachi, we see that targeted killings are taking place, and security personnel are being targeted. Targeting religious scholars and leaders is also a serious issue for Pakistan. The government also needs to take initiatives to address this.

The seventh social problem is terrorism. Since terrorism is a global problem, Pakistan has been fighting it since 9/11. Since then, Pakistan has lost about 120 billion US dollars, and more than 70,000 Pakistanis have been martyred in this way. Due to this, foreign investment in Pakistan is declining, and Pakistan's economy has fallen to



Tanzania floods and landslides kill more than 150

DAR ES SALAM (BBC): At least 155 people have died in floods and landslides in Tanzania following heavy rains caused by El Niño, the prime minister has said. Kassim Majaliwa warned that the rains might continue into May, and urged families to leave flood-prone areas. About 200,000 people and more than 51,000 households were already affected by the disaster, he added.

Heavy rains have also swept through neighbouring Kenya and Burundi, causing a humanitarian crisis in the region. Giving a report to Tanzania's parliament on the situation in his country since January, Mr Majaliwa said that in addition to the 155 people killed, 236 had been injured.

"The heavy El Nino rains, accompanied by strong winds, floods, and landslides in various parts of the country, have caused

significant damage. "These include loss of life, destruction of crops, homes, citizens' property, and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and railways," he added. A resident in northern Tanzania's Siha district told the BBC that his home had been destroyed. "I have nothing left, everything has been wiped away," he said.

In Kenya, President William Ruto has ordered the army to help with rescue operations, as heavy rains pounded large parts of the country, including the capital, Nairobi, where homes in some slum areas have been swept away, along with furniture and other goods. More than 10 have died in Kenya this week, bringing the death toll to at least 45 people since March, the Red Cross said. In Burundi, heavy rains have displaced nearly 100,000 peoples. BBC Weather's Chris Fawkes

says that one of the biggest drivers of the rains is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD).

The IOD - often called the "Indian Niño" because of its similarity to its Pacific equivalent - refers to the difference in sea-surface temperatures in opposite parts of the Indian Ocean. During a positive phase, the waters in the western Indian Ocean are much warmer than normal and this can bring heavier rain regardless of El Niño. However, when both a positive IOD and an El Niño occur at the same time, as was the case last year, the rains in East Africa can become extreme. One of the strongest positive IOD patterns on record coincided with one of the strongest El Niño patterns in 1997 and 1998, with severe flooding reported. These caused more than 6,000 deaths in five countries in the region.

26 pilot whales die after mass stranding in Australia

PERTH: At least 26 long-finned pilot whales have died, but several others were rescued, after 160 of them were stranded over a large area in Western Australia. Dozens of whales were stuck in shallow water spread across about 500 metres (0.31 miles) at Toby Inlet in Geographie Bay near Dunsborough. The region is less than 250km (155 miles) south of state capital Perth.

Footage from the area showed wildlife preservation teams and local authorities joined by many volunteers to help them get back to deeper waters. Pia Courtis, a spokesperson for the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, said samples would be taken from the deceased whales before removing them from the shores. More than 100 whales were moved offshore, but Courtis said they may return. "We've got vessels out on the water and

we've also got a spotter plane up in the air that's doing searches over every couple of hours to see where they are," she said. "So far so good, they haven't made it back to shore."

The department said that once fully beached, whales usually had to be euthanised as that would be "the most humane outcome". Mass strandings of pilot whales are not uncommon in Australia and New Zealand. But after decades of such events, scientists do not fully understand why they occur. Some researchers think pods go off track after feeding too close to shore. Pilot whales - which can grow to more than 6 metres (20 feet) long - are highly sociable, so they may follow podmates who stray into danger. Some stranding incidents have been linked to underwater noise pollution caused by humans, which could affect the animals' sensitive hear-

ing. Wildlife experts have said the whales' unusual behaviour could also indicate stress or illness within a pod. Pilot whales often maintain close relationships with their pods throughout their lives.

About 500 pilot whales died when they beached on New Zealand's remote Chatham Islands in 2022. The latest mass stranding event in Western Australia occurred at Cheynes Beach in Albany in July 2023, where at least 90 of the mammals died. The largest beaching of whales in Western Australia took place in Dunsborough in 1996 and involved 320 long-finned pilot whales. All but 20 of the animals were rescued and escorted back into deeper waters. Authorities have asked people not to attempt to rescue the whales without direction from experts as they may cause further injury to the animals, hinder coordinated rescue efforts, or hurt themselves. — Aljazeera

Burkina Faso army massacred 223 villagers

BURKINA FASO (BBC): More than 220 civilians, including at least 56 children, were massacred by Burkina Faso's military in a single day this year, Human Rights Watch says. In the attacks on 25 February, the army killed 179 people in Soro village and 44 others in the nearby Nondin village, an HRW investigation found.

HRW termed the mass killings "among the worst army abuse" incidents in the country in nearly a decade. Burkinabè authorities have not commented on the report. Last month, public prosecutor Aly Benjamin Coulibaly appealed for witnesses to identify the group behind the mass killings. He put the preliminary death toll at 170. Villagers who survived the attack told HRW that a military convoy with over 100 soldiers descended on Nondin village, about

30 minutes after Islamist fighters passed nearby. The soldiers went door-to-door, ejecting residents from their homes. "They then rounded up villagers in groups before opening fire on them," the report added, citing witness and survivor accounts. They arrived in Soro, about 5km (3 miles) away, an hour later, also gathering and shooting at villagers, the survivors added. In both villages, the soldiers also shot at those who attempted to hide or escape, witnesses said. The mass killings are believed to be retaliation by the military, which accused the villagers of aiding armed Islamist fighters.

They followed an attack by Islamist fighters on a nearby military camp in the northern Yatenga province. A survivor was quoted as saying that before the shootings, the soldiers accused the residents of

failing to cooperate with them by not informing them of the movements of the Islamist fighters. "The massacres in Nondin and Soro villages are just the latest mass killings of civilians by the Burkina Faso military in their counterinsurgency operations," said Tirana Hassan, executive director of Human Rights Watch. The Sahel country is ruled by a military junta, which seized power in a coup in 2022, promising to end the insurgency. The violence has however continued to escalate, with more than a third of Burkina Faso controlled by jihadist groups. International and human rights groups including the European Union and UN have accused Burkina Faso of serious human rights violations in its fight against insurgency, including the indiscriminate killings and forced disappearances of dozens of civilians.

Houthis launch attacks on US, Israeli vessels

SANAA: Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi armed group says it attacked US and Israeli vessels, with a Western coalition of warships defending amid the continuing fallout from the war on Gaza. Yahya Saree, the group's military spokesman, said in a video address that the Houthis hit the Maersk Yorktown cargo ship in the Gulf of Aden.

The US military confirmed that the Houthis launched an antiship ballistic missile from their territory towards the vessel, which it identified as a "US-flagged, owned, and operated vessel with 18 US and four Greek crew members". "There were no injuries or damage reported by US, coalition, or commercial ships," the US

Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement. The Greek Ministry of National Defence said that one of the country's military ships serving in the European Union's naval mission to counter the Houthis in the Red Sea intercepted two drones launched towards a commercial ship from Yemen. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) had earlier confirmed an incident some 72 nautical miles (133km) southeast of the port of Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden. In a statement, the UK said the Royal Navy warship HMS Diamond shot down a missile fired by Houthis from Yemen targeting a merchant vessel. "The UK continues to be

at the forefront of the international response to the Iranian-backed Houthis' dangerous attacks on commercial vessels, which have claimed the lives of international mariners." British Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said. Saree said the group targeted the Israeli ship MSC Veracruz in the Indian Ocean and launched projectiles at a US warship. The US military said within two hours of the attack on the Maersk Yorktown, its forces "successfully engaged and destroyed" four drones over Yemen. "These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for US, coalition, and merchant vessels," it said. — Aljazeera

Suleja prison: 108 inmates on the run in Nigeria

ABUJA (BBC): More than 100 prisoners have escaped from a jail near Nigeria's capital after heavy rain damaged part of the facility where they were housed, as well as the perimeter fence. According to the authorities, 118 inmates originally fled the Suleja Prison but 10 have been re-captured. A manhunt has been launched to find the others.

The identity of the prisoners is unclear at this point but there are fears that some might be dangerous. However, a statement from the prison said they were working with other security agencies and that people should go about their normal activities without any fear. "In conjunction with sister security agencies [we] have so far recaptured 10 fleeing inmates and taken them into custody, while we are in hot chase to recapture the rest," said a statement from Abuja's prison authority. It pointed out that many of the prison facilities in Suleja, about 50km (30 miles) from Abuja were built during the colonial era and therefore have become old and weak. Downpour, which lasted several hours, came at the start of the rainy season following a recent heatwave. Nigeria's meteorological agency recently released a warning of heavy rains and flooding in some states. Two years ago more than 400 prisoners escaped following a raid on another prison in Abuja. Four inmates, a security guard and several attackers were killed after the prison was targeted, according to officials. At the time Islamist fighters said they carried out the attack to free some of their members. More than 5,000 inmates have escaped during prison breaks in Nigeria since 2020. Many Nigerian prisons are overcrowded and lack basic amenities, although authorities say they are working to fix the issues. Many inmates have never been convicted of any crimes - they can wait for their trial to start for years on end. One prison recently said that up to 70% of its inmates were awaiting trial.

Like many things in South Africa, the school that Kunene remembers has changed, and what used to be a school hall has now been turned into several classrooms. "I somehow wish we could go back to that day, because of how excited I was and the things that happened thereafter," said Kunene, referring to Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first Black president and the introduction of a new constitution which afforded all South Africans equal rights, abolishing the racially discriminative system of apartheid. For many who experienced apartheid, those years remain etched in their collective memory.

"I cannot forget how we suffered at the hands of whites. In the city at night, there were white bikers with hair like this (describing a mohawk-like hairstyle) who would brutally assault a Black person if they saw them walking on a pavement. Those white boys were cruel," said 87-year-old Lily Makhanya, whose late husband died while working in the anti-

Risk of mily incidents on Belarus-Ukraine border quite high

MINSK: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said that the risk of military incidents along his country's border with Ukraine was quite high, according to Russia's state-run RIA news agency. Belarus had moved several combat-ready battalions from Vitebsk region, situated on its border with Russia, to the western limits of the country, he said, as delegates of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly (VNS) unanimously approved a new military doctrine emphasising that Belarus is a peace-loving country.

Lukashenko added that neighbouring Poland - to the country's west - should not expect aggressive actions from Belarus, the report said. The updated document listed the countries from which threats emanate, the range of internal and external threats to military security, and the position on the use of tactical nuclear weapons, the report said without elaborating on the countries named. Lukashenko, a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has frequently talked up the dangers of an attack by NATO or Ukraine as justification for maintaining his military and security apparatus on a constant state of high alert. The military doctrine declared Belarus's readiness to act as a platform for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and its openness to cooperation in the military sphere with any states, including NATO, RIA reported. Russian state news agency TASS quoted Lukashenko as saying there could be an "apocalypse" if Russia used nuclear weapons in retaliation for Western actions. Russia has deployed tactical nuclear weapons, missiles and troops in the country. At VNS meeting, Lukashenko alleged that the opposition planned to seize a district in the west of the country and request support from NATO troops, according to RIA. — Aljazeera



DAR ES SALAM: Public mini busses are submerged in the flooded streets in Tanzania.

South Africa to mark 30 years of freedom amid inequality, poverty

JOHANNESBURG (AP): As 72-year-old Nonki Kunene walks through the corridors of Thabisang Primary School in Soweto, South Africa, she recalls the joy she and many others felt 30 years ago when they voted for the first time.

It was at this school on April 27, 1994 that Kunene joined millions of South Africans to brave long queues and take part in the country's first democratic elections after decades of white minority rule which denied Black people the right to vote. However, as the country gears up for celebrations Saturday to mark 30 years of freedom and democracy, much of the enthusiasm and optimism of that period has subsided as Africa's most developed economy faces a myriad of challenges.

Like many things in South Africa, the school that Kunene remembers has changed, and what used to be a school hall has now been turned into several classrooms. "I somehow wish we could go back to that day, because of how excited I was and the things that happened thereafter," said Kunene, referring to Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first Black president and the introduction of a new constitution which afforded all South Africans equal rights, abolishing the racially discriminative system of apartheid. For many who experienced apartheid, those years remain etched in their collective memory.

"I cannot forget how we suffered at the hands of whites. In the city at night, there were white bikers with hair like this (describing a mohawk-like hairstyle) who would brutally assault a Black person if they saw them walking on a pavement. Those white boys were cruel," said 87-year-old Lily Makhanya, whose late husband died while working in the anti-

apartheid movement's underground structures. "If they saw you walking on the pavement, you would be assaulted so badly and left for dead." For Makhanya and many others who stood in those queues to vote in 1994, it represented a turning point from a brutal past to the promise of a prosperous future. But 30 years later, much of that optimism has evaporated amid the country's pressing challenges. They include widening inequality as the country's Black majority continues to live in poverty with an unemployment rate of more than 32%, the highest in the world. According to official statistics, more than 16 million South Africans rely on monthly welfare grants for survival.

Public demonstrations have become common as communities protest against the ruling African National Congress' failure to deliver job opportunities and basic services like water and electricity. An electricity crisis that has resulted in power blackouts that are devastating the country's economy has added to the party's woes as businesses and homes are sometimes forced to go without electricity for up to 12 hours a day. Areas like the affluent Johannesburg suburb of Sandton, which hosts beautiful skyscrapers and luxurious homes, are an example of the economic success enjoyed by a minority of the country's 60 million people. But the township of Alexandra, which lies a few kilometers from Sandton, is a stark reflection of the living conditions of the country's poor Black majority, where sewage from burst pipes flows on the streets and uncollected rubbish piles up on pavements. Such contradictions are common across the major cities, including the capital Pretoria and the city of Cape

Town, and they remain at the center of what is expected to be one of the country's most fiercely contested elections next month. For the first time since the ANC came to power in 1994, polls are indicating that the party might receive less than 50% of the national vote, which would see it lose power unless it manages to form a coalition with some smaller parties.

For some younger voters like 24-year-old Donald Mkhwanazi, the nostalgia does not resonate. Mkhwanazi will be voting for the first time in the May 29 election and is now actively involved in campaigning for a new political party, Rise Mzansi, which will be contesting a national election for the first time.

"I had an opportunity to vote in 2019, and in local elections in 2021, but I did not because I was not persuaded enough by any of these old parties about why I should vote," he said. "I didn't see the need to vote because of what has been happening over the past 30 years. We talk about freedom, but are we free from crime, are we free from poverty? What freedom is this that we are talking about?"

Political analyst Pearl Mncube said South Africans are justified in feeling failed by their leaders. "More and more South Africans have grown skeptical of pronouncements from government due to its history of continuously announcing grand plans without prioritizing the swift execution of said plans," Mncube said. She said while Freedom Day is meant to signify the country's transition from an oppressive past, it was important to highlight current problems and plans to overcome them. "We cannot use the past, and any nostalgia attached to it, to avoid accounting for the present," she said.

Kiribati parliament votes to remove Australian-born high court judge

SYDNEY (Reuters): Kiribati's parliament has voted to remove Australian-born High Court Judge David Lambourne, who said on Friday the move was politically motivated and an attack on the independence of the Pacific Island nation's judiciary. The parliament voted to accept the recommendation of a special tribunal to remove Lambourne for misbehaviour.

An attempt to deport Lambourne, a judge who is married to Kiribati's opposition party leader, sparked a judicial crisis two years ago in the remote atoll nation in a case closely watched by the United Nations and international legal groups. In a statement on Friday, Lambourne said he was saddened that the parliament had voted to advise the president he

should be removed from office as a judge. "This has been a process motivated not by a desire to do right by the Constitution, but by politics, and the fabric of our democracy has been weakened as a result," he said. "Despite no complaint ever having been made to the Chief Justice about my conduct, or the performance of my judicial functions, the (President) established a Tribunal to investigate me based on the flimsiest of allegations raised by the Chair of his own political party," he added. The Kiribati president's office did not respond to a request for comment. The tribunal report said Lambourne delayed delivery of written reasons in a judgement in a case during an election period. Lambourne had argued the delay was

because he was stranded outside Kiribati due to COVID-19 border closures. A resident of Kiribati for 30 years, Lambourne has been living there without a visa or salary since 2022 when President Taneti Maamau suspended him. Maamau then suspended all three Court of Appeal judges and the chief justice after they ruled Lambourne should not be deported. Kiribati will hold national elections this year, and Lambourne appeared in court last month in a failed bid to have his suspension overturned. The attempt to deport Lambourne in August 2022 failed when a Fiji Airlines pilot refused to accept Lambourne on the plane against his will.

