

Maryam reaches Masjid-e-Nabawi

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, along with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, reached Masjid-e-Nabawi (SAW) to pay tributes (dood-o-salaam) at the grave of Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). On the occasion, Madam Chief Minister offered special prayers for the development and prosperity of the entire Muslim Ummah, especially the beloved nation.



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MAKKAH MUKARAMAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif is being received by Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan H.E. Nawaf Al Saeed Al Maliki.

## Israel reduces troops in south Gaza, Egypt to host new talks

JERUSALEM/CAIRO (Reuters): Israel said on Sunday it had withdrawn more soldiers from southern Gaza, leaving just one brigade, as it and Hamas sent teams to Egypt for fresh talks on a potential ceasefire in the six-month conflict. Israel has been reducing numbers in Gaza since the start of the year to relieve reservists and is under growing pressure from its ally Washington to improve the humanitarian situation, especially after last week's killing of seven aid workers.

The military spokesperson did not give details on reasons for withdrawing soldiers or numbers involved. But Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said the troops will be preparing for future operations in Gaza. Both Israel and Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls Gaza, confirmed they were sending delegations to Egypt.

Hamas wants any deal to bring about an end to the war and withdrawal of Israeli forces. Israel has said that, after any truce, it would topple Hamas, which is sworn to its destruction.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there would be no deal without a hostage release and that he would not cave to international pressure. Hamas says an agreement must include freedom of

movement of residents across the Gaza Strip.

More than 250 hostages were seized and some 1,200 people killed during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, according to Israeli tallies. More than 33,100 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

Around 130 hostages are still being held in Gaza. Asked about troop withdrawals from the enclave, Israel's Chief of the General

Staff Herzi Halevi told reporters that the military was adapting its methods to what has been and will be a long war. Gallant said Israel will press on with the war until Hamas no longer controls Gaza or threatens Israel as a military group.

"The forces are exiting and preparing for their next missions," Gallant said at a meeting with military officials, according to a statement from his office, and "also their coming mission in the Rafah area".

Israel says an incursion into the Rafah area, near the border with Egypt, is needed to eliminate Hamas but anxious foreign powers have said it could exact an unacceptable toll on civilians, with more than a million people sheltering there.

Israel says it will evacuate civilians before launching an incursion.

Palestinian residents of the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, which has come under Israeli bombardment in recent months, said they had seen Israeli forces leaving the centre of the city and retreating to eastern districts.

Medics said they found at least 12 Palestinian bodies in the area. Some residents from Khan Younis, who have been sheltering in Rafah, began returning to their neighbourhoods after the Israeli troops left.

"It seems at the end it may be a happy Eid," said Imad Joudat, 55, who lives with his eight-member family in a tent in Rafah, referring to the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday that starts mid-week.

"The occupation withdrew forces from Khan Younis, the Americans are pressuring after some foreigners were killed and Egypt is holding a big round with the Americans, the Israelis, Hamas and Qatar. This time we are hopeful," Joudat told Reuters via a chat app.

## Israel says it hit Hezbollah sites in eastern Lebanon

BEIRUT (AFP/APP): Israel's military said Sunday its warplanes had struck Hezbollah sites in eastern Lebanon, where the Iran-backed group has a strong presence, in retaliation for one of its drones being downed.

A source close to Hezbollah told an AFP correspondent in eastern Lebanon's Baalbek region that the strikes targeted Janta and Sifri in the Bekaa Valley. The Israeli military said on Telegram that "fighter jets struck a military complex and three other terrorist infrastructure sites belonging to Hezbollah's air defense

network" in the region.

It said the strikes were "in retaliation for the attack" in which an army "drone was shot down" by a surface-to-air missile on Saturday. Sifri is in the Bekaa Valley plain, while nearby Janta is an arid mountainous region closer to the border with Syria.

A source from Lebanon's civil defence said there were no casualties. Israel and Hezbollah have exchanged near-daily cross-border fire since Palestinian militant group Hamas carried out an unprecedented attack on southern Israel on October 7, triggering war in Gaza.

## CM KP stresses modern research in agriculture as per requirements

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur chaired an important meeting of Agriculture Department, in which important policy decisions were taken to develop the agriculture sector on modern lines.

The Chief Minister has directed the relevant authorities to take innovative measures in order to have maximum production with minimum cost, adding that modern farming technology should be introduced and the field of research in agriculture be aligned with contemporary requirements for this purpose. He further directed them to collect detailed data of agricultural lands across the province and to take necessary steps for the cultivation of saffron in suitable lands by upcoming season, adding that saffron crops being grown in neighboring countries should also be evaluated in order to have better production.

He urged upon authorities to ensure useful utilization of available agriculture land in the province so as to make it

an effective source of income for the provincial government.

He directed that agriculture department should cultivate itself instead of giving these agricultural lands on contracts. However, he said that farmers should also be encouraged to cultivate saffron in the land suitable for this purpose.

The Chief Minister further directed them to initiate wild olive grafting program in the merged districts. He underlined the need for the construction of small artificial dams to cultivate vegetables in the districts where there is shortage of water, adding that drip irrigation system can also be introduced in such areas; agricultural activities should be carried out keeping in view the specific climatic conditions and other related aspects of different regions of the province. Self-sufficiency in agricultural production is much needed to control prevailing inflation, he said and added that his government will extend its all-out support to agriculture department for the purpose.

He directed the department to take special steps for

promoting horticulture and carry out survey for planting suitable fruit trees in every district of the province.

Moreover, he directed them to ensure complete transparency in the donor-assisted projects, set up an effective coordination mechanism between the department of agriculture and other related departments, and to establish different wings under the department with determinated role and responsibilities for achieving sustainable goals as per priorities of incumbent provincial government.

Ali Amin Gandapur made it clear that food security is one of the most priority areas of his government? concerted and integrated efforts are needed to ensure speedy implementation of CRBC and other major projects in this sector. The provincial government will extend its all-out support for this purpose, he concluded. Provincial Minister for Agriculture Muhammad Sajad, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Amjad Ali Khan, Secretary Agriculture Javed Marwat and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

# The Frontier Post

Zardari, Erdogan spoke over phone

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari and President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday called for further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries in various fields. The two leaders spoke over the phone and discussed matters of mutual interest, a post on President of Pakistan X account said. Zardari felicitated the Turkish President on the forthcoming Eid-ul-Fitr and invited him to visit Pakistan.

## PM constitutes body to review climate change governance, funds —PM arrives in Makkah for Umrah

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Prime Minister has constituted a high-level committee to review Climate Change Governance and Mechanisms to access Climate Funds and nominated Climate Change Minister, Romina Khurshed Alam and Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Dr Abid Suleri as its members alongwith other senior members.

The Minister of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination has issued a detailed notification explaining the context, mandate, terms of reference (TORs) and list of the members of the Committee.

The committee will be chaired by the Deputy Chairman Planning Commission that comprised of government officials, parliamentarians, representatives from civil society and environment NGOs, private sector, research institutes, and expert/advisors with knowledge on specific topics. The members are Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan (chair), Coordinator to PM on Climate Change, Roinina Khurshid Alam, Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, MNA Bilal Kiyani, Executive Director, SDPI, Dr Abid Suleri, Kashmala Kakakhel Climate Finance Expert, Rizwan Mehboob, Climate Expert, Ali

Tauqir Sheikh Climate Expert, Ahsan Kamran Climate Finance Expert, Nadia Rehman, Member CC PC, Secretary MoCC&EC (Secretary of the Committee), Secretary Ministry of Commerce, Secretary MoPDSI and Secretary Ministry of EA and Additional Secretary (EF) Ministry of Finance.

The Committee will suggest approach that involves mainstreaming climate considerations across all government organizations and operations, as well as integrating them into the development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It includes evaluating the effectiveness of existing and proposed institutional mechanisms such as the National Climate Change Council, SIFC, proposed Climate Change Authority, Climate Change Fund, National Disaster Risk Management Fund, and coordination with key ministries.

Additionally, there is a need to review institutional mechanisms and policies to mobilize climate finance, including climate funds and innovative financial instruments. The appraisal of institutional mechanisms and policies to mobilize carbon finance is also crucial. Furthermore, assessing institutional mechanisms and policies to attract private capital from various

sources such as Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), Pension Funds, Insurance Companies, Commercial Banks, Venture Capital, and Private sector firms is essential. Examining institutional mechanisms and policies to enhance engagement with Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to reduce the cost of finance and leverage private sector investment through grants, guarantees, and concessional climate funds will also be recommended by the Committee.

The committee will make recommendations to strengthen climate governance, access climate and carbon finance, and mobilize the private sector to drive decarbonization of industry, integrate into green value chains, and boost exports in alignment with evolving international regulatory mechanisms such as carbon border adjustments. Additionally, the role of media, academia, and research entities in policy advocacy and formulation should be articulated.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Sunday arrived in Makkah Mukaramah for offering Umrah. At the Makkah railway station, Saudi ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf Bin Saeed Al-Malkiy and high level officials received the prime minister.

## Security forces gunned down two terrorists in Waziristan: ISPR

### E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Security Forces held an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in North Waziristan and Panjgur districts, security forces gunned down four terrorists. According to the military's media wing, an IBO

are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism. In similar intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in North Waziristan and Panjgur districts, security forces gunned down four terrorists. According to the military's media wing, an IBO

(intelligence-based operation) was conducted in the Panjgur District of Balochistan on the reported presence of terrorists.

During an intense exchange of fire, two terrorists, including wanted militant Asad aka Hasrat were

gunned down. Meanwhile, the security forces also recovered arms, ammunition, and explosives from their possession. In a separate operation in the North Waziristan District, the security forces effectively engaged the terrorists' location as a result of which two terrorists were killed. "Weapons, ammunition & explosives were also recovered from them", the ISPR noted.

