

**NAB launches probe**  
KARACHI (INP): The NAB on Friday has launched an investigation into wheat theft worth billions of rupees in Sindh. The NAB instructed the Deputy Director of Food Department Karachi for the details of five years' worth of wheat from Garhi Khairo in Malir's godown. In a letter, the NAB authorities instructed the concerned officials to provide a detailed record of wheat which was brought to the Malir warehouse from 2015 to 2020.

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**Khan flays Gaza attacks**  
**F.P. Report**  
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman-for-life Imran Khan has strongly condemned Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza and called upon the Muslim leadership to take an effective lead as the people of Gaza are counting on the Ummah to speak up and act. In a message from Adiala Jail, PTI Founding Chairman vowed: "I stand with Gaza."

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# Shehbaz directs for fool-proof security of Chinese nationals

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday directed all the security agencies to ensure fool-proof security arrangements for the Chinese nationals working on various projects in Pakistan.

Chairing a meeting regarding security situation in the country, the prime minister said he had decided to personally review the meetings with respect to the overall security of the country especially the security of the Chinese citizens. He said war against the menace of terrorism will continue till its eradication from the country. He directed the interior ministry to increase collaboration with the provinces to further improve the provincial anti-terrorism departments.

The prime minister also instructed to chalk out a comprehensive strategy for the regular audit of the security SOPs. The interior ministry briefed the prime minister in detail about the overall law and order situation of the country and the performance of the ministry.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Interior Syed Mohsin Naqvi, top brass of the security agencies and the concerned high officials.

**Govt to establish Danish schools in Islamabad, other areas of country:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said the government will establish new Danish schools in remote areas of Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and other areas of the country including Islamabad where the children will get state of the art free education, boarding, and food facilities.

He was talking to the participants of the iftar-dinner hosted by him in honour of orphaned children and children with special abilities at the Prime Minister House. Besides he also announced to establish state of the art hospitals in Islamabad, AJK and GB. The prime minister, on the occasion, taking keen interest in the children, interacted with them and inquired about their well-being. "I am

## PM to visit Saudi Arabia from 6th

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif will visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 6 to 8 April 2024, during the last days of Ramadan. This would be the prime minister's first foreign visit since assuming his office.

During his visit, he will perform Umrah and offer prayers at the Masjid Nabwi Al-Sharif, a press release issued by the Foreign Office Spokesperson said on Friday. The prime minister is also expected to meet the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz and discuss issues of mutual interest. The leaders will also exchange views on regional and global developments. The prime minister will be accompanied by ministers for foreign, defence, finance, information and economic affairs. Pakistan and KSA have longstanding fraternal relations rooted in religious and cultural affinity. The people of Pakistan have the deepest respect and regard for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. The leadership of both countries is committed to advancing the fraternal ties and mutually rewarding economic and investment relations.

happy to meet the cute children came from various institutions including SOS and Hassan Academy," he said adding today the children were the chief guests while he was their host.

During his interaction with the children, the prime minister said he found them very intelligent who will join different professions in future and will play key role in the country's development and prosperity. He said no doubt, the parents were the biggest blessings, but the Holy Prophet Muhammad PBUH was also born with no father and his mother passed away when he was only six years old.

**On Quds Day, PM reiterates Pakistan's support to Palestinians; calls for prayers:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday reiterated that Pakistan would continue its moral and diplomatic support to the people of Palestine until their liberation from the Zionist occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestine state as per pre-1967 borders. The prime minister, in his message on Quds Day, annually observed on the last Friday of Holy Ramadan (Jumuat-ul-Wida), said the entire Pakistani nation condemned the Zionist oppression and expressed solidarity with the suffering Palestinian people.

He said for the past seven decades,

Israel had illegally occupied Palestine and Jerusalem and continuously violated international laws and human rights to maintain its occupation, while the international community acted as a silent spectator.

The prime minister said that the Israeli occupation and atrocities spanned over the last seven decades but its intensity increased manifolds since October last year. "So far, 32,000 Palestinians, including 17,000 children, have been killed and 70,000 injured in Gaza. Hospitals, refugee camps and schools have been deliberately targeted. Despite the UN Security Council's resolution for ceasefire, the unprovoked bombing of innocent civilians by Israel continues in Gaza," the prime minister commented.

He reiterated Pakistan's demand for the international community to play its role to pressure Israel to stop oppression against the Palestinian people. He also requested the Muslims in Pakistan and all over the world, observing the last Friday of Holy Ramadan to specially pray for their Palestinian and Kashmiri brothers and sisters for their salvation from the atrocities. He also called for prayers for peace, security and prosperity of Pakistan, and its riddance from the economic problems.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meeting orphans and differently abled children at an iftar organized for them.

## President lauds role of Pakistan's armed forces

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza and President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday expressed the "resolve to stamp out the scourge of terrorism" from the country.

The development came as Gen Mirza met Zardari at the Presidency, according to an official handout. The CJCSC felicitated the president on assuming his office and briefed him about the country's security situation as well as the operational preparedness of the armed forces.

Gen Mirza highlighted that the armed forces "had the capability to effectively deal with internal and external security challenges", the statement said. President Zardari lauded the armed forces' role in "defending the national frontiers as well as their contributions towards the socio-economic development of the country". He conveyed his "complete confidence" in the security forces' ability to successfully overcome internal and external security challenges. "The meeting expressed the resolve to stamp out the scourge of terrorism with the support of the nation," the statement said.

## Dar, Blinken discuss bilateral ties

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, received a telephone call from the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken here on Friday and discussed bilateral ties.

Both sides reiterated their dedication to strengthening bilateral cooperation across all spheres of mutual interest. A wide range of bilateral issues including enhancing trade and investment relations, climate change, agriculture and security came under discussion.

Various matters of regional importance such as situation in Gaza, the Red Sea and developments in Afghanistan were also discussed. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the current positive momentum in bilateral relations.

## IHC orders removal of Babar's name from ECL

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court has ordered removal of Dr Babar Awan Advocate's name from the Exit Control List (ECL). Justice Summan Rifat Imtiaz heard the application of Babar Awan on Friday.

On behalf of Babar Awan, Vakil Ali Azad appeared before the court. The court disposed of the petition after ordering removal of the name of Babar Awan from the ECL.

## 'Toxic powder' saga Judges to receive letters after security clearance

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: After several judges from the Supreme Court and high courts received letters containing 'toxic powder', the administration of the Lahore High Court (LHC) has devised new SOPs regarding letters being received in the name of jurists.

"New SOPs has been adopted for handling the letters being posted to the jurists," the LHC's administration said in a statement on Friday.

All courier companies and postmen have been restricted to mandatory clear all genre of letters and posts from the security room. A deputy superintendent police (DSP) ranked officers would undergo security checkup of the letters before they would be handed over to the relevant judges' staff officer.

A postman namely Atif — who delivered the letters containing suspicious powder substance to the judges' offices — told media that it was his routine work to deliver letters and he did not know what was inside the envelopes. After the suspected powdered letters, the Pakistan Post also took special measures for security of staffers and thorough inspection of postal letters, and other mails. It has been directed to provide masks and gloves to the staffers for their safety and security.

Subsequently, the Pakistan Post ordered entire staffers to carefully check letters and other mails, especially the mails in the names of judges, diplomats and other high-profile personalities, a notification read. The postal staffers have also been directed to stay vigilant while booking and delivery of mails, it

## White powder in threat letters sent to judges contained '10% arsenic'

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has received the forensic report of the powder found in mysterious letters sent to the judges of the high courts and the Supreme Court, sources told media.

At least four judges of the SC, eight of the Islamabad High Court and six of the Lahore High Court received letters, creating fear in the judiciary. The latest judge to receive the threatening letter was LHC's Justice Ali Baqar Najafi. The CTD lodged two FIRs against unknown people and launched an inquiry into the matter.

The sources disclosed that arsenic mixed in white powder was found in the letters. They further revealed that the powder contained 10% arsenic, adding that a higher ratio of the material can be "very poisonous" and harmful to the human body and can affect the nervous system upon inhalation. The investigators have obtained the videos of the CCTV cameras installed near the letterboxes in the sub-divisional post office Satellite Town, Rawalpindi.

The sources shared that the suspects in the videos are being identified with the help of Nadra. Earlier, the judges of the IHC including the chief justice received the letters containing the white powder which was believed to be anthrax. Later, CJP Qazi Faez Isa and three other SC judges including Justice Athar Minallah, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, and Justice Aminuddin received similar letters.

added.

The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) has received the forensic report of the powder found in the mysterious letters sent to the judges of the high courts and the Supreme Court, sources told media. At least six judges of the apex court, eight of the Islamabad High Court and six of the Lahore High Court received letters containing white powder which was believed to be anthrax, creating fear in the judiciary. The latest judge to receive the threatening letter was LHC's Justice Najafi.

The CTD lodged two FIRs against unknown people and launched an inquiry

into the matter. The investigators obtained the videos of the CCTV cameras installed near the letterboxes in the sub-divisional post office Satellite Town, Rawalpindi. The sources shared that the suspects in the videos are being identified with the help of Nadra.

Amid calls to probe the matter mount, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has promised the government would probe the matter of threat letters received by judges with suspicious powder, with a sense of responsibility to uncover the reality. Addressing the federal cabinet, he observed that the sensitive matter should not be given a political twist.

## Pakistan Bar urges SC to constitute full court

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) members including Abid Zuberi Friday appealed to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to form the full court to hear the suo moto notice of the letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges complaining of "meddling" by intelligence agencies in judicial matters.

The members of the Pakistan Bar Council have also applied to the Supreme Court to become a party in the suo moto case of the six judges' letter. In the application, the members of the Bar Council have said that the High Court judges should be made a party in the six judges' letter case.

The PBC members have said that the full court comprising all the judges should hear the case and secret agencies should be prevented from interfering in judicial affairs.

The PBC members also appealed in the application that the Judicial Council should be ordered to issue instructions on the reserva-

tions of the judges of the Islamabad High Court. It is also stated in the application that the independence of the judiciary is related to fundamental rights, and for the independence of the judiciary and the provision of justice, it is necessary to investigate the letters of the judges.

On March 25, six Islamabad High Court judges — out of a total strength of eight — wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) members regarding attempts to pressurise judges through abduction and torture of their relatives as well as secret surveillance. The letter was signed by judges Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Saman Rafat Imtiaz and addressed to the CJP and Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Munib Akhtar as well as the top judges of the Peshawar High Court and the IHC.

On Saturday last, the federal cabinet had approved the constitution of an inquiry

commission headed by ex-chief justice of Pakistan Tassaduq Hussain Jilani to probe allegations of interference by intelligence agencies in judicial affairs. The body has been authorised to "recommend action" against anyone from the intelligence agency, department, or government if found guilty. But the nominated commission head Justice Retired Tassaduq Hussain Jilani refused to lead the commission.

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa took suo motu notice regarding the six judges' letter on last Monday, a day after over 300 lawyers had urged the Supreme Court to take notice of allegations of interference in the judiciary by the intelligence apparatus under Article 184(3) of the Constitution, adding any government-led commission "would be bereft of necessary independence and powers" to probe the claims. Justice Isa constituted a seven-judge larger bench on the issue of judges' letter.

## Practical steps to be taken for media houses

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar reiterated the government's resolve to address all the issues being faced by journalists, media workers and media houses on priority.

He expressed the resolve during his separate meetings with the office bearers of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors and Pakistan Broadcasters Association. On the occasion, he vowed to take practical steps for ensuring well-being of the media workers and houses.

The minister, during the meetings, had a detailed discussion on the problems faced by media workers, journalists and newspaper industry. Tarar said he was fully aware of the problems of media workers and journalists and would take practical measures to protect their rights. Besides, all-out efforts would be made to provide required facilities to them, he added. The minister assured the office bearers of his full cooperation in getting the pending dues of media houses cleared at the earliest possible time. In this regard, concerted efforts were underway in line with the directives of PM Shehbaz Sharif, he added.

He said the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) had approved supplementary grant for payment of media houses' arrears and dues. The minister highlighted the role being played by the Ministry of Information between the government, journalists and media houses.

He said health cards for medical treatment of journalists would be issued soon. Nobody would be allowed to violate rights of journalists and media workers, he remarked. He also spoke on economic issues and expressed the government's strong commitment to address those issues in line with the vision of PM Shehbaz Sharif.



PESHAWAR: KP Chief Minister, Ali Amin Gandapur chairing the third meeting of provincial cabinet.

## ECP notifies victory of 37 Senators

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has officially issued notifications of success for 37 candidates who were elected to the Senate in the April 2 elections.

According to a notification, among them are Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Ishaq Dar from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), both representing the federal capital.

The notified senators from Punjab include Ahad Cheema (PML-N), Pervaiz Rasheed (PML-N), Hamid Khan (SIC), Raja Nasir Abbas (MWMP), Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi (Independent), Muhammad Talal Badar Chaudhry (PML-N), Nasir Mehmood (PML-N), Muhammad Aurangzeb (PML-N), Musadik Masood Malik (PML-N), Anusha Rehman Ahmad Khan (PML-N), Bushra Anjum Butt (PML-N), and Khalil Tahir (PML-N).

The notification includes Syed Masroor Ahsan, Dost Ali Jeesar, Ashraf Ali Jatoi, Syed Kazim Ali Shah, Amir Wali Uddin Chishti, Faisal Vawda, Nadeem Ahmed Bhutto, Zamir Hussain Ghumro, Sarmad Ali, Qurat-Ul-Ain Marri, Rubina Qaim Khani, and

## By-election campaigns set to conclude at midnight on 19th

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The ongoing election campaign for by-elections in 21 national and provincial assemblies of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan will conclude late Friday night (April 19-20)

In accordance with election regulations, campaigning will come to an end precisely at midnight falling between the April 19th and 20th. The ECP advises that candidates who continue engaging in political activities after this deadline will face legal consequences. Additionally, the ECP calls upon the media and the public to work together to uphold a free, fair, and transparent election process. The Election Commission has reminded the candidates participating in the by-elections about Section 182 of the Election Act, 2017. This section prohibits individuals from organizing, attending, or participating in any public meetings or processions within the constituency's area for a period of 48 hours after the polls end, until midnight.

minority member Poonjo, all hailing from Sindh and representing various political affiliations such as PPP, MQM, and an independent candidate.

The senators notified from Balochistan comprise Ahmed Khan representing JUIP, Anwar ul Kakar as an Independent candidate, Aimal Wali Khan from ANP, Jan Muhammad from NP, Sardar Al Haj Muhammad Umer Goraj representing PPP, Syedaal Khan from PML-N, Shahzaib Durrani also from PML-N, Bilal Ahmed Khan from PPP, Abdul Wasay representing JUIP, Husna

Bano from PPP, and Rahat Jamali.

It may be recalled that half of the Senate members - 48 - retired after completing their six-year term in March, prompting elections on April 2 to fill 30 vacant seats, with 18 already secured through uncontested elections. However, elections for 11 seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were postponed due to a deadlock between the provincial government and opposition regarding the oath-taking of elected MPAs on reserved seats. Consequently, 19 senators were elected in April 2.





LAHORE: A large number of people participating in Al-Quds rally to express solidarity with the people of Palestine at Mall Road. —APP Photo

## ‘New transport projects immediately after Eid’

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Transport, Mass Transit, Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has announced the launch of new transport projects immediately after

Eid, following the instructions of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, to bring good news to the people.

In his statement on social media, Senior Provincial Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has announced that the second phase of the pink bus service for women will be initiated in Karachi to

further enhance travel facilities for women.

He stated that new routes for electric buses will commence immediately after Eid, and the People's Bus Service will be launched in Mirpurkhas to provide travel facilities to the people.

Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that a cashless

ticket service will be introduced for public transport users. Additionally, the Sindh government will initiate a free shuttle service to connect the Orange Line BRT and Red Line BRT.

He stated that the free shuttle service for the people of Karachi will commence immediately after Eid.

## PRCS chairman meets DG Rangers Sindh,

KARACHI (APP): The Chairman Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari called on Director General Pakistan Rangers Sindh Major General Azhar Waqas here at Rangers Headquarters on Friday and discussed matters related to society's humanitarian initiatives in the province.

According to a press release issued by PRCS, during the dialogue, Sardar Shahid Laghari underscored PRCS's steadfastness and commitment, especially during challenging circumstances like the devastating floods of 2022. Through partnerships with esteemed organizations such as the IFRC, ICRC and Red Cross, Red Crescent Movement, PRCS promptly initiated relief efforts, benefiting over 2.8 million individuals across

55 districts, with a focus on underserved areas.

PRCS collaborated with the government and Armed Forces, complementing their relief endeavors to alleviate the plight of flood-affected communities.

Chairman Laghari elaborated on PRCS's emergency flood response in Sindh, detailing activities such as distributing essential supplies, providing shelter, installing water treatment facilities, and offering cash assistance to affected families.

Additionally, he outlined ongoing recovery initiatives aimed at providing shelter, livelihood support, water and sanitation facilities, hygiene promotion, and food distribution.

Moreover, Laghari highlighted PRCS's assistance to Sindh provincial and district branches in capacity

building and various programs, including supplying ambulances to enhance emergency care services during flood operations and beyond.

DG Rangers Sindh, Major General Azhar Waqas, lauded PRCS's significant contributions, emphasizing its pivotal role in natural disasters.

He praised the National Society's dedication under the leadership of Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, which transcends ethnic or cultural boundaries, contributing significantly to humanitarian endeavors.

DG Rangers pledged full support from the Rangers to PRCS in humanitarian endeavors and expressed readiness for collaborative actions to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable communities.

## Continuous efforts vital to ensure price control: Bilal

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin has said that prices of essential items remained low in the holy month of Ramadan.

He said this while presiding over a meeting of the supervisory ministry committee of Ramadan Relief Package at Civil Secretariat on Friday. He said that prices of onion, tomato and potato had been reduced by improving their supply, adding that the government had made sincere efforts to provide relief to the people.

He further said that price control was a continuous effort and teams should remain active in the field in this regard. Bilal Yasin said that a plan had been prepared to control inflation during last few days of the holy month of Ramadan and prior to Eid-ul-Fitr, adding that special focus was also being given to supply of essential items.

He directed the administration to ensure proper monitoring of prices and supply of chicken, onion, potato, tomato and other essential items. The meeting was informed that fair price shops would remain operational until 27th of Ramadan. Punjab Agriculture Minister Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani said that thousands of people were benefiting from fair price shops.

## CM's message on Youm Al Quds

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz has saluted the unflinching resolve and unwavering determination of the Palestinians on the Al-Quds Day.

In a statement, she said, "The sacrifices of our Palestinian brethren who are laying down their precious lives for the sake of freedom will not go waste. Israeli oppression and tyranny will not weaken the Palestinians fight for their liberation. The Zionists state's brutalities on our Palestinian brothers and sisters is highly condemnable. The first Qibla is a sacred place for all the Muslims across the globe".

Maryam Nawaz called upon the international community to immediately help cease the ongoing brutalities and barbarity committed by Israel, adding that the international community should play a proactive role in getting the UN Security Council resolutions and agreements implemented in letter and spirit. The CM outlined that peace would remain an elusive dream in the world unless the Palestinian and Kashmir issues are not amicably resolved.

## LHC promotes 20 AD&SJs

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday promoted 20 additional district and sessions judges (AD&SJs) to the rank of district and sessions judges (D&SJs) (Grade-21).

According to a notification issued here, the committee, comprising the chief justice and judges, promoted the AD&SJs on the recommendations made by the Performance Evaluation Committee, in its meeting held on March 29, 2024.

The AD&SJs promoted as D&SJs are: Ms. Misbah Khan, Munisif Khan, Naveed Anjum Saleemi, Humayun Saeed, Raja Shahid Zamir, Muhammad Mazhar Saleem, Raja Amjad Iqbal, Muhammad Sharif, Arshad Iqbal, Ms. Humaira-tuz-Zahra, Muhammad Naeem Saleem, Shamshad Ali Rana, Ghulam Hussain, Muhammad Bilal Baig, Afaq Ahmad, Ijaz Ali, Syed Imran Raza Naqvi, Muhammad Khalid Ishaq, Izhar-ul-Haq, and Muhammad Faisal Ahmad.

## Minister inaugurates first mobile pet clinic van in Lahore

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Agriculture Minister Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani on Friday inaugurated first mobile pet clinic van in the provincial capital.

According to official sources here, The Punjab Livestock and Dairy Development Department had taken the important initiative related to treatment and look after of animals.

## Chief of Naval Staff calls on Sindh CM

KARACHI (APP): The Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf called on the Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah at Chief Minister House here on Friday.

They discussed professional matters in the call-on.

The CM said that Karachi is the city of Navy. He said that Karachi is on the seashore that is why we call it the maritime city.

The CM Murad said that Pakistan Navy has valuable services in the fields of education and health in Sindh.

He said that during the flood, Pakistan Navy along with other forces fully helped the people of Sindh.

The Naval Chief congratulated Murad Ali Shah on assuming the charge of Chief Minister.

The Naval Chief appreciated the continuous coop-

eration of the Sindh government with the Pakistan Navy.

He said that Pakistan Navy carries out education, health and welfare activities along the Sindh coastline.

Later, the Chief Minister presented the gifts of Ajrak and Sindhi cap to the Naval Chief.

The Naval Chief presented a model of PN ship to the Sindh Chief Minister.

## Punjab to launch historic Air Ambulance Service

LAHORE (APP): Punjab's Minister for Health and Emergency Services, Khawaja Salman Rafique, has announced the imminent launch of the Air Ambulance Service, marking a significant milestone in the province's history.

During a visit to the Emergency Services Department at Thokar Niaz Baig here on Friday, the Minister disclosed plans for the introduction of the Air Ambulance Service, emphasizing its importance in providing swift medical assistance to the people of Punjab.

He underscored the department's commitment to extending services to the motorway, with rescuers stationed strategically at entry

and exit points to ensure rapid response to emergencies.

Highlighting the rigorous training regime for emergency medical technicians, Rafique revealed that examinations conducted by Aga Khan University will ensure the proficiency of personnel. He commended the motorcycle rescuers for their dedication, having assisted over 4 million citizens to date.

Expressing concern over escalating traffic accidents, he stressed the urgent need for strict enforcement of the Road Safety Act, particularly noting the prevalence of motorcycle-related incidents.

Secretary of the Punjab Emergency Services Department, Dr. Rizwan

Naseer, affirmed efforts to enhance relief operations and emergency management systems, with a continuous focus on monitoring the Air Ambulance Service plan.

In a bid to bolster service delivery, the minister inspected the Cadets Hostel and Managers Training Center, where he received a comprehensive briefing on the upcoming Air Ambulance Service from the department's Secretary.

With the impending launch of the Air Ambulance Service, Punjab aims to elevate its emergency response capabilities and ensure prompt medical assistance for its citizens, marking a significant stride towards public safety and well-being.



PESHAWAR: Prof. Dr. Ali Muhammad, Vice-Chancellor Islamia College, Peshawar, conferring PhD degree to Dr. Izhar Khan.

## KPCTA to run train safari trip for Takht Bhair relics



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) is going to run another train safari trip to the historic Takht Bhair relics during Eidul Fitr on Saturday April 13, 2024. These Buddha-era archaeological sites have been declared world heritage by UNESCO.

The decision was taken at a meeting held with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister's Advisor on Tourism, Culture, Museums & Archeology Zahid Chanzab in the chair. Besides others, Secretary Tourism Muhammad Bakhtiar, KPCTA Director General Barkatullah Marwat and Manager Events Hassina Shaikat also attended the meeting.