The High Court ruled earlier this month that Lambourne must not be

deported until parliament considers the outcome of a special tribunal. Lambourne said on Friday he was not given a fair hearing by the tribunal. "There has been a concerted attack on the independence of the Judiciary in Kiribati by the (president) and the Executive over the past 2 years." In a letter to Kiribati in September 2023, Margaret Satterthwaite, UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, expressed alarm at the suspensions of four judges, and concern the tribunal investigating Lambourne was headed by a lay magistrate with no formal legal qualifications. Kiribati's parliament is sitting for its final session this month, before dissolving in May ahead of national elections.

Qatar hails mediation 'milestone' as it hosts freed Ukrainian, Russian kids

DOHA: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says 16 Ukrainian children who "had previously been forcibly deported" to Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine are recovering in Qatar following their release. In a statement on X late, Zelenskyy said the group was freed and reunited with their families thanks to Qatari mediation efforts that have helped bring back dozens of children taken during the 27-month war.

He added that the children and their relatives were currently in the Gulf state "for medical, mental, and social recovery". Zelenskyy's statement came days after Qatar said 20 Ukrainian and Russian families had arrived in the Qatari capital to be provided healthcare and support with the ongoing mediation efforts to reunite families. They were accompanied by

Russian and Ukrainian officials who also met Qatari mediators. Russia's children's rights commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, announced a deal with Ukraine to exchange almost 50 children displaced by the invasion. "For the first time in a face-to-face format, we held talks with the Ukrainian side. Twenty-nine children are due to go to Ukraine and 19 to Russia," Lvova-Belova said. But the Ukrainian parliament's human rights commissioner, Dmytro Lubinets, later declined to confirm the information, telling the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency that the two countries "don't have any direct communication on this case".

Reporting from Doha, Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra said Qatar's mediation efforts began last year when Prime Minister and Foreign

Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani visited Russia and Ukraine, where he was asked to mediate the family reunification process. Ukraine accuses Russia of illegally taking more than 19,000 of its children since the start of the 2022 invasion, of whom fewer than 400 have been returned. Russia denies that charge, saying it has transferred children for their safety away from warzones. The fate of the children has been highly sensitive in Ukraine since the war began. Some of the children's parents have been killed while others have been separated from carers by the fast-moving front lines at the start of the invasion. Some were living in Ukrainian orphanages in areas Russia then occupied.

At an upscale Doha hotel, Qatari International

Cooperation Minister Lolwah al-Khater met visiting beneficiaries of the past exchanges. "Today was a milestone for us in Qatar in this mediation process," she told Al Jazeera. "We had 20 reunified families from both Ukraine and Russia with a high representation from both governments as well. We hope to upscale this process and to continue." Asked whether this could be a starting point to bring the warring sides together to discuss political issues, al-Khater said the focus of the mediation efforts from the beginning has been humanitarian matters.

"From there, we can discuss other portfolios as well," al-Khater noted. "The humanitarian and the political are very much intertwined, so we're hopeful that this will open also more venues in the future." — Aljazeera

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Economic Stability as the Bedrock of Independence

IN a significant address during the Green Pakistan Initiative conference, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir laid out a vision deeply resonant with national aspirations: the essentiality of economic stability for achieving true independence.

His words, echoing through various state-run media channels, come at a crucial juncture for Pakistan, a country on a steadfast journey towards reclaiming its economic sovereignty.

The context of General Munir's remarks is the ambitious Green Pakistan Initiative, a federal government project aimed at transforming 4.4 million acres of land across Pakistan into productive agricultural hubs.

The initiative, projected to generate around \$40 billion over the next five years and create four million jobs, is not just an economic venture but a stride towards strategic autonomy. By bolstering Pakistan's agricultural sector, the initiative promises to restore the country's status as a key player in Asian economies, reminiscent of its esteemed position during the Green Revolution era. General Munir's insistence on economic stability as a prerequisite for independence is a doctrine that resonates beyond the realms of economic theory.

It reflects a holistic understanding of sovereignty, one that encompasses not just political or territorial rights but extends to economic self-sufficiency. In today's globalized world, economic dependencies can often translate into political vulnerabilities, making economic resilience a cornerstone for any nation's true independence.

Moreover, the General's speech highlighted the collective responsibility of the Pakistani populace in this grand endeavor. His call to unite against the detractors of Pakistan's progress is an invitation to every citizen to partake in the national mission of economic revival. The emphasis on thwarting "negative propaganda and social media trolls" is particularly pertinent in an era where information warfare can significantly impact national projects.

The military's role in this economic crusade is noteworthy. Historically, the military in Pakistan has been a pivotal force in national affairs, and its full support for the Green Pakistan Initiative signifies the strategic importance of this project. The military's involvement is expected to bring discipline, efficiency, and a level of organization essential for the large-scale success of such initiatives.

This endeavor also smartly incorporates international cooperation, seeking to harness global partnerships to further Pakistan's agricultural capabilities. This is a clear nod towards diplomacy as a tool for economic strengthening, acknowledging that in the interconnected world of today, allies can play a significant role in a nation's economic journey.

The Green Pakistan Initiative also focuses on modernizing agriculture through what General Munir described as 'agricultural malls'—centers equipped with varied facilities to aid farmers. This approach not only aims to boost agricultural productivity but also to decentralize amenities, making them accessible across the country. Such initiatives could significantly impact rural development, bringing technology and resources to the doorsteps of the local farmer, and potentially stabilizing rural economies.

Critically, the economic dividends from this initiative are designed to be widely distributed, with a substantial portion allocated to the provinces and a focus on empowering farmers directly. This is an inclusive strategy aimed at ensuring that the benefits of economic advancements are not centralized but reach every corner of the country.

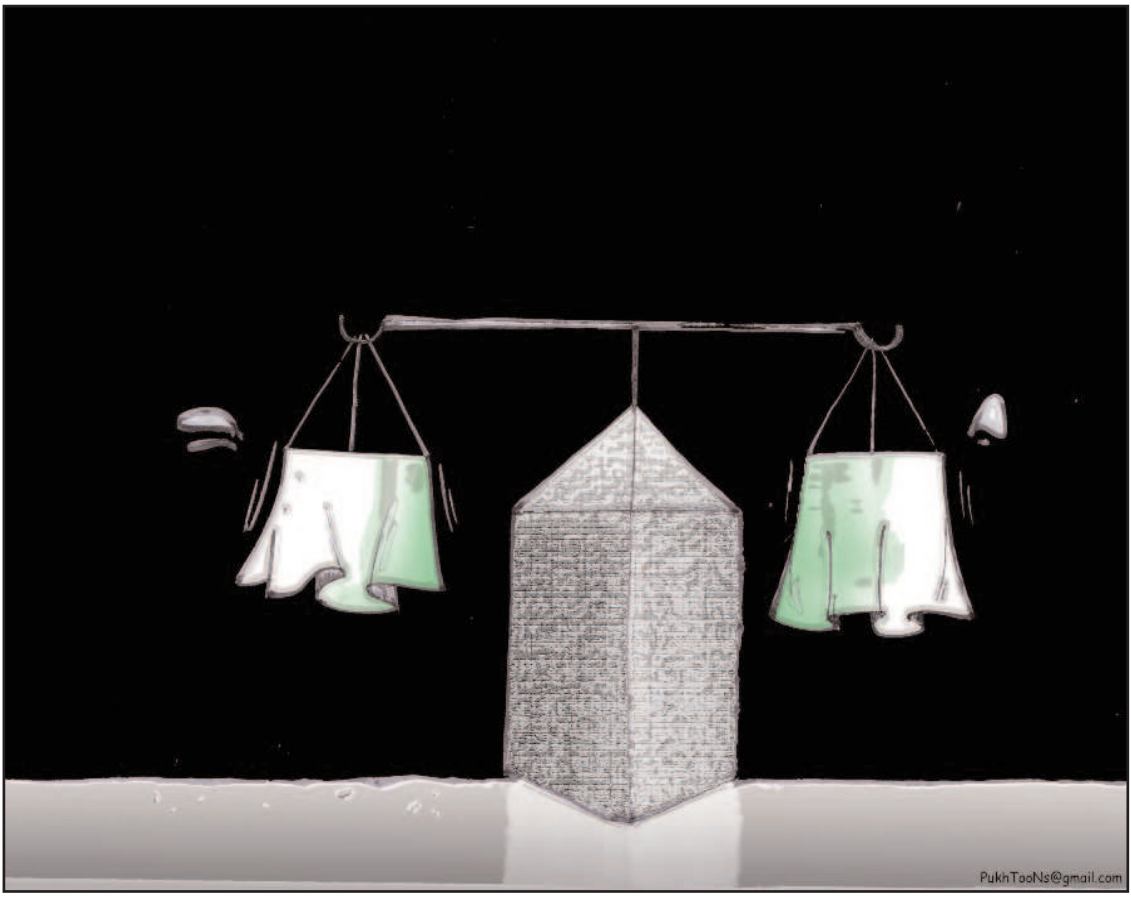
In essence, General Munir's address is a clarion call for a united front towards economic resilience as the pathway to independence. It underscores the belief that without a stable and self-sufficient economy, political independence may not be fully realized or sustained.

As Pakistan moves forward with its Green Pakistan Initiative, it does so with the dual goals of economic upliftment and enhanced national sovereignty. This vision of economic stability intertwined with national independence is not just a policy statement but a strategic blueprint for the future.

It is a comprehensive approach that promises not just to revitalize agriculture but to rejuvenate a nation's entire economic landscape. For Pakistan, the journey towards economic stability is indeed a journey towards enduring independence, a voyage that requires the collective will, effort, and perseverance of its entire populace.

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A princess, a Gazan mother and I

Asha Iyer Kumar

Iam no Kate Middleton. Neither have I been diagnosed with the big C. Yet I have been lately comparing me with her a lot, not on the same presumptuous level as you might suspect with eyes rolling, but as fellow human beings. And along with us, I have been thinking of an anonymous Gazan mother, who at this point might be looking up to the skies to see if parachutes are cascading down from a benevolent country's Air Force plane.

A royal lady riddled with the scrutiny of the world; a beleaguered mother in a war-torn land; and a middle-class woman in a glitzy desert city – what can presumably be common between us, except that we are women? Pain.

When Kate released the video announcing to the world that she has been afflicted with the most dreaded disease in the world, and when all the scorn that had been heaped upon her in the days that preceded it metamorphosed to sympathy, support and remorse, I vicariously felt vindicated. When she appealed for privacy and space, I felt her and acknowledged that she was entitled to it as she was coming to terms with an unexpected, life-threatening clinical revelation.

Cancer by its very nature is cruel; it carries with it connotations of a terminal condition; it is a subtle reminder of death and inspires fear like no other disease can. It is a metaphor for mortality. And for this reason, a diagnosis and an announcement thereafter warrant genuine compassion.

Not just for Kate, but for millions like her. Perhaps, her affluence and status can help her navigate this period with more courage and confi-

dence than most others. However, the fact that she belongs to a privileged class doesn't make the disease any less dreadful to her.

Even as I acknowledge pain as a constant in human lives, not all are stricken with the big C. Some, like me, are torn to tatters by the big D. The lancing difference between C and D is no one asks the former, 'Why? Why did you get cancer? What was lacking in your life?' But they ask me, 'Why? Why did you get into depression? Why the panic dis-

have to put food on the table; when you have huge psychiatric bills to pay: When people say recovery is all about 'will-power'; when the ignorant masses consider it either as 'derangement' and the educated class normalise it with casual refrains sans understanding; when people advise you to mask the pain, smile and not complain; when well-meaning friends goad you on with 'you are strong' when all defences are breaking, the agony then becomes manifold. It makes one wonder, 'Is Kate's cancer

days that seem splintered and impossible to put together is by looking at scenes from Gaza, where a wailing mother is desperate to find a few morsels to feed her children amidst what seems like a sea of rubble and hopelessness. She needn't come out and make announcements about the tragedy that has struck her life. She doesn't have the luxury of appealing for privacy or time; she doesn't even have what it takes to survive to the next day. She is a picture of unfiltered dystopian malady. With every shred of peace and happiness stolen from her chest, she and her children have no veritable reason to live; yet they live on because sometimes life offers no choice but to carry on until the time to leave arrives – either in the form of bombs and bullets for them; or in the form of systemic organ failure for the terminally ill; or as a slow, silent exit for those whose brain plays truant now and then.

Resistance is the only option before us whether the world backs us or not; whether we receive flaks or favour; whether we belong to the elite or the plebeian; because at the end of the day, none of us want to go down without a fight. And sometimes, acceptance seems like a curious alternative, when all other cards have been played.

Death, disease and devastation are huge equalisers. Pain and suffering don't feel different to a royal and a commoner. If compassion has to be shown in earnest, it has to go to every man, woman and child in distress.

Because misery cannot be compared, evaluated and rated. To each, his or her own. Kate is in pain, and so are many of us. To us all, may there be light at the end of the tunnel. Until then, let's keep walking.

Resistance is the only option before us whether the world backs us or not; whether we receive flaks or favour; whether we belong to the elite or the plebeian; because at the end of the day, none of us want to go down without a fight. And sometimes, acceptance seems like a curious alternative, when all other cards have been played. Death, disease and devastation are huge equalisers. Pain and suffering don't feel different to a royal and a commoner. If compassion has to be shown in earnest, it has to go to every man, woman and child in distress.

order? What was lacking in your life?"

"Brain chemicals, genetics, and life situations, my friend," is all I can say.

It takes cosmical courage for someone with the big D to go and announce to the world that they need space and time to recover; that they need privacy.

And when you are not privileged; when you

alone worthy of compassion? Is an ordinary woman's mental illness a trifling, or worse, a dubious thing?

If cancer is considered terminal, depression is terminal too. Not in the most obvious way, but life bleeds out, paper cut by paper cut. It is the most unobtrusive way of dying.

The only way I summon the will to live on

Recognition of Palestinian statehood is not the panacea

Yara Hawari

AS the genocide in Gaza rages on, various European countries, including Spain and Ireland, have indicated that they are moving towards recognising the State of Palestine.

The new Irish prime minister, Simon Harris, argued that a group of like-minded countries officially recognising a Palestinian state would "lend weight to the decision and ... send the strongest message".

Meanwhile, Spanish officials argued that this could create momentum for others to do the same. Currently, most countries in the Global South, but only very few in the West, recognise the State of Palestine. As it stands, recognition of the State of Palestine is a political and symbolic move – it signals the recognition of the Palestinian right to sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza. In reality, no such sovereignty exists – rather as an occupying force, the Israeli regime maintains de facto control over both territories and effectively controls everything that goes in and out, including people.

Recently, some moves have also been made towards granting Palestine full membership to the United Nations, and thus recognising its statehood at the UN level. In mid-April, a resolution was put forward at the UN Security Council that would have paved the way for full Palestinian membership. Twelve members of the UNSC voted in favour but, unsurprisingly, the United States blocked the initiative using its veto power. Rather predictably, the United Kingdom and Switzerland abstained. Prior to the vote, the Biden administration offered Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas a meeting at the White House in return for suspending the bid. Abbas declined, probably still stinging from last year when he reportedly accepted a similar offer and never received the invitation to the White House. Indeed, it has been the case many times before that the Palestinian Authority suspended action at the UN at the bequest of the Americans in return for a measly payoff, or no payoff at all.

Some Palestinians and international human rights organisations argue that recognition is a crucial step towards securing Palestinian fundamental rights and one that offers more legal avenues to hold the Israeli regime accountable. Yet it is difficult to envision how recognition of a state that does not exist would change the reality on the ground for Palestinians facing systematic erasure.

In fact, it is pertinent to ask whether some states are pushing for this symbolic political move amid an ongoing genocide to avoid taking much more tangible actions, such as arms/trade embargoes and sanctions on the Israeli regime, to support Palestinians and reaffirm their right to sovereignty. For example, Spain – one of the leading voices calling for recognition – in November exported \$1m worth of ammunition to the Israeli regime, which by that time had already killed thousands in Gaza. Meanwhile, Ireland's exports of restricted "dual-use" goods that have potential military purposes grew nearly sevenfold in 2023, from 11 million euros (\$11.8m) to more than 70 million euros (\$75m). Despite growing calls for an end to all trade relations between Ireland and the Israeli regime, these exports continue to this day. It thus begs the question: What does recognition of a people's statehood mean when you remain complicit in funding, arming and equipping the regime that is destroying the very people of that state?

But for most diplomats and foreign officials, the crux of the recognition argument is that it will revive the "two-state solution" amid what is being framed as a political impasse. A solution which, premised on the partition of the land of historic Palestine, does not recognise Palestinian fundamental rights in their entirety and effectively accepts Israeli apartheid. Indeed the two-state solution demands that Palestinians world over forgo their rights to their lands and properties in historic Palestine and accept a truncated state in the 1967 occupied lands instead. Further, it demands that Palestinians accept Zionism as a legitimate ideology rather than one of settler-colonial domination.