The military's media wing added that the killed terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as innocent civilians in the area.



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KARACHI: Children waving hands after getting board on Eid Special Train at Cantt Railway Station, departing to their home towns for celebrating Eidul Fitr, festive.

### CCPO reviews police performance

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana chaired a meeting at his office here on Sunday to review ongoing operations against drug trafficking and the apprehension of notorious criminals involved in heinous crimes.

The CCPO ordered expediting action against wanted criminals involved in murder cases and different acts of violence. He asked the investigative officers to benefit from the forensic science lab facility and professional expertise to pursue cases on merit. Affective investigations would help bring culprits to justice, he maintained.

The police are fully determined to eradicate drug trafficking from Lahore, he said and ordered accelerating crackdowns against individuals involved in the nefarious drug trade. He emphasized tightening the noose around those involved in the online buying and selling of drugs.

The CCPO instructed action to curb the drug mafia, ensuring exemplary operations with effective coordination to ensure the eradication of drug dealers. Police's effective crime control strategies and operational measures would contribute to the establishment of a secure society, he concluded.

DIG (Operations) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, DIG (Investigations) Zeeshan Asghar, SSP (Operations) Syed Ali Raza, SSP (Investigations) Anosh Masood Ch., Divisional SPs, SP South (Organized Crime Unit) Aftab Phularwan and SP (Organized Crime Unit) North Furqan Bilal attended the meeting.

### Home secretary visits CPWB

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Home Department Secretary Noor-ul-Amin Mengal visited the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CPWB) here on Sunday and reviewed the facilities, being provided to children residing there.

He was briefed by CPWB Chairperson and Member of the Provincial Assembly Sarah Ahmed on the Bureau's operations and initiatives aimed at protecting vulnerable children.

Mengal went to various sections of the Bureau, including the children's hostel, where he interacted with the children and inspected the facilities. He also visited the Child Protection School, IT lab, activity room, and sports room, taking a keen interest in the welfare and educational provisions for the children.

The home secretary spent time with children residing at the Bureau and commended the facilities being provided to them, as well as the measures taken to ensure their safety and protection. He praised the cleanliness and other arrangements in the children's hostel.

The visit was also attended by the Director-General of the Child Protection Bureau, the Director of Programs, the Director of Administration, and other officials.

## Restoration of law, order top priority of Sindh govt: Nasir

KARACHI (APP): The Pakistan People's Party Leader and Sindh Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah on Sunday said that the top priority of the Sindh government was to restore law and order situation at any cost in the province.

While reacting to a press conference of MQM-P

leader Khawaja Izharul Hassan, he said that the Sindh Chief Minister held a meeting with the IGP Sindh and AIGP Karachi and directed them to restore law and order situation.

Nasir Shah said that the Police and Rangers were not only carrying out targeted operations in

Karachi but also cracking down on street crimes. I do not understand, why did Khawaja Izhari was feeling bad on the appointment of an IGP of good reputation, he asked.

The minister said that the Sindh government would restore law and order in the entire province.

## IG Punjab's message on occasion of World Health Day

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said in a special message on the occasion of World Health Day that only a healthy force can better protect the nation and fight against criminals and anti-national elements with full force.

He said that the mission is to provide the best medical facilities for the police force and their families under the "Healthy Punjab" vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. Police service counters in all government hospitals of the province are providing various facilities to citizens including medico-legal certificates.

The IG Punjab said that for the first time in the history of the country, health screening of more than 02 lakh police force was completed. Vaccination of hepatitis B of police personnel,

treatment of personnel suffering from hepatitis C is continue. He said that psychological profiling of police personnel and concrete measures to restore mental health of affected personnel were implemented. Funds worth crores of rupees are being provided for the treatment of the brave men who were seriously injured in the line of duty.

The IG Punjab said that wheelchairs have been provided to the police personnel suffering from permanent physical disabilities in the line of duty and their children. MOUs have been inked with well-known hospitals to provide free and discounted treatment facilities to police employees and their families.

He said that police officials suffering from kidney and liver diseases have been ensured the best treatment facilities in PKLI. He

said that police personnel suffering from cancer and their families have access to treatment facilities in modern cancer care hospitals of Punjab.

The IG Punjab said that hearing impaired children of police personnel have been provided free cochlear implant facility under the project "Humare Phool". Children suffering from thalassemia and cerebral palsy of police employees are being regularly given funds for treatment. He said that in recognition of the eternal sacrifices of martyrs, the families of police martyrs are being provided free treatment facilities in all public and private hospitals. He said that according to the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, he will carry forward the mission of providing the best treatment to the police force and their families.

## Railways announces four special trains on Eid

LAHORE (PPI) Pakistan Railways has announced arrangements to run four special trains on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr to facilitate passengers leaving for their home towns to celebrate the occasion.

According to a Pakistan Railways report on Sunday, the first special train will leave Karachi for Peshawar on Sunday (today) at 6pm. The special train will reach Peshawar via Multan, Faisalabad from Karachi. The second Eid special train will depart from

Quetta for Rawalpindi on Sunday at 10 am.

The third Eid special train will depart from Karachi to Lahore on April 8 at 9 pm. The third special train will reach Lahore via Multan Sahiwal from Karachi. The special train will reach Sahiwal Multan Karachi from Lahore. The fourth special train running will depart from Lahore to Karachi at 5pm on April 9. Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan for Muslims around the world.

Muslims offer special prayers on Eid morning and spend time with their families and loved ones, eating lavish meals and going for recreational activities.

Railway authorities have instructed passengers to follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) while traveling in the trains and on stations, according to the report. The Pakistani government has announced a four-day holiday from April 10 till April 13 on account of Eid-ul-Fitr.

## Beggars flock to Lahore's markets, malls ahead of Eid

LAHORE (APP): As Eid-ul-Fitr approaches, professional beggars have flocked to markets, main roads, Ramazan bazaars, traffic signals and shopping malls to seek fortunes.

The beggars of all age groups can be seen seeking alms outside mosques after prayers and at shopping centres, markets, as scores of people head to markets for Eid shopping in the evening. Also they ensure their presence at traffic signals and other major roads and use different ways to seek alms from commuters.

But the story goes beyond further as several begging rackets become active as Eid draws nearer. These begging rackets divide their respec-

tive areas while special persons are deployed to monitor their activities and "earnings" on special occasions like Eid, said an elderly man Mushtaq Ali

Likewise, Bushra, an 16-year-old girl, who seeks alms on Ferozepur Road, told APP that no one from her family was educated and this was the best way to earn a living. Bushra said that she come here daily from Sundar Adda along with her mother, 9-year-old brother and a younger sister to seek alms as this is the best way to earn a square meal, she told APP.

It may be mentioned here that to add to the misery, police and district authorities concerned are least bothered about the social evil and sel-

dom take action against professional beggars leaving little for those needy.

Talking to APP, Search For Humanity, an NGO, chairman and child rights activist Iftikhar Mubarak said that police authorities were not paying attention to control this social evil.

This issue was related to the Child Protection Welfare Bureau (CPWB), which was not working in a proper manner, he added. When contacted, a CPWB official said that there was no information available on child beggars or "missing children". "Our teams are cracking down on child begging and launching raids in different areas of the city as per the strategy."

### Indian Sikhs to arrive in Pakistan for Vasakhi Mela

LAHORE (APP): Sikh pilgrims from India will come to Pakistan on April 13 to participate in the celebrations of Khalsa Janma Day and Vasakhi Mela.

Officials of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), Pradhan and other Sikh leaders will welcome the guests. ETB Secretary Farid Iqbal said all facilities would be provided to the Sikh pilgrims. In this regard, arrangements under the supervision of the Board's Additional Secretary Shrines Rana Shahid Saleem have been finalized. The main ceremony will be held at Gurudwara Panja Sahib, Hassan Abdal, on April 14. The pilgrims will reach Nankana Sahib from Hassan Abdal on April 15 and on April 18, they will go to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Narowal. On April 20, the yatrees will visit Aimanabad and reach Lahore where he would stay for one day. The Sikh pilgrims will return to India after completing their 10-day pilgrimage on April 22.

### Campaign against drugs continues

LAHORE (APP): On special direction of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the campaign against users and sellers of drugs has been intensified.

In the last 17 days, more than 10,000 raids were conducted across Punjab, in which 4713 accused were arrested and 4941 FIRs were registered. Over 3,398 kg hashish and 20 kg opium were recovered, besides the recovery of 17.5 kg of the most dangerous drug, ice. During this anti-narcotics campaign, more than 42,000 liters of liquor was also seized.

In the last 24 hours, 427 raids were conducted by police and other agencies, in which 139 accused were arrested and 173 FIRs were registered, besides the recovery of 102 kg of hashish, ice and heroin. The Chief Minister, said, "It is our commitment to protect youth from drugs, we will not give up or back-track from our resolve."

### Profiteers fined for over pricing

KARACHI (APP): In order to stop increasing artificial price hike during holy month of Ramadan, Karachi administration has speed up action against hoarders and profiteers and fine of Rs 978000 was imposed against 81 violators on the 26th day of Ramadan (Saturday).

According to statement issued by the Commissioner's spokesman here on Sunday, action has been taken in all seven districts of Karachi division and profiteers were fined for not implementing government fixed rates of daily use items.

Commissioner Muhammad Saleem Rajput directed all Deputy Commissioners to expedited action against violators so that citizens could be provided relief during Ramadan. The magistrates were asked to visit markets and check rate lists and action must be taken against those who found involved in profiteering and hoarding.