Zahid Chanzab said that the KPCTA was once again organizing a daylong guided train tour for the families to the historic Takht Bhair Buddhist ruins to explore the historical significance of this remarkable international site to the world after overwhelming demand from the tourists and her-

itage lovers.

He said the train tour was also aimed at promoting religious tourism and apprising the people of the KP's rich history and heritage sites. He said the train safari would take tourists from Saddar Cantt Railway Station at 9:00 AM and it will reach Takht Bhair Railway Station after sightseeing stops at various stations, including Peshawar City Railway Station, Nasirpur, Pabbi, and Mardan.

"The tourists would be briefed on the historic significance of UNESCO's World Heritage site besides visiting ancient monasteries inside the Buddhism Archaeological Complex," he revealed, adding that the event was meant to inform the visitors about the traditions, culture of the Buddha era and the religious importance of these relics to Buddhism followers, who often visited these sites for prayers and meditation.

Zahid Chanzab reiterated the pledge that more tourism activities would be organised for the entertainment of domestic and foreign tourists to continue the promotion of tourism in the province. The train safari

tour is one of the big steps ahead of such the endeavors in this regard.

KPCTA DG Barkatullah Marwat on this occasion said that the authority was arranging another guided tour for the families and tourists to highlight the grandeur of the heritage sites in KP and apprise the people of ancient history and culture of this ancient part of the world as well. He said that besides KPCTA staff members, the tourists would also be facilitated by the Tourism Police so that the tourists could fully enjoy the fun-filled event during Eidul Fitr.

Upon arrival, the tourists would be welcomed with vibrant tunes of a traditional band performance at the Saddar Cantt Railway Station, Peshawar, and then the train would start chugging towards Takht Bhair. Throughout the excursion, the participants would explore the remnants of the 1st Century A.D. of Buddhist Civilization. Takht Bhair stands as a testament to the grandeur of ancient Buddhist monastic centres declared by UNESCO as the one of the rich World Heritage sites.



Government of Pakistan  
Ministry of (Energy) Petroleum Division  
Geological Survey of Pakistan

## TENDER NOTICE

- Geological Survey of Pakistan (GSP), an attached department of Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division), Government of Pakistan, invites sealed bids from the firms / service companies / consortium registered with Income Tax, Sales Tax Departments and who are on FBR's Active Taxpayer's List (ATL) for the **Development, and Maintaining GIS Based Geodatabase Solution and Integrated Field Data Collection Mobile App.**
- Bidding documents can be downloaded from GSP website [www.gsp.gov.pk](http://www.gsp.gov.pk) and PPRA website [www.ppra.org.pk](http://www.ppra.org.pk).
- A pre-bid meeting will be held on **16<sup>th</sup> April, 2024 at 11:00 hours** at the office of the undersigned to provide an opportunity to the participating Bidders to interact with GSP with regard to various tender provisions / clauses, before the bids are submitted.
- The bids, prepared in accordance with the instructions in the Tender documents, along with Earnest Money Deposit / Bid Security amounting **1% of the bid price** in the shape of Bank draft / Pay order drawn in favour of Director General, Geological Survey of Pakistan may reach office of the undersigned by **23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2024 at 11 hours**. Technical bids will be opened on the same day at **11:30 hours** in the presence of representatives of the bidders.
- As per PPRA Rules 33(1), 2004, Geological Survey of Pakistan (GSP), Government of Pakistan, has the right to reject any or all bids / proposal at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid / proposal.

SAJJAD KARAMAT

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### INVITATION FOR BIDS

**Procurement of Office Electronic Equipment, Ref No: PAK-2000002333-0047-G-NCB**

- The Government of Pakistan has received financing from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and intends to apply a part of the proceeds of the financing to this purchase. The use of any IFAD financing shall be subject to IFAD's approval, pursuant to the terms and conditions of the financing agreement, as well as IFAD's rules, policies and procedures. IFAD and its officials, agents and employees shall be held harmless from and against all suits, proceedings, claims, demands, losses and liability of any kind or nature brought by any party in connection with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - Rural Economic Transformation Project (KP-RETP), Planning & Development Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- The KP-RETP seeks to contribute to poverty reduction, food and nutrition security and strengthened resilience of rural households. The development objective is sustainably improved Incomes of rural households through climate-resilient, high-value agriculture and off-farm/non-farm employment opportunities. The objective of the project will be achieved through an integrated approach of agribusiness development and skills development and employment promotion. The project will cover all the districts of KP province.
- The purchaser now invites sealed bids from eligible entities (bidders) for the provision of Office Electronic Equipment, the detail is given hereunder:

S.No.	Description of Goods	Quantity	Location	Delivery Period
1.	AC/DC Inverter (2 Ton)	8	PMU, Peshawar	45 days
2.	AC/DC Inverter (1.5 Ton)	16	"	"
3.	Refrigerator	5	"	"
4.	LED	6	"	"
5.	Water Dispenser	5	"	"

Bids will be evaluated for each item and the contract will comprise all the items awarded to a successful bidder. More details on these goods and related services are provided in the schedule of requirements in the bidding document.

- This IFB is open to all eligible bidders who wish to respond. Subject to restrictions noted in the bidding document, eligible entities may associate with other bidders to enhance their capacity to successfully carry out the procurement.
- Bidding will be conducted using the **National Competitive Bidding (NCB), Single Stage Single Envelope (1S1E)** procedure, the evaluation procedure for which is described in the bidding document, in accordance with the IFAD Procurement Handbook which is provided at [www.ifad.org/project-procurement](http://www.ifad.org/project-procurement). The NCB process, as described, will include a review and verification of qualifications and past performance, including a reference check, prior to the contract award.
- Please note that a pre-bid conference will be held on **April 23, 2024 at 1200 hours** as described in the bid data sheet (BDS), Section III of the bidding document.
- Bidders interested in submitting a bid shall purchase the bidding document against payment of a non-refundable fee of PKR 800.00. Bidding documents can be obtained by sending an e-mail or letter, giving full contact details of the bidder, to the following point of contact. This will ensure that the bidders receive updates regarding the bidding document.
- Bids must be delivered to the address and in the manner specified in the bid data sheet - instructions to bidders 23.2, no later than **1200 Hours (local time) on May 07, 2024**. Bids will be opened at **1230 Hours (local time) on May 07, 2024**.
- Bidders shall /be aware that late bids will not be accepted under any circumstance and will be returned unopened at the written request and cost of the bidder. All bids must be accompanied by a bid security of PKR. 225,000.00 in the manner specified in the bid data sheet.
- Please note that electronic bids shall not be accepted.

**Project Director**  
**PMU KP-RETP**  
**Block-A, 4th Floor, PDA Building, Phase-5, Hayatabad, Peshawar**  
**[zahoor@kpretp.gov.pk](mailto:zahoor@kpretp.gov.pk)**  
**091-9217956-57**

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# First ever drug policy to be initiated in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting to present the first ever drug policy was convened under the Chairmanship of Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah. Deputy Secretary Drugs Ibrahim, DG Drugs and Pharmacy Services Dr. Abbas, and a delegation from the Young Pharmacist Community, among other officials from the Drug Directorate, attended the meeting.

The proposed policy for the provision of standardized medicines to the province's citizens was presented in the meeting. Health Minister hint to approve the policy after formal proceedings and will be presented to cabinet for government's approval for its adaptation.

Health Minister was informed that, according to world health organization standards, pharmacists' appointments in hospitals will be brought in line with pharmacy services. Under the policy, pharmacist services will be integrated with health centres. Doctors will prescribe medicines based on formulas instead of brands, which will elimi-

nate brand pricing and supply manipulation from the drug market. Implementation of the policy will reduce patient drug expenses and ensure the proper use of medications, leading to a reduction in mortality rates.

The minister was informed that there is a shortage of pharmacists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the first province where a separate Drug Directorate General has been established, from where e-drug sale licenses are issued, and online access to drug testing laboratory reports is available.

As per Supreme Court orders, one pharmacist's appointment on fifty beds is mandatory. Through this policy, the appointment of pharmacists in hospitals will ensure public access to standardized medicines at lower rates. The policy will also help in reducing the harmful effects of medications by enhancing pharmacovigilance and anti-biotech resistance in hospitals, as well as in maintaining drug storage and supply chains.

The implementation of

## Drive to curb adulteration initiated

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority, under the supervision of Director General Wasif Saeed, has initiated a special campaign across the province to curb adulteration, on Friday.

According to the authority's spokesperson while issuing details, said that food safety teams conducted inspections of 1,300 food-related businesses in all districts of the province over the past three days. The report uncovered that warning notices were issued to 229 businesses for violating health standards, while fines were also imposed on 20 food businesses.

During the inspections, 3,438 substandard and harmful food items were seized, and 318 businesses were also issued licenses. Notably, during the ongoing crackdown, 196 bakery units underwent checking, resulting in the disposal of 2,683 substandard bakery products. Twelve bakery shops were fined for severe violations. Furthermore, fines worth millions of rupees were imposed on violators of health standards.

Commending the successful operations of the Food Authority, Provincial Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru said to ensure hygiene and safe food to the public, is the agenda of provincial government.

The minister instructed food safety teams to intensify crackdowns on bakeries during the last week of Ramadan and Eid, emphasizing zero tolerance for offenders. He also warned food-related businesses that strict action would be taken against anyone jeopardizing public health.



PESHAWAR: KP Minister for Agriculture, Maj (ret'd) Muhammad Sajjad Barkwal chairing a meeting of developmental projects in merged areas.

## HBK Ramadan Sports Gala

# Mahmood Jan Babar, Nadir Khawaja reach Table Tennis finals

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In the HBK Ramadan Sports Gala organized under the aegis of the Peshawar Press Club, Mahmood Jan Babar and Nader Khawaja in Table Tennis and Kamran Ali and Faizan Qazalbash were able to reach the Table Tennis event.

In the Badminton competitions, the team of Irfan Musazai and Ali Sheikh, the pair of Asmat Shah and Abid Khan, Zafar Iqbal and Shehzad Fahad reached the semi-finals. On this occasion, President Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik, former President M Riaz, General Secretary Irfan Musazai, senior journalists Faridullah, Ijaz Ahmad Khan and a large number of journalists and media workers were also present.

Addressing the ceremony, IG Police Akhtar Hayat Khan was the chief guest. He said that sports and positive activities teach us to fight for victory and defeat along with patience. Appreciating the Press Club and said that the leadership and organizers of the Press Club deserve congratulations for organizing the best entertainment gala for their members.

Due to professional engagements, they cannot find time for themselves. He said that the efforts to increase the welfare and professional capacity of journalists from the platform of Peshawar Press Club, as well as organizing positive activities



like Ramadan Sports Gala for them, is a praiseworthy matter. Our journalist brothers who run after the news are also good players, he said.

Earlier, Peshawar Press Club President Arshad Aziz Malik while welcoming the special guests and participants said that in this mega sports event of Peshawar Press Club. More than 150 working journalists are participating in various indoor games, while for the last few years this tournament has become a festival which provides opportunities for entertainment to working journalists working under severe mental stress and pressure.

At the end of the ceremony, Peshawar Press Club President Arshad Aziz Malik thanked the Inspector General of Police and presented him with the Ramadan Sports

Gala T-shirt and honorary shield. In the first semi-final, Faizan defeated Khurram Pervez and made it to the final, while in the second semi-final, Kamran Ali defeated Kashan Awan and reached the final. The first semi-final of the table tennis event was played between Mahmood Jan and Zeeshan Liaquat. In which Mahmood Jan won, in the second semi-final, Nader Khawaja defeated Aftab Ahmed and managed to reach the final.

Shehzada Fahad, Tahir Waseem, Shahzad and Arif Ikram won their respective matches in Carrom board competitions, Tariq Aziz, Arshad Maidani, Bilawal Arab, Arif Ikram, Nader Khawaja, Irfan Khan, in the Ludo event. Shah Faissal and Ehtesham Bashir qualified for the quarter-finals.

## Setup of control rooms at DHQ directed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Director General Health Services Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dr. Shaukat Ali, has directed all District Health Officers (DHOs) to establish emergency control rooms and ensure the availability of emergency facilities and medicines during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

Under Dr. Shaukat Ali's directive, all district health officers have been tasked with establishing emergency control rooms in their respective districts to monitor medical emergencies during the Eid holidays and ensure the availability of necessary medicines in emergency control rooms.

The Director General informed all district health officers that Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah and health department teams will visit each district during the Eid days to personally oversee the services of emergency rooms.

Dr. Shaukat Ali stated that the health department has provided districts with 211 essential medicines and

equipment, and District Health Officers have been mandated to maintain at least 60% availability of all essential medicines and items in their healthcare facilities.

DG emphasized that any health center with less than 60% availability of essential medicines and facilities will not be tolerated. Conversely, districts demonstrating more than 60% availability will be recognized and rewarded for their preparedness and efficiency.

At the end of the meeting, District Health Officers thanked the Director-General of Health for the supply of medicines and raised concerns about their respective issues. Director General Health Services, Dr. Shaukat Ali assured all DHOs that their requests for additional medications would be promptly fulfilled, and efforts would be made to meet the medication needs of all districts during Eid.

Dr. Shaukat Ali stressed the importance of ensuring the availability of staff and essential medicines in all district health facilities, particularly in providing standard

### Mama Welfare Organization lauded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Deputy Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Suriya BiBi bestowed certificate of appreciation to Chief Executive of Mama Welfare Organization for their outstanding service. Expressing profound gratitude, the Deputy Speaker extended sincere thanks to Sabiha Ara Khan and Hidayatullah, the esteemed leaders of Mama Welfare Organization, for their tireless efforts in serving the community.

Highlighting the organization's noble mission, the Deputy Speaker commended Mama Welfare Organization for its compassionate initiative to distribute Ramadan food packages to the impoverished and needy individuals, both locally and through dispatch services.

### CTD releases lists of incident so far in 2024

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Friday issued a detailed report on the incidents of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa this year so far.

This year, 131 incidents of terrorism occurred in the province, the report of the CTD said. The highest number of terrorist incidents took place in Dera Ismail Khan that is 25 in numbers, the report said. Six incidents of terrorism each were reported in Peshawar, Bajaur and South Waziristan and 11 incidents occurred in Lakki Marwat, 10 in Khyber while 3 and 3 incidents occurred in Karak and Mardan, the reports said.

## Govt initiates several project in newly merged districts

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture Major (retired) Muhammad Sajjad has said that the government is working on various projects for agricultural development in the merged districts. The main purpose of these developmental Projects are to promote agricultural production in these areas, adopt modern agricultural methods and equip farmers with facilities.

Provincial Minister further said that Significant steps are being taken in the agricultural sector in the merged districts in which tunnel farming, fruit and vegetable growing projects, vertical farming projects will be started. "In order to increase the agricultural production in the merged districts, agricultural seeds of

high quality will also be distributed among the farmers while agricultural machinery and training will also be provided to them," he added.

He expressed these views while presiding over the meeting held regarding the development process in the merged districts. In meeting members of the Provincial Assembly KP Muhammad Sohail Afridi, Naik Muhammad, Asif Masood, Mehboob Sher, Usman Betni and Ajmal Khan, besides the Secretary Agriculture Javed Marwat, DGs of various wings and other officers participated.

Provincial Minister Muhammad Sajjad said that there are bright opportunities for faster development of agriculture in the merged districts this area is of special importance in terms of agriculture in many aspects.

There are vast opportunities for the growth and promotion of olives. This is the reason why millions of wild olives are being transplanted here through various projects. As a result, quality olive oil worth of billions of rupees is expected to be produced from here. In this way, millions of high variety olive trees are also being planted in these areas.

He further said that for agricultural purposes in the merged districts. Solar systems are also being installed. Out of 687 solar systems, 327 have been installed so far. Provincial Minister for Agriculture directed the officers of the department to take the opinion of the concerned public representatives in marking the locations for approval and initiation of development schemes in their areas.

## Workers Welfare Board to be made responsible organization

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Workers Welfare Board will be formed very soon and responsible persons will be appointed as members of the board, said the Provincial Labor Minister Fazal Shakoor Khan here on Friday.

Board members who are interested in solving workers' problems and are serious about their welfare would be encouraged, Fazal Shakoor Khan said while presiding over a meeting of the

Workers Welfare Board.

In the meeting, the provincial minister stressed on the promotion of quality education in the educational institutions managed by the Workers Welfare Board. There was a detailed discussion about various welfare board issues including scholarships for school children and other facilities given to them, the Provincial Minister said. He said, in the meeting, marriage grants and labor colonies

were also discussed during the meeting.

Workers Welfare Board will be formed soon after consultation and responsible persons will be appointed as members, the Provincial Minister Fazl Shakoor Khan said. The people have elected us to serve and everyone will be given their right, the Provincial Minister said, adding, "We will use all resources to solve public problems.



PESHAWAR: KP Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan Afridi chairing a meeting regarding issues of girls and boys colleges in Mardan and Rustam.

# Nero and collapsing nuclear-powered Pakistan

By Engineer Arshad H Abbasi

**PAKISTAN is in the midst of political and economic turmoil, with record inflation, primarily due to the high cost of electricity to the extent that it now not only challenging national sovereignty but also slowing down GDP to levels like never before. The majority of Pakistanis pay bills that are far higher than their average monthly incomes. The cost hike is all because of circular debt in the power sector.**

In 2006, the threat of circular debt intensified the criminal oversight by the national power regulator, NEPRA. The main goal of NEPRA's creation was to provide a steady supply of electricity at a reasonable price, but it was also intended to address other issues facing the power industry, such as system losses, growing expenses, high tariffs, and generation capacity constraints.

Regrettably, NEPRA has not only completely failed to meet its fundamental goals but has also ruined the nation financially. Basic math says that Pakistan could not be economically destroyed by its worst enemy in the four major wars it fought with India but one institution seems to

leading the country into a financial disaster. The enemy kept Pakistan united during the wars but NEPRA has polarized the country. Where did NEPRA make a Himalayan blunder to destabilize the nation? Here is a summary of misdoings

In the year 2012, the complete roadmap was handed over to NEPRA to reduce circular debt to reduce T&D losses, now swollen to Rs 600 Bn. T&D losses could have been reduced to half without an investment of a single dollar. Almost 12 years gone NEPRA has failed to act on the solution and instead preferred to shift the burden to consumers. Another blunder horrendous crime is granting a license and keeping eyes closed on thermal power plants with low efficiency. Roadmap, to retrofit Oil and Gas fired plants was briefly handed over. However, NEPRA paid no attention. Low-efficiency gas-fired plants hastened the depletion of gas reserves while simultaneously burdening consumers with excessive costs. To put it simply, a plant that operates at a high efficiency uses less fuel-gas, coal, or oil-to produce one unit of electricity. However, NEPRA has continued to grant licenses to less efficient plants, which results in massive capacity payments. NEPRA

came up with the simple solution of shifting the burden to the suffering public. The cost of solar, hydropower, wind, and coal power plants was never scrutinized according to global cost rates. This is one of the reasons the cost of electricity is higher in Pakistan

My preaching at NEPRA was always on the technical audit to know the real efficiency versus the nameplate efficiency of the power plants but the entity ignored this advice and instead allowed a utility to run a plant at only 26%, whereas power plants with more than 62% efficacy remain underutilized. If the gas had been converted to a more efficient plant the cost of electricity would have been half. May this be a global record of the inefficiency of a regulator? Furthermore, NEPRA was unable to carry out the IPPs' technical and forensic audit. Reasons for abandoning GENCO's power plant retrofitting. Best known to NEPRA.

Unfortunately, establishing an institution in Pakistan always means corporate standard buildings, obtaining high salaries and benefits, posh cars, the newest laptops and cell phones, and complimentary amenities on par with those of Pakistan's best companies.

NEPRA's best architecturally designed inspiring building in the capital, with incredible views of the Murree and Margala hills offers a great work environment. Probably, this environment is not available to the Nobel laureates. Using this ambient environment, NEPRA only gives the unfortunate country a recipe for disaster.

Exploiting the NEPRA Act, in the year FY 2022-3, the NEPRA score was 660 meetings of hearing to legitimize their decision by sharing responsibility for misdoing yet it is a lucrative business too by fetching TA/DA at the cost of -poor consumers. I kindly request that readers review the NEPRA annual reports, which disclose that the organization has evolved into a leisure club. The best-equipped gym and auditorium in the NEPRA building provide year-round spectacular events, but customers pay heavy bills at the expense of their children's education. Rather than concentrating on problems when examining the spectacular events, think back to the time when Rome was burning and the Roman emperor Nero was playing his flute. Not only did extravagant events and a lack of awareness of national assigned duties turn 250 million

Pakistanis into haemolacria, but high electricity bills also led to many customers taking their own lives. For Pakistan, NEPRA itself turned out to be a Nero.

Yet the most hilarious act toward the nation is the start of CSR activities deviating from the original objective for which NEPRA was created. What a surprise the first prize awarded to the vertically integrated utility received the highest federal subsidy of Rs169bn. It is not a bad deal. Getting this huge, technically unjustified offered a few million to NEPRA to play the fiddle.

NEPRA is constantly planning events for publicity as Pakistan searches for ways to arrest the circular debt and reduce the cost of electricity. NEPRA's yearly revenue in FY 2022-2023 is Rs 3 billion, but after unrestrained spending, that amount drops to Rs 623 million. It may surprise readers that NEPRA officials consistently receive the best training possible from international institutions but severely lacking in commitment and devotion turned NEPRA into Nero.

The worst crime NEPRA has committed is to grant new generation licenses during the last 4 years when the country has already over-installed capacity and consumption

is constantly decreasing. It is unnoticed by NEPRA that the shifting of customers towards their home-based solar system is piling up enormous capacity payments.

The primary cause of the failure is the frequent pre-selection of NEPRA's Chairman and members, who were never chosen based on merit. This catastrophe is also the result of government action, as evidenced by the NEPRA Act amendment to park retired bureaucrats. The plot to destabilize Pakistan economically, as envisioned by Dr. Bhashyam Kasturi, must be exposed and dismantled. To promote transparency and fairness it is time to integrate artificial intelligence into all power regulator businesses. GOP has to immediately cut off this parasite's oxygen before replicating the collapse model USSR and Yugoslavia.

It is imperative - before the IMF lends more funds - to revamp blood-sucking institutions such as NEPRA and similar enterprises that are bleeding the country and weakening the faith consumers in the state. The sky will not fall if the bloodsucking NEPRA is shelved and superseded by a few credible experts. No funds will be enough before getting rid of these white elephants.





## In brief

### 2 girl students die in mishap Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Two girl students died and their father got seriously injured when a speedy dumper hit their bike in Nowshera on Friday. According to rescue officials, 7-year-old Adeeba and 8-year-old Ritba were going to attend their result announcement ceremony at their school with their father Zahid Khan. When the unfortunate family reached Nizampur Darwaz Gai, a speedy truck hit their bike, resultantly, both sisters died on the spot while their father was seriously injured. The dead bodies and injured father were shifted to DHQ Hospital Nowshera.