Today, in addition to the genocide in Gaza, which has seen Israeli forces kill more than 34,000 Palestinians and destroy 70 percent of the enclave's infrastructure, the West Bank is facing unprecedented land theft, settlement building, destruction of homes and violence at the hands of both soldiers and settlers. This reality is a rather predictable outcome of decades of pushing a flawed solution framework which favours colonial partition of justice and freedom.

That's why what Palestinians need from the international community at this moment is not the symbolic recognition of a non-existing state, but tangible action, including trade embargoes on and sanctions against the Israeli regime to hold it accountable for its ongoing crimes across colonised Palestine. As the genocide rages on, Gaza continues to teach the world many things, and among them is that the Palestinian people cannot be "siphoned off into Bantustans" and forgotten about. Indeed, partition will never be a sustainable or long-term solution and the international community needs to come to terms with this.

GCC-EU strategic partnership passes an important milestone

DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAI SHEG

TWO years after the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council announced their strategic partnership, they passed another milestone this week by holding a high-level meeting on security cooperation. All 33 member nations of the two blocs attended, with most represented by their foreign ministers.

Security cooperation between the two groups has been born out of necessity and is growing to fulfill that need. Josep Borrell, high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy and vice president of the European Commission, stressed at the start of the meeting that: "In times of turmoil and escalating tensions, peace and multilateralism are challenged in both our regions and we need more than ever to work together to resolve the crises, to prevent escalation and support a safer and more stable international environment."

There was high representation from both sides for the GCC-EU High-Level Meeting on Regional Security and Cooperation, which was held in Luxembourg on Monday. This was the first

forum of this nature. While the GCC-EU Joint Ministerial Council has been meeting annually since the signing of the 1988 Cooperation Agreement to discuss and decide on all issues related to their partnership, the Luxembourg gathering was security-focused. The wars in Gaza and Ukraine dominated the discussions.

The chronology of events leading to Monday's security meeting has been accelerated by geopolitical events. During a meeting in Brussels in February 2022, GCC and EU ministers announced a strategic upgrading of their relationship. At the same time, they adopted a five-year program covering 2023 to 2027 to reflect this transformation by including more political and security dialogue. In May 2022, the EU adopted a "Joint Communication" on the strategic partnership with the Gulf; "joint" here meaning a consensus between all EU institutions and commitment to the upgrade.

The Brussels ministerial meeting of 2022 was held amid rising global tensions. It was held on Feb. 21, three days before the start of Russia's war in

Ukraine, which led to dramatic changes in Europe's energy and security priorities. European countries have since sought to reduce their reliance on Russia for their energy needs and increase their imports from other sources, including the GCC states. The Ukraine war brought home the EU's acute security vulnerability and the need to strengthen its partnerships around the world.

In June 2023, the EU appointed Luigi Di Maio, a former Italian foreign minister, as EU special representative for the Gulf – a new post created to help accelerate the strategic elements of the newly upgraded partnership between the two groups. The Luxembourg meeting this week owes a lot to Di Maio's energetic advocacy of the need for greater security cooperation, as Borrell stressed and several other ministers also highlighted.

The 27th meeting of the GCC-EU Joint Ministerial Council was held in Muscat on Oct. 10, 2023, three days after the attack on Israel by Palestinian militants, which sparked the war against Gaza. Just

as the war in Ukraine shaped the early days of the GCC-EU strategic partnership, Israel's war on Gaza is now shaping the current phase of their engagement. The war has split the EU into different camps and made it difficult to reach consensus within the bloc, thus affecting the prospects for growing the GCC-EU strategic partnership.

Despite the disagreements among EU members on the war in Gaza, the Joint Council agreed in Muscat to hold a regular and structured GCC-EU regional security dialogue at the level of senior officials and to establish joint working groups when needed, within the framework of this security dialogue. This aimed at coordinating efforts on regional and global issues, including nuclear, missile and drone proliferation; maritime security; cybersecurity; counterterrorism; terrorism financing, recruitment and ideology; human trafficking; drug trafficking; irregular migration; organized crime; and energy security, the security of global food supplies and disaster preparedness and emergency response.

To carry out that decision, EU and GCC experts and senior officials met in Riyadh in January this year to map out the security cooperation between the two blocs. As a first step, they agreed to develop mechanisms for cooperation in five key areas: nuclear nonproliferation, maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism and emergency response. The Luxembourg meeting this week agreed with those five priorities.

Since the breakout of the Gaza war, the energetic diplomacy of Borrell, Di Maio and foreign ministers from both sides has been able to turn the tide within Europe and reestablish consensus on Gaza. As it became evident that Israel had gone beyond self-defense in its war of annihilation against Gaza, with tens of thousands killed, mostly women and children, and almost the entire population homeless, the tide started to shift. More countries have now realized the need for a change in policy and for Europe to play a more constructive role, instead of acquiescing to Israel's policy of mayhem and destruction.

By the time the Luxembourg meeting was

held, a new consensus had emerged. Led by countries such as Belgium, Ireland and Spain, all ministers at the meeting agreed on the need to stop the war, increase humanitarian assistance and move forward on a political solution based on the two-state solution along the 1967 lines. They also agreed on the need for the two blocs to take joint steps to achieve these goals. Those steps could include working harder to achieve an immediate and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, securing an exchange of prisoners, organizing an international conference to discuss the wider Middle East conflict and more recognitions of the state of Palestine by European nations.

Participants at the Luxembourg meeting agreed that the EU and the GCC now share many interests and have converging views on many topics, making it possible to do more together. With increased polarization in international relations generally, it has become imperative for the two blocs to partner in addressing geopolitical crises, especially Gaza/Palestine, and increasing regional security.

China, Latin America entitled to forge close space cooperation

Wang Yanan

CONSIDERING the unfathomable expanse of the universe, Earth, the only cosmic body we can call home, appears like a speck on a vast ocean. Yet in the cosmic expanse, a realm of boundless possibilities and uncertainties, lies the future of humankind. From the humble beginnings of human flight in a hot air balloon in 1783 to the monumental achievement of landing on the moon in 1969, our journey into space has been marked by remarkable achievements. Yet, given the grandeur of the cosmos, our accomplishments may seem modest.

Space technology offers a plethora of promising avenues for exploration and discovery. In space, we can unlock the mysteries of biology and life. We can explore space to make breakthroughs in medicines, cultivate more productive and resilient crops, and develop superior materials. The prospect of exploring distant planets and future migration paths of humans beckons us with tantalizing possibilities.

Unfortunately, access to these promising prospects is limited to only a few countries. There is significant imbalance among countries when it comes to space technology. While some countries possess advanced space capabilities, others lack even the basic communication satellites, and are thus deprived of the benefits of space technology.

China, as a developing coun-

try, has made significant strides in space technology, and prioritizes cooperation with other developing countries to ensure equitable access to space resources.

In recent years, China's cooperation with Latin American countries in space technology has expanded. China's collaboration with Venezuela on a future lunar exploration station project, including the possibility of sending Venezuelan astronauts to China's space station, exemplifies this trend.

China's commitment to equitable and mutually beneficial global cooperation ensures that the participating countries can synchronize their access to space technology, expand the frontiers of human knowledge and leverage China's experience in space research to develop their agriculture, industry and healthcare sectors, and boost their economy.

China's involvement in Latin American countries' space endeavors goes beyond mere provisions for satellites, because it has been participating in the construction of satellite ground control facilities, training technical personnel, and helping enhance their satellite manufacturing capabilities.

This collaborative approach has not only facilitated the sustainable development of space applications in Latin America but also enabled China to use satellite tracking and communi-

cations facilities in the region to support its own space program, including deep space exploration.

But China's deepening space technology cooperation with Latin American countries has made some countries, particularly Western countries, uncomfortable, with some of them saying China's involvement could destabilize the existing space exploration order and undermine the strategic interests of other space-faring nations. By saying so, however, they reveal their refusal to accept Latin American countries' desire to develop space technology and their willingness to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation with China.

The establishment of the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency in Mexico in 2021 is testament to the region's commitment to space exploration and development. However, China's collaboration with Latin American countries in space technology predates the establishment of the agency; it began in the late 1980s.

Over the years, China has launched satellites for several Latin American countries, including Brazil, providing vital support for their communication and resource survey efforts. It has also established space technology cooperation with countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Such collaboration has not only bolstered

Latin American countries' space capability but also fostered economic development and technological advancement in the region.

In the broader context, space technology cooperation represents a fundamental shift in the way we approach the exploration and exploitation of outer space. Instead of viewing space as a geopolitical battleground, we should embrace it as a platform promoting global collaboration and scientific discovery. By working together, countries can leverage their respective strengths and resources to address common challenges and realize the full potential of space exploration for the benefit of all humanity.

China's increasing role in space technology cooperation with Latin American countries holds great promise for the future of space exploration and development. By boosting collaboration and sharing resources, China and Latin American countries together can boost their space capabilities and help achieve the broader goals of scientific exploration and technological innovation.

The future of human civilization does not depend on individual countries' ability to set foot on celestial bodies, but rather on how much space technology can benefit humanity. As we journey into the cosmos, let us embrace the spirit of cooperation and partnership, and recognize that our collective future lies among the stars.

What I learned watching suspended Columbia students share a meal with my community

Serene Jones

LAST Thursday, I listened in horror as sirens blared outside my office window at Union Theological Seminary. Hundreds of officers from the New York City Police Department flooded onto the campus of our neighbor, Columbia University, to forcibly remove more than 100 peaceful student protestors from an encampment. Students were gathered there calling for action in the ongoing war in Gaza, including demanding the university sever any ties with Israel.

As the president of an institution with a 187-year legacy of leading on issues of justice and peace – where protesting is in our DNA – these events have shaken me to my core. I felt compelled to reach out to the community not just due to deeply held moral convictions, but due to strong principles of faith and spirituality.

In a community letter, I let our Union students, faculty and staff know that as an institution committed to being a safe haven for all – but especially our most vulnerable communities. And as an institution committed to academic freedom for deeply moral and spiritual reasons, we never silence voices of protest. We value these voices, even at times when that protest is against us.

Most importantly, I reminded our students that the aggressive police action being taken on other campuses across the country will not be taken here. As their president, I have their back.

In writing to our community, I had no intention of being radical or self-righteous. I was simply reminding the community of who we are – not only on days like last Thursday, but every day.

As the president of a higher education graduate school, the actions of my sister institutions tore me apart. Some of our students were also arrested while protesting. Instead of suspending or expelling them, we offered them care – as is our practice every day. We don't do everything perfectly, but we are committed to trying our best to engage in the messy work of justice and peace.

In the days that followed, we received several requests from the Columbia community. Faculty asked if they could teach suspended students (who were no longer allowed on their

campus) at Union. Suspended Jewish students also asked if they could host a Passover seder on our campus on Monday evening this week.

Our response to all these requests was a resounding “yes.”

Union's small but mighty staff put tremendous effort into working out all the logistics so we could make this happen, and our wonderful students worked hard to set up our courtyard on Monday evening for a meaningful Passover seder. The service – led by Columbia's Jewish students – restored for those of us present our sense of community. It was wonderful to see Union's diverse community of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and spiritual but not religious students congregate and share a meal with Columbia's Jewish students. Together, they held a seder like those happening all over the world. There was prayer. There was quiet contemplation. There was laughter.

I, like so much of the rest of the world in this moment, yearn for more Mondays instead of Thursdays.

These experiences illuminate the core of the tragedy gripping so many corners of our country. The war has caused immense pain and turmoil among myriad groups for a host of different reasons. People are mourning the victims of Hamas' attacks on Israel. People are agonizing over the death of tens of thousands of people in Gaza. People are grieving the loss of friends and family members overseas. People are grappling with anti-semitism and Islamophobia.

But amidst all of that, people are just looking for a common humanity – a way to stop the pain and make a difference. A way to find solace, together.

Unfortunately, rather than seeking to understand one another's perspectives and show empathy, many have claimed the moral high ground and attempted to quash any contrary opinions. University campuses have become battlegrounds.

Since the horrifying events of October 7 in Israel, our world has seemingly descended into chaos. As a faith leader, I, along with my Jewish siblings, am grieving all the lives lost that day to violence and those who have

terrifyingly been taken hostage. Along with my Muslim siblings, I am also mourning the more than 32,000 Palestinian lives lost, according to health officials in Gaza, to this crushing war and an unfolding humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

I am deeply grieved that as a nation, our American community has become so divided by this war. It is ripping communities, campuses and even families apart.

We at Union struggle with it as well. Our community has diverse perspectives on the war. As an institution committed to the hard and messy work of advancing justice and peace, we have engaged in difficult community conversations led by our faculty. Our goal has not been to build consensus, but rather to create safe community spaces where we can center our shared values.

We are far from perfect. We're a historically Christian seminary – and Christians have been and continue to be the source of some of the most virulent forms of hatred and violence. We stand against this, with humility.

Whatever our differences, I firmly believe campuses must be places for lively, rigorous debate, where we struggle collectively to find better ways to live together on this planet, and where students have the chance to find and strengthen their voices. Education is to experience the power of collective action, to become a passionate, engaged citizen. These precious values do not flourish when protests are squashed. Democracy itself cannot flourish.

With the events that unfolded at Columbia last Thursday, we are seeing encampments of peaceful student protestors rise up on campuses across the country. While university leaders are under tremendous pressure to respond with full force, I hope this tide of intolerance can be turned towards our highest values – including a commitment to freedom of speech. Campuses should be spaces where we learn to build a better world, not a more destructive one.

In these precarious times, it is all the more important that these values be upheld. Please join us in the struggle to manifest these values.

That, at its core, is what it means to be true educators.

— CNN

Russian influence in the South Caucasus should not be written off

KHALED ABOU ZAHR

HAS the South Caucasus become the new Middle East? Or has it become a second playing field for the Middle East's geopolitical interests? Analysts often use the Syrian file to link both regions. We notice in both these files the same players: Turkiye, Russia, Iran and, in the background, the Europeans and the US. Yet, what stands out as the most interesting dynamic in what is described as the “New Middle East” is the relationship between Russia and Turkiye.

A major geopolitical shift has taken place following the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and the fallout from the Ukraine war. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia now have a stronger global presence and have been actively looking to shift their foreign policy strategies away from Russia's influence. Azerbaijan is strengthening its links with Turkiye mainly, but also Israel and the EU; Armenia, disappointed by its Russian sponsorship, is clearly expanding its engagement with the EU and France in particular, while also looking to build military ties with India; and Georgia, facing domestic turmoil, is once again looking to fortify its relationships with the US and China, as well as the EU.

For many analysts, the dynamics in the South Caucasus have long been defined within the post-Soviet era, meaning following the collapse of the USSR. Now, they are putting forward the post-Ukraine era as a second phase of the decline in Russian influence in the region. And the country benefiting the most in terms of influence is

Turkiye, especially through its alliance with Azerbaijan, which has become a leading regional voice.

However, will this situation stay the same for long? Is the Russian army so focused on the Ukrainian front that it will lose even more ground in this vital region for Moscow?

If this is true, the ripple effects will extend to other countries and regions, such as Central Asia. Here too, just like in the Middle East, Turkish sitcoms and soap operas preceded Ankara's entry as a true geopolitical player.

I would put a twist on these analysts' view and look at defining this as the era of the post-Georgia war of 2008. In many ways, we are today living with the consequences of this incident – and on a bigger scale. Coincidentally, the Democrats are in the White House again. The Georgian defiance toward Moscow, some might even say provocations, pushed the creation of a new situation. Despite Moscow being able to maintain its interests there, it showed a weak military on the logistical side.

I remember vividly a former Arab military official being shocked at footage of Russian soldiers being transported in various seized trucks and pickups. This apparent weakness has taken decades to create a true challenge to Russia.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, if we compare militaries, Russia is the dominant force.

It is ranked as the second-biggest global military power and it maintains a vast array of

military assets, including the largest tank force and one of the largest nuclear arsenals. Moscow has, according to military reviews, a significant presence on the global stage, with more than 1.32 million active military personnel and a broad spectrum of capabilities from land to air to sea.

Turkiye, on the other hand, has only the eighth most powerful military in the world. But it has undergone significant modernization and expansion, particularly in its expeditionary and overseas capabilities. With a focus on technological advancements and self-reliance, Turkiye's armed forces have grown to be a key player within NATO and beyond, boasting a diverse and increasingly sophisticated array of military hardware and a robust defense industry.

When focusing on the Caucasus, Russia maintains a strategic military presence, particularly in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In Abkhazia, the Russian 7th Military Base hosts about 4,500 personnel, while South Ossetia's 4th Guards Military Base hosts some 3,500 personnel. Additionally, Russia has the 102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia, and the 3624th Airbase at Erebuni Airport near Yerevan, with estimated personnel numbers ranging from 3,214 to 5,000.