### Experts offer healthy food tips for Eid

LAHORE (APP): As Ramadan is about to end, experts from the Lahore General Hospital have emphasized the importance of maintaining a simple and healthy diet during Eid celebrations.

Assistant Professor of Medicine, Dr. Muhammad Maqsood, and Gynecologist, Dr. Laila Shafiq, highlighted the need for caution in dietary choices, especially considering the sensitivity of the stomach after a month of fasting. They advised against consuming heavy or spicy foods, as they could strain the digestive system and potentially lead to health issues, urging moderation, particularly for individuals with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and stomach ailments.

## Healthy population backbone of prosperous society: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that a healthy population is the backbone of a prosperous society.

In her message on the World Health Day on Sunday, she said that the purpose of celebrating World Health Day is to make people aware of the importance of health. She said, "It is very important for every individual to understand the importance of his health. A person's health is not just his personal matter but it affects the entire family." She resolved, "We want to ensure equal access to health facilities by every citizen."

The CM said that there is also a need to promote

awareness about healthy lifestyle along with the provision of treatment facilities. She advised people to choose healthy lifestyle, and eat nutritious diet.

She said that health reforms have been initiated under "Healthy Punjab Programme" and added that the Punjab government is providing resources worth billions of rupees for the improvement of public health facilities. The Chief Minister said that an air ambulance service will be started, and Punjab's first official Muhammad Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital will be built in Lahore while Nawaz Sharif Cardiology Hospital is being built in Sargodha.

She said that supply of

free medicines in government hospitals has started, and their free delivery at patients' doorsteps will also start soon.

She explained that upgradation of 2500 Basic Health Units (BHUs) and 300 Rural Health Centers (RHCs) has been initiated while 32 field hospitals are also being started to provide health facilities in remote areas. The CM said that a program of 200 Clinics on wheels has been launched for the provision of treatment facilities to slum dwellers in the province.

Maryam vowed to fulfil the goal of building three medical cities in South, Central and North Punjab.

## Minister detects illegal sand and stone mining

LAHORE (APP): In a significant crackdown on illegal mining activities, a major operation led by Provincial Minister for Mines & Minerals, Sardar Sher Ali Gorchani, uncovered rampant corruption and illicit practices in the sand and stone supply chain, amounting to millions of rupees in losses to the national exchequer.

The operation, conducted in the mountainous region of Sakhi Sarwar, DG Khan, revealed widespread irregularities in the supply of sand and stone, with daily kickbacks totaling millions extracted from local officials and employ-

ees, severely undermining the national treasury.

According to a handout issued here, accompanied by his team and local law enforcement, Minister Gorchani personally oversaw the swift apprehension of suspects, resulting in the filing of multiple FIRs and immediate suspension orders issued against the Deputy Director and Assistant Director of the Mines & Minerals Department.

Furthermore, directives have been issued to lodge FIRs against all implicated officials and employees, signaling a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption

and malpractice within the department.

Addressing the media, Minister Gorchani expressed grave concern over the unchecked illegal supply of sand and stone via truckloads across the country, with an estimated 3,000 such trucks dispatched daily, each reportedly paying bribes ranging from two to three thousand rupees per truck.

The minister vowed strict repercussions for any government employees or officials found colluding with criminal syndicates to defraud the state treasury, emphasizing that no leniency would be shown to those involved in such activities.

## ZA Bhutto's anniversary meeting to be held on April 14

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan People's Party Sindh Chapter's President Nisar Ahmed Khuhrro on Sunday said that the main public meeting of the Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's 45th death anniversary would be held at Garhi Khuda Bux on April 14.

He said that the Chairman of Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would deliver his speech to a large number of people in the public meeting.

He expressed these views in a meeting pertaining to the public meeting held at the People's

Secretariat. The meeting was attended by PPP Sindh Chapter's General Secretary Senator Waqar Mehdi, Javed Nagori and other PPP leaders.

The meeting decided to ensure the presence of a large number of the people to pay tributes to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Nisar Ahmed Khuhrro on the occasion said that the all arrangements were being made regarding the public meeting. He said that the apex court had washed the dark stain over the court by giving the historical verdict of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's refer-

ence. He further said that PPP had continued playing its role in protecting the democracy.

Nisar Khuhrro and Senator Waqar Mehdi said that the Sindh government had issued directives to step up action against criminal to restore law and order situation in the province.

They said that IGP Sindh was himself overseeing action against criminals. They further said that Law Enforcement Agencies including Rangers remained present to help police in maintaining and restore law and order situation.

## Advisor Tourism approves holding 3 more cultural galas in Chatral from April to July

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Zahid Chanzeb, Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture and Archeology, after running the Takht Bhai Train Safari on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, has approved organizing three more superb cultural and fun fairs in the mountainous areas of Upper and Lower Chatral during the next four months tourism season from April to July.

These historical galas include the Qaqlasht festival in Mastuj Tehsil of Upper Chatral, the religious festival Chalam Josh in the Kailash valley of Lower Chatral and the grand polo tournament and festival at the world's highest polo ground in Upper Chatral.

This time, these historical and traditional extravaganzas will be organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) under the formal government patronage and the necessary funds and sponsors have been arranged for this purpose. In this regard, a meeting was held at the Directorate General of Culture and Tourism Authority Peshawar under the chairmanship of Advisor Tourism Zahid Chanzeb, wherein Secretary Tourism Mohammad Bakhtiar, DG KPCTA Barkatullah Marwat and other concerned officials participated.

The meeting took stock of the arrangements for the

resources, security, facilities, infrastructure, communication network, traffic plan and other aspects for the successful holding of these special cultural fairs and necessary decisions were taken.

On this occasion, the Advisor Tourism Zahid Chanzeb said that a vivid improvement in the income and economy of the province is expected from tourism industry this time. He said that after the PTI's government coming into power for the third consecutive term under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a large number of domestic and foreign tourists are expected to arrive in this season that begins forthwith Eid-ul-Fitr.

"It will break all previous records of tourists entering Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa because his party chief Imran Khan has given international recognition to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of tourism industry, therefore, along with the tourism department, the divisional and district administrations of the tourist areas, police, tour operators, civil defense and development authorities must immediately come forward to play active role in this regard. He also directed the KPCTA to take over the registration and standard services of hotels and rest houses in addition to activating tourism police, arranging signboards, washrooms and

clean water on the roads at appropriate intervals for the convenience of tourists", he maintained adding that in addition to making all other institutions active for this purpose, he himself will continue to personally monitor the arrangements and will not avoid reprimanding those responsible by taking the strictest notice of any complaint or irregularity in facilitating the esteemed guests and tourists. The meeting after extensive discussion on the arrangements for the three annual festivals, it were finalized and the dates of its holding were also decided tentatively. DG KPCTA Barkatullah Marwat told Zahid Chanzeb that Qaqlasht festival is over 2000 years old historical fair which is celebrated every year in the month of April on the arrival of spring. He said people from different valleys and players participate in the Qaqlasht festival held in Tehsil Mastoluj, that is located at an altitude of 7,000 ft above sea level.

Among the events sanctioned by Advisor Tourism were different sports competitions including polo, evening music, local dance, cultural shows and traditional food stalls while the sports included tug-of-war, special persons sports competitions, skate shooting, marathon races, volleyball, cricket, archery, shooting, football, hockey, badminton, paragliding, table tennis and polo.



## Audit report of Institute of Kidney Diseases Peshawar: Irregularities in purchase of health equipment surfaced

PESHAWAR (APP): Complaints of widespread irregularities in procurement of equipment and construction contracts at the Institute of Kidney Diseases Peshawar (IKD) surfaced in an audit report released here Sunday.

According to an audit report, by buying various equipment for the kidney center at expensive prices from the market rate and giving the construction contract to the company after approval, the exchequer has caused a loss of millions of rupees.

In the audit report of the Institute of Kidney Disease Peshawar, objections were raised on medical devices and other items. Medical equipment and other items were purchased at prices higher than the market rate and by purchasing medical equipment at higher prices, the exchequer suffered a loss of Rs 9.7 million, according to the audit report.

Surgical gloves were

purchased at Rs 112 instead of Rs 71 and a loss of Rs 2.5 million was caused by the purchase of surgical gloves at a higher price, according to the audit report. Plastic bags were bought at Rs. 230 instead of Rs. 197, thus the sale packs were bought at a cost of Rs. 5160 more than the market rate.

Chemicals used in IKD were also bought at high prices, the audit report revealed. The contract for the beautification and construction work of the hospital was given against the rules. The contract is worth Rs. Rs. 88.7 million was given to a private company.

According to the audit report 10% performance security of Rs. 8.8 million has not been taken from the company and the contract has been unjustifiably extended till the year 2022-23. Unauthorized payment of Rs. 90 million has been made for construction work of OPDIBP, the audit report said.

## HBK-PPC Ramazan Sports Gala-2024 concluded



Ali Sheikh

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Press Club Ramazan Sports Gala concluded on Saturday night with an impressive closing ceremony. The event sponsored by HBK Hypermart, witnessed active participation from around 200 working journalists representing both print and electronic media, featuring in six different games. Mayor Peshawar Zubair Ali was the chief guest on the occasion while the presence of prominent personalities such as owners Mohib Afridi of HBK, Naeem Afridi, Jalil Jan of JUI, President Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik, and former President M Riaz added further grandeur to the event.

The two weeks event was organized within the premises of the Peshawar Press Club, in which journalists participated in badminton, table tennis, carom, snooker, ludo and tug of war.

Addressing the ceremony, Peshawar Mayor Zubair Ali hailed the efforts of Peshawar Press Club for holding the Sports Gala-2024 and highlighted the importance of sports in combating the rising challenges of mental and physical health in modern times. He also announced renovation of the main lawn and boundary walls of the Peshawar Press Club.