### Five children die in Sanghar

SANGHAR (INP): Five children from the same family have lost their lives after consuming tainted groundwater in district Sanghar of Sindh province. District Health Officer (DHO) of Sanghar revealed that these fatalities unfolded over a span of two days. Swift action followed the incident, with the DHO personally inspecting the affected area and ordering the immediate sealing of the suspected water pump believed to be the culprit behind the contamination. As a precautionary measure, the use of groundwater in the affected vicinity has been halted. Subsequent laboratory testing of water samples confirmed alarming levels of arsenic contamination. Arsenic poisoning poses severe health risks, including gastrointestinal distress, skin abnormalities, neurological complications, and organ damage. Sadly, in this instance, it proved fatal for the young victims. Local authorities are actively pursuing an investigation into the contamination's source and may need to implement measures to provide alternative, safe water sources to the affected community. Additionally, there's an urgent need to raise awareness about the hazards of tainted water and the critical importance of regular water quality assessments to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

### Two young girls, boy die

TOBA TEK SINGH (INP): Two young girls and their little brother died while their mother and two others kin were hospitalized in critical condition after taking poisonous tea in Toba Tek Singh on Friday. According to police, the affected family is a resident of Chak No. 520 of Toba Tek Singh. The parents had a tiff over the matrimonial issues of the young girls after which the father mixed poison in the tea. Their condition deteriorated and they were rushed to a hospital where two sisters and their little brother died. Mother Nadia Bibi was shifted to the DHQ hospital along with her five children while 17-year-old daughter Sania died on the spot while seven-year-old Ali Hassan breathed his last in the hospital. Police said that condition of 18-year-old Madiha and 16-year-old Aqsa were said to be critical in DHQ hospital while 10-year-old Iqra was shifted to Allied Hospital in Faisalabad. Police is yet to name the second girl who also passed away. The police further said that husband Asghar and his wife Nadia had an argument the previous day. In her statement, Nadia Bibi alleged that her husband mixed poison in the tea and after taking it the whole family got sick. Nadia Bibi stated that her husband Asghar used to quarrel in the house every day due to the matrimonial issues of their daughters.

# Corps Commander invited KP cabinet for Iftar party: PTI

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: A recent controversy arose in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Iftikhar Ali Mashwani clarified the nature of an invitation extended by a military commander to the provincial cabinet. The invitation, it was clarified, was solely for an iftar dinner, dispelling rumors of an official meeting.

In a statement to the media, MPA Iftikhar Ali Mashwani emphasized that no official meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet took place at the 11 Corps Headquarters with Core Commander. He explained that the invitation extended by the commander was for an iftar dinner during which a security briefing was provided, an area falling within the commander's domain.

MPA Mashwani further asserted that the 11 Corps would not interfere in matters pertaining to the provincial government and neither should it. He underscored the importance of maintaining the autonomy of the provincial government.

In an effort to address the escalating situation, MPA Iftikhar Ali Mashwani issued a statement to media outlets, urging the public to refrain from spreading propaganda against the provincial cabinet on social media platforms. He called for responsible conduct and emphasized the need to refrain from sensationalizing the situation.

The clarification comes amidst growing tensions and speculations regarding the nature of the invitation and its implications on the relationship between the provincial government and the military establishment. As the situation unfolds, stakeholders are keenly observing developments to ensure transparency and accountability in governance.

**Lawmakers stressed on public servant to ensure smooth provision of electricity:** To sort out problems related to electricity including load shedding of electricity and failure to replace the damaged transformer in time a grand meeting was

held under the chairmanship of Commissioner Mardan Division Shaukat Ali Yousafzai at his office.

Members of the provincial assembly from Mardan and Peshawar Electricity Supply Company (PESCO) Chief Akhtar Hameed along with his officers participated in the meeting. Assembly members including Ameer Farzand Khan, Iftikhar Ali Mashwani, Abdul Salam Afridi, Ehtsham Khan, Tariq Ariani and Zarshad Khan informed Chief Pesco about the public problems related to electricity and said that unnecessary delay in the replacement of damaged transformers caused serious problems to the public.

We are public representatives and people come to us for their problems, they said adding that load shedding is being done for 12 to 14 hours in Mardan despite being declared load shedding free. Chief Executive PESCO Akhtar Hameed assured the meeting that MPs are public representatives and respectable and all necessary steps will be taken to resolve the issues raised by them.

Later, a meeting was held in the conference room of Commissioner Mardan on electricity related issues in which representatives of local business organizations also participated. The trader leaders informed Chief Pesco Akhtar Hameed about the recent increase in load shedding in Mardan city which they said affected the business badly.

Commissioner Mardan said that he had promised the traders' representatives that the top officials of Pesco would be called. He fulfilled that promise and today Chief Pesco himself is here. Chief Pesco assured the meeting that the power related issues of the business community would be resolved on priority basis. He directed the officials present on the spot to conduct a regular survey to solve these problems. He further directed the staff to make sure the commercial feeder were detached from domestic consumers. The business leaders thanked Commissioner Mardan for holding the meeting.

# Shifting of offices from Tank to Wana sought

## F.P. Report

WANA: Political parties, tribal elders and Ulama demanded shifting of Waziristan district offices from Tank to Wana. The provincial government has been urged to expedite the deployment of essential personnel to Lower District of South Waziristan without further delay.

After dividing South Waziristan into two districts, the government's decision was hailed as a gesture of mercy for the deprived people of Lower Waziristan. However, it is now the responsibility of the present provincial administration to facilitate the establishment of separate line departments for Lower Waziristan immediately.

Political leaders of various parties issued a joint statement advocating shifting of departmental offices from Tank to Wana, the proposed capital of Lower Waziristan. They emphasized that the beginning of the development journey depends on the presence of responsible district officers

posted in Wana instead of Tank district. They cited the historical backwardness of South Waziristan, which they attributed to the concentration of district offices in Tank since the creation of Pakistan.

Highlighting the negative consequences of centralizing administrative functions in Tank, the leaders stressed the need for equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to reduce the region's underdevelopment. They argued that the absence of district offices in South Waziristan had contributed to its vulnerability to terrorism over the years.

A survey of local political leaders and representatives echoed these sentiments, stressing that the absence of administrative infrastructure in Tank has exacerbated socio-economic challenges and fueled extremism in the region. Leaders warned that further delays in providing essential services to the public could exacerbate security concerns and hamper efforts to combat terrorism in the two districts of South

Waziristan.

The government's response to these pressing demands will be critical in addressing the long-standing grievances of the people of South Waziristan and promoting peace and development in the region. Urgent action is needed to ensure immediate deployment of personnel and establishment of functional offices in Lower Waziristan, thereby laying the foundation for sustainable wana Urgent demand for staff posting and shifting office in Lower South Waziristan.

The provincial government has been urged to expedite the deployment of essential personnel to Lower District of South Waziristan without further delay. After dividing South Waziristan into two districts, the government's decision was hailed as a gesture of mercy for the deprived people. However, it is now the responsibility of the present provincial administration to facilitate the establishment of separate line departments for Lower Waziristan immediately.

## Farewell Iftar dinner in honour of SP hosted F.P. Report

CHITRAL: A farewell party was held in honor of Muhammad Sattar Khan SP investigation on his retirement from services held at Police line. According to detail Superintendent of Police (SP) Investigation Lower Chitral Mohammad Sattar Khan completed his service and retired after 40 years from Govt service.

A farewell party cum Iftar dinner was organized by the Lower Chitral police in his honor. A special Iftar party was also organized in this connection at police line lower Chitral. District Public Prosecutor Lower Chitral Ayaz Zarin, DSP Headquarters Iqbal Karim, DSP Circle Chitral Sajjad Hussain, DSP Circle Bumburit Hassanullah, DSP Circle Drosh Ahmed Isa, DSP Circle Lutkoh Tamizuddin, DSP Security Lawi Hydor Power Project, DSP Tourism Police Sher Raja, all SHOs, Additional SHOs, Office Staff and other officers. Representatives of the society also participated in farewell party.

Addressing the ceremony, outgoing SP Mohammad Sattar Khan said that while living in the police, he performed his duties with passion, dedication and honesty. He said that Lower Chitral police is professional police. I always found them professional. It is hoped that in future they will continue to serve the people in a similar way.

Other participants also expressed their views at the ceremony and appreciated the successful period of SP Mohammad Sattar Khan. During the farewell ceremony, gifts were also presented to the retired police officer.

## Police kills an alleged kidnapper

## F.P. Report

THATTA: An alleged kidnapper involved in abduction of minor girl Nabila was killed in what police described as an encounter. CIA and Ghara police jointly acted upon receiving a tip off regarding the presence of the accused in a poultry farm located near the Babra area of district.

As soon as police raided the identified place the suspect identified as Rafique Khaskeli opened fire on the police team inducing retaliation. After a brief encounter the suspect was gunned down. Police shifted the body to rural health center Ghara.

Police said that the deceased was involved in abduction of a minor girl and carried head money, adding that police traced him with the help of CCTV footage SSP Thatta Dr Imran Khan said that he wanted Thatta to become a crime free district.

# JI holds Gaza solidarity rally in Landi Kotal



## F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Like other parts of the country, on the call of Jamat-e-Islami, Pakistan (JI) a protest demonstration in solidarity of Palestine people was held at Bacha Khan Chawk, Landi Kotal Bazaar.

The protest rally was organized under the banner of JI, Khyber and was attended by a large number of the JI workers besides people from different walks of life. They were carrying banner and placards inscribed with writings to show support for Palestinians, some of them

read: "Stop the genocide" "Free Palestine."

Addressing on the occasion JI leaders including Sultan Akbar Afridi, Haji Hasan, Muqtader Shah Afridi, Murad Hussain Afridi and others criticized the US and European countries for supporting Israel in its oppression of Palestinians. They maintained, raising our voices for Palestinians is the responsibility of Muslims and a part of their faith.

The protestors vowed that they took to the streets to make our rulers realize that they don't need to be scared of the United State and that the public wants

them to be on the side of Palestine. They demanded that Muslim countries should come together for the Palestinian cause and the United Nations should play it active role to stop the genocide of Palestinians.

The participants marched from the Bacha Khan Square to the railway track, taxi stand where they dispersed after offering prayers for the success of the Palestine Muslims. It is to be stated here that so far more than thirty-two thousand Palestinians including women and children have martyred and seventy thousand got injured in the Israeli invasion on Gaza.

# Steps for eradication of dengue directed

## F.P. Report

ATTOCK: The public should ensure the implementation of the code of conduct issued by the Punjab government for the elimination of dengue mosquito so that this epidemic can be controlled effectively. These views were expressed by Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance and Planning Maleeha Isar while presiding over a meeting regarding the anti-dengue campaign at the DC office.

During the meeting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Health Dr. Asad Ismail, MS Isfandiyar Bukhari District Hospital Dr. Jawad Elhi, Officers from the Department of Education, Health and other officers related departments were present. The health department gave a detailed briefing to the participants regarding the anti-dengue campaign.

While giving a briefing, it was said that steps are being taken to eliminate dengue throughout the district. In this regard, all the departments are playing their special role. ADC reviewed the performance of all departments regarding the anti-dengue campaign in detail.

She added that in the current situation dengue mosquito is very dangerous and deadly. All government, semi-government and private organizations should play their full role to eradicate dengue and ensure all necessary measures and take precautionary measures to protect

people from dengue She added.

Meanwhile, district police officer Sardar Ghias Gul Khan on Thursday while presiding over the Crime Control Committee meeting has reiterated all the field officers of district Police to accelerate the crackdown against the gangsters of heinous crimes include target killers, robbers, dacoits, drugs pushing, car, motorbike lifters, specially murder cases under investigation and arresting the criminals of category A without further loss of time.

Among the crime control meeting was also attended by all police circle officers, SHOs of police stations and investigation officers of the Police Department. On this occasion, a detailed briefing on crime ratio was also made to the DPO who reviewed the overall progress of the Attock Police with particular reference to bring the proclaimed offenders of category-A, car lifters, killers, bandits, other street criminals to book and strict security arrangements were issued to maintain law and order in Attock district regarding mosque duties and the coming of Eid ul Fitr.

DPO directed to ensure protection of life and properties of the people being their first prime responsibility besides launching effective patrolling duties in their jurisdictions. He also advised all the office officers to eradicate the theft dacoities, theft cases minimizing the sense of

insecurity among the people. Strict action is being taken against those involved in drug peddling, gambling, running prostitution dens, possessing illegal arms and violating traffic rules, he added.

As per reports, DPO further said that police will never allow any evil elements to disturb the peace and law and order and strict legal action will be taken against such elements. He directed all the officers to ensure protection of lives, properties and honors of the citizens being their priority to avoid any untoward incidence within the sensitive inter provincial bordering territory of the district. He orders to make strict security arrangements at all mosques across the district during Eid ul fitr prayers, Attock Police is taking all measures to protect the public, he added.

According to the vision of IG Punjab, the success of all the projects started in terms of modern policing and smart working is subject to courteous treatment and prompt response to the people. On the directions of IG Police Punjab and RPO Rawalpindi, efforts are being made to root out crime and no lenient view is being taken in this context. Therefore, all police officers should future improve service delivery by ensuring uniform enforcement of the law. He has said that police are utilising all available resources for maintenance of law and order across the district and ensuring security of people, he added.

# Safety of citizen, security of mosques directed

## F.P. Report

LARKANA: Senior Superintendent of Police Larkana directed all police officers to ensure safety of the citizens and security, especially on the occasion of Friday prayers, and deployment of plainclothes and uniformed police personnel in central Masjids and surrounding areas across the district.

It has been urged to take all possible steps under the communication at the level, while orders have been given to ensure parking of vehicles and motorcycles at a distance from mosques and Imambargahs, the public should be aware of any suspicious activity or suspicious person/ persons and abandoned vehicles, bags, parcels, etc. have been made mandatory to report for immediate help 15 or the nearest mobile police station and all DSPs and SHOs posted in Larkana

district have been instructed to monitor the security measures automatically till the beginning and end of Friday prayers.

In view of security measures, all police officers and youths on duty should be present during the performance of Friday prayers. Strict legal and departmental action will be taken against any kind of negligence/negligence regarding the implementation of security measures across the district. DSP Civil Lines Dr. Zahoor Ahmad Soomro and DSP Ratodero Tabish Ali Shah have been assigned the task to monitoring to all security matters of Larkana jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, under the leadership of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Larkana Region Nasir Aftab Pathan targeted operation is continued against dacoits in Kashmir Kandakot district last night.

With the participation of

a heavy contingent of police and rangers, the hideouts of the dacoits were burnt and demolished, while under the comprehensive planning of DIGP Larkana, it was decided to continue the targeted operation against the dacoits in Kashmir Kandakot. The police are also exchanging fire intermittently with the dacoits.

During the firing, reports were also received that some dacoits were injured, while the ongoing target operation under the leadership of DIG Police Larkana involved police and rangers including armored vehicles and modern machinery. A large number of people are taking part, while in connection with the ongoing operation of police officers against robbers, Nasir Aftab, DIG Larkana, encouraged the police officers and youths and congratulated them on the ongoing successful operations against robbers.

## Proceedings of admn on violation of official fare

## F.P. Report

KARAK: In the light of the orders of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, the district administration Karak Friday started practical actions against the vehicle owners who violate the official rent certificate on the arrival of Eid-ul-Fitr.

In this regard, District Administrative Officer Shamimullah inquired about the fares from the riders at the joint check post along with the traffic police on Main Indus Highway in view of public interest. Those who boarded more than the prescribed number of rides and charged more than the fare fixed by the government were not only fined on the spot but also recovered the excess fare from the drivers and handed over the rides. Moreover, the district administration received a complaint through a complaint disk against a vehicle from Rawalpindi to Karak, acting on it, the vehicle was stopped on reaching Karak and the driver was fined for charging extra fare and taking more than the prescribed number of rides. Penalty was imposed while the excess fare was returned to the riders. The passengers expressed their special gratitude for the prompt action taken by the district administration. It should be remembered that this good initiative of the district administration Karak is being appreciated at the public level and it has appealed to continue this process besides Eid-ul-Fitr.

raw tobacco. Similarly, during a raid on the Walton Tobacco Company, government authorities seized 10 cartons of illegal cigarettes, 10 bags of tobacco to prepare 10 million cigarettes and 19 cigarette paper rolls and other related material.

In another operation, authorities raided a house which was taken on rent by National Tobacco Company. During the raid, the authorities seized 85 cartons filter rods, 67 cartons cigarette paper, 17 cartons illegal cigarette, 16 cartons cigarette tape, 10,000kgs of raw tobacco and other raw material.

In a separate raid at Chanan Tobacco Company, Barnala, the





## Brother of aid worker killed in Gaza flays arming Israel

GAZA (BBC): The family of a British aid worker killed by an air strike in Gaza have criticised the sale of arms to Israel. James Henderson was among seven aid workers who died in the Israeli attack, which his brother called "inexcusable". Rishi Sunak is under growing pressure after the strike, which also killed Britons John Chapman and James Kirby, as well as Australian, Palestinian, American-Canadian and Polish nationals.

The PM said the UK had a "very careful" arms licensing regime. Earlier, 600 legal experts wrote to the government saying weapon exports must end because the UK risks breaking international law over a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza. The group of World Central Kitchen aid workers had just unloaded more than 100 tonnes of food aid and the convoy's movements had been co-ordinated with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), according to the charity. Speaking on behalf of the family of former Royal Marine Mr Henderson, his brother - who declined to be named - told the Times the killings of people on a humanitarian mission was "inexcusable". "Accountability is the only hope of justice I have", he said. "I don't believe our government will hold the correct people to account, but I guarantee that our government will sell weapons to Israel, which may in turn be used to kill our fellow citizens."

"It's hard to comprehend that." British arms sales to Israel are lower than those of other countries, including Germany and Italy, and dwarfed by the billions supplied by its largest arms supplier, the US. But a UK ban would add to the diplomatic and political pressure on Israel, at a time when its conduct in the Gaza conflict is coming under renewed international scrutiny. The BBC understands there is an ongoing assessment over whether to suspend or revoke existing export licenses to Israel, which is almost finished.

That assessment, which will advise on the risk of Israel breaching international law, is not a result of the recent air strike. In fact it may not even consider the incident, since it is looking at Israel's actions from early 2024. Technically it is up to the business secretary to decide on issuing arms export licenses, but one MP familiar with the process said, in reality, it will be Mr Sunak who will make the decision when the Foreign Office issues its legal advice. Former UK foreign secretary Jack Straw told the BBC he believed it was "perfectly obvious" Israel was breaching international law. Mr Straw told Radio 4's PM programme that Israeli forces had

been "caught out" by the killing of Western aid workers but suggested they "would have dug in and refused any accountability at all" if all the victims had been Palestinian. Former Supreme Court president Lady Hale was among the lawyers, academics and retired senior judges who signed a 17-page letter to the government on the issue of arms sales to Israel. It says "serious action" is needed to "avoid UK complicity in grave breaches of international law, including potential violations of the Genocide Convention". The group add that the sale of arms and weapons systems to Israel "falls significantly short" of the government's obligations under international law, given the "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza - a situation that the letters says was highlighted in a provisional judgement issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in January - and the worsening humanitarian situation since.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Lord Sumption, the former Supreme Court judge who was one of the most notable signatories, said the UK had a duty to prevent genocide and there was a "plausible case that is what is happening" in Gaza. He added that the "framework of international law around war" does not mean countries can act however they want, even if they have been provoked or attacked, "however outrageously".

Lord Sumption continued: "It doesn't mean to say that you can indiscriminately slaughter innocent civilians and children. It doesn't mean to say you can attack aid convoys... It doesn't mean to say you can spend two weeks flattening hospitals." Mr Sunak called for an independent investigation into the air strike, but stopped short of saying arms sales should end, in an interview with the Sun newspaper after the incident. He added that the UK had been "consistently clear" with Israel that it must follow international humanitarian law. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described the attack as unintended and "tragic", and promised an independent investigation. It rejects the claim of genocide as "wholly unfounded".

The UK has licenced arms to Israel worth over £574m since 2008, when official country-level data was made available, according to pressure group Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT). Business Minister Greg Hands has previously told MPs the figure for 2022 - £42m - represented 0.02% of Israel's military imports that year.

## Diplomatic crisis erupts between Poland and Israel

WARSAW (AP): A new diplomatic crisis between Poland and Israel has erupted following the death of a Polish aid worker in Gaza, with the Polish president denouncing a comment by the Israeli ambassador as "outrageous" and the Foreign Ministry in Warsaw saying it was summing him for a meeting.

A 35-year-old Polish man was among seven people who were killed while delivering food to besieged Palestinians with the charity World Central Kitchen. Israel has called the incident a "mistake" that followed a misidentification. The charity said its vehicles were clearly marked. Amid shock in Poland over the death of the charity worker, Israel's ambassador to Poland, Yacov Livne, pushed back at what he said were attempts by the "extreme right and left in Poland" to accuse Israel of "intentional murder in the attack."

He said on social media that "anti-Semites will always remain anti-Semites, and Israel will remain a democratic Jewish state that fights for its right to exist. Also for the good of the entire Western world." Polish President Andrzej Duda called the comment "outrageous" and

described the ambassador as "the biggest problem for the state of Israel in relations with Poland." Duda said authorities in Israel have spoken about the tragedy "in a very subdued way," but added, "Unfortunately, their ambassador to Poland is not able to maintain such delicacy and sensitivity, which is unacceptable." Prime Minister Donald Tusk, while a political opponent of Duda's, voiced a similar position. He said that the comment had offended Poles, and said that the ambassador should apologize. The deputy foreign minister was quoted in the Polish media as saying that Livne was summoned to a meeting on Friday morning. A day earlier, Tusk published a comment on social media addressing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Livne saying that "the vast majority of Poles showed full solidarity with Israel after the Hamas attack. Today you are putting this solidarity to a really hard test. The tragic attack on volunteers and your reaction arouse understandable anger." Duda also called for Israel to pay "appropriate compensation" to the family of the aid worker, Damian Soból.

Soból had been on an aid mission to Gaza for the past six months following work in Ukraine, Morocco and Turkey. Polish and Israeli relations have recently been on the mend after several difficult years.

Ties were badly damaged due to disputes over how to remember Polish behavior during the Holocaust, when Nazi Germany occupied Poland and carried out the mass murder of Jews. For eight years until December, Poland had a nationalist government that played down Polish participation in the German killings of Jews and focused largely on Polish aid to Jews. Israel's government believed that approach amounted to historical distortion. Israel also objected to a law that limited property restitution claims, something that affected the heirs of Polish Holocaust victims, and recalled its ambassador in 2021 before sending Livne the next year as ties improved. Duda said that "we agreed to have this representative finally be in Poland in order to facilitate Israel's relations with Poland," but that the ambassador now "is making these relations more difficult."

## Brazil's police arrest 2 fugitives

SAO PAULO (AP): Brazil's federal police said that they arrested two fugitives who escaped a maximum-security prison in northeastern Brazil, bringing a 50-day manhunt to an end. Authorities also detained 14 people for helping the inmates since their getaway.

In February, Rogério Mendonça and Deibson Nascimento became the first inmates to ever escape from Brazil's federal penitentiary system, a source of embarrassment for both the justice ministry and the police. The two were arrested in the Amazon city of Maraba, more than 1,600 kilometers (995 miles) west of the Mossoro penitentiary where they were imprisoned. Authorities said their escape included a dayslong boat trip between the states of Ceara and Para, where they were arrested - a jour-

ney that is still under investigation.

"This is a victory for the Brazilian state and Brazil's security forces. It shows that organized crime will not thrive in our country," Justice Minister Ricardo Lewandowski said at a news conference in the capital city of Brasilia. Lewandowski added that the federal police knew Mendonça and Nascimento were planning to leave Brazil when they were taken into custody. Another four men who were with them on a bridge were also arrested.

"They were in a true criminal motorcade. We also seized three cars, multiple guns," the minister said. He added that despite finding traces of left-over food and tracks during their search, authorities lost the two after a while but managed to find them thanks to

the work of federal police intelligence agents. Mendonça and Nascimento were transferred to Mossoro in September to serve their sentences that together amount to 155 years in prison. Both are connected with one of Brazil's largest and most dangerous crime gangs. They escaped on Feb. 14, setting off a nationwide manhunt that included regular updates on Brazilian TV stations. While on the run, the pair allegedly held a family hostage for days near the penitentiary, hid on a farm and attacked at least one person in a rural area of the city of Barauna in the state of Rio Grande do Norte.