These bases play a crucial role in Russia's influence.

Meanwhile, Turkiye does not have any official military bases in the Caucasus region. However, it maintains close military cooperation with

Azerbaijan, including joint military exercises and defense agreements. This partnership was notably evident during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where Turkish support played a significant role in Baku's victory in clashes leading up to September 2023, when it reclaimed full control over the region that is disputed with Armenia. Turkiye's military presence in the region is more about strategic alliances and support, rather than physical bases.

This is an interesting twist, as Turkiye applies to Russia the same strategy Russia applies to the US in various theaters, such as Syria and Africa. Both countries are looking to avoid direct clashes and have found a modus operandi that blends indirect confrontation with collaboration in other arenas.

We should remember that this region has historically been a battleground for imperial powers, including the Ottoman Empire, Persia (and later Iran) and Russia.

This is why, with a potential expansion of the war in Ukraine, a more appropriate comparison is not with the Middle East, despite the common interests and stakeholders. Instead, we should remember the Russo-Turkish War of the 19th century, between the Ottoman Empire and a coalition led by the Russian Empire.

This war was fought in the Caucasus and ... wait for it ... the Balkans. One thing is clear: Russia's influence will not wane in the blink of an eye, especially as Moscow now has a war economy, with an impressive increase in its industrial military capacity.

Artificial Intelligence could help eliminate tuberculosis

GROUNDBREAKING new technologies seem to be emerging with increasing frequency nowadays. Since its launch in November 2022, OpenAI's generative artificial intelligence chatbot, ChatGPT, has become a global sensation, attracting more than 100 million users and inspiring numerous imitators. The technology's fast-evolving capabilities have also commanded the attention of world leaders, dominating discussions at both the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28) and the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

It is not difficult to understand why. By harnessing AI tools developed by private companies like OpenAI, governments and civil-society organisations could make significant strides toward tackling global challenges like climate change and economic inequality. Similarly, they could revolutionise how we fight infectious diseases, ensuring that life-saving care reaches those who need it most.

Tuberculosis is a prime example. TB, a preventable and curable disease, claims an average of more than 3,000 lives per day. Although the mechanisms of TB transmission are well understood, and highly effective treat-

ment regimens – including new and improved medications – are available worldwide, TB still led to 1.3 million deaths globally in 2022.

AI tools could play a major role in the global effort to end TB. To this end, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria is pursuing public-private partnerships with the goal of developing and deploying innovative digital public-health tools. During a recent trip to Bangladesh, for example, I encountered a team of health-care providers from the public and private sectors, along with local community partners, who are using digital X-rays, AI, and telemedicine to facilitate rapid TB screening. Patients whose X-ray results show signs of TB could immediately submit sputum samples for analysis and receive treatment at the community level, free of charge.

Similar initiatives are being launched around the world. In Pakistan's Punjab province, the humanitarian aid organisation Mercy Corps uses AI tools to identify “hot spots” – remote or rural areas where TB cases might go undetected – and set up mobile health camps to deliver diagnostic and treatment services directly to local residents. In the Padre de la

Vega prison in Paraguay, health-care workers use Fujifilm ultralight portable X-ray machines and AI technology to provide rapid and precise TB screening.

Likewise, physicians at Cambodia's National Centre for Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control in Phnom Penh bring portable Delft X-ray machines to nearby provinces to screen individuals unable to travel to the capital.

And in Indonesia, a new partnership between the Global Fund, Siemens Healthineers, and the country's national TB program aims to scale up early detection efforts by combining deep-learning AI technology and X-ray analysis to enable radiologists to read scans remotely.

Targeted, innovative projects such as these are crucial to overcoming persistent inequities that fuel the spread of infectious diseases: poverty, conflict- and weather-related displacement, overcrowding, and limited access to health facilities. Moreover, they are laying the groundwork for resilient health systems capable of meeting every person's needs. For example, in addition to TB screenings, Pakistan's mobile health camps offer essential services focusing on women and young

children.

These examples underscore the importance of fostering collaboration among companies, industry leaders, governments, and local health providers to devise innovative ways to address solvable problems like TB.

That is why the Global Fund, which contributes 76 per cent of all international financing to end TB, also allocates more than \$150 million annually to develop digital tools aimed at promoting equity and helping remote communities access critical health-care services.

But much more is needed. Devising targeted, effective, and sustainable solutions requires active engagement with local communities to mitigate a wide range of other public-health threats, such as pandemics and antimicrobial resistance. This is why it is crucial to have committed partners who can envision and develop cutting-edge digital tools.

By leveraging AI to augment local medical expertise, we have an opportunity to overcome TB once and for all. In a world brimming with innovative ideas and emerging technologies that until recently were beyond our imagination, ending this global scourge, and perhaps others, is finally within reach.

— Khaleej Times

Vision 2030: A much-needed pulse check

FAISAL J. ABBAS

THE annual report on what Saudi Vision 2030 has accomplished so far, on the eighth anniversary of the start of the Kingdom's transformation story, could not have come at a better time. On April 28 Riyadh will host more than 1,000 heads of state, thought leaders and policymakers from around the world at a two-day Special Meeting of the World Economic Forum on Global Collaboration, Growth, and Energy for Development.

The report supplies much needed context for the transformed Kingdom visitors will see when they land in the Saudi capital. Almost everything has changed, including much that was once deemed impossible: from the female airport immigration officer (who along with other women in numerous sectors now form 35.5 percent of the workforce, surpassing the 2023 goal) to the stripping away of the previously unchecked powers of the religious police, to a business environment that encourages foreign direct investment and international companies to relo-

cate and open their regional headquarters here.

Visitors will also notice significantly more greenery, with nearly 50 million trees planted since the launch of the Saudi Green Initiative in 2021.

There is no need to dwell further on the statistics, because the report speaks for itself – and also because over 100 million people already know all of that and much more about Saudi Arabia: the Kingdom surpassed its target of 100 million tourists in 2023, seven years early.

If you think I am being unduly positive, that is because there is a great deal to be positive about. The report finds that 87 percent of Vision 2030 initiatives are either on track or completed, and 81 percent of Level 3 key performance indicators have been reached. For me, as a journalist, the very reporting of these numbers is encouraging because it shows welcome levels of transparency and accountability by the government.

The report is also the most powerful argument against skeptics and mis-

informed cynics who cast doubt on Vision 2030 by cherry-picking the slowing down or downsizing of some of the ambitious projects the Kingdom is undertaking all at once. Yes, part of that may be true, but there are other targets that have been surpassed, and other projects expedited. To ignore that would be unfair.

Can more be done, or better results achieved? I will leave it to industry specialists to discuss areas of improvement in their own fields of expertise. However, again as a journalist, I would like to see more media involvement in monitoring and evaluating the performance of government entities, as opposed to just reporting on the results. Indeed, this should be added as a target, since it goes hand in hand, and in perfect harmony, with Vision 2030's culture of transparency, target setting and KPIs.

With new office bearers elected to the Saudi Journalists Association, and the Ministry of Media having declared 2024 the year of media transformation, I am confident we will see more progress on this front.



Pakistan Stock Exchange gains 771 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday gained 771.35 points, a positive change of 1.07 percent, closing at 72,742.75 points against 71,971.40 points the previous trading day.

A total of 541,144,650 shares valuing Rs 22.589 billion were traded during the day as compared to 798,527.177 shares valuing Rs 27.542 billion the last day.

Some 375 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 175 of them recorded gains and 175 sustained losses, whereas the prices of 25 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Askari Bank Limited with 39,174,000 shares at Rs 25.16 per share, K-Electric Limited with 31,235,856

shares at Rs 4.58 per share and WorldCall Telecom with 30,155,361 shares at Rs 1.33 per share.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 131.74 per share price, closing at Rs 7,822.61, whereas the runner-up was Sapphire Fiber Limited with a maximum decrease of Rs 101.08 per share closing at Rs 20,153.92, followed by Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs 38.36 decline to close at Rs 630.20.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 101.08 per share closing at Rs 20,153.92, followed by Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs 38.36 decline to close at Rs 630.20.

Rupee sees slight recovery against US dollar
Pakistani Rupee on Friday gained 10 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 278.38 against

the previous day's closing of Rs278.48.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 277.25 and Rs 279.8 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 20 paise and closed at Rs 298.87 against the last-day closing of Rs 298.67, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged at Rs1.78, whereas an increase of 07 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs348.48 compared to the last closing of Rs348.41.

The Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 03 and 02 paise to close at Rs75.79 and Rs74.22 respectively.

Gold rates up by Rs.2,500 per tola to Rs245,000

The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs.2,500 and was sold at Rs.245,000 on Friday compared to its sale at Rs.242,500 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs.2,143 to Rs.210,048 from Rs. 207,905 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.192,544 from Rs.190,580, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained stagnant at Rs.2,650 and Rs.2,271.94 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$21 to \$2,343 from \$2,322, the association reported.



KARACHI: Speaker of Hammad Shura Karachi General (Rtd) Moinuddin Haider addressing monthly meeting of Hammad Shura. Ms. Sadia Rashid and Dr. Shahid Hasan Siddiqui also present on occasion.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, Seaspan Beacon, SSL Brahma Putra and Haj Muhammad scheduled to load/offload Container and Cement, berthed at Container Terminal and Multi-Purpose Terminal respectively during last 24 hours.

Meanwhile another ship 'Doha' with Liquefied Natural Gas also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim during the same period.

A total of nine ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them six ships, SSL Brahma Putra, Seaspan Beacon, Seacon Yokohama, Asia Liberty, Bateleur and Hansa Oslo are expected to sail on today.

Cargo volume of 115,266 tonnes, comprising 87,961 tonnes imports cargo and 27,305 tonnes export cargo carried in 3,291 Containers (was handled at the port during last 24 hours).

Members express concern over debt

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The members of Hammad Shura Karachi Chapter expressed deep concern over the mounting external debt of the country and emphasized the importance of adopting long-term policies for Pakistan's financial stability.

On the request of the president of Hammad Foundation Pakistan, Ms. Sadia Rashid, the monthly meeting of Hammad Shura titled: "Will we always be stuck in the swamp of debt" held, at Hammad Corporate Head Office. The session was presided over by Speaker General (r) Moinuddin Haider.

The guest speaker, esteemed economist Dr. Shahid Hasan Siddiqui, stated that the economy of Pakistan is dominated by the elite class. He noted that policies formulated at both federal and provincial levels primarily serve the interests of this group. Over the past few years, Pakistan's external debt has surged notably. However, these loans have failed to benefit the average citizens;

instead, inflation has risen considerably. Consequently, these recent years have marked a period of severe economic downturn for Pakistan.

He further said that due to inflation and unfair profit-making, a small group accumulated significant wealth while poverty worsened across the country. It's crucial to stop favouring the elite. Sadly, there wasn't any rise in the budget for education and healthcare. The continuous rise in the prices of essential materials made it tougher for local businesses to compete globally.

Zafar Iqbal, Justice (r) Zia Pervaz, Engr. Ibn-ul-Hasan, Naushaba Khalil, Engr. Anwar-ul-Haq Siddiqui, Cdre (r) Sadeed Anwar Malik, Professor Dr. Tanveer Khalid, Senator Abdul Haseeb Khan, Huma Bukhari, Dr. Amjad Jafri and Col (r) Mukhtar Ahmed Butt emphasized the need to formalize the economy.

They suggested implementing reforms in the energy sector. There is a need to renegotiate contracts with independent power plants and explore new sources of renewable energy. Boost remittances by making deals with friendly nations for skilled workers. Additionally, taxes should be imposed on the property and agriculture sectors. While Pakistan has abundant natural resources, we lack the human and financial resources to effectively utilize and sell them globally.

Promoting technical education and training is urgently required, along with modernizing the manufacturing sector. With government support, the SME sector in Pakistan can thrive, and local industries should be encouraged. Pakistan has the potential to enhance the value of global products and re-export them to various markets.

Corruption has deeply permeated society, contributing to social deterioration. Mismanagement is at the core of many of Pakistan's challenges. Effective administration can mitigate numerous problems. Emphasizing ethical values in society, starting from the school level, is crucial.

Ahsan assumes office president and CEO of Engro Corporation

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Ahsan Zafar Syed has assumed the office of President & CEO Engro Corporation, after the completion of Ghias Khan's seven-year tenure at the Group. He began his journey with Engro in 1991 as a young engineer, accumulating three decades of experience in operations, project management, and strategic leadership across the petrochemical, energy, and food & agriculture sectors.



Before his appointment as President and CEO of Engro Corporation, Ahsan led Engro's flagship fertilizer business. Under his leadership, Engro Fertilizers became the most

valuable fertilizer company on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. During his tenure as CEO of the Energy vertical, Ahsan played a pivotal role in realizing Pakistan's Thar dream by unearthing indigenous coal and operationalizing a 660MW power plant at mine mouth.

On assuming office Ahsan Zafar Syed said, "I am deeply humbled to assume the role of President & CEO of Engro Corporation. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the

Board for their confidence in me and appreciate the contributions of my predecessor Ghias Khan. I am excited to lead the organization that is committed to addressing pressing issues of our time, recognizing their dynamic and ever-evolving nature. In this journey, we will adhere to our core values, contribute positively to the communities we operate in, and cultivate trust-based relationships with our employees, shareholders, and wider society."

SSUET convocation held, 1177 degrees awarded

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sir Syed University of Engineering & Technology (SSUET), organized its 27th Convocation with a traditional zeal that was attended by a large number of educationists, scholars, dignitaries including faculty and students. Governor Sindh, Muhammad Kamran Tessori was the Chief Guest of the event. Sir Syed University awarded 1,117 Bachelor's, 60 Master's, and 1 PhD degree. Position holders were awarded gold, silver, and bronze medals for securing the highest marks in the respective disciplines.

Addressing the convocation, Governor Sindh, Muhammad Kamran Tessori said that Sir Syed University is an ideological academic institute that serves as an institution of inspiration playing a vital role and contributing towards national development and also providing a capable workforce internationally. University also acts as a catalytic agent for social change and the progress of society. Sir Syed University has equipped graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their professional endeavors and make a positive impact on society. Sir Syed University is not just limited to academic excellence but also works towards the betterment of society.

Governor Kamran Tessori said that we are going to give non-refundable loans of one lakh to one crore to the youth who come up with new ideas or unique business plans. At Governor House, around 50,000 students are getting free information technology education in different trades and after completing a one-year diploma in IT, they will be able to earn 15 lakh to 20 lakh rupees per month. It will open new vistas of business and employment opportunities. We have decided to make Sindh to be recognized as IT Province.

Speaking on the auspicious occasion, Chancellor SSUET, Jawaid Anwar said that even in the period of recession, a large number of students preferred to enroll in Sir Syed University, which is itself proof of the remarkable performance of our university. Due to the hard work



and exemplary performance of the faculty and management, Sir Syed University has become the top priority for the new students. It is an era of technology. Young graduates are moving towards entrepreneurship. Students are working on new ideas, on new products. New business opportunities are being created and youth are being given priority in employment who can play an effective role in increasing the efficiency, production, and profitability of the enterprises.

He said that digital technology has become a necessity for us in the 21st century and the growth of digital technology has a profound impact on human society. Significant changes are being noticed in societies under the influence of digital technology. Now the trend has entirely changed and apart from getting a degree, students are approaching software-based digital applications.

In pursuit of the contemporary demand, Sir Syed University has launched two new programs Data Science and Cyber Security Network. A new degree based on Business and IT subjects including Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing will also be introduced. Being aware of the present challenges, we are going to inaugurate the Cyber Security Center of Excellence at Sir Syed University very soon.

Chancellor Jawaid Anwar said that in view of the economic crisis and taking into account the sufferings of the employees of Sir Syed University, we are revising the salary scale. Presenting SSUET's

annual report for the year 2023-24, Vice Chancellor SSUET, Prof. Dr. Wali Uddin, said that Sir Syed University has now grown to 16 academic departments offering undergraduate, postgraduate, MS, and PhD programs with more than 7,000 students and around 350 faculty members, including 64 holding PhDs. The Department of Applied Computing & Emerging Sciences has been formed under which various programs relevant to new emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, etc. will be launched.

He said that the university has secured the Brand of the Year Award for the last 3 consecutive years from Brands Foundation in the category of Best Engineering, Science and Technology Institute, which shows the university's tremendous progress in multiple directions. Sir Syed University achieved a place in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking and EU-funded projects facilitated the university in becoming an SDG-based university. The university actively participated in Erasmus+ ICM programs, fostering collaborations with renowned European universities and developing collaborations with international partners such as Politehnica University of Bucharest and Technical University of Cluj-Napoca in ongoing projects, French, Russian, and South Korean delegations visited Sir Syed University to explore options for potential collaboration and partnership. SSUET delegation visited Romania and Italy to attend meetings of the

partners of the European Union-funded "ACTIVE" project.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Wali Uddin said that the University awarded merit-based scholarships worth approximately 35 million rupees to 1,318 deserving students. In order to enhance academic excellence and diversify research efforts by exchanging knowledge and skills, the University has signed 102 MOUs to date. The University also signed MoUs with Kyungdong University, South Korea, Pokhara University, Nepal, and the University of Malaga, Spain. During the years 2023-2024, the SSUET faculty has published 175 research papers in various national and international journals.