Cash prizes and trophies were distributed among the



winners and runners-up of different events. Secretary of the Club Irfan Musazai and Ali Sheikh emerged triumphant in the badminton event after they defeated Zafar Iqbal and Shahzada Fahad in a hard fought final by 3-1. The score was 15-11, 10-15, 15-13 and 15-12. Meanwhile Nader Khawaja claimed victory in Table Tennis by beating Mahmood Jan Babar in another exciting final. Nader won the final 11-9, 12-10. Shahzad Ahmed won the Carrom Board title by defeating Shahzada Fahad while Irshad Maidani clinched in Ludo, and Kamran Ali was victorious in Snooker.

In the senior category of Badminton, Shahabuddin and Faridullah clinched success, while the reporters' team triumphed in the tug-of-war event.

The finals showcased intense competition, with Irfan Musazai, Ali Sheikh emerging victorious in badminton, Shahzad Ahmed securing the win in carrom board, Hasan Ali's team triumphing in tug-of-war, Irshad Maidani conquering Ludo, and Kamran Ali emerging as the snooker champion.

President Peshawar Press Club Arshad Aziz Malik and General Secretary Irfan Musazai extended their thanks to the guests and participants, presenting them with sports gala kits and shields, thus concluding the event on a high note.

## Tailors overcharging irk Eid shoppers in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The overcharging by tailors have irked Eid shoppers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and demanded of the district administration to take stern action against price-hikers and profiteers.

As only few days left in Eidul Fitr celebrations, the male and female tailors started overcharging people by earning almost double profit in the last days of Ramazan than normal days that annoyed customers of all aged groups.

In Peshawar, Charsadda and Nowshera, the tailors are heavily charging customers demanding upto Rs3,000 per suit for stitching these days.

Expressing dissatisfaction on overcharging and quality of stitching clothes by tailors, the Eid shoppers asked the district administration to maintain check and balance over the market rates and regulate charges of tailoring as quickly as possible.

"The tailors started looting people as one suit

was being stitched at Rs Rs2500 to Rs3000 these days. Therefore, I opted to buy readymade cloth to save tailors charges," said Qaiser Khan, a resident of Nowshera district.

He accused the district administration for its failure to regulate stitching rates of tailors, forcing many to purchase readymade cloths on Eid.

Zubair Afridi, a lady tailor of Faqirabad said the tailors received double orders on this Eid comparatively from normal days as customers were pressing for new booking despite our refusal.

To fulfill the placed and new orders, he said most of tailors hired extra labourers by working till late night in the local markets at Faqirabad, Qissa Khwani, Karimpura and Interior City.

Most of tailoring shops are overcrowded with customers and many tailors refused to accept more bookings.

Ayub Khan, a tailor of

Pabbi told APP that his business was shined on the arrival of Eid.

He said this was the right time we make some profit compared to other months in the wake of increase in price hike in Peshawar.

He made it clear that charges for suits stitching were almost double because of workload of the customers, increase of electricity charges, shops' rents, labour wages, relevant materials and "we have to put in extra effort to fulfill people orders by using generators in case of loading shedding."

"I visited several tailors shops but was unable to find anyone quality tailor ready to take my order for Eid," said a customer Sajid Khan, a resident of Pabbi.

"I prefer readymade white Shalwar suit for this Eid with matching Peshawari Chappal keeping in view of high charges of the tailors and arrival of summer season."

A online tailoring social

media platform spokesman said that online service has been popular with female customers, and we will continue to serve our people during Ramazan.

He said we were working round the clock to meet placed orders as quickly as possible ahead of Eid.

Another women customer, Shaheen Bibi of Wapda Town said that tailors with own sweetwill increased stitching charges upto Rs 500 for a single suit in Peshawar that needed to be checked by the district administration.

Majority quality lady tailors displayed their notices outside their shops inscribing that 'booking is closed' adding well off families were forced to pay double charges to stitch their suits from their favourite tailors.

The people requested Deputy Commissioners to mobilize his staff so that overcharging by tailors could be avoided on occasion of Eidul Fitr.

## Eid shopping gains pace in Peshawar, many worries about high prices of readymade cloths

PESHAWAR (APP): The Eid-ul-Fitr shopping activities are gaining pace in the walled city of Peshawar as bulk of the shopping centers and fashionable markets have been flooded with many foreign goods and items, which were not available here in the past to attract buyers.

Most of the markets and shopping malls have been illuminated with colourful lights, bunting and were decorated artistically to attract customers during night.

To facilitate the general public, on the special instructions of the Chief Minister, it has been decided to keep the BRT service active till 12 midnight looking after the visits of the

general public to various bazaars, said Sadaf Kamil, spokesperson of Trans Peshawar, when contacted.

BRT service timings are extended till Chand Raat, Spokesman Trans Peshawar informed. Service will be provided on stopping route SR-02 during extra working hours till midnight, spokesperson Trans Peshawar said. Travel facility is being provided from Chamkani to Karkhano Market on SR-02 route, Miss Sadaf Kamil said.

The bus of this route stops at every stop from Chamkani to Karkhano, Trans Peshawar spokesperson said. The last bus from Chamkani will leave at 11 pm, while the last bus from Karkhano will leave at 12 pm, said Trans Peshawar spokesperson. The purpose of extension of working hours is to facilitate Eid shopping to the people, Miss Sadaf informed.

During visit on Sunday to different bazaars, most of the ladies and kids' wears like sharee, short-kameez, lehenga, and imitations ornaments have been imported from Dubai, Singapore, China and Thailand as Eid Special offers, special in the markets on the Main Jamrud Road University Towns and Sadar Shopping Malls.

The fervor of Eid shopping is gradually picking up in Peshawar as the majority of buyers are coming for shopping while several will probably visit Chand Raat,"

a shop owner Wali Khan, told APP.

Most of the buyers nowadays just enter his shop, ask about prices and then return empty handed. The sale will increase with a hope that buyers will come in large numbers as Eid comes nearer, he informed, adding the customers, who are demanding quality products have to pay more for it, he remarked.

Customers however, are not happy with the shooting prices of the imported items like Sohaji Saree and Bezoow woollens, Akhtar jamawar and wallet shaal having the prices at range of Rs. 4000, 3000, 2500 and 1800 respectively in the shopping arcades.

The prices of the Eid Special Offers items are higher than the previous years and are beyond the purchasing capacity of the middle and salaried class. A readymade short kameez was priced Rs. 3500 as against it was available Rs. 2000 to 2200 in the previous year. Similarly, the prices of the children's and teenage girls' clothes are too high and beyond the purchasing power of underprivileged groups. "I purchased readymade Salwar Kameez for myself as I can't afford increasing stitching rates," Siraj Khan said. He said this time the prices of readymade clothes are high like J dot, Maria-B etc.

The City markets and

shopping stores are stuffed with internationally famous brands of cosmetics like Wella, Lakme and Jordana and men women wear like Bazoo, Lee and Wrangler. For these items people usually go to Singapore, UAE and Thailand and other international cities as part of their Eid Shopping.

Some fashionable shopping markets like Hayatabad shopping malls, Deans Trade Centre, Tipu Sultan Road markets, Peshawar Trade Centre, Shaheen and Meena bazaars, Jawad Tower, Qassa Khwani and Karkhano Market are stuffed with variety of foreign goods for the forthcoming Eid shoppers.

The Shafi Market in the

cant area are turned into sea of Women on Sunday as new shops like Johns sons and Moon Internationals were opened to attract the shoppers.

In Jahangir Abad on main University road, majority of new shopping arcades and shops were opened and overflow with famous foreign goods to cater the demand of the affluent Eid shoppers.

The girls are taking keen interest in shopping for Henna and Bangles on Eid. "The shopping of bangles and henna is always in my priority list which doubles my joy on Eid Day," says Anmol while busy in selection of bangles in Deans Trade Centre with her mother and brother.

"The selection of quality bangles and henna are very difficult task as new brands and variety comes to markets. "I finally purchased 10 sets of bangles and henna for myself and family following my three hours long shopping," she added. "The wearing of new and crystal bangles and decorating hands with henna on Eid Day gives me immense pleasure and joy on Eid Day," Anmol remarked.

There are shops in the city, which are selling Punjabi garments with a variety of designs and colours designed locally. It appears that the shopping activities would further gain pace in the markets as Eid-ul-Fitr advent became further closer.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur chairing a meeting of Agriculture Department.

### Bettani vows to resolve long lasting problems

PESHAWAR (APP): Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA) Tank, Usman Bettani on Sunday said that the provincial government is committed to build and develop the rural areas of the district and provide all kinds of facilities to people at their doorstep.

Talking to different delegations, Usman Bettani said that steps are being taken to solve the basic problems including long lasting drinking problem, health, education and infrastructure.

He said that practical measures to solve the problems have been started and as soon as possible Tank people would be facilitated.

He said that cleanliness demand of people have been accepted and the Tehsil Municipal Administration would work now in this regard on daily basis.

Bettani said that the work of the poor sanitation, removal of garbage's dumps and cleaning of streets, provision of street lights would be completed soon.

MPA said that he has raised the voice of Tank problems with high ups and they are committed to resolve it on priority basis. He said that he will take timely action against any officer if found absent.

### Police arrests 20 suspects

PESHAWAR (INP): A search and strike operation in the limits of Kohat Police Station Muhammad Riaz Shaheed was carried out and during operation as many as 20 suspects, including some wanted proclaimed offenders, were arrested with weapons and drugs were recovered from their possession.