Lewandowski said investigators are looking into possible support from locals for the fugitives. He added that the two would be sent back to the Mossoro penitentiary.

## Lavrov says Chinese peace plan on Ukraine reasonable

MOSCOW (Reuters): China has proposed the most reasonable peace plan so far for resolving the Ukraine conflict, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted as saying. Beijing put forward a 12-point paper more than a year ago that set out general principles for ending the war but did not get into specifics. It received a lukewarm reception at the time in both Russia and Ukraine, while the United States said China was presenting itself as a peace-maker but reflecting Russia's "false narrative" and failing to condemn its invasion.

"The most important thing for us is that the Chinese document is based on an analysis of the reasons for what is happening and the need to eliminate these root causes. It is structured in logic from the general to the specific," state news agency RIA quoted Lavrov as telling reporters. "This plan was criticized for being vague... But this is a reasonable plan that the great Chinese civilization proposed for discussion."

Lavrov is due to meet his Chinese counterpart soon and President Vladimir Putin said last month he would consider going to China for the first overseas trip of his new six-year term. Russia says it is willing to enter talks about Ukraine but that these must reflect what it calls the "new realities" on the ground, where its forces control just under a fifth of the country and Moscow has claimed four Ukrainian regions as its own. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has put forward his own peace formula that calls for a cessation of hostilities and a full Russian withdrawal from all occupied territory.

Praising China's plan provides Moscow with a way to signal that it is open to talking peace while attacking Zelenskyy's initiative, which Lavrov called "a menu from which you can pull out whatever you want". Switzerland has said it will host a conference based on Zelenskyy's plan, but Russia has called the initiative pointless and said it is doomed to fail without Moscow's participation.

## France and its allies 'could have stopped' 1994 Rwanda genocide

PARIS (AP): French President Emmanuel Macron said that France and its allies could have stopped the 1994 Rwanda genocide but lacked the will to do so, a strong declaration ahead of the African country's 30th anniversary of the slaughter that left over 800,000 people dead.

Macron's office said in a statement that the French president will release a video on social media as Rwanda marks the solemn commemoration of the genocide. In the video, Macron says that "France, which could have stopped the genocide with its Western and African allies, lacked the will to do so."

In 2021 during a visit to the central African country, Macron acknowledged France's "responsibility" in the genocide that left over 800,000 people dead, mainly ethnic Tutsis and the Hutus who tried to protect them. He stopped short of an apology, but Rwandan President Paul Kagame signaled that a page had been turned in France-Rwanda ties, following a series of French efforts to repair ties between the two countries. The Rwandan government has long accused France of "enabling" the genocide. Since he was first elected in 2017, Macron notably commissioned a report about France's role before and during the genocide and decided to open the country's archives from this period to the public. In video, Macron will recall that when the genocide started, "the international community had the means to know and to take actions" based on the knowledge about genocides that had been revealed by survivors of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust, his office said.



TAIPEI: Rescue workers in the Taroko National Park. The earthquake dislodged boulders and rocks, which fell down mountainsides and onto roads and hiking paths.

## Students walk out of schools to protest governor's veto

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP): Students in Alaska's capital walked out of school and marched through the halls of the statehouse to protest Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy's latest education veto and the Legislature's failure to override it.

The walkout was part of a protest organized by the executive board of the Alaska Association of Student Governments, said Felix Myers, a student organizer from Sitka. Plans called for 40-minute walkouts at schools across Alaska, with 40 representing the number of votes lawmakers needed to override the veto. Lawmakers fell one vote short in their override attempt last month. The walkout was planned for around 11 a.m., a time chosen in part to minimize disruptions and to ensure participation, he said.

"We've tried to be heard, we've tried to be listened to and we've been ignored, and that's why we've gotten to this point," he said in a phone interview from Anchorage. Myers is a student adviser to the state board of education but said he was not speaking or acting in that capacity concerning the walkout.

Dunleavy in March made good on a threat to veto a package overwhelming passed by lawmakers that called for a \$175-million increase in aid to districts through a school funding formula. He complained the measure lacked provisions he supported, including a three-year program offering annual bonuses of up to \$15,000 as a way to attract and keep teachers and changes to the applica-

tion process for charter schools aimed at promoting those schools.

But those items lacked broad support among lawmakers, who questioned the effectiveness and cost of the untested teacher retention plan and expressed concern that allowing the state education board - whose members are appointed by the governor - to directly approve charters would erode local control. After vetoing the package, Dunleavy said he was moving on to other issues, such as energy, but in a later statement said: "As the conversation around education continues, I will work with every member of the legislature to pass an increase in funding and needed reforms." He has not specified what increase in funding he would support.

School leaders and advocates urged a roughly \$360 million increase in aid - but nonetheless supported the package passed by lawmakers as a positive step. School officials have cited the toll of inflation, along with high energy and insurance costs, as they struggle in some cases with multimillion-dollar deficits and teacher shortages. They also said unpredictable levels of state support make long-term planning difficult. Lawmakers last year approved a one-time, \$175-million funding boost but Dunleavy vetoed half that sum. Lawmakers could not muster sufficient support to override that veto, either.

School funding is expected to remain a closely watched issue the remainder of this session. During the

walkout, students from Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa at Kalé and supporters - including some legislators - marched roughly a mile to the state Capitol, with some carrying handmade signs and chanting slogans, such as "fund our future." They chanted loudly in the Capitol halls, including on the third floor, where the governor's offices are, though Dunleavy was not in Juneau.

About two dozen students gathered in the House Finance Committee room and after a meeting on an unrelated issue had concluded, approached Republican Rep. Julie Coulombe. She is one of the lawmakers who voted for the education package but voted against overturning Dunleavy's veto. Coulombe welcomed their questions. She said given Dunleavy's opposition to the package, she worried that even if an override were successful he would still wind up cutting at least some of the additional funding for schools when he got the state budget. She said she wants to keep working on a plan that would provide extra funding and get Dunleavy's support. She encouraged the students to stay involved.

"Don't lose hope, this is a messy process," she said. Rachel Wood, a student who marched to the Capitol, said the event showed her young people can play an active part in what happens at the Legislature. She and fellow student Meadow Stanley said they hoped lawmakers who expressed support for education back that up by passing increased funding.

## Drones deliver drugs, food to French prison cells

PARIS (AFP): In the dead of night a drone hovers over a prison in southern France, secretly dropping packages to inmates inside. But one parcel becomes stuck in the railing outside a cell window, and guards seize three others.

Across France, prisoners have been making orders online for drones to illegally bring them everything from drugs and phones to their favourite fast food, often just outside their window. The botched delivery in southern France in early 2023 led authorities to bring down a business called "Drone2France" that had been delivering goods to more than a dozen prisons in France and Belgium.

Inmates from late 2022 to December 2023 had been making orders via social media app Snapchat, paying an average of 450 euros (\$490) per package, weighing a maximum 350 grammes. The service provider required a minimum order of four packages per delivery, and they often fell from the drone's claws in potato sacks. Another setup called "Air Colis" ("Air parcel"), busted in western France in

September, lowered down contraband stuffed in socks on the end of fishing line. And in another incident in southern France, authorities found parcels containing more than 100 grammes of cocaine and 700 grammes of cannabis. Hundreds of such deliveries are made a year, prison guards say. "There isn't a day when there isn't a drone flying over, whether on the mainland or in overseas territories," said Dominique Gombert of prison guard union FO Justice. Last year, more than 1,000 drones were detected in flight over penitentiaries, 400 of which were "blocked", a source close to the case said.

The prisons authority did not reply to a request from AFP for comment, but union representatives provide details of how the drone deliveries worked. Wilfried Fonck, the secretary-general of another prison guard union called Ufap-Unsa Justice, said the deliveries were becoming increasingly precise. "They make it almost right up to a window," Fonck said. Most orders are for cannabis and mobile phones, but also kebabs, spicy merguez

sausages, ceramic knives or religious books, he explained. Delivery services advertise directly on social media and can pick up the goods from an inmate's friend or relative.

Most drones are the smaller ones sold online, which is why packages cannot be too heavy. The drone operator is usually located within a radius of two to five kilometres (1.2 to three miles) from the prison, with accomplices on the lookout. The drone often flies with all its lights off, guided by a light the inmate shines out of their window. The detainee then only needs to stretch their arm through the bars to catch the goods. With less guards at nighttime, there is less chance of being caught. "At most, you can conduct surprise searches the next morning," Fonck said. But that was often complicated because those storing the contraband were often the more discreet inmates. Drone security breaches are not as serious in France as in Ecuador, where police in September defused an explosives-laden aircraft on the roof of a maximum-security jail.

But French authorities are still taking the problem seriously, ordering specialised equipment to deal with it in 2019 and 2021. Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti in July last year said the government had spent more than 12 million euros (\$13 million) on gear to deter "95 percent of drone threats". This gear includes detectors to catch drones over a prison, as well as electromagnetic scramblers to paralyse the aircraft and force them to make an emergency landing.

There had been some success to the measures, with some smugglers forced to revert to the older technique of simply lobbing goods over the prison's outside walls. But Gombert said other operators of drone delivery services were constantly innovating to outplay aerial defences. "Some hackers manage to circumvent the areas under protection," he said. Others "test higher altitudes" to avoid anti-drone domes. Another source close to the case said the authorities were often left playing catch-up. "We're playing a game of Tom and Jerry," they said.

## Somalia expels Ethiopian ambassador amid row over Somaliland port deal

ADDIS ABABA: Somalia has expelled the Ethiopian ambassador from the country and ordered the closure of two consulates. It accused Ethiopia of infringing on Somalia's "sovereignty and internal affairs". Somalia also recalled its ambassador from Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, for "comprehensive consultations".

Ethiopia's foreign ministry spokesperson Nebiyu Tedla told Reuters news agency the government did not have information on the matter. The expulsion highlights an escalation in diplomatic tensions in the region following land-locked

Ethiopia's port deal with the self-declared republic of Somaliland earlier this year.

Its independence has not been internationally recognised and Somalia condemned the deal as an attack on its sovereignty. In January, Ethiopia signed a deal with Somaliland to lease a 20km (12 miles) strip of coastline, so it could build a navy base. The deal is not legally binding, though it is seen as a statement of intent and can lead to a treaty imposing obligations on those parties who have signed. In exchange, Ethiopia reportedly told Somaliland it would offer it possible recognition in the

future - which angered Somalia.

Somaliland seceded from Somalia more than 30 years ago, but is not recognised by the African Union (AU) or the UN as an independent state. Following this deal, Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud launched a diplomatic campaign and travelled to Eritrea and Egypt - two countries with fraught relations with Ethiopia. Somalia demanded a public reversal of the deal by Ethiopia but this has not happened. Somalia has described the deal as an act of aggression, adding that it was an "impediment to...

peace and stability". Earlier this week Ethiopian delegates met officials from the semi-autonomous Somali province of Puntland, which has difficult relations with the central government.

This year Puntland said it would operate as a functionally independent state amid a dispute over Somali constitutional changes. The two Ethiopian consulates that Somalia has ordered to close are in Hargeisa and Garowe, the capitals of Somaliland and Puntland, respectively. The prospect of armed clashes between the two countries seems unlikely at this point. — Aljazeera



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## Terrorism, newest ploy of the old ally

PAKISTAN has once again ruled out the possibility of talks with proscribed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). While responding to a recent suggestion by an Afghan Minister regarding Pakistan's talks with the banned TTP, Pakistan Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch categorically declared that Pakistan expects the Afghan authorities to take urgent action against the terrorist outfits and their leadership for the crimes they are committing and terrorist incidents they are responsible for in Pakistan. According to her, Pakistan remains committed to fighting against all terrorist outfits that have targeted Pakistan and the symbols of Pak-China friendship.

Pakistan has witnessed an alarming rise in terrorism-related violence particularly in recent times. There has been a gradual increase in terrorism in the country since the Taliban-ruled government regained control in Afghanistan. Similarly, the lethality of terror attacks has intensified multiple folds since 2022, as compared to the previous years when Afghanistan was under US occupation. Historically, the Pak-Afghan border region, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces, has become a hotspot for frequent terrorist attacks by the TTP and Baloch insurgent groups respectively. The statistical data suggest that the country witnessed 245 terror attacks during the first quarter of 2024, while more than 92% of all fatalities and 86% of attacks accounted for both provinces bordering Afghanistan.

Historically, TTP's attacks against the state of Pakistan have increased significantly after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, because both groups have identical ideologies and pursue similar manifestos in adjoining nations. Pakistan has persistently raised the issue of TTP safe havens in Afghanistan with Afghan interim authorities who vehemently showed a cold shoulder and refused to cooperate with Pakistan in this regard. The situation became worrisome and more consequential for Pakistan after several terrorist outfits including Al-Qaeda, the TTP, and its splinter groups allied with having salient support from the cleric regime in Kabul. Historically, the proscribed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has become a major irritant in Islamabad's relations with Kabul as the militant group remained one of the major actors of violence in Pakistan and enjoys haven in Afghanistan. Due to persistent no cooperation from Kabul concerning the TTP, Pakistan sought to downgrade its diplomatic and trade ties with Kabul. It launched surgical strikes against terrorist outfits camped inside Afghanistan. A ferocious battle between Pakistan LEAs and terrorist outfits is currently underway during which the Pakistani military is hunting down miscreants through intelligence-based targeted operations across the country. In the current scenario, the proposal of dialogue with the TTP is presumably somehow ill-designed, ill-motivated, and a continuation of the previous strategy of the Afghan regime wherein the Afghan interim government mediated talks between Pakistan and the TTP two years back. A temporary ceasefire, relocation, and resettlement of miscreants on Pakistani soil in Erstwhile FATA and Malakand division rebirthed the giant of terrorism in the country.

Historically, the Pakistani government out of the well-being of its citizens and traditional religious rituals, provided an opportunity and chance to the miscreants despite their involvement in terrorism against the state, to give up arms and live a peaceful life with their families in their homes, struck a truce with the TTP, allow general amnesty and resettled wanted criminals on its soil. But habitual outlawed and criminals shortly returned to violence and waged a fresh war against the state. Presently, the Pakistani LEAs with full support from the public and partnering nations are embattled with the terrorist outfits in all parts of the country. Pakistan seeks cooperation from the Afghan interim government in its ongoing war against terrorism to shut down terrorism safe havens on its soil and hand over miscreant leadership to Islamabad. Ironically, Afghan leadership betrayed its long-held ally and firmly stands with the TTP leadership, advocating for talks and urging a fresh peace deal like the previous one. Unfortunately, the Pakistani strategists for decades remained in the fantasy of so-called strategic depth and disillusioned with the idea of one nation and two states. The recent events have largely removed the strategic misconception of the Pakistani leaders. Islamabad is now well prepared and can better tackle the menace of terrorism in a befitting manner in the coming days.

## Gaza war and Human Rights Council

THE UN Human Rights Council is all set to consider a draft resolution calling for a cessation of arms sales to Israel, whose unceasing invasion into Gaza continued over the past six months. The draft resolution was brought forward by Pakistan on behalf of 55 UN member states in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); a few nonaligned nations also sponsored the resolution. The draft demands Israel end its occupation of Palestinian territory and immediately lift its blockade on the Gaza Strip and all other forms of collective punishment. The draft calls upon all states to cease the sale, transfer, and diversion of arms, munitions, and other military equipment to Israel, to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights in the occupied territory.

The Hamas-Israel war in Gaza has marked one of the deadliest conflicts in the Middle East in recent decades. Israel's ruthless bombardment has turned the thickly populated territory into dunes of mud and concrete all around, wherein, continuous blockade flared up an humanitarian crisis due to famine and starvation of civilians. The death toll reached 34,000, with more than 78,000 wounded since Israel launched its military offensive on October 8, last year. The United Nations and the global community not only back tracked in halting Israeli offensive against innocent Palestinians but it also failed in getting humanitarian aid pass through the Israeli blockade of Palestinian territory. On the other hand, billions of dollars of modern arsenal and bulk of economic assistance is continuously pouring down into the Jewish state by the United States and other western nations. Such biased conduct further adds to the hostility of the aggressor and reduces the prospects for the ceasefire and truce.

Multiple global forums including the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the ICC failed in bringing down Israeli aggression and realizing peace in the Middle East, Pakistan, several other Muslim countries and some nonaligned nations have tabled a draft resolution at the UN Human Rights Council Geneva, demanding a ban on the sale of arms and ammunition to Israel in a bid to put a cap on the war hostilities and disrupt grave human rights violations by the Israeli regime. There are the least scopes for any relief/ improvement in Gaza situation through this measure yet Muslim community uses all possible means and fulfills all rituals which might reduce suffering of bereaved Palestinains at some point in the future.



# Israel losing support in US due to Gaza violence

Ray Hanania

ISRAEL'S excessive violence against Palestinian targets in Gaza is steadily undermining the support it has long enjoyed among the American public, especially among young people, who generally rely more heavily on social media for their news and information than the largely biased US media.

Separate surveys by the Pew Research Center and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research show this trending shift away from supporting Israel. Israel still enjoys significant support in America, but the results of these surveys reflect a significant generational divide, with younger Americans questioning Israel's actions while older Americans continue to embrace blind loyalty to the nation founded on Palestinian lands in 1948.

Although the mainstream media depicts the conflict as being the result of the violent assault by Hamas militants on Oct. 7, calling it terrorism, social media videos and reporting frames this attack as a response to Israel's long history of anti-Palestinian violence.

Claims regarding the Oct. 7 violence that were reported without verification by the mainstream media have been challenged on social media, with many people questioning the allegations of rapes and horrific violence against babies originally made by pro-Israel military sources.

Younger Americans are also seeing videos of heavily armed Israeli soldiers laughing and celebrating as they shoot and kill unarmed Palestinian civilians as they walk on destroyed Gazan roads. One video, which has been widely viewed and shared on TikTok and X, shows four unarmed Palestinians in civilian clothing walking on a destroyed major road before being blown up by Israeli weaponry. One of the four initially survives but is then quickly killed in a second explosion.

Videos posted online also show Israeli soldiers beating and brutalizing women and children and razing mosques, hospitals, schools, homes and busi-

nesses in Gaza. The number of fatalities has risen to about 31,000, but many believe the real figure to be even higher, as Israel prohibits foreign journalists from entering Gaza to cover the conflict. Meanwhile, the Committee to Protect Journalists reports that 103 media workers have been killed in Israeli strikes.

**The proposed law faces a tougher fight in the Senate. It must pass through the upper house and be signed off by Biden before it becomes law. America has been bombarded by one-sided pro-Israel messaging and public relations spin ever since Israel's founding. Such messages have dominated Hollywood movies, the publishing industry and the mainstream news media, where pro-Israel writers significantly outnumber pro-Palestinian journalists. But social media is having an impact thanks to the gut-wrenching images of Israelis killing Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Not surprisingly, attitudes among younger Americans are impacted by social media and are changing, showing growing support for Palestinian rights and less support for Israel. That erosion is less obvious among older Americans, surveys show.**

Israel has always enjoyed unquestioning political support from American governments. US support also includes hundreds of billions of dollars in funds, nearly unrestricted access to American weaponry and protection at the UN Security Council. Since Oct. 7, Washington has vetoed three resolutions calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. It finally abstained on a fourth resolution last month in the face of a growing anti-President Joe Biden voter movement called #AbandonBiden.

The erosion of support among young Americans is one reason, maybe the primary reason, Israel's political supporters introduced and last month passed legislation in Congress that threatens to ban TikTok. The proposed law faces a

tougher fight in the Senate. It must pass through the upper house and be signed off by Biden before it becomes law.

America has been bombarded by one-sided pro-Israel messaging and public relations spin ever since Israel's founding. Such messages have dominated Hollywood movies, the publishing industry and the

percent had an unfavorable view. More significantly, only 41 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 had a favorable view, compared to 69 percent of over-65s.

Polling released this week by Pew further highlights that shift, with younger Americans generally opposed to military aid to Israel. Only 16 percent of adults under 30 favor the US providing military aid to Israel to help in its war on Gaza, compared with 56 percent of those aged 65 and older. The poll also shows that 34 percent of younger Americans say Hamas' reasons for fighting Israel are valid, while 30 percent say they are not. The remaining 35 percent say they are unsure - a significant crack in Israel's domination of the American public. Older Americans are less likely to see Hamas' reasons for fighting as valid and far more likely to see them as not valid, the Pew survey shows. For example, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of 65-plus Americans say Hamas' reasons are not valid.

The Pew research reflects similar findings by others. An AP-NORC center poll released in February showed that half of American adults believe Israel has "gone too far" in Gaza. The shift from the beginning of Israel's war in 2023 to early 2024 is also reflected among Republicans. By late January, 33 percent of Republicans said Israel had gone too far, up from only 18 percent. Similar shifts took place among independents, Democrats and all US adults, according to the AP-NORC poll.

A change in Americans' view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would result in more pressure on Tel Aviv to accept genuine peace with the Palestinians. But to make this happen, people throughout the world will have to do a better job of countering the pro-Israel propaganda in America. It will not be easy to undo the brainwashing Americans have long experienced at the hands of the pro-Israel lobby, but it is necessary to achieve a genuine and lasting solution to the conflict.

Arab News

# Why some billionaires will back Trump

Paul Krugman

DONALD Trump's campaign is reportedly strapped for cash. Small-dollar donations are running far behind their 2020 pace. Big Trump rallies aren't yielding his biggest cash hauls. Some large-dollar donors are hesitant, in part because they worry (with good reason) that their money will be used not for the campaign but to pay his legal bills. So he has been wooing right-wing billionaires.

I have no idea how successful he'll be, but it seems highly likely that at least some billionaires will provide substantial sums to a man who tried to overturn the last election and has been open about his authoritarian intentions - using the Justice Department to go after his political opponents, rounding up millions of undocumented immigrants and putting them into detention camps and more.

Which raises the question: Why would billionaires support such a person? After all, it's not as if they've been suf-

fering under President Biden. Economists, myself included, often remind people that the stock market is not the economy. Low unemployment and rising real wages - both of which, by the way, the Biden economy has delivered, even if many people don't believe it - have much more relevance to most people's lives.

But stock prices are probably a much better indicator of how the very wealthy, who hold a lot of financial assets, are doing. And although in 2020 Trump predicted a stock crash if Biden won, the market has, in fact, been hitting record highs under the current administration. Why, then, back a candidate who more or less promises to unleash social and political chaos?

One straightforward answer is that the wealthy will almost certainly pay lower taxes - and corporations will be less regulated - if Trump wins than if Biden stays in office. If you believe, like some leftists, that Republicans and Democrats are basically the same - that both serve the interests of cor-

porations and the elite - you're wrong. The modern Democratic Party isn't, despite what prominent Republicans say, Marxist or socialist. It does, however, have a track record of raising taxes on the wealthy to pay for social programs. Notably, the Affordable Care Act used new taxes on high-income individuals to pay for health care subsidies.

These new taxes helped lead to a jump in the effective federal tax rate on the highest-income 0.01 percent of the population: President Barack Obama did much more income redistribution than many people realize. Trump, by contrast, passed a big tax cut that favored the wealthy and largely reversed the Obama-era rise in their effective tax rate. (Why do people still refer to Trump as a populist? Biden is now proposing significant tax hikes on corporations and the wealthy. And he wouldn't even have to pass legislation to preside over tax increases: Most of

the provisions in the Trump tax cut will expire at the end of next year unless Congress renews it.