Registrar Cdre. (r) Syed Sarfraz Ali while conducting the event said that the vision for Sir Syed University is to transform it into a center of academic excellence and make it a world-class institution. Our mission is to develop and nurture excellent professionals who can contribute to the betterment of our society and the world at large.

Students were also honored with gold, silver, and bronze medals including merit certificates for their outstanding achievements in their academic career. Anab Ali (Biomedical Engineering), Amina Siddiqui (Biomedical Science), Ayesha Khan (Computer Engineering), Malik Tanzeel (Electrical Engineering), Syed Muhammad Abdur Rahman un Nabi (Electronic Engineering), Ilma Ameen (Computer Science), Muneeb Ahmed Khan (Information

Technology), Ramna Nadeem (Software Engineering), Taikhoom (Civil Engineering), Syed Muhammad Jibran Jilani (Civil Engineering Technology), Sehrish Jawaid (Architecture) and Hafsa Tariq (Business Administration) received gold medals for securing 1st position.

Recipients of silver medals for securing second position included Kinza Imran (Biomedical Engineering), Syeda Aiman Zehra (Biomedical Science), Ismail Zaheer Sheikh (Computer Engineering), Umer Farooq (Electrical Engineering), Sawera (Electronic Engineering), Wania Khan (Computer Science), Asma Shafi (Information Technology), Unsa Athar (Software Engineering), Muhammad Daniyal (Civil Engineering), Shaikh Muhammad Faizan (Civil Engineering Technology), Nida Tasneem (Architecture) and Asbah Abid (Business Administration), while Nabeeha Sahar (Biomedical Engineering), Fahma Noman Siddiqui (Biomedical Science), Neha Shakil (Computer Engineering), Umer Zaid (Electrical Engineering), Talha Mustafa (Electronic Engineering), Hanzala Bin Rashid (Computer Science), Kainat Jamil (Information Technology), Mukadus Jawaid (Software Engineering), Choudhary Muhammad Huzaimullah (Civil Engineering), Saifullah (Civil Engineering Technology) and Muhammad Mashood Chohan (Architecture) were awarded bronze medals for standing 3rd position.

In the end, students of Sir Syed University presented Tarana e Aligarh with live music.

Tokyo stocks close higher

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks closed higher on Friday after the Bank of Japan kept its key interest rate unchanged.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index advanced 0.81 percent, or 306.28 points, to 37,934.76 while the broader Topix index added 0.86 percent, or 22.95 points, to 2,686.48. During trading hours on Friday, the Bank of Japan said it had kept its ultra-low interest rates unchanged after a two-day policy meeting.

The bank also stopped short of signalling another hike, pushing the yen to a

fresh 34-year low.

The dollar bought 156.22 yen at one point on Friday, before easing to 156.01 yen in late Tokyo hours. The greenback changed hands below levels of 156 yen before the BoJ decision. "As there was no policy change by the BoJ, investors were relieved," Ichiro Asai, senior strategist at SBI Securities, told AFP.

"Before the BoJ decision, investors were cautious as some reports had suggested that the Bank could tweak its policy by shrinking the size of government bond purchases," he added. The BoJ

has been a global outlier in sticking to an ultra-loose policy while other central banks pushed rates up as they fought against surging inflation -- causing a wide differential that saw investors push into other currencies.

"A cheaper yen is good for Japanese exporters but not good for companies which face rising import costs and that rely on domestic demand," Asai said. Investors were awaiting BoJ governor Kazuo Ueda's press conference after the closing bell, in which "he may comment on forex", he added.

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COURT NOTICES KOHAT

In The Court of Sana Afzal C.J-V Kohat. Suit no.23/1 Date of hearing.07-05-2024, Titled:- Abdul Rasheed (etc) Vs Muhammad Usman (etc) Notice against:- (5/1) Muhammad Hafeez Lrs Muhammad Shafique (11/2) Khalil Lrs Zahira (Late) R/o Togh Bala District Kohat presently R/o(now in Abroad) (Defendants/ Lrs) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendants/Lrs in which date of hearing 07-05-2024, is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendants/Lrs is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 07-05-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order Issued on 19-04-2024 (Court of CJ-V Kohat)

In The Court of Malika Allaudin Senior Civil Judge Family Court Kohat Suit no 550/FC Date of hearing 11-05-2024, Titled:- Mst Mehreen (etc) Vs Khalafan (etc) Notice against:- Khalafan Son of Shoukat Hussain R/o Razzir Banda District Kohat presently R/o (now in Abroad Jabal Ali

Freezon Port Dhabi UAE) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a family suit of Dower(etc) against you defendant in which date of hearing 11-05-2024 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 11-05-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order Issued on 20-04-2024 (Court of S.C.J.F.C Kohat)

In The Court of Iftikhar Ahmad C.J-XI Kohat. Suit no. 37/1 Date of hearing.08-05-2024, Titled:- Sayed Raiz Ud Din Vs Aizaz Ul Islam. Notice against:- (Aizaz Ul Islam Son of Shaor Ul Islam R/o Mohallah Pir Saeed Shah Pir Khel Ghamkol Road District Kohat presently R/o(in Abroad Near Airport Rashidiya Dubai UAE Mob no. 00971527391483) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendant in which date of hearing 08-05-2024 is fixed for your appearance Since

your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 08-05-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order Issued on 15-04-2024 (Court of CJ-XI Kohat).

BUNER

IN The Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge 1 /Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar.Suit No 556/1. Institution 24/10/ 2023. Date of hearing. 21/5/2024.Enzar Gul etc VS Rozi Gul. Notice to No 6.Abdul Haleem s/o Taza Gul resident of Hissar tehsel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 am dated 21/5/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

SUIT NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF MISS AMBREEN NAVID JUDGE BANKING COURT-1 PESHAWAR

Federal Judicial Complex, Phase-7 Hayatabad Peshawar Case No: 33/1 of 2024, Date of hearing: 28-05-2024, Declaration. M/S Gogdara Swat Construction Company through Ali Khan S/o Sarfaraz Khan, Director, Gogdara, Babuzai Swat VS Bank of khyber through Manager. 1. Bank of Khyber through Manager, Mingora Branch, Situated at Makan bagh, Mingora District Swat. Where as the plaintiff has instituted suit for the Reduction of accounts against you under section 10(2) of the Financial Institution (Recovery of Finance) Ordinance 2001, you are hereby summoned to obtain leave of the court to appear and defend the suit within 30 days after receipt/ publication of the notice in the newspapers. Failing which an ex-parte decree shall be passed in favour of the Bank with costs. Issued today on 18-04-2024 under my signature and seal of the Court. Registrar (Banking Court, 1 Peshawar



In brief

Rohmalia takes T20 record figures of 7-0

(Agencies): Indonesia's Rohmalia took an astonishing 7-0 to claim the best figures in T20 international history. Off-spinner Rohmalia, 17, achieved the feat on her international debut in the fifth T20 against Mongolia in Bali. Mongolia were all out for just 24 in 16.2 overs, after being set 152 to win. Rohmalia bowled 3.2 overs and took a wicket with her first ball, with five of her victims dismissed without scoring. The teenager is the third bowler to take seven wickets in a women's T20I after Argentina's Alison Stocks and the Netherlands' Frederique Overdijk, who both finished with figures of 7-3. The best bowling figures in men's T20Is are 7-8 by Malaysia's Syazrul Idrus against China in 2023. Mongolia captain Tsendsuren Ariuntsetseg top-scored with seven in her team's innings while Ni Nanda Sakarini scored 61 from 44 balls in Indonesia's 151-5.

PSA World C'ships in May

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 2023-24 CIB PSA World Championships will be held at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization and the Palm Hills Club when the sport's most prestigious tournament returns to Cairo, Egypt from May 9 to 18. A glass show court would be erected at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization from the third round onwards, with all matches from the opening two rounds and selected third round matches taking place at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization also hosted the 2021-22 edition of the sport's pinnacle event, with Egyptian World No.1s Ali Farag and Nour El Sherbini capturing their third and sixth World Championship titles, respectively. "We are delighted to bring squash's biggest event back to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, which is the latest iconic Egyptian landmark to host a professional squash tournament," said PSA Chief Executive Alex Gough.

Yuvraj named as Ambassador

NEW DELHI (Agencies): The International Cricket Council (ICC) unveiled former Indian all-rounder Yuvraj Singh as ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 Ambassador on Friday. The tournament will be jointly hosted by the United States of America (USA) and the West Indies from 1 June to 29 June. Singh will participate in the World Cup promotional events in the United States before and during the tournament. He will also attend the much-anticipated match between archrivals India and Pakistan in New York on 9 June. The former all-rounder expressed his excitement about being the ambassador of the T20 World Cup and shared his best memories from the tournament. He set the stage on fire during the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007, hitting six sixes in an over against England. India went on to win the tournament by defeating Pakistan in the final. "Some of my fondest cricketing memories have come from playing at the T20 World Cup, including hitting six sixes in an over, so it's very exciting to be part of this edition, which is set to be the biggest one yet," Yuvraj said.

Asia Cricket Week from April 28

ISLAMABAD (APP): ICC Asia has launched Asia Cricket Week, to take place from April 28 to May 5. The Week is a celebration of the various forms of our sport in the region.

Activities range from a women's trainer workshop in Kuala Lumpur, cricket clinics and workshops in Nepal, community outreach programmes in Singapore to foundation coaching courses to school Physical Education teachers in Uzbekistan and the UAE's hosting of a men's U19 inter-Emirates event, said a press release.

It is a particularly excit-

ing week for women's cricket in the region, where in Iran, a women's tournament kicks off in Tehran, Qatar, along with Malaysia's Women's Super League getting off the ground featuring five teams that will play 14 matches and can be watched live on ICC.

For the first time, Kuwait will host Bahrain in the "Yalla Shabab" (Le's Go Guys) series, from 25 to 27 April at Sulaibiya Cricket Ground. The three-match, 100% indigenous Arab T20 series is designed to encourage local support ahead of the

2030 and 2034 Asian Games in Doha and Riyadh respectively. In Hong Kong, the hosts and China will deliver their men's and women's Premier League Finals Day on 5 May.

Both Games will be broadcast live locally, promoting the sport and encouraging fan support for both the men's and women's games in the region. The ICC's Criciio training and education programme will be live in Bahrain, Mongolia, Qatar and Tajikistan, while junior cricket and school's events will be hosted in Cambodia,

China, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.

This special week of cricket coincides with the United Nations' observance of April 6 as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. This initiative aims to strengthen the spirit of cricket throughout the region, symbolizing sportsmanship and unity.

With this in mind, ICC Asia invited its members to engage by organizing cricket-related events and meetings during this time. Aminul Islam, Regional Manager of ICC Asia said,

"The enthusiastic response has been truly overwhelming, and we are thrilled with the buy-in from our members.

"The unique combination of broad reach, the power to overcome barriers, and the capability for low-cost, high-impact engagement makes Asia Cricket Week an effective tool in achieving our development goals.

"We are deeply impressed by the depth and breadth of each program designed by our members. Their genuine interest and dedicated efforts fill us with optimism for the future."



Sabalenka struggles through in Madrid Open

MADRID (AFP): Defending Madrid Open champion Aryna Sabalenka battled past Magda Linette 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 on Friday to reach the third round.

The Australian Open winner has been in poor form since then and her Polish opponent fought well in the two hour nine minute contest.

Big-hitter Sabalenka, ranked second in the world, started well with a decisive break in the third game.

However Linette forced the Belarusian to scramble in the second set, breaking to love and then consolidating for a 4-1 lead. The 32-year-old Pole carved out three break points in the sixth game but although she could not take them, eventually steered the match to a deciding third set. Two-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka saved two break points in the first game and another in the seventh to stay on serve.

The 25-year-old then opened up a break point of her own, only her fifth of the match, converting it with a fortunate net cord for a 5-3 lead. Sabalenka wrapped up her narrow victory over the world number 48 by smashing down an ace and will face Katie Boulter or Robin Montgomery in the third round.

Earlier Elena Rybakina eased past Lucia Bronzetti 6-4, 6-3. The Kazakhstani, ranked fourth in the world, continued her good form after triumphing in Stuttgart last week. The 2022 Wimbledon champion has three titles in the bag this season and is shaping up nicely for Roland Garros.

Italian Bronzetti, strong on clay, broke at the start of the second set but was swiftly overpowered.

Rybakina faces a potential rematch of the Stuttgart final in the third round if Marta Kostyuk defeats Mayar Sherif later Friday. Teen sensation Mirra Andreeva came from a set and a break down to defeat Czech Linda Noskova 4-3, 6-3, 6-3. The 16-year-old reached the third round in Madrid for the second year running by ousting her 19-year-old opponent, seeded 29th.

Pakistani squash prodigies grab silver at Doha junior championship

DOHA (INP): Pakistani squash sensations Abdullah Zaman and Ahmad Ali Naz clinched silver medals at the Junior Squash Championship in Doha. Despite fierce competition, the dynamic duo showcased exceptional skills, representing Pakistan with pride and determination on the international stage.

Hailing from a lineage of squash greatness, the Zaman brothers, grandsons of legendary player Qamar Zaman, continue to uphold the family legacy with their remarkable performances. Abdullah Zaman's younger brother, Ryan Zaman, also made waves in the under-11 category, reaching the semi-finals with flair.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association showered praise on the young athletes, highlighting their strategic brilliance and dedication to the game. As Abdullah Zaman and Ahmad Ali Naz carve their path to success, their journey promises to inspire a new generation of squash enthusiasts across Pakistan. With the Qatar Junior Squash Championship providing a global platform for budding talents, the event stands as a beacon of opportunity for aspiring players worldwide to elevate their careers to unprecedented heights.

Babar Azam points finger on batting

LAHORE (INP): National team captain Babar Azam voiced his disappointment as Pakistan succumbed to yet another defeat against New Zealand in the ongoing series. Addressing the media following the fourth match at Gaddafi Stadium, Azam squarely attributed the loss to the team's batting performance, stressing that the inability to notch up runs proved to be their Achilles' heel. Azam conceded that despite a commendable effort in restricting New Zealand, Pakistan faltered in their batting innings, failing to muster the necessary momentum to chase down the target. Reflecting on the missed opportunity, he acknowledged the team's failure to capitalize on crucial middle overs, lamenting their inability to reach the attainable target of 179 runs.

Regarding the team dynamics and the infusion of young talent, Azam commented will be jointly hosted by the budding bowlers while acknowledging the necessity for squad alterations due to injuries. Despite the setbacks, Azam remains optimistic about the team's potential to bounce back and deliver stronger performances in the remainder of the series.



KARACHI: Pakistan dismissed Hayley Matthews in the first over, Pakistan vs West Indies, 1st Women T20I.

Pakistani driver bags first-ever top 4 finish

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): British-Pakistani racer Enaam Ahmed achieved a ground-breaking milestone this week by securing Pakistan's first-ever top 4 finish at the Nations Cup in the Dubai 12-Hour Endurance Karting Race.

Ahmed, 24, was born to Pakistani parents in London where he started racing on Go-Kart tracks while he was eight. His passion grew with time, and he ultimately became the British Formula Champion at 12 and a European and World Champion at the age of 14. He is currently in the American Formula 3 league, before which he was car racing in the British Formula 3 and became a champion at 17.

For the Dubai tournament, Ahmed told Pakistan's Geo News he chose the "two most talented drivers from Pakistan" to make team Pakistan, namely Maz Chughtai and

Shamiq Saeed.

In the qualifying round, Pakistan managed to secure 2nd place in the Nations Cup and 4th overall against 30 of the best endurance teams from around the world. Team Pakistan then delivered a historic top-4 finish, but also won over archrivals India with an impressive 9-lap lead even after dropping to 30th place due to an unlucky puncture.

"It's an honor to represent Pakistan and to achieve this milestone alongside my teammates," he told reporters. "We worked tirelessly to make our country proud, and to also secure a commanding victory over India adds an extra layer of satisfaction to our accomplishment ... This victory not only underscores Pakistan's prowess in motorsports but also opens a new chapter whereby a new generation of drivers will be inspired." Speaking to Arab News

in an interview in 2022, Ahmed said what inspired him was a desire to "change the way the world perceives our country [Pakistan] and the Muslim world, in terms of sports."

"Representing the country [Pakistan] is what gives me the power, what gives me the motivation to succeed ... What keeps me going is this burning ambition to prove that we can be the best."