According to details, the Kohat Police recovered 1 repeater, 4 pistols, 5 chargers, dozens of cartridges, and 3 kg of hashish from the possession of the detained persons.

A heavy contingent of Police participated in the search operation under ASP Sadar Muhammad Talha Arif led the operation, Station House Officer (SHO) Muhammad Riaz Shaheed Asif Hayat and other heavy Police contingent also participated in the operation.

Action was taken against unregistered tenants and suspects during targeted search operations in various areas.

Cases have been registered against the arrested persons including arms and drugs in the Mohammad Riaz Shaheed Police Station, a spokesman of the Kohat Police confirmed.

## Peshawar BRT extends service hours for Eid rush

PESHAWAR (INP): The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to extend the operating hours of BRT buses in Peshawar to make commuting easier for residents. Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur personally directed that the BRT service should run until midnight.

With Eid-ul-Fitr approaching, Peshawar experiences a significant increase in people using BRT buses. Since markets stay open late to accommodate Eid shoppers, citizens continue visiting them even late at night.

Starting immediately, BRT buses will operate until midnight instead of the usual 10 pm cutoff time on regular days.

To help with Eid shopping, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur stressed the need for the service extension. As a result, BRT buses from Chamkani to factories will run until midnight.

BRT Peshawar is considered a successful mass transit project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and has received international recognition. Its approach includes special buses on the main corridor and feeder routes across the city,

ensuring accessibility for residents from all parts of Peshawar. Reports suggest that hundreds of thousands of passengers use the BRT bus service daily, highlighting its vital role in the city's transportation system.

### Wave of inflation in Peshawar uncontrollable

PESHAWAR (APP): The wave of inflation in Peshawar is uncontrollable as the prices of vegetables and fruits increase day by day despite efforts being made by the district administration to make constant raids to control the price hike.

The price of Onion jumped to Rs 250 from Rs. 200 official rates while Tomato Rs 180, Garlic Rs 650 and Ginger Rs 620 per kg were sold. The price of Potatoes Rs. 110, Kachalu 240, Green pepper 160, Capsicum 140, Eggplant 120, Cauliflower 90, and Okra 360 are sold per kg.

The prices of the fruits also saw a clear increase and the price of Apple Rs. 350, Pomegranate Rs. 580, Malta Rs. 360, Stobery Rs. 280, Amardo Rs. 300 are being sold per kg while banana 200 rupees per dozen is being sold.

The price of live chicken will increase by Rs. 50 per kg, the price will reach Rs. 490 well before Eid-ul-Fitr and the price of eggs is Rs. 340 per dozen which reach beyond the purchasing power of the common people.

## Transforming Manatu: A call for uplift and progress

Farooq Khan

Manatu, a remote area situated 24 kilometers away from Sada, has long suffered from neglect and dilapidation. In this article, we shed light on the pressing issues faced by the community and advocate for much-needed improvements to uplift the lives of its residents.

The 24-kilometer road connecting Manatu to Sada is in dire need of repair. This road is crucial for the transportation of goods, services, and medical assistance. It is high time that this road receives the attention it deserves. Manatu's Basic Health Unit (BHU) should be upgraded to the status of a Civil Hospital. This will not only provide better healthcare facilities but also attract skilled medical professionals to the area.

Education is the key to progress, and the people of Central Kurram Zemshast deserve better educational opportunities. While there has been progress with the establishment of girls' schools, more investment is needed in educational infrastructure.

The recent allocation of a building for a girls' school is commendable, but there is still a need for a computer lab and a science room.

Furthermore, the lack of

hostels for students and teachers is a significant hurdle to education in the region. The government should consider building hostels to encourage more teachers to serve in the area and provide a conducive environment for students.

Agriculture is the backbone of the local economy, with many residents engaged in farming and livestock raising. Thousands of acres of barren land should be reclaimed and made arable to boost agricultural production. We urge the Agriculture Department to take note of this opportunity for growth.

Access to clean drinking water is a basic necessity. Manatu should prioritize the installation of solar tube wells and repair of the water pipeline to ensure that residents have a reliable source of clean water. Manatu's strategic location has made it a historically troubled area. Efforts must be made to ensure the safety of its residents.

Additionally, the government should consider Manatu for a special development package to address its unique challenges.

Manatu has the potential to become a model village, given its abundant olive groves and potential for crop cultivation. Initiatives for olive transplanting, sunflower hybridization, and soybean cultivation should

be started to unlock the agricultural potential of the region.

Improved transportation and connectivity can open up opportunities for economic growth.

Initiatives such as bus services to Manatu and the repair of the Sidh Bazar road can significantly impact the lives of the residents.

Manatu deserves access to essential emergency services. The establishment of a 1122 rescue service and a police station will enhance the safety and well-being of the community.

We humbly request the Prime Minister and Army Chief to consider these issues seriously. The community's future depends on the collective efforts of the government and its commitment to the development of Manatu.

Manatu has great potential, but it requires immediate attention and investment from the government.

With improved infrastructure, healthcare, education, and agriculture, Manatu can become a thriving and prosperous community, setting an example for development in the region.

It's time to transform Manatu and provide its residents with the quality of life they deserve.

(The writer is a gold medalist from Gomal University)





## In brief

### Two sanitary workers die

HYDERABAD (APP): Two sanitary workers suffocated to death due to carbon monoxide poisoning while cleaning a drain in a factory in the SITE area here on Sunday. According to Rescue 1122, their team pulled out the dead bodies, which were soaked in sewage, from a manhole. The deceased have been identified as Amir Maseeh and Azmi Maseeh, both 25 years of age. The dead bodies were shifted to Liaquat University Hospital by the SITE police. According to the eye witnesses, both the deceased had landed in the manhole without safety gear.

### 33 cops promoted

SARGODHA (INP): District Police Officer Muhammad Faisal Kamran on Sunday promoted 33 constables to the rank of head constables in the district. He made these promotions while presiding over a meeting of promotion board. Among those promoted were 29 executive and 04 band staff members. The DPO Sargodha congratulated the promoted head constables and said with the promotion in rank comes an enhance in responsibilities therefore, the promoted police officers should fulfill their duties with complete honesty. The promotion board included the Additional SP Sargodha, ASP City and DSP Legal.

### Motorcycle crushed

FAISALABAD (INP): Two over speeded cars crushed to kill a motorcycle riding couple on Canal Road Faisalabad on Sunday. According to police, Zain, a resident of Mansoorabad was going on a motorcycle with his wife Razia when two racing cars hit and crushed them as a result both died on the spot. However, police arrested both car drivers and shifted the bodies of the deceased to mortuary unit.

### Suspect arrested

HYDERABAD (APP): Hyderabad police arrested a suspected street criminal in injured condition in an encounter on Risala road in the limits of City police station here Sunday. According to the police spokesman, a patrolling team of City police station signalled 3 persons riding on a motorbike to stop for checking. However, he claimed, the suspects opened fire on the police in a bid to escape. One of them, later identified as Syed Bilal, sustained a gunshot wound in his leg during the exchange of fire, he told. He added that Bilal was apprehended but his 2 accomplices escaped. The injured suspect was shifted to Liaquat University Hospital (LUH). The spokesman said that the police were checking the previous criminal history of the suspect.

### Women shot killed

B A H A W A L P U R (APP): Armed men allegedly shot and killed a woman over a dispute in a village lying within the jurisdiction of Bahawalnagar. Police sources said that a man registered his complaint with the police, submitting that armed men had shot and killed his sister. The police reached the scene and shifted the body to the hospital for postmortem. The deceased was identified as 40-year-old Rani Bibi. The cause behind the murder was told to be a dispute. The police have registered an FIR against the accused and initiated efforts to trace out and arrest them. Further probe was underway.

# 182 outlaws held; drugs recovered

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (INP): The Dera police arrested 182 outlaws including 108 drug peddlers recovering over 48 kilograms of drugs and a cache of illegal arms and ammunition over the last month, said a police spokesman on Sunday.

He said the district police led by District Police Officer (DPO) Dera Nasir Mehmood following the directions of Regional Police Officer Nasir Mehmood Satti making all out efforts to eradicate all crimes from the society.

He said the police have arrested 108 drug peddlers and recovered 32.265 kg of hashish, 12,574 kg of Ice drug, 3.388 kg of heroin and one bottle of liquor during different operations taken across the district.

Similarly, he said, the police while taking actions against illegal arms and ammunition arrested 74 outlaws recovering two Kalashnikovs, 14 guns, five rifles, 72 Pistols and 15,564 cartridges.

The police registered

825 cases including 107 against drug dealers, 74 against those possessing illegal arms, six against gamblers, 471 of anti-terrorism activities, 102 against suspects, 16 under Ramazan Act and 16 against Kite-Flying while 33 against violators of National Action Plan (NAP).

**12 butchers held for selling meat at exorbitant rates**

The district administration has arrested around 12 butchers imposing fines on them for selling meat at exorbitant rates.

According to the administration, among other shopkeepers the 12 butchers were held during ongoing crackdown against profiteers aimed at extending relief to citizens during the holy month of Ramazan by ensuring availability of essential commodities at officially-notified rates.

It says that Assistant Commissioner Dera Faseeh Ishaq Abbasi visited different areas including Multan road, Mohallah Jogianwala,

Imamia Gate, Muslim Bazaar and others wherein he checked quality and prices of meat at butchers' shops.

During inspection, around 12 butchers were found violating officially prescribed price list. The assistant commissioner imposed fine over the violators and sent them behind the bars.

Talking to media on this occasion, the assistant commissioner said the action was taken after multiple complaints received by the administration against the butchers regarding meat prices.