But I'd say that the prospect of lower taxes shouldn't be enough to get billionaires to support Trump. After all, how much would the extra money really matter to people whose lifestyles are already incredibly lavish? My sense looking in from the outside is that among the very wealthy, making more money is less about what they can afford than it is about prestige - making more than others in their peer group. And the thing about higher taxes is that because they would apply to everyone, they wouldn't alter the rat race: Your perceived rivals would take the same hit you would.

And a Trump return to power would make America a scarier place, which should matter much more even to billionaires than a few percentage points on their tax rate. But do they understand that?

## West cannot let Putin open a second front in Europe

Ivana Stradner & Mark Montgomery

THURSDAY marks Nato's 75th anniversary, and Vladimir Putin's grand strategic vision remains resolute: its dissolution. Emboldened by recent advances in Ukraine, the direct peril to Nato affiliates such as Poland and the Baltic States remains high. Yet they are not alone. The Balkans, often neglected, are also a ripe prospect for Russia's aspirations, and are becoming increasingly febrile and dangerous. Britain and its allies neglected the Balkans at their peril over a century ago. We cannot afford to make the same mistake again.

The US ambassador to Nato took the unusual step of warning this week that Russia is using disinformation, cyberattacks, and other nefarious tactics to "destabilise" the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a case in point. Three decades after war ravaged that country, Serbia - backed by its friends in Moscow - is reigniting ethnic tensions, jeopardising European security. Europe and the US need to put the fire out before it engulfs the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises two autonomous entities - the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The former is populated chiefly by Bosniak Muslims and Croats, while and Serbs dominated Republika Srpska, which is friendly with nearby Serbia. These ethnic divisions produced a bloody war in 1992-1995 that left more than 100,000 people dead and millions homeless. The conflict ended only after Nato intervention that led to a US-brokered a peace deal, whose implementation is overseen by a high representative appointed by an international council. An EU peacekeeping force, EUFOR, ensures order under Operation ALTHEA.

Today, the country remains deeply divided. Republika Srpska's President Milorad Dodik, an ally of Russia and Serbia, has pushed it to the brink of war by threatening to secede. In September, Dodik barred High Representative Christian Schmidt from attending official meetings at the presidential headquarters. Moscow and deliberately Belgrade are stoking these divisions.

On March 5, as such, the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence warned of an increased risk of inter-ethnic violence in the Western Balkans. The warning highlighted Dodik's "provocative steps to neutralise international oversight in Bosnia and secure de-facto secession for his Republika Srpska." This "could prompt leaders of the Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) population to bolster their own capacity to protect their interests and possibly lead to violent conflicts that could overwhelm peacekeeping forces."

The situation worsened last month after Schmidt imposed a set of changes to the country's election law to guarantee free and fair elections. Dodik immediately rejected Schmidt's "integrity package" and again threatened to secede. Serbian

President Aleksandar Vučić? joined in by posting a cryptic message on Instagram, stating that "difficult days are ahead for Serbia" due to "direct threats to the vital interests of both Serbia and Republika Srpska." He added: "The battle will be tough, the toughest ever. We will fight. Serbia will win." In January, most concerningly for our purposes, Dodik met Vladimir Putin and reaffirmed the entity's refusal to join Western sanctions against Moscow over its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In March, Dodik said, "the Serbian people will always be on the side of the Russians."

Is it any wonder, therefore, that Russia is fanning the flames, using information operations to push for "RSEXIT" (hinting at the secession of Republika Srpska)? In December, Putin even suggested it would be possible to start transmitting Russian-state-owned media RT to Bosnia.

By sowing chaos in the Balkans, Putin aims to strengthen Moscow's regional influence, distract Europe from supporting Ukraine, and give Putin leverage over Western powers who do not want the violence to escalate. For Vučić?, meddling in Bosnia and Herzegovina offers helps strengthen his grip on power in Serbia. He also wields access to Dodik as a bargaining chip with the West by positioning himself as a peacemaker.

Western powers need to deal with these threats now before it's too late. First, Washington needs to change how it deals with Vučić?. To date, the US has attempted to appease the Serbian leader out of fear of escalation. Appeasement won't work. Instead, the US ambassador to Serbia should take a firm approach, warning Vučić? indicating that he will be held accountable for any escalation to violence. The European Union, meanwhile, should join US and UK sanctions against Dodik and other actors who are destabilising the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the United States and United Kingdom need to play a more active role in ensuring peace. They have entrusted Bosnia and Herzegovina's security to the European Union, relying on the ALTHEA mission to maintain peace and security in the country. However, the EU decision-making process is dysfunctional and slow to act, often held hostage by countries like Hungary that are seeking to extract concessions from Brussels. In fact, a Hungarian general currently leads ALTHEA. Therefore, the US and UK should lead a coalition of the willing with key EU member states such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands, signaling their readiness to respond to security threats from Belgrade and Moscow. As Russia looks to turn around its war in Ukraine, the Kremlin would no doubt love to distract the West by opening a second front in the Balkans. Putin wants to show that his will to challenge the West is greater than the West's will to resist. It's time to prove him wrong.

The New York Times

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# Why NATO’s 75th birthday is a troubled one

Andrew Hammond

NATO on Thursday marked the 75th anniversary of the signing of its founding treaty, yet the mood music is far from celebratory. Key leaders within the military alliance are increasingly concerned that the bloc is facing its biggest ever challenges. For example, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a former European Council president, last week warned that Europe is in a dangerous new "prewar era." He asserted that Ukraine must not be defeated by Russia for the good not just of NATO members but all those who value the post-1945 rules-based order. Tusk said that war is "no longer a concept from the past," that "it's real and it started" and "literally any scenario is possible."

This is one reason NATO is reportedly drawing up plans to secure a five-year military aid package of up to \$100 billion. The so-called Mission for Ukraine proposal is being shepherded by Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg for final approval over the summer, ahead of November's US presidential election. The plan would allow NATO to manage the supply of weapons to Ukraine for the first time since Russia began its attack in February 2022. The reason for the urgency is that Tusk and other leaders have warned that the next few months of the conflict will "decide everything," given the urgent need for the West to help Ukraine rearm. The Polish PM said: "We are living in the most

critical moment since the end of the Second World War."

What Tusk is highlighting is the growing concern in key NATO nations that, absent a significant shift, the tide is turning in the Ukraine war in Russia's favor. Moreover, any outcome that could be perceived as a major victory for Moscow would significantly add to the threat environment facing other nations in Europe.

It is in this somber context that NATO is planning for the next half-decade, with a change of leadership anticipated in the second half of this year. The person widely anticipated to become the next secretary-general of the military alliance is long-standing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

The good news for the next NATO chief is that the context for the debate about the alliance's future has been transformed in the post-COVID-19 period. Only five years ago, there was widespread concern about NATO's purpose, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying that it was experiencing "brain death." Macron's remarkable outburst was driven by what he saw as a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. This included the US' diminished commitment to NATO under the Trump presidency. Fast forward to today and Macron has said that Russia's invasion of Ukraine woke NATO up with the "worst of electroshocks," even though big questions remain about its future. It is an unexpected turnaround of for-

tunes, in the most serious of circumstances, that could also be fueled by Western concerns about China.

The Ukraine conflict has underlined the continuing relevance of NATO, with its collective member state population of about 1 billion. For all its remaining weaknesses, it remains one of the world's most successful ever military alliances and has helped underpin the longest period of sustained peace in the West's modern history.

While this is positive, NATO could, however, face a major internal challenge from November if Trump wins a new term. Former Trump administration officials, including ex-National Security Adviser John Bolton, have confirmed that the former president came close to announcing the US' withdrawal from NATO during his first term. For instance, Trump threw the alliance's 2018 summit into disarray by threatening to pull the US out. Despite the strength of the other NATO members, there is no question that America's withdrawal would be a body blow to its credibility. Trump, who originally described Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "genius," may also have plans to try to warm ties with Moscow, as was his intent in his first term.

Behind the scenes, there is much scenario planning going on regarding the feasibility of NATO without US participation. It is possible that the Western alliance could try to keep the military organization functioning for a few

years in the hope that the successor to any second Trump presidency might bring Washington back into the fold.

In the meantime, Rutte and other Western leaders assert in public that the best way for Europe to prepare for any change of incumbent in the White House is to increase defense spending. It is important, therefore, to see all member nations in Europe now commit to meeting the target of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense. In 2024, 20 NATO members are expected to do so, up from just three in 2014. Some, including Poland, have gone much further and now spend some 4 percent of GDP on defense.

If other nations move in the direction that Poland is heading, there may well be a possibility for intra-alliance harmony with the US. Here, it is the combination of Russian military assertiveness, instability in the Middle East and Africa and Trump's uncertain commitment to Europe's security that is turning this picture around.

In the longer term, it is also plausible that such higher defense spending will be locked in by NATO concerns about wider shifts in the global security environment, including threats from China. What is perceived as Beijing's increasing international assertiveness is a growing concern in the West and this will become especially significant if Xi Jinping continues to consolidate his strategic partnership with the newly reelected Vladimir Putin.

# Sunak’s Conservatives face years of oblivion

Martin Kettle

**INCREDIBLE though it may seem, it is increasingly likely that Rishi Sunak's Conservative leadership will be challenged in June. To many, the idea that choosing a fifth Tory prime minister in as many years might be the solution to internal party turmoil, or that ditching Sunak a few months before a general election would reanimate the electorate, will feel utterly delusional. To a significant group of Conservative MPs and activists, however, it is a primrose path that beckons irresistibly.**

These critics never supported Sunak in the first place. They can't forgive him for not having Boris Johnson's post-Brexit appeal. They despise his caution about their obsessions. They treat his failure to dent Labour's poll lead with contempt. They believe, probably rightly, that in the 2 May local elections Sunak may lead the Tories to a humiliating defeat. But they hope this will panic the party into yet another change of leader and a lurch to their land of lost content on the populist right.

These local elections would matter a lot in any circumstances. They are not midterms, from which a defeated governing party can always hope to recover. Instead these are nearly end-of-terms. And they tell a fateful story. The Tories are staring at the loss of more than half of their councillors in May, with possible defeats for prominent mayors, including Andy Street in the West Midlands and Ben Houchen in Tees Valley, and the rise of Richard Tice's Reform party slicing into the 2019 Tory electorate.

Put that together with last weekend's well-publicised 15,000-person general election survey by Survation, and you have a party on death row. Survation's poll forecasts for Labour a vast 286-seat general election majority, with Keir Starmer leading 468 MPs into the next parliament and the Conservatives reduced to a mere 98, easily their worst result of the democratic era. A new YouGov poll puts the figure at 403 seats, with a Labour majority of 154. The combination of the dire polls and the likely local election losses is a Conservative leadership tinderbox, ready to ignite after the local election weekend.

Sunak knows this only too well. It is why, by his own rather modest standards as a

stump politician, he is putting unusual effort into local campaigning. It is also why his threat to call a June general election rather than submit to a challenge from his MPs should be taken more seriously than it is. The rebels certainly take it seriously, because it would kill their desperate strategy. Their hope that they can persuade King Charles to block a request from Sunak for a dissolution, however, is for the birds.

Such is the party's volatility that the leadership hopefuls know the game is already afoot. The likelihood is nevertheless that Sunak will cling on to the loyalty of the majority, as John Major did in similar circumstances in 1995. But that is not a certainty. In the end, his MPs and their press backers are an unbiddable crew. If 53 of his 348 MPs ask for a confidence vote, many others will cast restraint aside.

From the grandstand, this all appears like a collective suicide strategy. For many on the pitch, though, it is clearly different. Priti Patel and Suella Braverman are weighing early challenges after the local elections. Penny Mordaunt and Kemi Badenoch do not want to be left behind if others have momentum. Nor do James Cleverly or Grant Shapps. Liz Truss, the most discrediting Tory of the modern era, is eyeing the scrum. Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, though not MPs, will be drawn into the intrigue. Even Dominic Cummings is taking fresh interest.

What all of this misses, though, is something much larger. Neither the current, blundering Conservative party nor the super-successful ideological one about which the rebels fantasise is a viable and stable centre-right party of government. A change of leader does not change that. To recreate an electorally viable party is not the work of weeks, but of years. That's especially the case when, as the Tory journalist Danny Finkelstein pointed out this week, young Tory voters are almost extinct.

Rather than pretend that ousting Sunak will solve or even do anything to mitigate the Tory party's plight, the Conservatives need a dose of historical humility and to play a longer game. After a terrible Tory performance in the local elections of 1995,

the historians Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon argued in this paper that, although party leaders insisted that the next general election was still winnable, the Conservatives were locked into a cycle that pointed to a devastating defeat. That analysis seems as fresh, relevant and, above all, as accurate today as it did then.

Ball and Seldon argued that nine conditions defined the likelihood of Conservative defeat. These were: a negative image of the leader, confusion over policy direction, internal disunity, organisational disarray, weakened party finances, a hostile media and intellectual climate, public dissatisfaction with the economy, a "time for a change" mood and a credible opposition party.

All were present in 1995, six of them in an acute form. Much the same is true today. Sunak's ratings are poor. Policy confusion - think net zero or levelling up - is common. Party divisions are deep. The intellectual climate is increasingly negative. Economic satisfaction is very low. There is a mood for change. And Labour is a credible alternative government. As the Liberal Democrat polling specialist Mark Pack observed last week, this puts the Conservatives today in at least as difficult a situation as in 1945, 1964 and 1997 - all of them elections lost by the Tories.

Ten years after their 1995 Guardian article, Ball and Seldon published a book, *Recovering Power*, about precisely this aspect of Tory history. It argued that in opposition the Tories too often lost sight of the need for adaptability to new ideas and a credible alternative platform, underpinned by hunger for office. But it stressed that any opposition recovery also depended on the failures, shortcomings and economic record of the government in power.

It is hard not to agree. The Conservative party has lost its way in government. Yet it shows few signs of grasping the scale of the tasks that would await it in opposition either. The truth is that the future of the Tory party does not rest in the personalities of those who are squabbling for Sunak's job. It lies in the hands of Keir Starmer's Labour party and its future record in government.

The Guardian

## Dulles Airport should keep its name, and Trump can have Rikers

Jay Parini

**THE news is mostly tragic these days, with destructive wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the usual drumbeat of mass shootings and climate disasters. I'm often hesitant to turn on the radio when I wake up. What next? The arrival of some needed comic relief, unexpectedly, in the form of a Republican proposal to change the name of Washington Dulles International Airport to Donald J. Trump International Airport. And this was not "Saturday Night Live."**

Republican Rep. Guy Reschenthaler of Pennsylvania, the chief deputy majority whip in the House, introduced this hilarious bill this week with six other Republicans: Michael Waltz of Florida, Andrew Ogles of Tennessee, Chuck Fleischmann of Tennessee, Paul Gosar of Arizona, Barry Moore of Alabama and Troy Nehls of Texas.

"Freedom. Prosperity. Strength. That's what America stood for under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump - the best president of my lifetime," Reschenthaler wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter. It never fails to shock me how GOP officials seem endlessly willing to grovel at the feet of their master, hoping to curry favor with a man whose ego is beyond satiation.

Trump must be laughing at them. I certainly am. I travel a lot, and was at Dulles last week. Believe me, it could use some attention - not with congressional rebranding, but with an influx of public funds. It's a nightmarish hub, with a tram system that feels wildly outmoded and slow: Walking often seems faster than riding from gate to gate. I often fly out of Dulles rather late in the day, and there isn't a place to get a sandwich or cup of coffee after about 9 p.m. Going through customs and passport control at Dulles is arduously slow. The customer reviews of this airport are not heartening.

Of the more than 25 mil-

lion travelers who poured through this airport in 2023, many of them are international visitors. Can you imagine the impression it would make to arrive at something called Trump International? Democrats reacted to the House bill quickly. The very notion of pasting the name of a twice-impeached and four-times-indicted former president on a major airport is beyond ridiculous. "Donald Trump is facing 91 felony charges," Democratic Rep. Gerry Connolly, whose district includes part of Dulles, said in a statement. "If Republicans want to name something after him, I'd suggest they find a federal prison."

Rep. Don Beyer, another Northern Virginia Democrat, remembered the day Trump enacted his 2017 executive order to bar travelers from certain majority-Muslim countries entry into the US - and how lawmakers went to Dulles to press for legal representation for those detained under the policy. Trump is a man already found liable by a New York judge for business fraud and found liable by a jury for defamation and sexual abuse. God knows what lies ahead for him in the four trials that await him; Trump has denied any wrongdoing.

It probably makes more sense to rename Rikers Island, that 413-acre jail complex in the Bronx, after one of New York's most famous defendants. Trump Island, where when you arrive for processing, you get an orange wig to go with your orange jumpsuit. And maybe a copy of the Trump Bible to read. Joking aside, it matters what we call our airports. We want to remember and lift up people who have been important to our nation, to the democratic project.

President Ronald Reagan was a man of dignity, and it made sense to rename Washington National Airport for him. JFK was an appropriate name to replace Idlewild Airport with. Edward O'Hare, after whom

the Chicago airport is named, was a genuine hero, an aviator who died in combat in 1943. But Trump?

Trump's war record was not memorable. He evaded going to Vietnam because of "bone spurs," getting a letter to avoid service from his father's podiatrist friend. Rather famously, he allegedly called those who lost their lives or were wounded in American wars "losers" and "suckers." He said that Arizona Sen. John McCain was not a war hero "because he was captured" and endured five years as a prisoner of war. Enough with Trump, who claims he's being harassed by the justice system. He's not being indicted because he's running for president. More likely, he's running for president because he wants to distract us from his criminal indictments.

John Foster Dulles was, I would argue, a man of integrity whose name should stay where it is. He was President Dwight D. Eisenhower's close friend and advisor, and served as a revered secretary of state from 1953-1959. He was, of course, of his era, and his strong stance against all forms of communism defined his career. As with most who attain high office, he had his admirers and detractors. "Mr. Dulles was a man of complex character, full of paradoxes," The New York Times wrote in his obituary. "A shrewd and successful corporation lawyer, he was also a moralist and political philosopher. He could marshal his ideas swiftly, fluently and extemporaneously; he coined many phrases, but he was not noted as an originator of new ideas."

However unoriginal as a thinker, Dulles was someone of stature, a dedicated public servant worth recalling. And - how low have we sunk - he was not the first former president in history to face criminal charges (four indictments, no less) and stand accused of trying to overturn the results of a peaceful election.

CNN

# Ngugi wa Thiong’o: Literary giant, revolutionary hero, domestic abuser

Tafi Mhaka

ON March 12, Mukoma wa Ngugi, the Kenyan American poet and author, who is the son of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the famed writer widely seen as a giant of African literature, took to X, formerly Twitter, to allege that his father was an abusive husband. "My father Ngugi wa Thiong'o physically abused my late mother. He would beat her up. Some of my earliest memories are of me going to visit her at my grandmother's where she would seek refuge." Mukoma's tweet went viral and solicited hundreds of responses that exposed the long, dark shadow patriarchy continues to cast over many African societies.

Sure, many commentators thanked Mukoma for sharing his account of a man who is not only his father, but an African cultural icon. Others, however, were less complimentary and appeared to be gravely offended by his openness. They accused him of embarrassing his father and seeking validation from Westerners.

Mukoma's assertions, some claimed, was a "consequence of Western education". It is, they suggested, "un-African" to speak out against one's father, more so to thousands and potentially millions of strangers. Ten days after his initial statement, on March 23, Mukoma responded to the criticism he received for speaking up for his mother.

"We cannot use African culture to hide atrocities," he wrote on X. "My father beat up my mother. What is African about that?" In another post, he described the culture of violence against women that underpins Kenyan society as a "patriarchal cancer". Ngugi is a literary genius, a storyteller par excellence and a respected revolutionary. Before there was the internet, video on-demand platforms, TV or even radio in most households, two African giants dominated African literature: Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author, and, of course, Ngugi.

From the 1960s, Achebe and Ngugi articulated African identity and consciousness amid the anti-colonial struggle. They stood up for the human rights of Africans

with their words. Through novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, to name a few, Achebe chronicled the impact of colonialism on Igbo culture, religion and sociopolitical systems. And in a *Man of the People*, he explored the failings of postcolonial leadership and states.

Ngugi, who went by the name James early in his career, also focused on African opposition to colonial rule. Weep not Child, for instance, deals with the so-called Mau Mau Uprising, while *Grain of Wheat* looks at the state of emergency in Kenya's struggle for independence (1952-60). Through these and other novels, Ngugi advocated for resistance against colonial oppression and repression in the independence era. In 1978, he was arrested and detained for a year without trial by the administration of former Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta over a play titled *Ngahika Ndenda* (I will marry when I want).

Over the years, Ngugi was regularly harassed and victimised by authorities in Kenya for voicing his opposition to corruption, misrule and the abuse of power. He has stayed the course and today, at the age of 86, continues to advocate for freedom from neocolonialism and political oppression. With 13 honorary degrees from institutions around the world, as well as countless awards, including the 2022: PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature, Ngugi is a certified literary genius.

But, for all of his achievements in the last 60 years, the famed author appears to have failed where it counted most: protecting African women. He produced many timeless literary classics, and became a leading voice in the fight against colonialism and post-colonial repression, but according to his own son, could not liberate his dear wife, sons and daughters from the extreme ravages of toxic masculinity and domestic violence. Of course, in the wake of Mukoma's public disclosures, Africans could choose to label Ngugi a flawed genius. He is, after all, human.

They could - as many tried to do in lashing out at Mukoma - brush his alleged abuse of his wife under the carpet in the name of protecting his literary and revolutionary legacy. This would be an easy and convenient position to take. But it wouldn't be right. Ngugi's alleged personal failings, sadly, are not only his own. The harm he is said to have inflicted on his wife is not the unique failing of a genius. It is very much representative of a societal ill pervasive in most African populations. It is proof that even the most respected and principled revolutionaries, who have been consistent and relentless in their defence of human rights and dignity on the surface, are not immune to the ill effects of patriarchy.

Ngugi, it seems, wanted women to experience liberty from colonialism and post-colonial subjugation, but remain bonded to the steely constraints of Kikuyu culture. Although he repeatedly expressed how he abhorred systemic violence, he apparently believed he had the "right" to consistently employ violence against his spouse and, by extension, his children. To his mind, it seems, there were limits to women's human rights.

For a long time, under the guise of tradition, African men have been allowed and even encouraged to discipline "their women" and children with violence. Thus, many argue Ngugi is just a product of his times and what he is said to have done to his late wife should not be judged through a 21st-century progressive lens.

The truth, however, is that gender-based violence is not a practice of old. It is very much a modern and everyday menace in African societies. And it can never be tackled if we continue to excuse the actions of abusers, especially those with high public profiles, by pointing to their age, their professional success, or indeed, seemingly impeccable anti-colonial and revolutionary credentials. The spirit of intolerance and violence that "allowed" Ngugi to physically assault his wife in the 1960s and 1970s has not dissipated. In fact,

gender-based violence is on the rise in Kenya.

On January 27, thousands of protesters, male and female, took to the streets of Nairobi calling for an end to femicide and violence against women. About 500 women and girls have been murdered in Kenya since 2016. According to a report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UN Women, "Such homicides are usually the fatal endpoint of a pattern of physical or sexual violence, fuelled by social norms enforcing male control or power over women." Ngugi's alleged violence is, unfortunately, a window to a continental (and, frankly global) problem. Hence, his son's revelations should not become a point of contention.

This should instead be a teaching moment. How do our cultural practices and norms intersect with modern or constitutional rights and liberties? Is culture beyond the purview of transformative change? The struggle from oppression, I must say, is far from over.