While Ahmed has traveled and raced in some top teams and against some of the best drivers in the world, he also had to face racism initially as a rare person of color alongside the black British driver, Lewis Hamilton, who had inspired him to enter the profession in the first place. Ahmed has also found it difficult to find good sponsors, which he said was the reason he missed the chance of getting into Formula 2 in Europe.



"There were moments when I didn't want to give up but it was looking like I would have to give up because there was no option," he said. "There were some situations when I didn't have a sponsor one week before a race, but I always found a way."

Despite the odds, there has been no looking back for Ahmed, who has never lost a race and always fin-

ishes in the top three.

"I have always done things to be the best or nothing," he said. "I don't do things just to take part or come second or third. I am here to win."

Speaking about his special connection with Pakistan, he said he was "put on this earth to race for Pakistan and become a champion."

"I have two biggest

motivations: One is to make my country proud and raise the flag of Pakistan the highest it has ever been, and to relieve my parents, my family of work."

Ahmed is also on the Road to Indy series, a race-car driver development program that provided a scholarship-funded path to reach the IndyCar Series and Indianapolis 500.



MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz plays a forehand against Alexander Shevchenko during their Men's Singles Round of 64 match on Day Four of the Mutua Madrid Open.

Man Utd 'have to back' struggling Rashford, says Ten Hag

LONDON (AFP): Erik ten Hag said Friday he has a "lot of sympathy" for Marcus Rashford as the Manchester United manager demanded support for his misfiring forward.

The 26-year-old scored a career-high 30 goals last season and was rewarded with a new deal until 2028, but his form has since slumped dramatically.

Rashford has managed just eight goals in 40 appearances for his boyhood club during the current campaign and fans booed him in last Sunday's FA Cup semi-final win against Coventry.

The England international, writing in the

Players' Tribune in February, said: "If you back me, good. If you doubt me, even better."

But responding to a post on X that called the treatment of Rashford "absolutely disgusting", "cruel" and "abuse", the United forward said: "I appreciate your support! It is abuse and has been for months. Enough is enough." Ten Hag, speaking at his pre-match press conference, said he empathised with Rashford's plight.

"Last year he had a brilliant season. I think the best season in his career, he scored 30 goals, so there you see where he's capable of," the Dutch coach said.

"This season he didn't give the performances and then people are very critical, and I think we have to back him. "Everyone should back him and push him to get back to the levels he was last year."

Rashford, who missed the 4-2 win against Sheffield United in mid-week, will again be unavailable when injury-hit United host second-bottom Burnley on Saturday. Ten Hag's men, aiming to qualify for European football next season, are sixth in the Premier League table.

Asked if he is expecting to have two regular centre-backs available for the

game, Ten Hag said with a resigned laugh: "No. Same squad apart from Mason Mount. He will return into the squad." With Victor Lindelof, Raphael Varane, Willy Kambwala, Jonny Evans and Lisandro Martinez still absent, Casemiro is set to start as makeshift centre-back again.

But Ten Hag expects Martinez to be back for a run-in that concludes with the FA Cup final against Manchester City, along with long-term absentees Luke Shaw and Anthony Martial.

"I think we are going to see them in this season," he said of the trio. "They returned, all three, onto the pitch."

DCA Dir Upper playing with young cricketer's future career

PESHAWAR (APP): District Cricket Association Dir Upper is playing the career of the promising cricketer Anisur Rehman who is short-listed by the Pakistan Cricket Board selection committee for the four teams' event being played at Dir Cricket Stadium.

Anisur Rehman was selected in the Blue team but due to a clerical spelling mistake in his name, which was later on settled down by the selection committee but despite the fact, he was kicked out of the team by the sitting president of the District Cricket Association Sadaqat Ali.

Sadaqat Ali not only kicked Anisur Rehman out of the team but also accommodated his like-minded players and instead of giving a chance to Anisur Rehman to represent the Blue team after his selection was made by the PCB selection committee, he did not allow him.

Talking to APP, Anisur Rehman said that he worked hard and was selected on merit in the team but due to a spelling mistake in his name when the selection committee announced the team, he was not allowed by DCA Dir Upper President to play. He demanded the Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board to take the matters with the concerned officials so as to safeguard his cricketing future.

"It is a joke with the cricket as a player was selected by the selection committee of the Pakistan Cricket Board but the player was not allowed by the DCA Dir Upper President due to his likes and dislikes," former office-bearer of the Dir Upper Cricket Association told APP.

"I have also talked to the umpire Farhad Ali to include me in the team as the matter was cleared after the spelling mistakes owned by the PCB selectors but I was denied my legitimate right," Anisur Rehman said.

The mistake was also in the list of the selection committee which was corrected when the selection committee was contacted through phone. The selection committee also sent a corrected list of the names to DCA Dir Upper President but despite all fact, he denied Anisur Rehman to join the team, Anisur Rehman said.

He also appealed to Director Domestic Pakistan Cricket Board to take timely action on violation of such rules and should take concrete steps to prevent such incidents in future. People who have even a little understanding of cricket should be brought into the district association.

For the first time in the ongoing cricket tournament, it is seen that Farhad Ali is umpiring continuously for 15 to 20 overs on one end, which is also not justified, a for-

mer DCA office-bear said. He said the sitting office-bearers including the President Dir Upper Cricket Association are continually violating the PCB rules for cricket in Dir Upper which need to be addressed to safeguard future young cricketers in the district.

When Sadaqat Ali, President Dir Upper was contacted to tell his point of view, he said, there is no need for PCB selectors. "I am all in all, there is no need for a PCB selector," Sadaqat Ali said. "I will decide who will play and who will not," Sadaqat said. The selection committee should consult with me before announcing the team, he added.

The PCB selector Saqib Faqir was contacted, he disclosed, yes, there was a spelling mistake in the name of Anisur Rehman, which was later on corrected immediately even on the PCB web-site and also sent the same correction to President Dir Upper Cricket Association but despite all Anisur Rehman was denied to play for Blue Team.

He said Mr. Sadaqat Ali had given him 12 to 14 names to include in the selection but we made all the selection or merit rather to follow and including his blue-eyed player, Saqib Faqir said. He also misbehaved with me on refusal of such selection, national selector Saqib Faqir said.



In brief

Special puppet show

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), in collaboration with the International Foreign Women Association Islamabad, will organize a Puppet Show for foreigners and the general public on April 28. The activity will be held at PNCA Auditorium. The family puppet show will be performed in English, featuring 20 minutes performance followed by the presentation. The puppet theatre PNCA will showcase the skills of its puppeteers featuring vibrant costumed puppets and will present puppet folk tales, skits and folk dances. Children along with parents have been invited to attend the show.

Rawat police arrest 4 robbers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawat Police while conducting a raid here managed to arrest four accused allegedly involved in a bank robbery and recovered Rs700,000, arms, and other items from their possession. A Mehran car bought with the looted money was also recovered. A police spokesman informed that three pistols, ammunition, and a 12-bore rifle used in the incidents were recovered from the accused. Police arrested four accused namely Mateen, Manzoor, Umar, and Mobeen and after the identification parade of the accused, the recovery was made, he added. He informed that the accused had committed a bank robbery in the Rawat area in February this year. City Police Officer, Syed Khalid Hamdani taking notice of the incident had formed special teams headed by Superintendent of Police, Saddar to arrest the accused. Police teams traced and arrested the accused with the help of modern technology, human intelligence, and CCTV footage, the spokesman said. The arrested accused would be challenged with concrete evidence, SP Saddar said, Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar.

Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and street criminals and recovered eight stolen motorcycles, four mobile phones, and other items from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Taxila Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Yasir Mehmood and Muhammad Hussain and recovered eight stolen motorcycles, four mobile phones, two electric motors, cash Rs 37,000 and other items from their possession.

IRSA releases 113,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 113,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 178,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1448.73 feet and was 34.73 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 30,800 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1142.65 feet, which was 92.65 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 63,700 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 43,000, 56,000, 58,800 and 19,800 cusecs respectively.



ISLAMABAD: Students of Mehergarh's youth leaders visiting Senate Museum at Parliament House.

Minister proposes plan to remove congestion on busy roads in big cities

RAWALPINDI (APP): Provincial Minister for Transport and Mass Transit Bilal Akbar Khan on Friday said that Punjab government is taking all necessary steps to provide comfortable travelling to people and for this, a comprehensive plan has been prepared to remove congestion on busy roads in different cities including Rawalpindi.

He said that government was fully cognizant of the travelling issues for which new feeder routes were proposed to provide comfort to daily road users.

Chairing 'Integrated Urban Transport Plan' committee's meeting here at the Commissioner's Office, the minister said that Chief Minister Punjab has given special directives to implement the "decongestion plan" of all major cities including Rawalpindi on emergency basis for which 78 eco-friendly air-conditioned buses have been sanctioned initially for the

city. Six feeder routes of 52km have also been proposed for phase one project, to provide access to various metro bus stations including Saddar, Mareer, Liaquat Bagh, Chandni Chowk, 6th road and Faizabad stations.

He said adding that a study was in progress on Nespak's traffic plan. The scheme is in the approval phase which would be included in the upcoming ADP, he said. More buses and new feeder routes would also be added in the light of the study, making metro bus service more convenient for people, he stated.

Earlier, Secretary Rawalpindi Transport Authority (RTA) briefed the minister on proposed feeder routes for the buses. It was apprised that in the first route, 12 buses would be provided for a 9 km long route from Swan station to Railway Station via GT Road.

The second route would

be 12km long from Islamabad Expressway to the Railway station via Airport Road, Chaklala, Dhok Kashmirian, Rahmanabad, Jinnah Park, Kachehri, Punjab House, Mareer Chowk to the Railway station for which 16 buses would be operated. As per plan, 12 buses to be provided for 7km long route from Dhok Kashmirian to Railway Workshop via Tipu Road. The fourth route would be from Dhok Kashmirian to TB Hospital via Rawal Road. Similarly, 11 buses for 8km long route from Pir Wadhae Morr to Mareer Bridge via GT Road, have also been proposed for the fifth route, and the sixth route is supposed to be 9km long from Faizabad Interchange to IJP Road.

Sixth Road, Rahmanabad stop, Sadiqabad Chowk, Khanna Road to Khanna Bridge for which 15 buses have been proposed.

Jashn-e-Baharan festival rescheduled for first week of May

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Jashn-e-Baharan festival scheduled to be held from April 26 to 28, has been postponed due to heavy rain forecast.

According to a Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Rawalpindi spokesperson, the authority was finalizing all the arrangements for the Jashn-e-Baharan festival, scheduled to be held from April 26, Friday to April 28, Sunday at Allama Iqbal Park Rawalpindi.

The festival has been postponed due to the forecast of heavy rains across the country including Rawalpindi. The Jashn-e-Baharan festival would be held next week in the first week of May for which the final date would be announced soon, she informed.

The National Disaster Management Authority has forecast heavy rains across the country this week from April 26 to 29.

Art exhibition highlighting "Echoes of Earth" on May 4

ISLAMABAD (APP): Theatre Wallay will feature an art exhibition, titled "Echoes of the Earth", a celebration of climate consciousness on May 4 at Bhattai Auditorium in Islamabad. The exhibition supported by the US Mission in Pakistan in partnership with Pakistan-US Alumni Network orchestrated a transformative writing workshop aimed at cultivating the talents of aspiring writers to tackle pressing climate issues, said a statement issued by Theatre Wallay here Friday.

The exhibition would feature stalls and reading corners focused around climate change and sustainable solutions. The activity will be attended by individuals from diverse backgrounds, each contributing their unique perspectives and creativity to address Pakistan's distinct environmental challenges. Together, they forged original narratives that shed light on the urgency of climate issues, emphasizing their tangible impact on our communities. This workshop served as a catalyst for raising awareness and inspiring action, reaffirming the undeniable reality of climate change.

Naqvi visits Police Facilitation center

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Friday visited a Police Facilitation Center (PFC) in Islamabad's F-6 sector to inspect the counters made for the convenience of the citizens. Mohsin Naqvi directed the officials to keep the PFC open for 24 hours for the convenience of the citizens. He said that the citizens should be able to avail the services at facility centers at any time according to their convenience.

The minister inspected various counters of the PFC and appreciated the staff for

serving the citizens. He directed the authorities to provide comfortable chairs to the applicants coming for driving licenses. Naqvi met the citizens who came to the PFC and asked about the solution to the problems.

Citizens welcomed the announcement of keeping the Police Service Center open 24 hours and thanked Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

Inspector General Police Islamabad Ali Nasir Rizvi gave a briefing about PFC to the minister.

Ashrafi re-elected member of MWL's Supreme Council

ISLAMABAD (APP): Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman and International Tazim-e-Haramain Sharifain Council Secretary General, has been re-elected as a member of the Supreme Council of Muslim World League.

With a longstanding commitment to the upliftment of Islamic values and the welfare of Muslim communities worldwide, Ashrafi has consistently been at the forefront of advocating for unity and cooperation within the Muslim world. Ashrafi's re-

election to the prestigious Supreme Council reaffirms his influential role in shaping the discourse surrounding contemporary Islamic issues. Throughout his tenure, Ashrafi has demonstrated remarkable leadership in promoting interfaith harmony, countering extremism, and fostering dialogue among diverse Muslim sects.

Ashrafi's unwavering efforts have earned him respect and recognition both nationally and internationally. As a member of the Supreme Council of Muslim World League, Ashrafi is poised to con-

tinue his advocacy for the rights and well-being of Muslims, while also contributing to the League's initiatives aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting the Muslim Ummah.

In response to his re-election, Ashrafi expressed gratitude for the trust expressed by the members of the Supreme Council in him. He reiterated his commitment to advancing the interests of Muslims, emphasizing the importance of unity and solidarity in the face of global challenges.

AIOU extends admission deadline till May 15

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has extended the date of admissions for the second phase of Semester Spring 2024 till May 15 with late fee charges.

Director Admissions, while giving a briefing to the Vice Chancellor on the ongoing admissions here Friday, said that the students have requested to extend the deadline. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mehmood while approving the extension, said that the AIOU is taking all the necessary measures to facilitate the students in admission process.

Fresh students can now apply for admission, while continuing students can enrol in Associate Degree in Arts (BA), Associate Degree in Commerce (BCom), BBA, B.Ed, BS, Post Graduate Diplomas and Certificate courses till May 15 with late fee charges.

The admission forms and prospectus of all programs offered in phase 2 of semester spring 2024 are available on the university website.

Students can visit their nearest regional office or call the university's helpline 051-111 112 468 for any information.

PAL, SNHF to organize an interactive session with writers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) in collaboration with Sultan Noor Hussain Foundation (SNHF) will organize an interactive literary session with writers and scholars at District Jhang on April 28.

Chairperson PAL Prof Dr. Najiba Arif will preside over the literary session and interact with local writers and poets at the Foundation's office in District Jhang, said a statement issued here on Friday.

Well known scholar's Dr Mohsin Mugiyaana and Mumtaz Baloch will shed light on Urdu and Punjabi literature

respectively at the event.

Sahibzada Saman Sultan will moderate the literary session, while Director General PAL Sultan Nasir will also shed light on the Academy initiatives for the promotion of literature.

Mohsin Sultan will deliver a commendatory address at the literary interaction. Under a unique intervention, the PAL Chairperson is reaching out to writers and scholars of far-flung areas to explore their literary work and encourage them to get their due share of recognition at the national level.

ANF recovers 90 kg drugs in 11 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 11 operations across the country managed to recover 90 kg drugs and arrested eight accused, said ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 5.3 kg Ice was recovered from a passenger going to Qatar at Lahore Airport.

22 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from a passenger going to Sharjah at Islamabad Airport.

630 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel booked for the UK at a courier office in Bahria Town, Rawalpindi.

32 grams heroin was recovered from a parcel sent to UK at the courier office in Lahore. In another operation at a courier office in Rawalpindi, 8 grams weed were

recovered from a parcel sent from the UK. 22.8 kg hashish was recovered from Dera Ismail Khan.

The spokesman said that in two operations in Islamabad, 34.8 kg hashish and 4 kg heroin were recovered from the possession of 4 suspects.

14.4 kg hashish, 2.4 kg opium and 800 grams ice were recovered from a parcel sent to Lahore, Shakargarh and Pannu Aqil at a courier office in Ring Road Peshawar and an accused was arrested.

5 kg hashish was recovered from a parcel sent to Lucky Marwat at courier office in Sukkur and an accused was also arrested. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.



ISLAMABAD: An attractive and eye catching view of flowers blooming on trees in the Fedearl Capital.

Saudi Arabia's Umrah and Ziyarah Forum focuses on innovative ways to enhance pilgrim experience

ISLAMABAD (APP): Umrah and Ziyarah Forum concluded at the King Salman International Convention Center in Madinah. During the three-day event, participants discussed ways to foster collaborations, enhance the pilgrimage experience and improve the services provided for pilgrims.