He said the administration was committed to provide maximum relief to the citizens and the availability of commodities would be ensured at official price lists.

Moreover, he appealed the public to get their complaints, if any, with the price monitoring desks established at different places in the city so that appropriate action could be taken against the violators.

## Bus terminals inspected to review fares compliance

HARIPUR (APP): Deputy Commissioner Haripur Khan Muhammad along with District Police Officer (DPO) Suleman Zafar on Sunday paid a comprehensive visit to various bus terminals including Haripur to Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mansehra to ensure compliance with government fare regulations among transporters and drivers.

During their visit, they issued clear directives emphasizing the importance of displaying the government fare schedule on the front screen of vehicles. They also stressed that passengers should only be allowed as per the permit regulations.

To enforce these regulations, they warned of strict actions, including permit cancellations and vehicle impoundment, in case of

any violations.

In addition to overseeing fare compliance, the DPO Haripur directed the Traffic Police to intensify efforts to manage traffic flow and ensure fare adherence, especially during the Eid period.

Furthermore, they took the opportunity to visit the main market of Haripur, where they commended the effective deployment of security forces on duty.

## Abbotabad traffic police continues operation

ABBOTTABAD (APP): In compliance with the directives of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Hazara, SSP Traffic Tariq Mahmood Khan on Sunday conducted an extensive operation along Murree Road to alleviate traffic congestion and ensure smooth vehicle flow during the Eid vacations.

The operation targeted vendors, Suzuki drivers and individuals encroaching on roadside spaces as well as those engaged in illegal

parking.

Stringent measures were implemented against Suzuki and vehicles parked in various areas, including Dhobi Ghat Chowk, Jhugian, Bijli Ghar, Kala Pull, and others.

Inspector Traffic Wasim Khan was accompanied by Deputy Superintendent Murree Road and other officials during the operation. Meanwhile, in Abbottabad, the traffic police continued their

crackdown on individuals obstructing footpaths and roads. Multiple FIRs have been filed against encroachers and roadside vendors.

Under the guidance of DPO Abbottabad Omar Tufail Khan and the supervision of SSP Traffic Tariq Mahmood Khan, Abbottabad Traffic Police initiated actions to address the issues faced by pedestrians on roadsides and footpaths."

## Police ensures foolproof security arrangements

KHANEWAL (APP): Police have ensured foolproof security arrangements at churches across the district.

DPO Khanewal Rana Umar Farooq directed police officials to check churches duties on which SDPOs checked the duties of the police employees posted at the churches.

Umar Farooq said that security arrangements were made under an effective strategy to protect the lives and properties of the

Christian community on Sunday.

Provision of metal detectors, barriers and roof duty on churches was ensured.

DPO said that protection of rights of minority was responsibility of police.

**Two motorcyclists dies as car run over them**

As many as two motorcyclists were crushed to death after a speeding car ran over them near Sharif Cotton Factory on GT road.

According to details, an

overspeeding car hit two motorcyclists near Sharif cotton factory GT road in two persons died on the spot. The deceased were identified as Sajjad and Asif residents of Chak No 125/15-L Mian Channu.

The car driver managed to escape from there while police shifted the bodies to the Tehsil headquarters hospital Mian Channu.

Police took the car into custody and launched legal action into the incident.

## 27% world population faces food shortage

MULTAN (APP): Chairman Department of Human Nutrition Dr Tauseef Sultan said that about 27 percent of world population was faced with issue of food insecurity. However, half of Pakistan's populace is undergoing malnutrition, he said while addressing international conference at the Department here Sunday.

The conference was attended by scholars like Dr Esatanly from Nigeria, Dr Traner from Indonesia, Ahmed ul Aareb from Saudi Arabia, Dr Amjid from Turkey, Dr Ansar from Australia, Mazhar Iqbal of Doaba Foundation, Pervaiz Iqbal Ansari from Farmers Development Organization, Dean Department of Food Science and Nutrition Dr Saeed Akhtar and others.

According to World Hunger Index 2021-22, nine countries were suffered badly in terms of food

insecurity.

Dr Tauseef stated that there was need to educate and impart awareness to farmers on modern agricultural practices so that they could be able to produce maximum food.

Dr Estanely presented his research paper on how to lower glucose level in blood. Dr Asim shed light on benefits of camel milk and meat. Dr Hafiz Ishaq proposed solutions to the food shortage.

Dr Shakeel Ahmed provided insight into improving crop cultivation amidst climate change, advocating for adopting specific guidelines.

Dr Tanveer stressed upon the rising challenge of animal diseases, posing a significant hurdle to food acquisition, while Dr Tariq shed light on nutritional deficiencies in rural areas.

Dr Ramzan shared his views on plight of small scale farmers and Dr Saadia

discussed the children's nutritional issues.

Dr Sibat-e-Abbas discussed about protein shortage in food. Similarly, Dr Khalid highlighted the benefits of pulses.

Dr Kinza, Dr Saima, Dr Tauseef, Dr Shaguffa also shared their work on various fruits, vegetables and plants and suggested long term preservation methods.

The speakers proposed collaborative measures to address food and nutrition challenges and stressed utilization of modern technology to enhance food safety. The ultimate goal of preserving food elements is to achieve healthy life which is only possible through a sustained focus on nutritious food intake.

Vice Chancellor Dr Muhammad Ali lauded the conduct of the international event and hoped that it would surely help contributing positively to global food issues.



HYDERABAD: Women selecting and purchasing sandals from vendor in preparations of upcoming Eidul Fitr.

## Soft drinks vendor shot dead

QUETTA (INP): A soft drinks vendor was shot and killed by unidentified assailants in Panjgur, Balochistan, on Sunday.

Police officials reported that the attackers, who arrived on a motorbike, fired five to six shots at the vendor sitting on his cart. The victim, identified as Sajid Hussain from Rajanpur, Punjab, died instantly. The assailants managed to escape the scene.

The Balochistan government strongly condemned the murder of the innocent salesman. A provincial government spokesperson stated that authorities are attempting to contact the deceased's kin and provide them with necessary information, following instructions from Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Hussain's body was transported from Panjgur to Quetta, from where it will be sent to his hometown in Rajanpur.

## Security beefed up ahead of Eid

MUZAFFARGARH (INP): Police have beefed up security across the district to prevent any untoward incident during the upcoming event of Eidul Fitr.

In line with special directives of DPO Syed Husnain Haider, the police have deployed officials at all entry and exit points of the district. The officials have been directed to ensure comprehensive checking of everyone before entry and exit in the district to prevent any untoward incident during Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations.

In this regard, the police on Sunday, arrested an accused Muhammad Ejaz and recovered illegal weapons from his possession. A case has been registered against the accused, police sources added.

However, the DPO Syed Husnain Haider has also ordered increasing police patrolling in the district.

He has also instructed police to set up pickets at different areas.

## USC achieves 101% sale target

MULTAN (APP): Utility Store Corporation (USC) Multan Zone achieved 101 percent sale target with record Rs 4.84 billion sale under Prime Minister's Ramazan Relief Package.

These views were expressed by Zonal Manager Multan Zone Waqar Hussain while talking to media persons.

He further said that as many as 1.9 million low-income people have benefited from the said Ramazan Relief Package.

He said that the Prime Minister Pakistan has given the biggest Ramazan relief package of the history in which BISP and PMT 60 registered families have been provided targeted subsidy. Rs 4.80 billion sale target was set for Multan zone as per package and they have achieved 101 percent sale target due to hard work of officials and sales staff on 25th of Ramazan before the end of Ramadan. USC Zonal Manager stated that stock provided to customers by USC including including flour, sugar, pulses and rice was of high quality.

## KVDA distributed 4000 saplings

CHITRAL (APP): Under Kalash Valley Development Authority, free saplings were distributed among the students of Government High School Bron Bomburit in order to make the area green. Director General KVDA Minhasuddin was the guest on this occasion. In this regard, a brief event was also organized in High School Bron, in which the principal of the school and other experts highlighted the importance and benefits of trees and plants.

In the plantation drive, the forest department had given them free saplings and with the support of a non-governmental organization, these saplings were distributed among the students free of charge. On this occasion, they will be enlightened on the importance of plants and their positive impact on climate change.

A total of 25000 saplings were distributed free in the same school. Speaking on this occasion, Director

General Minhasuddin said that apart from this, he also distributed 700 fruit trees to the people for free and told the local people about their importance so that they not only plant these plants but also cultivate them and care for them.

Munhasuddin further said that Chitral is a dry zone, there is no monsoon rains, due to which we often face massive loss of life and property in case of floods.

He said that we made it clear to the school children and teachers in this event that if we plant more trees, we can avoid the flood damage because when these plants grow up to become trees, it will act as a natural check dam.

When the flood water comes down from the mountains, its speed is very fast, but this tree reduces its speed by becoming an obstacle in its path.

School Principal Sanaullah said that children are very eager to do new work, they want to do

everything according to their own will, so we have given them this task today that we will distribute free houseplants to them so that they will be able to plant them.

"If you plant these plants, you will continue to water them and by cultivating them, you will also make them successful," he added. He said we have to educate our younger generation about the importance of plants for their healthier lives.

Owais Ahmed, Project Manager said that we have distributed more than 4000 free plants in Kalash Valley and educate the children in the schools about the benefits and importance of these plants. One plant provides us with more than Rs. 70,000 of free oxygen in a year and these plants grow up and have a very positive impact on our environment and can keep Chitral green and clean. As part of the program, free saplings were also distributed among the school children.

## FIA arrests three members of hawala hundi gang

DG KHAN (INP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has arrested three members of an organized hawala-hundi gang from Dera Ghazi Khan.