Much good can still come out of this undeniably sad episode in Ngugi's life. As someone who is still active in public life, the famed author can finish telling the story his son started, acknowledge his shortcomings, and publicly apologise for the pain he allegedly inflicted on his wife, Nyambura, and his entire family. I understand that this won't be an easy feat, but it is perhaps the only way for the author to protect his revolutionary legacy, and take his lifelong fight against oppression and injustice to another level in his sunset years. As an agent of change who commands widespread respect, he should own up to his failings and spread greater awareness about the need to free women from the bonds of depraved cultural norms. It is time to assess how certain traditions pose a threat to women's wellbeing and indeed their very lives. Our understanding of the behaviours that make an African man must change. For too long, violence and intolerance against female agency have been used as markers of masculine pride and authority in Africa. It is time to say enough is enough.

Aljazeera

# Ireland is too poor to afford Irish unification

Ruth Dudley Edwards

**YESTERDAY brought yet another report on the potentially enormous costs of Irish unification, this time from a Dublin think tank, the Institute of International and European Affairs. Soberly titled Irish Northern Ireland Subvention. Possible Unification Effects, it was parodied in a headline on the Sluggemotoole.com website: "Reports estimate Irish Reunification to cost somewhere between 37 pence and 44 trillion pounds?..."**

But the authors, Professor Edgar Morgenroth and John FitzGerald, are well-regarded economists. It is more than five decades since FitzGerald's father, Garret, (who would first become Taoiseach in 1981), also an economist, tried to introduce some reality to the debate with his book *Towards a New Ireland*, which confronted some of the challenges of unifying Ireland very early in the blood-soaked years of the Troubles.

He warned that tax levels would soar in the south to match the substantially higher public spending northerners were accustomed to. Now his son believes that it could cost as much as £20.5 billion annually for two decades to give northerners the same welfare and

public sector pay rates as the south.

Northern Ireland was impoverished by the destruction of the Troubles and the sectarian and political mistrust that continues in the aftermath. Many thousands of bright young people who left to escape violence never came home. The Republic might be rich at the moment, but its buoyant economy has shallow roots and its vulnerability is underestimated. Few remember how close to disaster it came during and after the financial crisis that left the Celtic Tiger on life-support and the government taking orders from the International Monetary Fund and the European Union.

Ireland is an optimistic country and the harsh lessons appear to have been forgotten, but the economic statistics are being distorted by a reliance on multinational firms (which pay 80 per cent of corporation tax). With the United States and EU threatening the tax policies that so attracted them, the exit of these firms would cause immense damage. The country is also facing big new spending pressures. The political conversations that dominate have been until

recently about which lobbies should most benefit from the dispersal of national wealth, but now huge numbers of immigrants are occupying hotels and public buildings in small towns and sleeping in tents outside government buildings in cities.

Moreover, the recent rejection of the socially progressive but idiotic proposals to change the constitution shone a spotlight on the gap between the ordinary Pat or Maureen and the governing elite. Ireland is beginning to realise that it's living beyond its means. Which is why Sinn Fein, which sheds policies like a Persian cat in its anxiety to reassure middle-class voters that it is safe, is panic-stricken as it clings on to Irish unity - the only policy that matters to the Sinn Fein strategists, the IRA Army Council veterans who still rule the roost from the Belfast shadows.

Polls show that there is nothing near a majority in Northern Ireland for unity, and down south enthusiasm does not survive much scrutiny.

"I don't mind a united Ireland as long as it has no effect whatsoever on the 26 counties," a taxi driver said to me more than a decade ago,

and that still appears to be the attitude of the average southerner. They don't want tax increases and they are reluctant to woo unionists even with a gesture like joining the Commonwealth. Extreme nationalists, the ones who actually care, resist reconciliation: they want subjugation.

So who should pay for unification, Sinn Fein - the eulogisers of the IRA who almost destroyed Northern Ireland - are now being asked. The late Gerry Fitt, the leader of constitutional nationalism - who with his family was driven out of Belfast by IRA supporters in the early 1980s and became a stalwart in the House of Lords - explained Sinn Fein policy as an instruction to the British "to f--- off and leave your wallet on the mantelpiece".

The hapless Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, now Sinn Fein's chief whip, was sent out to man the media barricades yesterday. If people on both sides of the border voted for a united Ireland, he explained, "You have to assume that Britain will have, and indeed would, step up. To take financial responsibility, moving forward." The Brits might have something to say about that.

The Telegraph





SIALKOT: People purchasing iftar related stuff to break their fast during holy fasting month of Ramadan.

## Rupee remains unchanged; closed at Rs277.92 against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Rupee on Friday remained static against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs277.92 against the previous day's closing of Rs277.92.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs277.2 and Rs280.25 respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 58 paise to close at Rs301.16 against

the last-day closing of Rs301.74, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.83, whereas a decrease of Rs1.09 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs350.87 compared to the last closing of Rs351.96.

## AJK govt. paces up crackdown against cigarette industry involved in tax evasion

### F.P Report

MIRPUR: Joint teams of AJK's excise and taxation department and police have upped its crackdown operation against tax evasion in the cigarette industry of AJK.

According to details, over the instructions of Prime Minister of AJK, crack down operation had been contained with full pace against the tax evading cigarette manufacturing factories in the areas of AJK.

In this regard raids were conducted on warehouses and different offices of National Tobacco Company, Watan Tobacco Company, Walton Tobacco Company and Chinara Tobacco Company in Mirpur, Bhimber and Barnala.

In the late evening of Wednesday, a raid had been conducted at a warehouse of Watan Tobacco Company under the supervision of DSP HQ Naseer Ahmed along with IRO Inland Muhammad Shakeel. The authorities raided warehouses situated at Barnala Road, Bhimber and confiscated raw material of cigarettes including 3,230 bags of tobacco, 45 cartons of filter paper, 504 cartons of filter rod, 90 cartons of cigarette brand Express, 31 cartons of cigarette brand Hero and 33 cartons of cigarette brand Grace. The authorities later sealed the warehouse and initiated legal procedure against the owner and the warehouse manager.

In another operation,

government authorities raided warehouse of National Tobacco Company, Bhimber and seized 3,811 cartons of illegal cigarettes and more than 384,000kgs of raw tobacco. Similarly, during a raid on the Walton Tobacco Company, government authorities seized 10 cartons of illegal cigarettes, 10 bags of tobacco to prepare 100 million cigarettes and 19 cigarette paper rolls and other related material.

In another operation, authorities raided a house which was taken on rent by National Tobacco Company. During the raid, the authorities seized 85 cartons filter rods, 67 cartons cigarette paper, 17 cartons illegal cigarette, 16 cartons cigarette tape, 10,000kgs of raw tobacco

and other raw material.

In a separate raid at Chanar Tobacco Company, Barnala, the authorities confiscated 731 bags of tobacco.

At the moment, AJK tax authorities are losing billions of rupees annually only due to tax evasion in the cigarette sector of AJK. These illegal cigarettes which are manufactured in AJK are smuggled to the various areas of Punjab. It is interesting to mention that despite passing of last final date, track and trace system had not been implemented in the cigarette factories located in the areas of AJK. Its also worth mentioning that illegal tobacco trade causes a revenue loss to state of Pakistan to the tune of Rupees 300 billion every year.

## Message of Ms. Sadia Rashid, President of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan

### F.P Report

KARACHI: As the auspicious 27th of Ramadan approaches, let us reflect upon its profound significance in our history and collective consciousness. This blessed night marks the revelation of the Holy Quran, a divine guidance bestowed upon humanity, illuminating our path towards righteousness and spiritual enlightenment.

For the Muslim Ummah, the 27th of Ramadan holds dual significance: the revelation of the Quran and Laylat al-Qadr, a night better than a thousand months, symbolizing the rule of Allah's law and the blessing

ings it brings. The establishment of Pakistan on this sacred night is a testament to divine purpose, affirming our nation's destiny to endure and thrive.

Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said, the visionary founder of Hamdard Pakistan, advocated for observing the 27th of Ramadan as Independence Day, recognizing its spiritual and patriotic resonance. Today, we honour his legacy by commemorating this day with fervor and gratitude, acknowledging Allah's blessings and our commitment to Pakistan's growth.

In light of the challenges

facing our nation, let us unite in prayer and repentance. On this blessed night, let us seek Allah's mercy and forgiveness.

Since 1973, Hamdard Pakistan and its subsidiaries have celebrated this day with religious and national fervor, inspired by Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said's vision. Let us reaffirm our commitment to Allah's decrees and contribute wholeheartedly to Pakistan's progress, guided by faith and gratitude. May Allah grant us strength and wisdom to overcome adversity and uphold the honour of our beloved nation. Ameen!

## Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Fiveships namely, Cosco America, Xpress Salween, Marina Arung, Lian Song Hu and Alba Gas carrying Container, Palm oil, Gas oil and LPG, berthed at Container, Liquid Terminal, FOTCO Terminal and Sui Southern Gas Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile three more ships, BanglarAragroti, Corona and Sea Pearl are also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on same day. A total of eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, Xpress Salween and Cosco America left the Port on today morning while two more ships, Mala Kado and Goofy are expected to sail on today morning.

Cargo volume of 89,181 tonnes, comprising 46,508 tonnes imports cargo and 42,673 tonnes export cargo carried in 3,122 Containers (1,360 TEUs Imports and 1,762 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

## Gold rates dip by Rs.900 to Rs240,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold witnessed a decrease of Rs900 and was sold at Rs240,200 on Friday as compared to its sale at Rs241,100 on the previous day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs772 and was sold at Rs205,932 against the sale price of Rs206,704 and 10 gram 22 karat gold also decreased to Rs188,772 from Rs189,480, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs2,650 and Rs.2271.94 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$5 to 2,306 from \$2,311, the Association reported.

# Weekly inflation up by 0.96 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 0.96 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on April 4, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 326.29 points as compared to 323.20 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 29.45 per cent.

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

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs. 17,732, increased by 0.83 per cent and went down to 315.95 points from last week's 313.35 points.

The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517; Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, increased by 0.90 percent, 0.85 percent, 0.93 and 1.02 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 16 (31.37%) items increased, 13 (25.49%) items decreased and 22 (43.14%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included bananas (3.57%), wheat flour (2.68%), eggs and diesel (1.18%), gur (0.63%), sugar (0.41%), mustard oil (0.26%), pulse masoor (0.25%) and potatoes (0.23%). On Year-on-Year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included ladies sandal (12.52%), tomatoes (11.93%), gents sandal (8.70%), petrol (3.45%), chicken (2.99%), long cloth (2.23%), onion (1.30%), bread (1.03%), beef (0.75%), garlic (0.70%), mutton (0.41%) and rice basmati broken (0.14%).

The commodities which

recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included bananas (26.68%), cooking oil 5 litre (20.53%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (17.61%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (17.28%), mustard oil (14.22%), wheat flour (5.86%), diesel (3.61%), and cigarettes (0.06%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices gas charges for Q1 (570.00%), onions (107.59%), chillies powder (66.05%), gents sandal (66.71%), gents sponge chappal (58.05%), garlic (53.51%), tomatoes (35.77%), gur (34.00%), salt powder (32.78%), energy saver (29.83%), pulse mash (26.98%) and tea prepared (23.34%).

## Unveiling Dynamics: Safeguarding Chinese Interests in Pakistan

### Syed Ali Nawaz Gilani.

The recent focus on safeguarding the safety and security of Chinese nationals and investments within Pakistan underscores the enduring partnership between the two nations. As the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) continues to serve as a cornerstone of their cooperation, it is imperative to prioritize the protection of Chinese interests in Pakistani territory.

Recent events have highlighted the evolving security challenges facing Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan. In response, Pakistani authorities have recognized the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate risks and enhance the environment for Chinese engagement. This includes fostering trust and collaboration between the two nations to sustain bilateral cooperation and advance mutual prosperity and stability.

The commitment of Pakistani authorities to upholding the safety of Chinese investments reaffirms the depth of the partnership and its dedication to mutual prosperity and stability. By emphasizing the importance of close collaboration with Chinese counterparts, Pakistan is demonstrating its proactive stance towards ensuring the security of Chinese nationals and projects within its borders.

The strategic alliance between Pakistan and China remains strong, with both nations committed to creating a safe and secure environment for Chinese engagement in Pakistan. As the partnership continues to evolve, it is crucial for both countries to work together to address security challenges and uphold the principles of mutual prosperity and stability. In doing so, the enduring partnership between Pakistan and China will only grow stronger, laying the foundation for continued cooperation and economic integration, with

tion and economic development in the region.

Worth mentioning that Pakistan and China share a longstanding relationship marked by cooperation in various domains, including trade, infrastructure development, and strategic alliances. Recent developments, however, have unveiled both opportunities and challenges in this bilateral partnership. This article delves into three significant developments shaping Pakistan-China relations, ranging from the reopening of the Khunjerab border to security challenges faced by Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan.

The Khunjerab border, situated at a staggering altitude of approximately 15,000 feet above sea level, serves as the sole land crossing connecting Pakistan with China. After four months of closure due to snowfall, the border reopened for traffic, facilitating bilateral trade and tourism. This development not only signifies the resumption of economic activities but also underscores the resilience of Pakistan-China relations despite seasonal challenges. As per the protocol agreement of 1985, the border remains closed from December 1 to March 31 annually. However, the recent reopening indicates the commitment of both nations to bolster connectivity and foster economic exchanges.

Pakistan and China are on the verge of finalizing modalities for third-party participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), aimed at enhancing the project's regional scope and attracting additional investors. The draft shared by the Chinese side outlines general principles and objectives for third-party involvement, emphasizing inclusivity, mutual benefits, and government-led steering of CPEC. This move reflects a strategic shift towards broader regional connectivity and economic integration, with

CPEC serving as an open platform for cooperation. The establishment of the Joint Working Group on International Cooperation and Coordination underscores the collaborative efforts to streamline third-party participation and ensure sustainable development. While economic cooperation between China and Pakistan has made great progress, security challenges continue to be a significant concern for Chinese investments and personnel in the country. The recent suicide bombing targeting Chinese engineers at the Dasu hydropower project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province serves as a grim reminder of the risks faced by foreign nationals.

The attack, claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), underscores the complex security environment in Pakistan, plagued by insurgency and jihadist activities.

Additionally, the thwarted attempt to breach the Gwadar Port Authority compound further highlights the diverse threats facing Chinese interests in Pakistan. To ensure the safety of their investments and personnel, it is crucial for Chinese companies to implement robust security measures and conduct a strategic reassessment of their operations in the region.

The recent attack targeting Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan has implications for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's upcoming visit to Beijing. It is likely that the focus of the visit will shift towards evaluating the effectiveness of current security measures for Chinese residents and projects in Pakistan.

Additionally, the summary highlights the grievances of Baloch separatists towards Chinese involvement in projects like the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor (CPEC). These grievances stem from concerns about marginalization, economic deprivation, and inadequate development in Balochistan despite its resource richness. The lack of tangible benefits from CPEC in Balochistan has fueled resentment and enabled separatist groups to exploit local grievances for recruitment and propaganda. Moreover, the targeting of Chinese interests by jihadist groups and Baloch separatists poses challenges for Pakistan's government in convincing Beijing to initiate new projects. To address these challenges, the summary suggests that addressing Baloch grievances and collaborating with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to tackle security threats are essential steps towards improving the situation. The recent developments in Pakistan-China relations underscore both the opportunities and challenges inherent in this strategic partnership. While the reopening of the Khunjerab border signifies resilience and cooperation, security concerns pose formidable obstacles to economic development and regional connectivity, particularly within the ambit of CPEC. As Pakistan navigates these complexities, addressing security imperatives, fostering inclusive growth, and mitigating grievances will be crucial in sustaining the momentum of bilateral cooperation and realizing the shared vision of prosperity and stability in the region.

(The author is the Secretary General of the Pakistan China Friendship Association, serving in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chapter, and is also a foreign affairs analyst and media advisor based in Peshawar. For further inquiries or correspondence, he can be contacted via email at [syed.gilani@gmail.com](mailto:syed.gilani@gmail.com).)

## Asian equities tumble, oil extends gains on Middle East worries

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian stocks tumbled Friday and oil extended the previous day's surge on worries that Israel's war with Hamas could widen to a regional conflict with Iran as both sides ratcheted up tensions. The threat of regional war compounded fears that the Federal Reserve would not cut interest rates as much as previously expected, with focus now on the release of key US jobs data later in the day.

The sell-off followed a plunge across the board on Wall Street that observers said could also be partially blamed on profit-taking from a months-long rally that has seen several indexes hit multiple records this year. Optimism was at a premium on trading floors after a deadly strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, which Tehran blamed on Israel and threatened retaliation.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Tuesday the country "will be punished at the hands of our brave men. We will make them regret this crime and the other ones". On Wednesday he called

the strike a "desperate" effort by Israel that "will not save them from defeat" in Gaza. "Of course they will be slapped for that action," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in return has pledged to go after those who harm his country.

The military strengthened its defences Thursday, while the army paused leave for combat units, blocked GPS signals in certain places and raised its "alertness". "For years, Iran has been acting against us both directly and via its proxies; therefore, Israel is acting against Iran and its proxies, defensively and offensively," Netanyahu said. "We will know how to defend ourselves and we will act according to the simple principle of whoever harms us or plans to harm us, we will harm them." The prospect of a war in the crude-rich Middle East sent prices up more than one percent Thursday, with Brent breaking \$90 a barrel for the first time since October.

It extended those gains Friday, along with West Texas Intermediate. "The wider Mideast tensions stemming from the Gaza war are probably at the highest in months," said Vandana Hari, of Vanda Insights. "Crude is reflecting that Mideast conflagration fear premium." Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management added that the crisis and the war in Ukraine were making investors increasingly nervous. "The world feels markedly less safe today than when we woke up on Monday. Market sentiment seems to reflect a growing sense of widespread geopolitical unease," he said.

All three main indexes on Wall Street ended more than one percent down, and Asia continued the selling. Tokyo tanked more than two percent, with a stronger yen adding to the pain for Japanese investors, while Hong Kong, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Wellington and Manila were also deep in the red. Traders are awaiting the release of US non-farm payroll data later in the day, which could have a bearing on the Fed's decision-making regarding interest rates.

Confidence in three cuts this year, beginning in June, is being tested by a string of

recent data indicating the US economy remains in rude health, while bank officials have done little to soothe concerns. Minneapolis Fed chief Neel Kashkari said Thursday that there was a chance of no reductions this year, calling inflation figures in January and February "a little bit concerning" and adding that he wanted to see more positive data.

His Philadelphia counterpart Patrick Harker warned prices were still rising too sharply and that "we're not where we need to be", while Richmond boss Thomas Barkin called it "smart" to take time to get a clearer idea about the path for inflation.

However, Cleveland's Loretta Mester indicated officials were close to being confident enough to start lowering rates and Chicago Fed boss Austan Goolsbee said the recent uptick in inflation did not change the view that it was coming down.

Tokyo - Nikkei 225: DOWN 2.4 percent at 39,812.24 (break)

Hong Kong - Hang Seng Index: DOWN 0.9 percent at 16,573.99

## Apple cuts jobs after dropping self-driving car plans

NEW YORK (BBC): Apple has cut more than 600 jobs after reportedly dropping its self-driving car plans. The majority of the cuts come from the address of the site which was working on the recently abandoned self-driving car project in California, according to Bloomberg.

The state's employment department was notified on 28 March that 614 staff will be laid off in May.

Apple has been approached for comment.

The tech giant has avoided mass layoffs in recent years, unlike other firms which have cut hundreds of thousands of jobs since the pandemic. In May last year, Apple boss Tim Cook told CNBC that layoffs would be a "last resort".

There have been more than 50,000 job cuts in the industry so far in 2024, according to tracker layoffs.fyi. High-profile firms

such as Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Snap and PayPal are among the tech companies to have announced cuts in 2024. However, Apple has laid off far fewer people compared to their competitors. It has a global workforce of about 161,000, according to GlobalData. Apple is the world's most valuable company - but "no one is immune to job cuts," says industry analyst Paolo Pescatore of PP Foresight.

"While this might seem significant given that it relates to Apple as one of the last big tech giants to make job cuts, it is not driven by the need for efficiencies," says Mr Pescatore. "It feels more like a shift of strategic focus into other new emerging areas like AI," he adds. Reports of Apple ending its multi-billion-dollar investment into its self-driving car project first emerged in February.

However, the company has never publicly acknowledged its existence. Apple reportedly spent billions of dollars on research and development of a fully autonomous vehicle without a steering wheel and pedals. But it was understood to still be years away from producing a vehicle. Other companies such as Ford and General Motors have also slowed down on autonomous vehicle research as costs rise. It was reported that Apple would move many of its 2,000-strong electric car team to work on AI projects instead.

A separate filing in the California jobs report shows that in January, Apple laid off 121 workers in its San Diego office. According to Bloomberg, this team was working on AI and workers were asked to move to Austin, Texas.





In brief

PCB media director resigns

L A H O R E (Monitoring Desk): The media director of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Aalia Rasheed has resigned from her post citing “personal engagements”. Sports journalist Aalia Rasheed had worked as media director in the PCB for about six months. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had Aalia Rasheed as its new media director in October 2023. Aalia, who had already worked with the board for a short period in 2009, was roped in after Umar Farooq Kalson, who was hired by the board’s interim Management Committee chief Zaka Ashraf, was removed from the position. Board reappoints Sami-ul-Hasan Burney as new media director. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has reappointed Samiul-Hasan Burney as new media director. Presently, Sami-ul-Hasan Burni was working on a special project at PCB. Samiul-Hasan Burney was removed from the post by former PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf. Sami had also served as media director in the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Collins wins twice in Charleston

C H A R L E S T O N (Agencies): Danielle Collins extended her winning streak to 10 matches, winning twice on Thursday to reach the quarterfinals of the Credit One Charleston (S.C.) Open. First, Collins upset second-seeded Ons Jabeur of Tunisia 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 in a second-round match that had been pushed back to Thursday due to rain. Then Collins blitzed Sloane Stephens 6-2, 6-2 in a matchup of unseeded US players. Collins, a 30-year-old Floridian who is retiring at the end of the season, captured the Miami Open championship last week. Next up for Collins will be a match against 11th-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium, who got past seventh-seeded Elina Svitolina of Ukraine 6-4, 6-1. Earlier Thursday, Mertens defeated France’s Varvara Gracheva 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. The United States’ Jessica Pegula cruised into the quarterfinals with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Poland’s Magda Linette. In other third-round action, Belarus’ Victoria Azarenka, the 12th seed, rallied past the United States’ Taylor Townsend 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 to reach the quarters. Third-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece downed Australia’s Astra Sharma 6-4, 6-1, and fourth-seeded Daria Kasatkina of Russia eliminated 15th-seeded Anhelina Kalinina of Ukraine 6-1, 6-4. Ninth-seeded Veronika Kudermetova of Russia toppled fifth-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil 7-5, 6-1, and Romania’s Jaqueline Cristian beat 10th-seeded Emma Navarro of the United States 6-3, 5-7, 6-1. Stephens won her second-round match earlier Thursday, defeating 14th-seeded Leylah Fernandez of Canada 6-4, 6-4. Copa Colsanitas Home-country favorite Camila Osorio, the sixth seed, moved into the quarterfinals at Bogota, Colombia, with a 7-6 (4), 6-4 victory over Romania’s Anca Alexia Todoni. Osorio overcame eight double faults in part by winning 45 percent of her return points. Todoni put just 48 percent of her first serves in play. The rest of the scheduled Thursday slate was delayed due to a power failure.

## Emirates Cricket Board slaps five-year ban on Usman Khan

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): Right-handed opener Usman Khan has been banned for a five-year period by the Emirate Cricket Board (ECB) over “breaching his obligations” owed to the cricketing body.

The ECB, after a detailed investigation, claimed to have found Usman Khan misinterpreted his decision to play for the UAE national men’s cricket team.