The agenda for the forum, organized by the Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in partnership with the Pilgrim Experience Program, included six discussion sessions and 24 workshops led by 29 experts and specialists. The topics they covered included services for pilgrims and other visitors, advancements in air travel services for pilgrims, financial systems in the Umrah and ziyarah sectors, and development opportunities

in housing and hospitality services, Arab News reported. Other discussions focused on services at ports, the automation of operations, ways to improve the efficiency of workers, and the important role of services provided for visitors at holy sites and throughout their journeys in Makkah and Madinah.

One of the key topics was air travel services, with discussions about the growth in flight numbers and the need to provide a comprehensive range of services throughout pilgrims' journeys beyond those purely focusing on their rituals. For example, participants highlighted plans for the expansion of Madinah Airport to better accommodate the increasing numbers of pilgrims and other visitors arriving there.

Another discussion examined financial services

in the Umrah and ziyarah sector, and explored the options for international money transfers, ways to develop financial procedures, and innovative digital solutions for processing transactions. Other topics included development opportunities in housing and hospitality services, during which speakers emphasized the importance of transparency and the need for full compliance by service providers with the terms of their contracts.

The final day of the event featured two panel discussions, one about the role of technology in finding solutions to the challenges in guest services, and the other on ways to carefully develop historical sites to enrich the historical and spiritual experiences for visitors to Makkah and Madinah.

UK higher Education leaders visit CUI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Higher Education Leaders from the UK along with British Council officials visited COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) on Friday to explore avenues of cooperation in higher education sector.

The visit was aimed at building sustainable person-to-person and institution-to-institution contacts and collaborations with British universities.

The delegation is visiting Pakistan from April 21 to 27 under the Pak-UK Education Gateway – a partnership project between HEC and the British Council.

Delegates from the University of Glasgow, University of Salford, Cardiff University, University of London, Queen Mary University of London, Staffordshire University, University of Exeter, INTO University and Bangor University were part of the visit. Senior officials from the UK's Department for Business and Trade, Department for Education and Office for Students and the British Council also accompanied the delegates.

Prof. Dr. Sajid Qamar, Rector of CUI welcomed the delegates on behalf of COMSATS University and shared the historic exchanges with UK that had contributed to the development of CUI as one of the leading institutions of learning in

Pakistan. In his welcome address, Rector Prof. Dr. Sajid Qamar said, "CUI has had a longstanding affiliation with the universities in UK. It is really heartening to have UK Higher Education Leaders here to explore and potentially discover more opportunities and avenues where our faculty and students can be engaged with UK universities". He thanked the Scottish Higher Education Trade Envoy for their cooperation in providing scholarships to female students of CUI.

Dr. Hammad Omer, T.I., Head International Office informed the delegates on CUI's past engagements with the United Kingdom. He revealed that former Prime Minister of the UK, The Rt Hon Lord Cameron visited CUI in April 2011. Around 20 collaborative agreements have been signed with UK universities.

Since its inception, over 190 delegates from UK higher education institutions have visited CUI, with over 110 CUI officials reciprocating visits to various research and development organizations and universities in the UK. One hundred fifty (150) UK Alumni are currently serving as faculty members, officers, and staff across all CUI campuses, further cementing the enduring bonds between our nations.

Uzbekistan sends aid

KABUL (Khaama Press): A new package containing 169 tons of humanitarian aid had been delivered to Balkh from Termez. The delivery took place in the presence of Mohammad Yousuf Wafa, the Taliban governor of Balkh, and Erkin Khamraev the Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister. Uzbekistan's official sources have stated that the new aid package includes 48 tons of flour, 48 tons of wheat, 15 tons of vegetable oil, 24 tons of sugar, 22 tons of macaroni, and packaged meat.

The Frontier Post

Shawwal 18, 1445 — Saturday, April 27, 2024

Afghanistan beat Iraq 5-3

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan defeated Iraq 5-3 on Friday and moved closer to the 2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup qualification. Afghanistan's goals were scored by Akbar Kazemi (1), Farzad Mahmoodi (1), Mehran Ghulami (1), and Jawad Safari (2). In the other match of playoff in Thailand on Friday, Kyrgyzstan beat Vietnam 3-2. Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan will face off for a spot at the Futsal World Cup on Sunday at the Playoff final.

Salang reconstruction work to resume

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Works said that the reconstruction of the Salang Pass will resume soon with the improvement of the weather. Officials in the ministry said that the construction cost of part of the Salang highway has been collected through the toll tax on vehicles passing through this route, as per the directive of the leader of the Islamic Emirate and deposited into a specified bank account. Reconstruction will be resumed by several private companies that had previously been contracted. Mohammad Ashraf Haqshenas, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works, told TOLONews: "With the improvement of the weather, the reconstruction of the

Salang highway, which had previously been contracted in three parts, will resume, and its funding will come from the crossing tax revenue, activated in the southern Salang by the order of the Amir al-Mu'minin." The crossing tax has been set by the Ministry of Public Works at 800 to 2,600 Afis for fast-moving and freight vehicles; however, the ministry has not disclosed how much money has been collected so far. Meanwhile, drivers on this route complain about the excessive deterioration of the road. Abdullah, a freight vehicle driver who was supposed to transport onions from Tajikistan to Pakistan and whose truck broke down, told TOLONews:

"We loaded a lot of onions, now they have spoiled, and the road is still not fixed; we are facing many problems." Drivers and passengers using this route are urging officials to fundamentally reconstruct this highway. "From here to Jabal Saraj, it takes a whole day; the vehicles are weak, the load is heavy, and the road is not fixed," said Sharifullah, a resident of Baghlan. "Our request is that these roads be built as soon as possible," said Wais Rahman, another driver on the Salang route. The concrete inside the Salang tunnel and Gallery 16 was completed on the 29th of Qaws last year (solar calendar), and 80 kilometers of this highway are set to be rebuilt by contracted companies.

Neighboring countries accused of helping ISIS

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Taliban Foreign Minister says three neighboring countries support ISIS attacks in Afghanistan and the region. The Taliban Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, said at the opening ceremony of the Afghan-Kazakh exhibition, that these three neighbouring countries have provided the ground for ISIS in the region. Muttaqi added that one of these countries provides manpower for ISIS, the second facilitates its educational programs, and the third encourages ISIS attacks. Muttaqi did not name any specific country. However, reports say that Muttaqi's targets are Afghanistan's neighboring countries, Tajikistan and Iran. These reports said that according to the Taliban, "Tajikistan provides human resources for ISIS and Iran plays a role in the transportation of ISIS." He also added that investigations by this group show that 8 out of every 10 security incidents are designed outside of Afghanistan. Muttaqi said that if these countries fulfil their responsibility correctly, security problems will not arise in Afghanistan. The Taliban Foreign Minister emphasized that Afghanistan does not harm others and that other countries should refrain from "destructive actions in Afghanistan." He stated that Afghanistan's security is linked to regional security and added that if Afghanistan is secure, the region will be safe. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, ISIS has emerged as the primary group posing security challenges to the Taliban. Recently, ISIS has intensified its attacks both within Afghanistan and across the region, presenting a significant threat to stability and peace in the region.

‘No destructive groups present in Afghanistan’

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of National Defense Mohammad Yaqub Mujahid has said that no destructive groups including Daesh have physical presence in Afghanistan, adding the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) will not allow anyone to pose threat to any country in the region from the Afghan soil. Mujahid made the remarks in a meeting with a delegation from Malaysia in Kabul. According to a statement released by the Ministry of Defense, Mujahid highlighted Malaysia's "good treatment" of Afghan refugees and its long-standing relations with Afghanistan, and said that Malaysia is a powerful Islamic country and visits should increase.



He added that with the establishment of the Islamic Emirate, occupation and war ended in Afghanistan, and the country is fully secure. Based on the statement, the Malaysian delegation called Afghanistan a friendly country and while emphasizing on comprehensive cooperation, it assured that what they have seen in Afghanistan will be shared with the authorities of their country.

Ministry announces commencement of talks



KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Industry and Trade of Afghanistan announced the commencement of trilateral talks in Kabul between delegations from Taliban officials, the Republic of Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Kazakhstan. In a message posted on its social media platform X on Friday, the ministry stated that the trilateral talks between Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have begun. Further details about the start of these talks have not been provided yet. The Ministry of Industry and Trade of Afghanistan also announced the visit of trade delegations from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Kabul to facilitate and enhance transit, trade, and

mutual investments. Additionally, "strengthening and expanding bilateral relations, holding the Afghan-Kazakh exhibition, and a trade communication conference" have been stated as the objectives of this visit. The Kazakh delegation, led by Serik Zhalmagannarin, Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, and the Turkmen trade delegation arrived in Kabul last Wednesday and Thursday of the past week for discussions with Taliban officials in Afghanistan. Amidst a dire humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, reports indicate that over 20 million people in the country urgently require aid. The situation is dire, with widespread poverty, food insecurity, and lack of

access to basic necessities plaguing the Afghan population. Adding to the severity of the crisis is the mass deportation of Afghan migrants from neighboring countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran. These deportations have intensified the humanitarian emergency in Afghanistan, overwhelming already strained resources and infrastructure. Furthermore, amid the dire circumstances, Afghan women face additional challenges as restrictions on their employment further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. With limited opportunities for women to contribute to the workforce, families struggle to meet their basic needs, deepening the severity of the crisis nationwide.

Malaysia assists Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Taliban's Ministry of Interior announced a meeting between Serajuddin Haqqani and representatives from the ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Malaysia in Kabul. According to the ministry, Malaysia is assisting Afghanistan in the areas of cyber security and digital crimes. The Taliban's Ministry of Interior stated in a newsletter on Friday, April 26th, that Serajuddin Haqqani expressed the Taliban's desire for close relations with the entire world, especially with Islamic countries. He regarded Malaysia as an advanced Islamic country and desired to benefit from its experiences. Discussions were held during this meeting on joint efforts between the Taliban and Malaysia in combating drug trafficking, police training, and cooperation in other sectors. Details of these discussions have not yet been disclosed. The Ministry of Defense also announced that Mullah Yaqoob, the Minister of Defense of the Taliban, also met with this high-level Malaysian delegation in Kabul. Yaqoob claimed during this meeting that there is no war in Afghanistan.

EU allocates 17 million euros to support Afghans on the move

KABUL (Ariana News): The European Union signed an agreement worth 17 million euros with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to improve access to basic services, increased economic opportunities and protection for Afghans on the move and their host communities in Afghanistan. The needs of women and girls are a particular focus of the programme, EU said in a statement released. The statement noted that from January 2023 until April 2024, over 1.5 million Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran. "I am deeply moved by

the hardship returnees face when being deported to Afghanistan. In a country suffering from poverty and climate change, and in a city that just saw devastating earthquakes, this truly is a crisis within a crisis," said Peteris Ustubs, Director for the Middle East, Asia and Pacific of the European Commission's Department for International Partnerships during the signing ceremony at the IOM transit centre in Herat. Raffaella Iodice, EU Chargée d'Affaires a.i. to Afghanistan, added "The solidarity of the Afghan people towards their brothers

and sisters is an inspiration. We must assure that communities hosting and helping new arrivals are supported. The partnership with IOM ensures access to essential services and provides protection for Afghan returnees and their host communities. As women and girls can be particularly affected, we make sure that all members of society can benefit". "IOM's continued partnership with the EU has been critical in enabling our teams to reach hundreds of thousands of Afghan returnees and other vulnerable communities in the country", said IOM

Chief of Mission, Maria Moita. "Thanks to this renewed commitment, we will be able to focus on addressing the immense challenges in the areas of return and contribute to reintegration, social cohesion, and longer-term solutions for those communities." This additional contribution is part of a 5-year programme that is being implemented across Afghanistan and in four countries in the region. It builds on the EU's previous support to IOM to improve the wellbeing of Afghans forced to return to the country, EU said.

Malaysia to share experiences on cyber security with IEA

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Interior Affairs Sirajuddin Haqqani has said in a meeting with a delegation from Malaysia in Kabul that Malaysia is an advanced country and that Afghanistan should use its experiences. According to a statement released by the Interior Ministry, Haqqani, in the meeting, emphasized that security is ensured in Afghanistan and unity among Afghans has been restored. He stated that the Islamic Emirate wants to have close relations and engagement with the world, especially Islamic countries. The Malaysian delegation consists of representatives of the Ministries of Interior and Defense, and advisers of the Prime



Minister's Office. According to the statement, a member of the delegation provided information about Malaysia's capabilities in cyber security and tackling cyber crime, and said that Malaysia will share its experiences in this field with the Islamic Emirate. In the meeting, the two

Makers of traditional Afghan cloaks fear art will be lost

S A R - E - P U L (TOLONews): The traditional Afghan cloak industry, which has a history of over 300 years and involves weaving with silk and cotton threads, is facing extinction, artisans say. Religious scholars, cultural activists, and weavers of this ancient industry in Sar-e-Pul are seeking support from the caretaker government and aid organizations. Women in the village of Balghali in Sar-e-Pul province used to sew the "Ala Chah" traditional Afghan cloak with precision and delicacy, but now this ancient industry, which also has global fame, is being forgotten. "Only one or two machines of this industry are left in Balghali, and it is on the verge of collapse. We want the Islamic Emirate to pay attention to this matter; there should be more of these machines so that the old artifacts do not disappear," said Ainullah, a weaver of traditional Afghan cloaks. "In those times when Afghanistan did not import goods from any foreign country, people used goods made from these handicraft

industries, and since then, the industry of traditional Afghan cloak making has become popular," said Nematullah Hanafi, a religious scholar. "Our request from the Islamic Emirate is to prepare equipment for the creators of these handicrafts and support them in every way," said Lutfullah Nadim, a cultural activist. Meanwhile, local officials in Sar-e-Pul pledged to market and keep this ancient industry alive. Mohammad Shaker Shahab, head of Industry and Commerce in Sar-e-Pul, said: "We are in talks with institutions that work on handicrafts related to traditional Afghan cloaks to teach other apprentices so that this market can thrive in our province, other provinces, and abroad." Abdul Ghaffar Haqnuma, head of Information and Culture in Sar-e-Pul, said: "For 300 years, the culture, art, and work of the people of Sar-

e-Pul have been to weave the traditional Afghan cloak from silk threads, and they see a lot of hardship and difficulty, and we do not hesitate to cooperate with them." The traditional Afghan cloak is one of the ancient handicraft industries of the people of Balghali in Sar-e-Pul province, which has been facing a recession for some time, but the residents of this place want this ancient industry to grow again.



Karzai: Girls' education vital issue for Afghanistan



KABUL (Ariana News): Former president Hamid Karzai said in a meeting with Iran's ambassador and special representative, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, that education of girls was a "vital issue" for Afghanistan. Karzai said he appreciated Iran's cooperation and its standing with the Afghan people, especially

Iran's contributions to education in Afghanistan. During the meeting, Karzai said peace and stability in the region are in the interest of all regional countries.

Media faces economic challenges in Takhar province

TAKHAR (TOLONews): On the eve of World Press Freedom Day, several private media officials in Takhar said that economic challenges have forced some media outlets in the province to stop their broadcasts. They called on the caretaker government officials to address their challenges. In the nearly three years that have passed since the Islamic Emirate takeover, media activities in the country have experienced significant ups and downs. "After the change of the

regime, local media in Takhar province have been facing severe financial and economic problems," said Saboor Tabesh, an official from one of the private media. "Media cannot currently afford the cost of electricity and salaries of their employees, and many media licenses have not been renewed due to lack of financial support and economic problems," said Ramazan Bator, an official from one of the private media. A number of journalists

in Takhar asked the caretaker government to address their challenges. "Our request from media-supporting institutions and the caretaker government is to cooperate with the media and journalists," said Sadrudin Qonui, a journalist. "Support the journalists and ask them to adapt their profession," said Seyyed Yasin Dehzad, head of the Journalists' Union in the Northeast zone. The Takhar department of Information and Culture, although it did not mention

the challenges of the media and journalists, asked them to operate within the framework of Islamic Sharia. Khalilullah Amini, the head of information at Takhar department of Information and Culture, said: "Freedom of expression is allowed within the framework of Sharia, and our officials must be open to criticism." Currently, there are 13 private media outlets in Takhar province, with more than 40 individuals working in these media.

Rain fury triggers floods in Balochistan cities

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Torrential rains accompanied by thunder and lightning wreaked havoc across various districts of Balochistan once again, reported on Friday.

According to administrative sources, torrential rains submerged large swathes of land, collapsed numerous mud houses and other installations in Chaghi and damaged more than 50 houses in border areas near Taftan. Administrative sources said that the border city of Taftan bore the brunt of the heavy downpour, with significant damage inflicted upon homes and other structures.