The FIA spokesperson reported that the apprehended individuals identified as Ali Haider, Muhammad Khan, Abdul Aziz and substantial amount of Rs59 lac, debt card, cheque books and mobile phones was also seized from the suspects possession.

Earlier, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) claimed to have arrested a total of seven individuals, including four wanted culprits, allegedly involved in human trafficking and operating illegal money exchange business.

As per FIA spokesperson, revealed that the individuals were arrested from different cities across the country including Multan, DG Khan, and Bahawalpur.

The FIA spokesperson

reported that the apprehended individuals were found to be in possession of a substantial amount of local currency, exceeding Rs 1 million in cash, while a significant sum of foreign currency, amounting to 4562 Saudi Riyals, was also seized from the suspects.

The FIA has vowed to continue its efforts to root out such unlawful practices and bring the perpetrators to justice.

## Greece boat tragedy's prime accused arrested

SARGODHA (INP): Police has arrested the prime accused of Greece boat incident from Phularwan area of Sargodha.

It was disclosed after arrest of Yasir Bilal that the accused has been affiliated with an international network of human smuggling, police sources said.

Phularwan police arrested accused Yasir and recovered illegal arms from his possession. It was disclosed during questioning to the suspect that, he has been prime accused of the Greece boat incident.

The police after formalities handed over the

accused to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

The accused had received millions of rupees from the victims of the June boat tragedy and facilitated them to board on the ill-fated boat that capsized in Greece territorial waters leaving several youth dead.

He has been key accused in two FIRs of the FIA and was at large after the incident. The law enforcement agencies searching for other accomplices of the accused.

Last year in June, an Italy-bound fishing trawler reportedly carrying at least

800 people — including hundreds of Pakistanis — capsized off Greece. Only 104 people are known to have survived in the incident.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had directed authorities concerned to hold an inquiry into the human trafficking that led to the tragic incident of migrants' shipwreck near Greece with several Pakistani nationals onboard.

He had directed concerned authorities for an immediate crackdown against agents involved in the heinous crime of human trafficking and called for bringing them to justice.

## Punjab farmers to hold massive protest after Eid

MULTAN (INP): Punjab farmers' union Kisan Ittehad has warned of strong protests across the province after Eid-ul-Fitr, slamming the government for maintaining a low support price for wheat.

Kisan Ittehad Chairman Chaudhry Khalid Hussain Bath criticized the government's decision to keep the wheat support price at Rs 3,900 per maund, terming it insufficient. He pointed out that the price remained unchanged from last year,

despite a significant rise in production costs.

Bath highlighted the doubling of prices for agricultural essentials like fertilizer, electricity, and diesel. He argued that the government should have increased the support price proportionally to inflation to ensure fair compensation for farmers.

The Kisan Ittehad leader expressed disappointment with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, accusing her of failing to fulfill her

promises to support farmers. He called the current policy "anti-farmer" and demanded an immediate revision of the wheat support price to at least Rs 5,000 per maund.

Bath further pointed out the disparity with neighboring Sindh province, which had set a higher support price of Rs 4,600 per maund for wheat. He vowed that Punjab farmers would hold strong protests after Eid to demand a fairer deal from the government.





## Pellegrini wins Slovakia presidential election

BRATISLAVA (AFP/APP): Ukraine-sceptic government ally Peter Pellegrini won Slovakia's presidential election Saturday against pro-Western diplomat Ivan Korcok.

Opposition-backed Korcok conceded defeat as nearly complete results showed he had received 47 percent of the vote against former prime minister Pellegrini's 53 percent. "It is a huge satisfaction," Pellegrini said in Bratislava, vowing "to ensure that Slovakia remains on the side of peace and not on the side of war".

Ahead of the run-off, Pellegrini had said he advocated peace talks with Russia. Korcok argued he did not believe Ukraine should give up territory to achieve peace.

Divisions over the Ukraine war dominated the run-off vote given the starkly opposing views of the conflict by the two candidates for the post that is largely ceremonial.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine became a fixture of the electoral campaign in the EU and NATO member of 5.4 million people after populist Prime Minister Robert Fico, Pellegrini's ally, questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and called for peace with

Russia. The government in office since October includes Fico's Smer party, Pellegrini's Hlas and the small far-right SNS. It has discontinued military aid to Ukraine.

Pellegrini, 48, thanked his coalition partners after his win. Korcok said he was "disappointed" but he respected the result.

"I want to express my belief that Peter Pellegrini will be independent and will act according to his own convictions and without orders," the 60-year-old added.

"It turns out that it is possible to become the president of the Slovak Republic by spreading hatred. The campaign can also be won by making me a war candidate."

Fico had called Korcok a "warmonger" in a video ahead of the run-off, whose turnout was 61 percent.

He "will support everything the West tells him without hesitation, including dragging Slovakia into the war", the prime minister added.

Fico backed Pellegrini as "a moderate candidate who recognises the value of peace".

Analyst Tomas Kozciak had told AFP that in the event of a Pellegrini win, "Slovakia could go the 'Orban

way," referring to Kremlin-friendly Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Earlier Saturday Pellegrini had argued that the election was "not about the future direction of foreign policy in Slovakia".

He had said whatever the outcome, "we will continue to be a strong member of the European Union and NATO." Pellegrini was prime minister from 2018 to 2020 after Fico was toppled from a previous stint as premier following the murders of journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée.

The double murder sparked large rallies that forced Fico's resignation as Kuciak had been working on links between the Italian mafia and Smer-SD. Pellegrini will replace outgoing President Zuzana Caputova, who is staunchly pro-Ukraine like Korcok. No candidate took 50 percent of the vote in the first round last month, forcing a second round of voting. Though the office is largely ceremonial, Slovakia's president has the power to ratify international treaties as well as veto laws passed by parliament and appoint top judges. The position also serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Pellegrini will be sworn in on June 15.

## Russia evacuates almost 4,500 people after dam burst

MOSCOW (AFP/APP): Russia on Saturday said it had evacuated almost 4,500 people in the Orenburg region in the southern Urals due to flooding after a dam burst. Emergency services worked through the night after a dam burst in the city of Orsk, near the border with Kazakhstan, on Friday.

The press service of the Orenburg governor said "4,402 people, including 1,100 children" had been evacuated and more than 6,000 homes were affected by the flooding after torrential rain.

President Vladimir Putin ordered Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Kurenkov to the region, a Kremlin spokesman said late Saturday.

Authorities also opened a criminal case for "negligence and violation of construction safety rules" over the burst dam, which was built in 2014.

Authorities said the situation was difficult throughout the region, warning of a dangerous water level on the Ural river in the main city of Orenburg. The mayor of the city of half a million people, Sergei Salmin, said authorities would forcibly evacuate people from flooded zones if necessary. He said the water level of the Ural river had risen to dangerous levels and will rise further.

"The situation leaves you no choice. At night, the river can



reach a critical level," he said. "I call on everyone in the flooded zone to leave their houses immediately."

"There is no time for convincing," he added, saying that "those who refuse to leave the danger zone voluntarily, we will forcibly evacuate with the help of police officers".

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said the floods

were one of the worst natural disasters in Kazakhstan in 80 years.

He called for authorities in the Central Asian country to be ready to help those affected.

Russian emergency services published images of rescue workers going through villages on boats and hovercrafts. Several regions in the Urals and western Siberia have been affected by floods since the start of spring.

## Ecuador faces diplomatic backlash after raid at Mexican embassy in Quito

QUITO (AFP/APP): Ecuador found itself at the center of a growing diplomatic melee Saturday after authorities stormed the Mexican embassy in Quito to arrest former vice president Jorge Glas, who had been granted political asylum there.

The incident Friday night prompted Mexico to quickly sever diplomatic ties with the South American nation, citing the "violation of international law." Nicaragua followed suit. Images taken by AFP showed police special forces massed outside the embassy and at least one agent scaling its walls.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said authorities "forcibly entered" the building to arrest Glas, accused of corruption.

"This is a flagrant violation of international law

and the sovereignty of Mexico," he said on social media platform X.

Foreign minister Alicia Barcena said on X: "Mexico announces the immediate breaking of diplomatic relations with Ecuador."

She added that Mexican diplomatic personnel will immediately leave the South American country and asked Quito to "offer the necessary guarantees" for their movement.

Nicaragua joined Mexico in cutting ties with Ecuador on Saturday, with the government of President Daniel Ortega announcing the break following the "unusual and reprehensible action" of the embassy storming.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva condemned the operation "in the strongest terms" and expressed "all of my soli-

darity" with Lopez Obrador."

Several other countries in the region, including Venezuela, Cuba, Chile and Bolivia, also hit out at Ecuador's actions.

And Honduras called for an urgent convening of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States over the matter.

Mexico had complained earlier Friday of "harassment" due to an increased police presence outside its Quito embassy.

According to an AFP photographer at the scene, Glas, 54, was moved Saturday from the holding facility he had spent the night in. The government said he was transferred to a maximum-security prison in the port city of Guayaquil.

The former Ecuadoran vice president -- who served under leftist

President Rafael Correa -- sought refuge in the Mexican embassy last December after authorities issued a warrant for his arrest for alleged corruption.

His asylum request was formally granted on Friday, angering Quito and deepening the diplomatic dispute between the two Latin American nations.

Ecuadoran President Daniel Noboa's government called the move an "illicit act," while Mexico insisted it had granted political asylum to Glas "after a thorough analysis."n Former president Correa, who has been exiled in Belgium since 2017 and was sentenced in absentia to eight years in prison for corruption, wrote on X that "not even in the worst dictatorships has a country's embassy been violated."