“After a detailed investigation, Usman was found to have misrepresented to ECB about his decision to play for the UAE team and has used the opportunities and development provided by the ECB to him to seek out other prospects and it was evident that he was no longer wanting to play for ECB nor complete the eligibility criteria which he was under an obligation to do,” ECB said in a statement.

“Usman participated in the ECB Sanctioned International League T20



Season 2 earlier this year in the UAE Category as a local player.

“The ECB also entered into an ECB Employment Contract with Usman for a period of one year. This was done to give him security and allow him to fulfil his eligibility criteria that would allow him to represent UAE in international cricket.” The sanction imposed will prohibit Usman from participating

in any ECB tournaments for the next five years.

“Usman is found to have breached his obligations owed to ECB and will therefore not be allowed to participate in ECB sanctioned tournaments/leagues as well as local events organized under the aegis of councils/academies in UAE for a period of five years,” ECB concluded.

For the unversed, Usman Khan, who played

the previous two editions of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) as an overseas player, impressed with his consistent batting exploits and was thus approached by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to consider representing his homeland.

He was subsequently named among the 29 players participating in the ongoing physical fitness camp, being held in collaboration with the Pakistan Army at Kakul, Abbottabad.

The ongoing camp is slated to conclude on April 8 and the details suggest that the Pakistan squad for the upcoming five-match home T20I series against New Zealand will be shortlisted from the 29 probables.

It is worth mentioning here that Usman Khan only participated in the UAE’s domestic tournaments and was yet to make his international debut for the country.

## Ten Hag blames poor decisions for Man United’s shocking defeat to Chelsea

LONDON (Agencies): Manchester United coach Erik Ten Hag expressed frustration and blamed costly mistakes and poor decision-making for his side conceding two stoppage-time goals against Chelsea to lose 4-3 on Thursday.

Ten Hag said his team deserved to win at Stamford Bridge, after rallying from a two-goal deficit with a brace from Alejandro Garnacho and a goal from Bruno Fernandes.

Individual errors, however, led them to defeat just a few days after his team conceded a last-gasp equaliser to Brentford in a 1-1 draw to move further

away from a top-four Premier League finish.

Man U now sits at sixth with 48 points. “I had the feeling we were dominating the game, got ourselves into a winning position, scoring great goals,” Ten Hag told reporters.

“Then, in stoppage time, we didn’t manage to win. Of course it’s frustrating. “We made individual errors that cost us the game. The players know their jobs and they didn’t make the right decisions. We have to read when to keep the ball, to pass, move and switch the play when we are winning.

“In five days we dropped five points. That is unac-

ceptable. We gave away a game we should have won.”

The Dutch manager said injury absences of key players have dampened his team’s performance, but he is confident his players will step up on Sunday when they host leaders Liverpool.

“(Raphael) Varane, (Jonny) Evans, Also Casemiro we have to take off. That doesn’t help. You need these types to show leadership and what to do,” he said. “I don’t know if they will play on Sunday. The team will be there on Sunday. They have character. They showed it today, fighting ourselves into the game.”

## “Awesome opportunity for young guys,” Finn Allen on Pakistan T20Is



to get an opportunity at the top level to see where they stand against a formidable Pakistan side,” he said.

Finn Allen, fresh from a remarkable century against Pakistan earlier this year at home, acknowledged that it would be a tough challenge to compete against Pakistan in their backyard.

“I guess with the upcoming series, we batted out with them at home not too long ago, but it is on their turf now, and we know from tours in the past that they are pretty tough to beat at home,” Allen said.

“Hopefully, Mark Chapman can pull through for the boys again like last time, but I think it will be a good challenge and a good series,” he added.

### New Zealand T20I squad vs Pakistan

Michael Bracewell (c), Finn Allen, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Adam Milne, Jimmy Neesham, Will O’Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi.

## Talented youngsters will be provided chance in National Games

ISLAMABAD (APP): An important meeting took place here on Friday between former hockey great Olympian Khawaja Junaid and Chairman of the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, wherein it was decided that the talented youngsters, identified through the Prime Minister’s Talent Hunt Programme would get the opportunity to participate in the National Games, scheduled to be held later this year.

The selected athletes will undergo rigorous training to hone their skills, enabling them to represent Pakistan with excellence, said a news release.

The meeting focused on the

revival of hockey in Pakistan and the broader engagement of youth through sports initiatives.

Rana Mashhood underscored the government’s commitment to revitalize hockey, highlighting ongoing efforts for that. It was discussed that Pakistan was gearing up for the South Asian Games (SAG), with a keen focus on showcasing country’s talent on the international stage.

Rana highlighted sports’ role in positively engaging the country’s youth, highlighting its potential to foster unity, discipline, and national pride. He reiterated the government’s unwavering support for initiatives aimed at harnessing the country’s sporting tal-

ent and promoting a culture of athleticism and camaraderie. Khawaja Junaid expressed the optimism that the golden era of hockey in Pakistan would be revived. He commended the government’s proactive approach for sports development. He assured his full support to the initiatives, discussed during the meeting. He emphasized the importance of nurturing young talent and providing them with ample opportunities to excel.

The meeting concluded on a high note, with both the parties reaffirming their commitment to collaboratively work for the advancement of sports in Pakistan and the empowerment of its youth.

## Jofra Archer: England bowler ruled out of Tests until 2025



LONDON (Agencies): England pace bowler Jofra Archer will not play Test cricket until 2025 but this summer’s T20 World Cup is “absolutely” a realistic goal, says managing director Rob Key.

Archer, 29, has not played for England in any format since March 2023 because of an elbow injury. The T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States starts on 1 June.

“The whole plan with Jofra is he is going to play white-ball cricket this summer,” Key told Sky Sports.

“Then hopefully next summer when we play

India then the Ashes [in Australia] we get him back for Test cricket.”

Archer bowled the super over when England beat New Zealand in the final of the 2019 World Cup.

However, his career has been hampered by injuries since and he missed the entire home summer last year with a stress fracture in his right elbow.

Archer, who signed a two-year central contract with England in October, last played a Test in February 2021.

“Jofra’s been out at Sussex’s pre-season in India and bowled quickly out there. He bowled really

well,” Key said.

“He’s now just gone back to the Caribbean, where he will play a little bit of club cricket, stuff like that.

“It’s all about getting himself ready for that T20 World Cup. He’ll hopefully play the Pakistan [T20] series [in May], but it’s all fingers crossed with Jofra at the moment.

“What we’re going to do is take it slower [rather] than trying to go too quickly so we get him back for not just a short period, but a long period.”

England play three Tests against West Indies and Sri Lanka this summer.

## Bahawalpur Football Association holds elections

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Bahawalpur District Football Association had held its annual elections for year 2024 here.

Under the auspices of Pakistan Football Federation, elections for year 2024 were held here at Bahawalpur Stadium.

Umair Khalid and Mamoon-Ur-Rasheed contested for the office of president.

Farooq Kahdim and Rai Shujaat contested for the office of general secretary.

Munazzam Hussain and Hafiz Hussain contested for the office of finance secretary.

Twenty-Four foot clubs of Bahawalpur district cast their vote in the elections.

Sixteen foot clubs voted for Umair Khalid, Farooq Khadim and Munazzam Hussain, respectively.

According to the results, Umair Khalid has been elected as president, Farooq Khadim as general secretary and Munazzam Hussain as finance secretary of the Bahawalpur District Football Association.

## Muhammad Ali’s ‘Thrilla in Manila’ shorts up for auction



NEW YORK (Agencies): The shorts worn by Muhammad Ali in his legendary “Thrilla in Manila” boxing match are up for grabs at Sotheby’s in New York, part of a growing sports memorabilia market eyed by auction houses.

Bids – including the latest for \$3.8 million – have been rolling in since late March for the Everlast-brand shorts, which are white with black stripes and are signed by Ali.

The auction is open until April 12.

The sale comes as Sotheby’s is auctioning off a slew of sports lots, including a uniform from NBA star Victor Wembanyama.

Despite a growing interest in historic sporting items, Sotheby’s said that, as of Thursday, the minimum price agreed to by the seller of Ali’s shorts has not yet been reached.

Sotheby’s estimates the shorts could eventually fetch \$4-6 million.

Ali’s 1975 “Thrilla in Manila” fight against Joe Frazier was held in the Philippines and followed his “Rumble in the Jungle” bout in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then called Zaire) the year before.

Ali’s fight in the Philippines went to 14 rounds before Frazier’s coach threw in the towel.

“It was like death. Closest thing to dying that I know of,” Ali said of the fight, which was held amid stifling heat and humidity, with temperatures heightened by TV lights.

Ali, born Cassius Clay in the southeastern state of Kentucky, is known as both a sporting great and for his role in fighting for civil rights for African Americans. He died in 2016. Also for sale is a raft of NBA jerseys, including French player Wembanyama’s complete uniform from an exhibition game held earlier this year.

Interest in the game day goods also apparently extends to items from Wembanyama’s locker – including a chair, water bottles and a towel.

For those who don’t have the cash for the jersey – estimated to sell for \$80-120,000 – the locker contents are estimated to go for \$5-7,000.

## Clippers beat Nuggets despite Jokic triple-double

NEW YORK (Agencies): The LA Clippers overturned an early 17-point deficit to narrowly beat defending NBA champions the Denver Nuggets 102-100.

Nikola Jokic’s 36 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists were in vain for the Nuggets. The feat was Jokic’s 24th triple-double of the season but he missed a three-point attempt with seconds remaining.

The result boosts the Clippers’ play-off hopes, though they have already secured at least a play-in spot. The top six teams in each conference qualify for the play-offs while the teams in seventh to 10th place face play-in games for the final two spots.

Paul George scored 28

points and James Harden 20 for the Clippers, who were without Kawhi Leonard, absent for the second consecutive game with a knee injury. Elsewhere, the New York Knicks ended their three-game losing streak in style by overturning a 21-point deficit against the Sacramento Kings.

Jalen Brunson scored 35 points and Josh Hart added 31 points, nine rebounds and eight assists as the Knicks eventually won 120-109. The Knicks are fifth in the NBA Eastern Conference but announced before the game that Julius Randle will require surgery on a dislocated shoulder to rule him out for the rest of the season.

The Philadelphia 76ers

also boosted their play-off hopes with a 109-105 win over the Miami Heat, with Tyrese Maxey and Joel Embiid leading the charge with 37 and 29 points respectively.

Maxey returned from two games out with a hip injury and added 11 assists and nine rebounds in a team effort that leaves the 76ers eighth in the Eastern Conference, while Miami are seventh. In the Western Conference, the Golden State Warriors won their sixth game in a row with a 133-110 victory over the Houston Rockets.

It was a crucial result for the Warriors, with the Rockets being the only team who could knock them out of the play-in spots.





## In brief

### Death anniversary of Ghulam Farid Sabri

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 30th death anniversary of renowned Qawwal Ghulam Farid Sabri was observed on Friday. Ghulam Farid Sabri along with his brother Maqbool Sabri were known as Sabri Brothers and earned much fame in Qawwali. "Mera Koi Nahin Hai Tere Siwa", "Bhardo Jholi Meri Ya Muhammad" and "Tajdar-e-Haram" are some of their most acclaimed Qawwalis. He died on April 5, 1994 in Karachi.

### IRSA releases 85,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 85,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 91,500 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1421.23 feet and was 23.21 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 20,800 cusecs and 30,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1098.10 feet, which was 48.15 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 33,200 cusecs and 18,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Gudab and Sukkur was recorded as 29,100, 32,700, 30,000 and 7,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 23,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 9,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### ANF seizes 170 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting eight operations across the country managed to recover 170 kg drugs and arrested 11 accused, said an ANF spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 1 kg heroin was recovered from a passenger going to Sharjah at Islamabad Airport. In two operations at Sialkot Airport, 1.6 kg Ice was recovered from two Qatari-bound passengers. In fourth operation, 90 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects rounded up from Northern Bypass Karachi. 75 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested near Balali check post Quetta while 2 kg heroin was recovered from two accused netted in Hudiara Kasur. 590 grams hashish and 24 grams Ice were recovered from an accused in Chakwal and 600 grams hashish were recovered from an accused arrested in Mansehra. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are under process.

### Police arrest seven gamblers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police arrested seven gamblers and recovered Rs 18,700 stake money, nine mobile phones, and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that Pirwadhai police conducted a raid and arrested seven gamblers namely Zaheer, Naseer, Ismail, Usman, Saveed, Aqil Mir and Yousaf, who were allegedly involved in betting while playing cards. Police recovered Rs 18,700, nine mobile phones and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is under process.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with British High Commissioner HE Jane Marriott.

## NDMA launches Disaster Management Coordination Forum

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has established a national level forum titled 'Disaster Management Coordination Forum' (DMCF) to bolster provincial coordination. The forum is designed to provide strategic guidance and to oversee, coordinate and monitor disaster management activities and interventions at both national and provincial levels, a news release said.

The inaugural meeting

of the DMCF was convened at NDMA Headquarters, presided by Chairman NDMA, Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik.

The meeting was attended by all Members, including NDMA senior management, as well as the Director Generals of Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs), Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA) and State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA).

The DMCF is set to

meet quarterly to deliberate on matters outlined in the Terms of Reference (TORs). Additionally, NDMA's Disaster Risk Reduction Wing will provide secretariat support for the DMCF, ensuring streamlined operations and continuity.

This initiative marks a significant step forward in NDMA's commitment to enhancing disaster preparedness and response mechanisms across the nation, fostering a collaborative environment for effective disaster management.

### Railways all set to ply four special trains on Eid

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has completed all arrangements to run four special trains on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr to facilitate the passengers leaving for their native towns to celebrate the auspicious occasion with their dear ones. According to the schedule issued by Pakistan Railways, the first Eid special train would depart from Karachi to Peshawar and the other from Karachi Cantonment to Lahore.

As per the schedule, the first special train would leave Karachi for Peshawar on April 07 at 6:00 am while the second special train would run from Quetta to Rawalpindi on the same day at 10:00 am.

The third train will leave from Karachi Cantonment to Lahore on April 08 at 9:00 pm while the last Eid special passenger train will leave from Lahore to Karachi on April 09 at 5:00 pm. All the passengers have been instructed to follow the standard operation procedures (SOPs) during the traveling in the trains and on the stations.

## British HC takes up security cooperation issues with Naqvi

ISLAMABAD (INP): British High Commissioner (BHC) to Pakistan Jean Marriott held a special meeting with Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi at his office here on Friday and discussed a raft of issues.

The British High Commissioner was warmly welcomed by Mohsin Naqvi at the Ministry of Interior building, where bilateral security cooperation and matters of mutual interest were also discussed.

Both sides expressed a commitment to bolster relations and cooperation between their countless across various domains.

The British envoy also engaged in discussions regarding the upcoming Pakistan-England cricket series with Mohsin Naqvi who is also Chairman of the Pakistan

Cricket Board (PCB).

Ms Jane Marriott has been the British High Commissioner to Pakistan since July 2023. Before taking up her current position, she was British High Commissioner to Kenya (2019-23) and Ambassador to Yemen (2013-15).

She has previously served as Director of the UK's Joint International Counter-Terrorism Unit; joint FCDO Director for the Middle East and North Africa; Ambassador to Sana'a, Yemen (2013-15); Deputy and Acting Ambassador to Tehran; and as an adviser to the US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke. She has also completed two postings to Iraq and one to Afghanistan.

## Second phase of Hajj training to start from April 15

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second phase of Hajj training will commence from April 15 and it will be conducted by 40 resource persons and religious scholars of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony at 122 locations across the country.

Chief Master Trainer Ahmed Nadeem Khan said this while addressing the concluding session of training of Hajj Master Trainers of the ministry on Friday.

He further said the Hajj Curriculum Committee consisting of experienced officers of the ministry has finalized the Hajj training curriculum after many days of hard work. He said the committee has finalized the training schedule and locations for the second phase of Hajj training after long consultations with the respective Hajj camps. In the second phase, he said Hajj pilgrims from suburban areas will be provided with suitcase, head carry bag, shoe bag, Ahram belt and women's bag in a phased manner.

complete the training phase before the flights start for the sacred journey.

The chief master trainer said the ministry's mission is to ensure that every pilgrim is fully aware of the Hajj rituals and administrative matters and performs his worship with discipline and integrity. "One of the objectives of the training is to inform the Hajj pilgrims about the arrangements of the Religious Affairs Ministry and the facilities of the Government Hajj Scheme so that they can seek guidance and help for themselves or their fellow pilgrims if needed," he maintained. According to the Ministry's Spokesman Muhammad Umar Butt, mandatory vaccination of all Hajj pilgrims in Hajj camps will be started ten days before Hajj flights and all Hajj pilgrims will be provided with suitcase, head carry bag, shoe bag, Ahram belt and women's bag in a phased manner.

### IESCO notifies 2-day power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Friday issued 2 power suspension programme for April 6 and April 8 for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period on April 6, 2024, from 07:00 AM to 12:00 Noon, Rawalpindi City Circle, Nust Road, Sadiqabad, 4th Road Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Morga, Fuji Foundation, Mohra Nagyal, Mehboob Shaheed, AOWHS, Wilayat Complex, X-Liar Colony, Pindi Board, Parkview, Pepsi, Model Town, Humak, Dhok Awan, Zaraj, I&II, IST, RCC Express, Emirates, Askari-7, Sir Syed Road, FFC, Khadam Hussain Road, Adamji Road Feeders, Jhelum Circle, Mohalla Shaheedan, Shamsabad, Chhapran Feeders.

## Infrastructure development projects pose serious threat to Snow leopards, prey species in GB: WWF study

ISLAMABAD (APP): "Rapid infrastructure development, primarily roads, potentially degrades the Snow leopard (Panthera uncia) habitat resulting in disrupting the big cats' movement and increasing human-wildlife conflict in the Gilgit-Baltistan region. The prey species of the Snow leopard such as Himalayan ibex and domestic livestock are also killed due to heavy traffic on the highways". This has been revealed in WWF-Pakistan's baseline research study undertaken through the project titled "Building Ecological and Sustainable Transport and Linear Infrastructure for Snow Leopards in the Hindu Kush Karakoram Himalaya Landscape in Pakistan (BEAST)". The project was supported by the "With Snow Leopards Small Grant" (SLSG) initiated by Tencent Foundation and Shan Shui Conservation Center with support from Huatui Foundation, Amity Foundation, and Pecking University Center for Nature and Society.

The study recommended that there is need to strike a balance between boosting infrastructure development with conservation of threatened wildlife such as Snow leopards in the region. The report stated that the Gilgit Baltistan (GB) region is home to diverse wildlife including vulnerable Snow leopards. It pointed out that the linear infrastructure development, which cuts through the landscape such as roads, has fragmented the Snow

leopard habitat. The report found that although linear infrastructure improves national and regional economies, it restricts wildlife movement and poses threat to the Snow leopards and their prey species such as ungulates. Focusing on the broader road ecology theme, the study gathered evidence on infrastructure-related threats to Snow leopards and their habitat in the GB region. It collected data on wildlife-vehicle collisions, investigated the impact of increasing infrastructure on human-wildlife interaction and analysed land use changes in known Snow leopard hotspots over the past twenty years. It covered two major roads namely Karakoram Highway (KKH) and Gilgit-Shandur Road which bisect Snow leopard habitat. In the backdrop of the surging infrastructure growth in GB region, WWF-Pakistan launched the Sustainable Infrastructure Initiative in 2019 which aimed to build the capacities of relevant stakeholders, raise awareness, and advocate for sustainable and green infrastructure planning and development in the Hindukush-Karakoram-Himalaya (HKH) region.

Commenting on the study, Director General WWF-Pakistan, Hamid Naqi Khan said that infrastructure development project help boost trade and tourism, but they should not overlook the environment and species conservation aspects. He was of the view that

detrimetal impacts of the development projects could be avoided through meticulous planning, sustainable infrastructure and integrated approach which promotes biodiversity conservation and protection of the natural ecosystem. "It is crucial to build upon this study and undertake further investigations on wildlife movement and migration patterns to assess the impact of infrastructure development on wildlife populations in critical habitats", Khan added.

The report indicated that large-scale transport-infrastructure development and burgeoning hospitality projects have posed a threat to the local biodiversity and pristine landscape in GB. The report proposed that following the current laws regulating wildlife, linear development, and human encroachment should be prohibited in the protected areas. It also recommended that the construction of wildlife corridors and crossings in potential wildlife habitats could help minimize the access of wildlife to high-traffic roads and could reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. It also suggested that the deployment of devoted law enforcement and traffic personnel along wildlife hotspots can help thwart the hunting and poaching of Snow leopards and its prey species. The report also suggested that infrastructure-related development projects should take proactive mitigation steps to safeguard the native ecology and wild species.

## Two-week training course on 'Disaster Resilient Structures' to be held

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTEC) has planned to organize a two-week training course on "Disaster Resilient Structures" from April 22 to May 03. The training course will be hosted by the COMSTEC, the Russian Association of Earthquake Engineering and Protection from Natural and Man-made Hazards (RAEE) in collaboration with the NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan.

According to an official of COMSTEC, this joint initiative aims to bolster capabilities in disaster resilience and sustainable engineering practices. The training course will comprehensively address a range of hazards, including earthquakes, floods, fires, and tsunamis, with a primary focus on cultivating a deeper understanding of risks to infrastructure, communities, and societies.

Leading experts in these areas from Russia and Pakistan will share their knowledge and experiences with the participants. The course will explore mitiga-

tion strategies and promote sustainable development principles.

The content and methodology of the course are designed to develop a deeper understanding of the risks posed by these hazards to infrastructure, communities and societies and the disaster resilient and sustainable engineering strategies to deal with hazards. Those having Bachelors Degree in Civil Engineering are eligible to apply for the course. The target audience for this course includes teaching staff from Pakistan, Russia, and other OIC member states. Around 30 to 40 participants are expected to be benefited from this valuable training opportunity.

The NED University of Engineering and Technology will generously provide airport pick-up and drop-off services, accommodation, and meals during the duration of the training course in Karachi.

The intended participants can apply through submitting application using the prescribed form via email till March 31. For any queries, Prof. Masood Rafi (rafim@neduet.edu.pk) or Mr. Muhammad Ameen Kalroo (ameen@comstec.org) can be contacted.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif presenting a souvenir to H.E. Wada Mitsuhiro, Ambassador of Japan.



### 3 killed in shooting

KABUL (Khaama Press): Local sources in Farah province say that last night, three worshippers lost their lives due to gunfire by unidentified individuals during Tarawih prayers in Farah. Sources speaking to the media have stated that this incident occurred on Thursday night, April 4th, attack in the village of Tokali, Pusht Koh district. Abdul Zaher Khadem, the security commander of Farah, also confirmed the occurrence of this incident and stated that investigations are underway in this regard.

## The Frontier Post

RAMZAAAN 26, 1445 — SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2024

### EU allocates 150,000 euros

KABUL (Ariana News): The European Union announced Friday it has allocated 150,000 euros (over 11 million Afghanis) to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to families affected by the extreme cold temperatures that hit Afghanistan in early March. This EU funding was channelled through the IFRC to help deliver vital relief items to around 11,200 people in some of the most affected provinces, including Badghis and Kunduz, EU said in a statement.