The majority of the city found itself submerged as a result of the floodwaters. The local administration has initiated the rescue operation to relocate the flood-affected families. In Chaghi district, Thursday night's floods washed away homes while agricultural fields have been inundated with extensive damage to crops.

Furthermore, stormy winds also paralysed life in Dalbandin city, causing several shop signboards to topple while low-lying areas in Dorban were inundated by rising waters. The Met Office had already forecasted a new round of rain system from April 25 and said that the westerly wave to extend its grip over most parts of the country by April 26.

As per the weather report, the rainfall is anticipated to continue until April 27 in Balochistan areas including Noushki, Pishin, Harnai, Zhob, Barkhan, Gwadar, Kech, Awaran, Chaghi, Kharan, Kalat, Mastung, Jhal Magsi, Naseerabad, Sibbi, Kohlu, Dera Bugti, Loralai, Qilla Saifullah, Qila Abdullah, Quetta, Ziarat, Shirani, and Musa Khel are expected to receive rainfall. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has cautioned citizens against unnecessary travel as the country braces for another bout of rainfall.

The NDMA emphasized that the expected rain this week could lead to flash floods and landslides, particularly in low-lying and mountainous areas. As per the Met Office report, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan will also receive another spell of rain from April 25 to 29.

Due to heavy rains and floods on April 15, Balochistan government imposed a rain and urban flood emergency in the province as more than two dozens people were died due to lightning and floods. The bridge in Dab Khanzai area was washed away by floodwaters, severing connection

between Pishin Bazaar and Barshor and Toba Kakrri. Several vehicles were left stranded in Pishin after heavy rains in and around the city inundated not only low-lying areas but also flooded roads.

On April 18, seven people including four women and three children were died as downpours played havoc in Chaman while Quetta and Gwadar were submerged due to heavy rains and most areas lost ground connectivity as roads and highways were washed away. Due to the unprecedented downpour in Gwadar regions, highways also were washed away and ground connectivity with Karachi and other Sindh areas was disrupted.

In Quetta, rainwater entered the houses while highways and linked roads were closed to any traffic. The downpour affected the areas of Turbat, Panjgur, Noshki, Pishin, and Chaman as well. Rainfall in Ziarat, Pasni, Ormara, Jiواني, and Jhal Magsi has triggered flash floods. According to the report, numerous settlements in these areas have been submerged, and the roofs of many houses have collapsed while ground connectivity has also been disrupted in several villages.

Thunderstorm and hail likely to occur in Punjab from today till April 29 and Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued alert in this regard on Friday. According to PDMA spokesperson there will be stormy rains in the districts of South Punjab from Friday 26 to 28 April. Rains will occur in Murree, Galiyat, Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Mandi Bahauddin, Gujranwala and Gujarat, said spokesperson PDMA.

Spokesperson said that rain is also likely in Hafizabad, Sialkot, Narowal, Lahore, Kasur, Okara, Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh, Jhang, Khushab, Sargodha, Mianwali, Pakpattan and Sahiwal. In most of the districts there will be rain along with hail, said spokesperson PDMA.

According to the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab, the administration is on round the clock alert, said DG PDMA Irfan Ali Kathia. The DG said that the district administration of the entire province has been informed about the new weather situation. The DG directed the administration that drainage should be ensured in low lying areas. He warned the citizens to stay in safe places to avoid lightning and never go under the open sky during lightning and stormy conditions. Citizens are requested to stay away from electric poles during the storm and in case of emergency, contact the concerned district administration on helpline 1129, said DG PDMA.

Egyptian team in Israel for talks on Gaza hostages

CAIRO (Reuters): An Egyptian delegation met Israeli counterparts on Friday, looking for a way to restart talks to end the war in Gaza and return the remaining Israeli hostages, an official briefed on the meetings said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Israel had no new proposals to make, although it was willing to consider a limited truce in which 33 hostages would be released by the Islamist movement Hamas, instead of the 40 previously under discussion.

"There are no current hostage talks between Israel and Hamas, nor is there a new Israeli offer in that regard," the official said. "What there is, is an attempt by Egypt to restart the talks with an Egyptian proposal that would entail the release of 33 hostages — women, elderly and infirm." According to Israeli media reports, Israeli intelligence officials believe there are 33 female, elderly and sick hostages left alive in Gaza, out of a total of 133 still being held

by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups.

There was no decision on how long any truce would last but if such an exchange were agreed, the pause in fighting would be "definitely less than six weeks," the official said. The visit by the Egyptian delegation came a day after the United States and 17 other countries appealed to Hamas to release all of its hostages as a pathway to end the crisis in Gaza. Hamas vowed not to relent to international pressure.

Hamas said it was "open to any ideas or proposals that take into account the needs and rights of our people." However it stuck to central demands Israel has rejected, and said it criticized the statement for not calling for a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The visit by the Egyptian delegation followed Israeli media reports of a visit to Cairo on Thursday by the Israeli army chief, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, and Ronen Bar, the head of Shin Bet, Israel's

domestic intelligence service.

Egypt, concerned about a potential influx of Palestinian refugees from neighboring Gaza if the war continues with the long-promised Israeli offensive into the southern city of Rafah, has taken an increasingly active role in the negotiations. "The Egyptians are really picking up the mantle on this. Egypt wants to see progress, not least because it's worried about a prospective Rafah operation," the official said.

Israel was increasingly looking past Qatar as a main broker, according to the official, after it failed to respond to Israeli demands to expel Hamas leaders from its territory or curb their finances. "Qatar is still involved but in a lesser capacity," the official said. "It's clear to everyone they failed to deliver, even when it came to expelling Hamas or even shutting down their bank accounts." However Hamas officials said they still considered Qatar a key mediator, alongside Egypt.

Omar alleges raids on PTI workers homes

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Opposition leader Omar Ayub raised serious concerns in the National Assembly regarding alleged raids on opposition homes in Punjab, accusing Punjab IG Usman Anwar of corruption and criticizing the deteriorating state of the Punjab Police Force. Speaker ordered removal of remarks concerning IG, calling for a judicial inquiry into the Bahawalnagar incident.

Expressing his dismay during the National Assembly session, Omar Ayub stated, "This is unacceptable." He highlighted the need for attention from Islamabad, emphasizing that rallies would be held here as well, asserting that no curfew is necessary in the capital. With over three crore votes, PTI faces scrutiny under Form 47. "There is an illegal Interior Minister present," Omar Ayub claimed. He advocated for medical facilities for Bushra Bibi, expressing mistrust in government hospitals.

"Bushra Bibi's rights are being violated," Omar Ayub declared, demanding her immediate release. He alleged mistreatment, stating she is confined to a small room and denied proper medical treatment, with suspicions raised over the authenticity of her medical tests conducted in government hospitals.

"We demand private medical facilities for Bushra Bibi at Shaukat Khanum Hospital," he asserted, expressing a lack of faith in government doctors. Accusing the government of using oppressive tactics, Omar Ayub claimed that denying treatment facilities to former First Lady is a ploy to pressure Imran Khan's government. "We have repeatedly demanded that Bushra Bibi be provided with medical facilities as it is her fundamental right," he added.

SIC second largest party in NA: ECP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday officially informed the National Assembly (NA) Secretariat that Sunni Alliance Council (SIC) is the second largest party in National Assembly.

As per details, ECP officially notified the National Assembly Secretariat regarding the party positions in NA. According to the ECP report, Sunni Alliance Council (SIC) has total 82 members including 49 from Punjab and 33 independent candidates after PTI-backed candidate joined the SIC, making it the second-largest party in the National Assembly.

Sunni Ittehad Council with 82 members (including 49 from Punjab and 33 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), PPP 71, MQM 21, JUI 11, PML-Q 5, IPP 4 and MWM, PKMAP, BNP, PMAP, BAP PML-Z each have one member. The Election Commission has clarified that no specific seats have been allocated to the Sunni Ittehad Council.

The National Assembly Secretariat had requested the Election Commission to provide an updated party position, which has now been notified. The development came after the NA Secretariat earlier announced that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independent members of National Assembly (NA) cannot be considered lawmakers belonging to the Sunni Alliance Council (SIC) yet.

According to the details, the NA Secretariat said that it has not been conveyed by the Election Commission by the Election Commission (ECP) about independent MNAs joining the SIC. "The PTI-backed lawmakers would be considered independents until the National Assembly Secretariat receives the party affiliation notification from the ECP," the secretariat said in a statement. On February 18, the PTI, whose candidates contested the February 8 general elections 'independently', decided to form an alliance with the SIC. Previously, the PTI had also announced to form a coalition in Centre and Punjab with the Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) but the move faced backlash by some party members.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Dawoodi Bohra community called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

India votes in Phase 2 of election as Modi raises campaign pitch

NEW DELHI (AFP): India has voted in the second phase of the world's biggest election, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his challengers raise the pitch of the campaign by focusing on hot-button issues such as religious discrimination, affirmative action and taxes.

Almost one billion people are eligible to vote in the seven-phase general election that began on April 19 and concludes on June 1, with votes set to be counted on June 4. A total of 88 seats out of the 543 in the lower house of parliament went to the polls on Friday, with 160 million people eligible to vote across 13 states and federal territories. Modi is seeking a record-equalling third straight term on the back of his economic record, welfare measures, national pride, Hindu nationalism and personal popularity.

His challengers have formed an alliance of more than two dozen parties and are promising greater affirmative action, more handouts and an end to what they call Modi's autocratic rule. More than half of the seats in Friday's contests were in the southern states of Kerala and Karnataka and the western state of Rajasthan.

Kerala is the only major Indian state where Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has never won a parliamentary seat, though it has seen a steady rise in its voter support from 1.75 percent in 1984 to 13 percent in 2019. In February, Modi said the state gave a "two-digit vote share to the BJP" in 2019. "This time, the party would win double-digit seats from Kerala," he told an election rally.

But there is little evidence to suggest such support for the BJP in a state dominated by two coalitions for

decades — the United Democratic Front (UDF), headed by the Congress party, and the communist-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), which is currently in power in the state. Modi's main opponent, Rahul Gandhi of the Indian National Congress, is seeking re-election from Wayanad in Kerala.

"This election is not a regular election ... because for the first time in the history of India, one party and one person is trying to finish the constitution and democracy of India," Gandhi said at an election rally in a region of neighbouring Karnataka. The campaign has become more heated since the first phase of voting on April 19 as Modi and the Congress face off on communal issues, with the prime minister accusing the opposition party of favouring minority Muslims, aiming to dilute affirmative action and planning to impose an inheritance tax.

Congress has denied the charges and said Modi fears losing and was using divisive language to distract voters from real issues such as unemployment, the price rise and rural distress. Kailash Adhikari, managing director of Governance Now magazine, told Al Jazeera he did not see the BJP creating any "rift on the basis of any religion".

"Right from the prime minister to the home minister, they have said that India is as much for Hindus as it is for all the other communities, be it Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, or others," he said. "We must also understand the kind of victory that we saw in 2014 and 2019, it cannot just come from one particular majority [group]." The Election Commission and political parties were concerned

that unseasonably hot weather, and weddings in some parts of the country, affected the voter turnout. Turnout in the first round of voting last week dropped nearly four points to 66 percent from the previous election in 2019, with speculation among experts that higher-than-average temperatures were to blame.

Modi took to social media shortly before polls opened on Friday to urge those voting to turn out in "record numbers" despite the heat. "A high voter turnout strengthens our democracy," he wrote on social media platform X. "Your vote is your voice!"

The second round of the poll — conducted in phases to ease the immense logistical burden of staging an election in the world's most populous country — includes districts that have this week seen temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). India's weather bureau on Thursday said severe heat-wave conditions would continue in several states through the weekend. That includes parts of the eastern state of Bihar, where five districts voted on Friday and where temperatures more than 5.1C (9.2F) above the seasonal average were recorded this week.

Karnataka in the south and parts of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state and heartland of the Hindu faith, are also scheduled to vote while facing heatwave conditions. "Voter turnout we typically expect in the early hours is quite low this time around," polling officer Shyam Sundar Bharti told AFP news agency in Mathura, a city not far from the Taj Mahal where temperatures were expected to hit 41C (106F). "The heat is the reason," he said.

China and US should be ‘partners, not rivals’, Xi tells Blinken

BEIJING: United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken has capped a visit to Beijing by meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping as the two countries try to stabilise relations amid disputes over national security, the economy, and geopolitical differences on the Middle East, Ukraine and Southeast Asia.

Xi told the top US diplomat on Friday that the two superpowers "should be partners rather than rivals" and should help each other succeed rather than hurt each other, according to the state news agency Xinhua. "I proposed mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation to be the three overarching principles. They are both lessons learned from the past and a guide for the future," he said.

Xi said China would be happy to see a prosperous US and hopes Washington will share this outlook for Beijing so bilateral ties can "truly stabilise, improve and move forward". But as both Xi and Blinken said, there are still major issues that threaten the recent improvement in relations. Blinken raised the issue of Chinese "support to the Russian defence industrial base" during five and a half hours of talks, according to US Department of State spokesper-

son Matthew Miller, who added that the two sides also discussed fractious topics such as Taiwan and the South China Sea.

China has not provided Russia with arms for its war in Ukraine, but the US and other Western nations say Chinese industrial exports like machinery and semiconductors have helped Russia increase its production of weapons. Beijing has called this normal trade between China and Russia that should not be disrupted or restricted, also pointing out that the war is being prolonged by major Western arms transfers and funding for Ukraine. Blinken earlier on Friday met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who cautioned that their countries could either "keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral" or even "slide into confrontation".

Wang said China observes a number of "red lines" that the US must not overstep as their relations are tested by "negative factors". "China's legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed, and our core interests are facing challenges," he told Blinken. The US warned China about its assertive moves around the Philippines and promised to defend its ally.

"I made clear that while the US will continue to de-escalate tensions, our defence commitments to the Philippines remain ironclad," Blinken told reporters, adding that he raised Beijing's "dangerous actions in the South China Sea" during meetings with top leaders. In addition to clashing on Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory and the US has been arming, the two nations have seen tensions rising over artificial intelligence, a law that seeks to ban TikTok in the US if its Chinese parent company refuses to sell it and China's supply of chemicals used to make fantasy.

Underscoring the fraught nature of their relations, US President Joe Biden signed into law a bipartisan bill that includes \$8bn to counter China's military might along with \$61bn for Ukraine and billions in military aid for Taiwan just hours before Blinken arrived in China on Wednesday. China-US relations have been turbulent in recent years with the situation exacerbated among other things by a trade war, then-House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 and a row over the US downing of a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon last year. — Aljazeera

King Charles to resume public duties after cancer diagnosis

LONDON (Reuters): Britain's King Charles will return to public duties next week for the first time since being diagnosed with cancer as he makes good progress following treatment and a period of recuperation, Buckingham Palace said on Friday.

In February, the palace revealed that the 75-year-old king had been diagnosed with an unspecified form of cancer detected in tests after a corrective procedure for an enlarged prostate. Although Charles continued with official state business, the diagnosis led him to postpone public engagements to begin treatment and rest.

"His majesty's treatment programme will continue, but doctors are sufficiently pleased with the progress made so far that the king is now able to resume a number of public-facing duties," a Buckingham Palace spokesperson said. "His majesty is greatly encouraged to be resuming some public-facing duties and very grateful to his medical team for their continued care and expertise."

Although it was too early to say

how much longer his cancer treatment would last, the spokesperson said his doctors were "very encouraged by the progress made so far and remain positive about the king's continued recovery". No further details about his condition or his treatment were given, in line with the usual stance on medical privacy.

While pictured and filmed carrying out some official duties in private, Charles's only public appearance came last month when he greeted well-wishers in an impromptu walkabout after an Easter church service in Windsor, raising hopes that his health was improving. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak responded to the news of the king's return to public duties, saying on social media site X: "Brilliant news to end the week!"

To mark his return, Charles and his wife Queen Camilla will visit a cancer treatment centre in London next Tuesday, the palace said. It was also confirmed that the Japanese Emperor Naruhito and his wife, Empress Masako, would pay a state visit in late June. However, Charles will not carry out his usual summer

programme and his plans will be crafted in consultation with his medical team to minimise risks to recovery, the palace said.

The king's absence has coincided with news that his daughter-in-law Kate, wife of his son and heir Prince William, was undergoing preventative chemotherapy after tests in the wake of major abdominal surgery revealed cancer had been present. The Princess of Wales, often known by her maiden name Kate Middleton, will herself only return to public duties when her medical team say she is well enough to do so.

Charles's health scare came less than 18 months into his reign after he succeeded from his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth, and less than a year since his coronation, Britain's biggest ceremonial event for seven decades. "As the first anniversary of the coronation approaches, their majesties remain deeply grateful for the many kindnesses and good wishes they have received from around the world throughout the joys and challenges of the past year," Buckingham Palace said.