# Amnesty International concerned over continued Afghan migrant expulsion



KABUL (Khaama Press): The International Amnesty Organization has expressed concern over the initiation of the second phase of forced expulsion of Afghan migrants from Pakistan, stating that the continuation of this process particularly endangers women, girls, journalists, and human rights defenders. The organization demanded the cessation of the expulsion of Afghan migrants from Pakistan in a statement released on Wednesday, April 3rd. According to an official

of the International Amnesty Organization, "The repatriation of foreign nationals from Pakistan violates refugee rights and international human rights law, especially the principle of non-refoulement, endangering the lives of all Afghan refugees, especially women, girls, journalists, and human rights defenders." The statement further asserts, "Pakistan authorities' ruthless disregard for expelling migrants, harassment, and violations constitute a serious breach of human rights and a looming

humanitarian disaster awaiting Afghan refugees upon expulsion to Afghanistan under Taliban control." The organization also continues to add that Pakistani authorities "instead of heeding repeated global calls to halt expulsion, the newly elected Pakistani government has further entrenched itself in this issue." Previously, the International Amnesty Organization and human rights organizations have expressed concerns about

the expulsion of illegal Afghan migrants, stating that this scheme affects women and civil society activists. Additionally, Amnesty International stated last week in a statement that the expulsion of Afghan migrants from Pakistan places women and girls at "imminent risk." According to the United Nations Office for Women's Affairs in Afghanistan, 80% of the expelled migrants from Pakistan are women and children, most of whom are highly vulnerable.

# Political parties are banned in Afghanistan: Justice Ministry

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Justice has once again emphasized the ban on the activities of political parties in the country and says that the directorate of political parties has been revoked and removed from the ministry's structures. The ministry stressed that only charity organizations and unions can operate according to the principles and with an official license. "This ministry has suspended the activities of social institutions that were active in the previous administration, and only charitable foundations and unions can operate with official permission," said Barkatullah Rasooli, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice. The ministry officials added that despite the prohibition, some officials of political parties who were registered in this ministry in the previous government have taken positions. "Lately, some officials of political parties who



were registered in the previous administration of the Justice Ministry, have taken positions and made movements from the addresses of their revoked parties," said Rasooli added. This ministry has considered any activities under the name of the party illegal in Afghanistan and has warned that if such activities

are repeated, they will deal with the violators legally. The ministry has also warned the social institutions whose activities are suspended to refrain from illegal activities. "I wish that the Taliban (Islamic Emirate) do not ban the activities of political parties

for accepting positive criticism, for listening to the voices of the people in the framework of political parties," said a political expert. Earlier, Acting Minister of Justice Abdul Hakim Sharai said that parties have no place in the Islamic Emirate and that taking the name of a party is a crime.

# Amnesty intl calls for reopened schools for Afghan women and girls

KABUL (TOLONews): Amnesty International in a report called for the immediate reopening of schools and universities for girls in Afghanistan. According to the report, following the return to power of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan and the imposition of restrictions, the country is on the brink of "irreversible destruction." Amnesty international said it calls "on the Taliban de-facto authorities to grant women and girls their full spectrum of rights including access to education for girls of all ages by immediately re-opening all schools and universities, ensuring access to health-care, and allowing women to return to work." Meanwhile, a number of girl students are once again demanding the reopening of schools and universities. Asma, a student who has turned to calligraphy for the past five months, said she prepares every year to go to school; but this year, she has once again lost the dream of going to school.

"Our demand of the Islamic Emirate was to open schools and universities for girls, but it still did not happen. We are very disappointed," Asma told a TOLONews reporter. "Last year I used to go to school at this time and I was very happy, but this year I did not go to school, and it was disappointing for me," said Mehriah, a student. Other girls who have been left out of school describe their unfulfilled hopes. "This year we were hopeful that school gates would be opened for girls, but once again we were not allowed to go to school," said Marwa, a student. "My request of the Islamic Emirate is simply

to give basic rights to girls, which include education, and to open the doors of schools and universities for them," said Friha, another student. Although seventeen days have passed since the start of the new academic year in the country, the Islamic Emirate has not yet commented on the return of girl students to school.

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# George W. Bush Institute Countries benefit from Afghanistan's mines

KABUL (TOLONews): George W. Bush Institute, in a report, said that countries such as Iran, China, and Russia, along with foreign companies, are benefiting from the extraction of Afghan mines by the Islamic Emirate. This report accused senior officials of the Islamic Emirate of having close relations with two Chinese companies with whom oil extraction contracts have been signed. According to the report, Afghanistan is rich in mineral reserves and other raw materials valued between \$1 trillion and \$3 trillion dollars. "The interests of

regional countries and even global stakeholders are involved, hence the Afghan government must consider these factors and extract the country's natural resources and mines in a standardized and economical manner for sustainable economic growth," Abdul Zuhur Mudabber, an economic affairs expert, told TOLONews. At the same time, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum has rejected George W. Bush Institute's report, saying that the mines have been contracted out transparently and based on national interests.

Homayoun Afghan, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, said: "We completely reject the report and find it baseless. Afghanistan's mines are contracted to domestic companies based on the country's national interests through a free and transparent bidding process, and after the contract is awarded, they are strictly monitored according to their principles and commitments." Meanwhile, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Investment said that the standards set by the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum for extrac-

tion are in the country's interest and have had positive effects on the economy. "The bidding process and the procedure that the Ministry of Mines is conducting are really very transparent, scientific, and professional. One should not be misled by reality," said Khan Jan Alokozay, a member of the ACCI's board of directors. According to the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, the value of small-scale mine contracts is 10 billion Afghanis, and the value of major mines is \$7 billion dollars, which have been awarded to domestic and foreign companies.



# Turkish Mayor issues warning Afghan refugees face expulsion for minor infractions

KABUL (Khaama Press): Ozkan Yilmaz, the mayor of the city of Usak in Turkey, has warned that if Afghan and Syrian refugees in this small city make the slightest mistake, they will be expelled. This member of the opposition party to Erdogan also stated that he would not grant these migrants permits for trade and work. Turkish media on Thursday, April 4th, reflected the new statements of the mayor of Usak. Mr. Yilmaz is a member of the Republican People's Party of Turkey, a party that has recently achieved significant victories in local elections in major Turkish cities, increasing the hopes of its supporters for success in presidential and parliamentary elections. Yilmaz emphasized that he does not want any more Afghan and Syrian refugees



in Usak and will not grant trade and work permits to those residing there. In a contemptuous tone, he said that if these refugees make the slightest

mistake, "I will kick them out without hesitation." Turkey has intensified the detention of mainly Afghan refugees in recent months. The Turkish

Interior Minister has announced an increase in inspection checkpoints and patrols in various cities of Turkey to identify and detain "illegal" refugees.

# Afghanistan urges Pakistan for migrant issue resolution

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Affairs has requested the Taliban

administration of Pakistan to make any decisions regarding migrants within the framework of bilateral understanding.

According to the newsletter of the Ministry of Migrants, Abdul Rahman Rashid, a deputy of this ministry, raised

this request on Thursday, April 4th, in a meeting with Junaid Waziri, the Charge d'Affaires of the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul. Rashid has told Pakistani diplomats that the issue of migrants is bilateral, and decisions regarding them should be made within the understanding between the two countries. According to reports, Pakistan has expelled 535,000 Afghan migrants from the country since November last year and intends to start the second phase of expelling Afghans soon. Recently, Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Islamic Emirate, said at an iftar program at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul, attended by representatives and ambassadors of countries, that more than one million Afghan migrants were forcibly and voluntarily expelled from neighboring countries.





# KP cabinet approves Rs859.8m supplementary grant for TMAs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The provincial cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday approved the provision of 859.8 million supplementary grant for the Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMAs) in the settled and merged districts to meet out salaries, pensions and previous liabilities. According to details, the funds are being provided for TMAs in 86 settled and 25 merged districts of the province. The cabinet also approved the upcoming administrative expenses for which formal concurrence will be given in the upcoming assembly session.

The 3rd meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in which detailed deliberations were carried on provision of grant for Cadet College Spinkai in South Waziristan Tribal District, supplementary grant for the TMAs, and approval of the signing of financial agreement between the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Unit.

While chairing the meeting, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur directed the relevant quarters to come up with concrete proposals to rid the provincial government from unnecessary liabilities, increase revenue through reforms, affective utilization of government property and pragmatic steps to revise the lease policy for enhanced revenue generation. He also directed the TMAs and Agriculture department to increase market places (mandi) in every district of the province.

The cabinet principally approved the provision of special financial grant for Cadet College Spinkai in South Waziristan Tribal District which will cater for the operational expenses of the College. The college is currently providing quality education to students in South Waziristan where fees have been kept at a bare

## CM decides to establish three directorates in Excise Dept

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has decided to establish three separate directorates in Excise Department with the purpose to enhance its working capacity in line with contemporary needs and requirements.

These directorates will include Directorate of Vehicle Registration & Management, Directorate of Intelligence and Narcotics Control and Directorate of Property Tax. The chief minister has directed the quarters concerned to clearly determine the role and responsibilities of the proposed directorates. He added that ultimate goal is to put this important department on modern lines, and all possible steps would be taken in this regard. He was presiding over a meeting of Excise and Taxation department, held here at Chief Minister's House.

The chief minister has directed the concerned authorities to propose necessary amendments in the relevant legal framework for enhancing revenue collection of the department. He also decided to withdraw the Excise department's vehicles under the use of unauthorized persons, and directed the authorities concerned to formally serve the notice to all unauthorized persons in this regard, adding that legal action would be taken against those who do not return the vehicles within the stipulated time frame. All such vehicles would be handed over to police and other provincial departments on need basis. He further directed that the defective and useless vehicles, currently parked at warehouse of Excise department, should also be auctioned in a transparent manner, and made it clear that, these vehicles should not be handed over to anyone on political recommendation.

Moreover, he directed for complete documentation of all authorized persons who are provided with official vehicles. Similarly, he directed to have viable mechanism for collecting commercial tax on residential rented properties. The chief minister has directed the Excise department to introduce GIS system in order to ensure property tax collection in a more efficient and transparent manner. Ali Amin Gandapur made it clear that, he believes in practical steps instead of routine paperwork and presentations; we need to do work hard with concerted and result-oriented approach in order to expand our tax net, he stated. The Chief Minister also directed for necessary steps to strengthen the performance assessment mechanism within the department, adding that the officials with good performance should be encouraged, whereas, officials neglecting their professional obligations should be held accountable.

minimum keeping in view the low economic activity in the area and to provide quality education to maximum number of students. The Chief Minister directed to undertake measures for provision of fund for scholarship to needy students and students with martyred parents of the Cadet

Colleges of Spinkai and Wana.

The provincial cabinet also approved the signing of financial agreement between the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for Sustainable Development Goals Unit.

## Earthquake hits New York City region

NEW YORK (Reuters): A 4.7-magnitude earthquake struck the New York City region on Friday morning, according to the US Geological Survey, shaking buildings and surprising residents in an area that rarely experiences notable seismic activity.

The quake's epicenter was near Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, the USGS said. No damage was immediately reported. The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre initially measured the quake at 5.5 magnitude on the Richter scale.

The earthquake was felt across the region, including in New York City, New Jersey, northern Pennsylvania and western Connecticut, according to Reuters journalists and social media. Charita Walcott, a 38-year-old resident in the Bronx borough of New York, said the quake felt "like a violent rumble that lasted about 30 seconds or so." "It was kind of like being in a drum circle, that vibration," she said.

At the United Nations in midtown Manhattan, the Save the Children CEO abruptly stopped addressing the Security Council on the Israel-Gaza conflict as cameras began shuddering. "You're making the ground shake," Palestinian UN envoy Riyad Mansour quipped.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) told airlines they can expect flights to be held for New York City airports until noon because of the earthquake and delays of 30-45 minutes. Some flights bound for New York diverted to other airports, according to the tracking website FlightAware. "Air traffic operations are resuming as quickly as possible," the FAA said. The busy Holland Tunnel, one of three major Hudson River crossings between New York City and New Jersey, will be temporarily closed for inspection, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said.

The governors of New York and New Jersey posted on social media platform X that they were mounting emergency responses. New York City Mayor Eric Adams has been briefed, and there were no immediate reports of "major impacts," his office said on X. Friday's tremor reminded some residents of the 2011 5.8-magnitude earthquake in Virginia that prompted evacuations in New York City, including City Hall, and caused damage in Washington.

## PPP nominates Gilani for Senate chairman

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) on Thursday nominated former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani as its candidate for the prized slot of Senate chairman.

A notification in this regard has been issued by Jamil Soomro, political secretary to PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. As per an agreement between the PPP and PML-N, the post of president, Senate chairman and governorship of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were given to the PPP, while the posts of Senate deputy chairman, National Assembly speaker and governorship of Sindh and Balochistan were given to the PML-N.

At the moment, Gilani has the support of 24 senators from the PPP, 19 from PML-N, four from BAP, three from ANP, three independents and one from the National Party, taking the tally to 54. If he gets the support of three MQM-P and five JUI-F senators,

then the tally will be 62 which suggests that the ruling coalition nominee will be in a comfortable position to win the election.

On the other hand, the PTI has the support of 20 senators and one each from the BNP and PML-Q, taking the tally to 22. If the JUI-F opts to sit with the opposition, then it would have a total of 27 members.

It may be mentioned that the Senate election on 11 seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has not been held, as the Election Commission of Pakistan has postponed the election there. If Gilani gets elected as the Senate chairman, he will set the unique record of having served as the National Assembly speaker, prime minister and Senate chairman.

The Senate is expected to meet for its inaugural session of the new year on April 9 in which the newly-elected members of the upper house of Parliament would be administered the oath. According to parliamentary sources, following the recent appointment of

Senator-elect Ishaq Dar as presiding officer because of the slots of chairman and deputy chairman Senate lying vacant, preparations are afoot to summon the session.

Both Sadiq Sanjrani and Mirza Muhammad Afridi had completed their three-year terms as chairman and deputy chairman before the recent Senate elections. Therefore, it was necessary to appoint a presiding officer prior to the Senate session.

It is for the first time that the House would be holding a session without polling in an assembly. Hence, the now 96-member Senate will be shy of 11 members when it meets. "So far, there is no indication from the government that the election to fill the posts of Senate chairman and deputy chairman will be held after the oath-taking of new members. There is no legal bar as well in conducting polling to elect the custodian of the House and his deputy," an expert said.



ISLAMABAD: People offering dua during Juma Tul Wida prayer in the holy month of Ramazan at Faisal Mosque.

## Society's attitude towards persons with disabilities deplored

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Any talk about protecting persons with disabilities is meaningless unless rules are framed for putting into operation the laws for the protection of disabled persons already made by the federal parliament and by the provinces.

Addressing a seminar organized in Islamabad today PPP human rights cell president senator Farhatullah Babar said that excepting Sindh neither any province nor the federal government

had been framed rules. He said that in a security driven state fundamental rights and freedoms take a back seat and the bureaucracy feels any urgency to operationalise the laws relating to human rights and welfare of people.

Another challenge is the societal attitude. This attitude is reflected in the statement of a provincial minister in Punjab sometime back that disabled children are the wrath of God to punish parents for their wrongdoings. This insensitivity of the society is a reason that rights and

welfare of the PWDs does not attract the attention of policy makers and no tools are provided to make persons with disabilities economically or politically empowered.

Those insensitive towards the disabled must remember that disability is not a permanent feature and it can afflict anyone at any time. He said that a disabled woman senator recently complained that she was not invited even once to the Parliament's Women Caucus during the last 6 years of its existence.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## IMF ready for new loan program with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The International Monetary Fund (IMF) spokesperson Julie Kozack in a monthly press briefing the IMF authorities have expressed interest in a successor IMF-supported program with the aim of resolving Pakistan's fiscal and external stability challenges and laying the foundation for inclusive growth.

The IMF spokesperson said that of course, IMF stands ready to engage in program discussions in the coming months. The spokeswoman of the international lender gave an overview of rounds held between Pakistan and IMF and said: "So, on March 19, IMF staff and the Pakistani authorities reached staff-level agreement on the second and final review under Pakistan's Stand-By Arrangement, SBA."

"This is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board. Upon approval by the Board, Pakistan will have access to around \$1.1 billion, and that would bring total disbursements under the SBA to about \$3 billion. We do expect the board meeting to take place in late April," the spokesperson said.

"The agreement recognizes the strong, the staff level agreement, recognizes the strong program implementation by the State bank of Pakistan (SPB) and the caretaker government in recent months, as well as the new government's intentions for ongoing policy and reform efforts to move Pakistan from stabilization to a strong and sustainable recovery. "Pakistan's economic and financial improvement has improved in the months since the first review was completed. Growth and confidence are continuing to recover. And we will be releasing in the next weeks as part of our World Economic Outlook, our latest growth forecasts for Pakistan," Ms. Kozack said.

## UN: Israel be held accountable

GENEVA (Reuters): The United Nations Human Rights Council on Friday adopted a resolution calling for Israel to be held accountable for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip, although Israel dismissed it as a "distorted text."

Twenty-eight countries voted in favor, 13 abstained and six opposed the resolution, including the United States and Germany. The adoption prompted several representatives to the Council to cheer and clap. The resolution stressed "the need to ensure accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in order to end impunity." It also expressed "grave concern at reports of serious human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law, including of possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." The council also demanded a halt to all arms sales to Israel, highlighting warnings of "genocide" in its war in Gaza, which has killed more than 33,000 people.

Meirav Eilon Shahar, Israel's permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva, accused the Council of having "long abandoned the Israeli people and long defended Hamas." "According to the resolution before you today, Israel has no right to protect its people, while Hamas has every right to murder and torture innocent Israelis," she said ahead of the vote.

## PTI backed candidates challenge election results

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supported candidates, including former Deputy Speaker Mahmood Jan and Ex-provincial minister Kamran Bangash had challenged election results of Constituencies PK-72 and PK-82, respectively.

The pleas have been filed through Advocate Ali Gohar Darani, who has submitted petitions to the Election Tribunal. The Election Commission, District Returning Officers (DROs), and successful candidates were named as respondents in the petitions.

It is alleged in the petitions that discrepancies were found between Form 45 and Form 47, where successful candidates were declared winners in Form 45 but opposition candidates were declared successful in Form 47. The signatures of Presiding Officers on Form 45 and Form 46 also differ.

The petitions have requested the tribunal to

summon polling agents and Presiding Officers as official witnesses to verify Forms 45 and 46. Concerns have been raised about multiple Form 45s being filled by one person, casting doubts on the election results.

Despite filing complaints with the Election Commission, the candidates claim that their grievances were not properly addressed and their requests were dismissed. However, according to the results on Form 45, the petitioners have emerged victorious.

The Election Tribunal has been urged to rearrange constituency results in accordance with the results on Form 45 and to ensure a fair investigation into the matter. The petitioners pleaded for declaring successful candidates results null and void as well as argued for issuance of successful notifications in favor of them as per Form 45 collected by polling agents.

**Murderer convicted**

**for 25 years imprisonment:** Criminal Model Court Judge Wadia Mushtaq convicted murderer for 25 years of imprisonment and imposed Rs5 Lakh fine over land dispute. According to prosecution, Hidayat Ullah has opened firing on his nephew named Shah Faisal over land dispute while the First Information Report registered on the complaint of deceased wife at Kalu Khan police station.

The murderer was arrested along with weapon used in the offense by police and collected evidence in this regard. The counsel for complainant Syed Mubashir Shah advocate argued that the culprit had killed his nephew brutally over land dispute while wife of the deceased is eyewitness of the occurrence. Model Court Judge Wadia Mushtaq convicted Hidayat Ullah for 25 years of imprisonment along with Rs5 lakh in for committing murder after conclusion of arguments.

## Rallies to show solidarity with Palestinians held

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan on Friday convened countrywide rallies to express solidarity with the people of Palestine on the occasion of Yom-ul-Qudas.

Acting Emir of JI, Liaqat Baloch, addressed the rally in Islamabad, while Secretary-General Ameerul Azim led the protest march in front of JI headquarters, Mansoorah Lahore. Rallies were organized in other cities following the appeal of JI Emir Sirajul Haq.

Individuals from all walks of life participated, holding placards and Palestine flags, vociferously denouncing Israeli atrocities against the people of Gaza. Addressing the participants of the Islamabad march, Liaqat Baloch

emphasized that the Muslim world would diminish in significance if it failed to support Palestine and Kashmir. He stressed that the freedom of Palestine and Kashmir is intricately linked to the freedom of the entire Muslim world.

Criticizing the silence of Muslim rulers regarding Israeli aggression in Gaza, Baloch remarked that these leaders have inadequately represented the sentiments of the Muslim world, particularly targeting the inaction of Islamabad. He underscored that Palestinians are looking towards Pakistan for assistance, yet the government appears more inclined towards Washington.

Baloch highlighted the dire situation in Gaza, describing it as the largest

open jail where thousands suffer without adequate food, medicine, or water, with many perishing in bombings.

He urged the people of Pakistan to attend Eid prayers at mosques while holding Palestinian flags as a gesture of solidarity. Baloch also condemned the police's use of force against participants of the Gaza march, asserting that such actions diminish the government's respect among the populace.

Meanwhile, addressing the solidarity rally at Mansoorah, Azim called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and urged Muslim rulers to take concrete steps to aid Palestinians. He affirmed that JI has been actively involved in supporting Palestinians since day one.

## Israel approves reopening of Erez crossing into Gaza

JERUSALEM (AP): Israel said it approved the reopening of the Erez crossing into northern Gaza and the temporary use of Ashdod port in southern Israel, following US demands to increase humanitarian aid supplies into Gaza.

During a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday night, US President Joe Biden demanded "specific, concrete" steps to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, saying conditions could be placed on US aid if Israel did not respond.

The growing pressure on Israel came after the killing of seven aid workers in an Israeli strike on Monday night, which triggered global outrage at the continuing problems with aid deliveries into the besieged enclave.

A meeting of the security cabinet late on Thursday approved immediate steps to increase humanitarian aid to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, a statement said. In addition to reopening the Erez crossing point, which has been closed since it was destroyed during the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, the security cabinet also approved increasing Jordanian aid through the Kerem Shalom crossing point, the statement said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the measures the Israeli

government has announced to expand the flow of aid into Gaza are welcome but may not be enough to meet the Biden administration's demands for dramatic improvements in humanitarian conditions in the territory. Blinken said that opening more border crossings, if fully implemented, has the potential to surge assistance to Palestinians caught in the fighting between Israel and Hamas. However, the US also wants to see tangible steps to bolster the protection of civilians and aid workers, he said.

In addition, he called for an "independent, thorough and fully publicized investigation" into the recent killings of aid workers. Seven employees of the charity World Central Kitchen, including six international volunteers, were killed in multiple Israeli airstrikes on their convoy in Gaza late Monday. The incident sparked international outrage and put Israel on the defensive about its conduct in its six-month-old war against Hamas, particularly the high number of civilian deaths in Gaza.

"We welcome that steps that have been announced by Israel," Blinken said. "These are positive developments but the real test is results and that's what we're looking to see in the coming days and the coming weeks." At the same

time, he said the US wanted to see a "better system for de-confliction and coordination" so that aid can be safely delivered and distributed inside Gaza.

"All of these things are critical and that really needs to be measured by results," Blinken told reporters in the town of Leuven, outside Brussels, where he was meeting with US and European trade and commerce officials. The decision to reopen the Erez crossing, the main crossing point from Israel into northern Gaza before the war, represented a major shift after Israeli officials previously rejected calls for more entry points into Gaza to be opened up.

UNRWA, the main UN aid agency in Gaza, also welcomed the reopening of the crossings, but said Israel needs to do more. "We call on the Israeli authorities to reverse their decision that bans UNRWA from reaching northern Gaza with food supplies," it said in a statement.

"The clock is ticking fast toward famine and UNRWA must be allowed to do its work, and reach the north on a regular basis with food and nutrition supplies." The agency last month said it had been told by Israel it would no longer approve food convoys to the north, where the humanitarian crisis is most acute.