## Ousted Ivory Coast leader Gbagbo seeks return to presidency

AGBOVILLE (AFP/APP): Thousands of people turned out Saturday to see Ivory Coast's former president Laurent Gbagbo announce his bid to return to office even though he is ineligible.

Supporters came from all over the country to Agboville, 70 kilometres (43 miles) north of Abidjan, to hear 78-year-old Gbagbo denounce "the high cost of living" in a lengthy speech lasting more than two hours. Gbagbo, who was president from 2000 to 2011, would like to represent the African People's Party-Cote d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) but is barred from running because of a 20-year jail sentence for looting the Central Bank of West

African States (BCEAO) in 2011 during a bloody post-election crisis that left 3,000 dead.

Even if he was acquitted in 2021 by the International Criminal Court of human rights abuses allegedly committed during the crisis and pardoned by President Alassane Ouattara a year later for the BCEAO case, he has not been amnestied, which bars him from electoral lists.

"I am not guilty", he declared Saturday, saying he would divulge documents in the coming days to "reveal the truth."

"For peace, for cohesion" we must adopt an "amnesty law", said Bertin Kouassi Kouadio, federal

secretary of the PPA-CI in Yopougon, a working class area of Abidjan.

Gbagbo's supporters are already organised for the elections that must be held within 18 months.

On Saturday, they paraded through the streets of Agboville, to the rhythm of traditional drums and singing in praise of their "president". Eloge Paibo, head of the PPA-CI in Abidjan, said the rally would "remobilise the troops". "This mobilisation should show the whole world that president Gbagbo has the means to win," said Ines Nadege Blezira, a pro-Gbagbo activist for more than 30 years, who held a banner in

the party's blue colours.

The wider popularity of Gbagbo, who spent almost 10 years outside Ivory Coast when he was imprisoned at the ICC, is difficult to measure.

In the 2023 local elections, the PPA-CI won only a handful of towns and its leaders lost in many municipalities and regions.

So far, Gbagbo is the only political heavyweight to have declared their candidacy. Tidjane Thiam, leader of the main opposition party, is expected to be named by the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI), but President Ouattara has yet to say if he's running for a fourth term.

## Polish pro-EU wing wants local vote to end 'age of populism'

WARSAW (AFP/APP): Poland's ruling pro-European coalition parties are hoping Sunday's local election will put an end to an "age of populism" represented by the previous nationalist government.

The vote is seen as a first test for the ruling centre-left coalition of Prime Minister Donald Tusk, which emerged from the October general election.

Voters in the EU and NATO member of 38 million people will choose mayors and local and regional government members from among almost 200,000 candidates.

On the national scale, the vote "will be tantamount to a referendum on the political parties", Stanislaw Moeck, a professor at the Collegium Civitas university in Warsaw, told AFP.

Opinion polls show Tusk's centrist Civic Coalition (KO) neck and neck with the nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS) which ruled the country until last year, with both scoring just under 30 percent backing. The election could serve as a litmus test for

the two parties on a national scale, but the vote will be crucial for the country's 16 regional councils. Members of the ruling coalition, running separately, are hoping to win in all but one of them.

The KO will be counting on its allies, the Christian-Democratic party Third Way and the Left party, to help the pro-European camp prevail. The PiS, which currently rules in five regions, may team up with the far-right Confederation or minor regional groupings after the vote. Anna Materska-Sosnowska, an analyst at the Stefan Batory Foundation, said that if the pro-EU alliance wins, it will "confirm a rejection of undemocratic tendencies" among the country's voters.

Tusk, who served as the European Council head in 2014-2019, highlighted this during the campaign, saying the country was "rebuilding the rule of law these days" after the PiS rule. His ally Rafal Trzaskowski, the mayor of Warsaw who is seeking to extend his term in the vote, said Friday that "a second stage is needed in this march to

end the age of populism represented by the PiS".

The pro-Western parties need a big win also because the Tusk government is facing criticism from some voters for a slow pace of reforms after the first 100 days in office.

For the PiS, which is still the largest party in parliament, the election is "a chance to see what degree of support they can count on", said Materska-Sosnowska.

On the national level, the PiS is hoping to remain the country's biggest party, fuelling its hopes of returning to power some day.

Its loss to KO could in turn result in a collapse of the party led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski in the longer term, analysts said.

Former PiS Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has recently warned that his party should "get ready for a tough race ahead".

The PiS can count on its faithful voters in smaller towns and the countryside, especially in Poland's rural east and southeast.

The ruling coalition is all but certain to prevail

in large cities.

In Warsaw, Trzaskowski is tipped to win the mayor's seat in the first round.

A second-round decider two weeks later would be perceived as a major surprise. The election campaign was focused largely on local issues, such as transport, housing and the reinforcement of local and regional governments after years of centralisation pushed by the PiS.

The campaign was marked by farmers' rallies in protest against the EU's Green Deal and cheap grain imports from Ukraine.

Protesters were also angry about financial scandals linked to the previous government and a rift in the ruling coalition over bids to liberalise the abortion law in the strongly Catholic country. Turnout is expected to trail the record-high 74.4 percent from last year's general election, which propelled the Tusk-led coalition to power. Polling stations will open at 0500 GMT and close at 1900 GMT on Sunday, with exit polls to be published shortly afterwards.

## AI vs humans: influencers face competition from virtual models

PARIS (AFP/APP): Social media influencers have embraced artificial intelligence to spice up their content but they are also facing growing competition from AI-generated Instagramers, TikTokers and YouTubers.

Sporting pink hair and posing in lingerie, swimsuits or gym outfits, Aitana Lopez has more than 300,000 followers on Instagram where she is described as a "gamer at heart" and "fitness lover" -- except she's not real.

Aitana was created by The Clueless, a Barcelona-based company that describes itself as an "AI modeling agency" run by "visionaries on a mission to redefine the world of influencers".

Sofia Novales, project manager at The Clueless, said the "rising costs associated with human influencers" was a reason behind the company's creation.

"Virtual models, being digital, present a more economical alternative," Novales said.

Another plus: total control over content. "The advantages lie in unparalleled creative control, allowing seamless decision-making on image, fashion, and aesthetics without the need for physical photoshoots,"

Novales said.

The rise of AI has fuelled concerns about the proliferation of deepfake videos that could be used maliciously.

Meta, owner of Facebook and Instagram, said Friday it would start putting "Made with AI labels" on AI-generated content in May.

AI presents a huge business opportunity for content creators: The influencer market is expected to grow rapidly, from \$16.5 billion in 2022 to nearly \$200 billion by 2032, according to Allied Market Research.

Using virtual influencers is not new: Barbie already has millions of followers on Instagram.

But they are now being used in advertisements where they can't be told apart from a real person.

Take Lil Miquela, a "19-year-old Robot living in LA" created by a California agency in 2016.

With 2.6 million followers on Instagram and 3.5 million on TikTok, Lil Maqueta has promoted brands as big as BMW.

The idea was to "create something never seen before," the German premium carmaker said in a statement to AFP.

"Attracting a younger, technology-savvy genera-

tion is for us the icing on the cake," it said.

Maud Lejeune, who heads up the Paris-based digital strategy agency AD Crew, said that it isn't difficult for the public to accept AI influencers.

"It's like actors on TV: we know it isn't real yet we follow them and we find it interesting, it's like watching a mini-series."

AD Crew represents more than 30 influencers, but Lejeune created her own virtual influencer, Metagaya, two years ago.

"The current level of design didn't exist then. It's technical, you've got to dress them, take photos for the background, create a story," said Lejeune, acknowledging that Metagaya didn't turn out very well.

The rapid technological progress brought by the likes of OpenAI's Sora video generator could make it easier to create and operate realistic virtual influencers.

Human influencers are also seizing on AI technology to make better videos. France's Charles Sterlings sees an opportunity to improve translations.

He uses different tools on platforms like HeyGen and Rask.ai to automatically translate and lip-sync his video posts into

English and Spanish.

Sterlings also uses Deepshot, a platform that allows users to create deepfakes by changing the words and mouth movement of people in real videos.

He said it took him just a few minutes and a few dollars to manipulate a video of French President Emmanuel Macron.

But Sterlings sees the technology as a competitor as well as a useful tool.

"Anyone with a phone can be an influencer. But eventually, it will be artificial intelligence, available 24 hours a day, and much cheaper to develop," he said.

For Maud Lejeune, AI can help influencers produce more content.

"It's tough to put yourself in front of the camera for a long time and certain creators burn out... Maybe AI will provide a new way to create without exposing oneself," she said. The Clueless has no qualms about its AI models taking away business from real influencers.

"We don't foresee real models becoming obsolete or replaced by AI-generated models like Aitana," said Novales. "In our view, they can coexist as another competition of the industry."

## Top Europe rights court to issue landmark climate verdicts

STRAZBOURG (AFP/APP): Europe's top rights court will on Tuesday issue unprecedented verdicts in three separate cases on the responsibility of states in the face of global warming, rulings that could force governments to adopt more ambitious climate policies.

The European Court of Human Rights, part of the 46-member Council of Europe, will rule on whether governments' climate change policies are violating the European Convention on Human Rights, which it oversees.

All three cases accuse European governments of inaction or insufficient action in their measures against global warming.

In a sign of the importance of the issue, the cases have all been treated as priority by the Grand Chamber of the ECHR, the court's top instance, whose 17 judges can set a potentially crucial legal precedent. It will be the first time the court has issued a ruling on climate change.

While several European states, including France,

have already been condemned by domestic courts for not fulfilling commitments against global warming, the ECHR could go further and make clear new fundamental rights.

The challenge lies in ensuring "the recognition of an individual and collective right to a climate that is as stable as possible, which would constitute an important legal innovation", said lawyer and former French environment minister Corinne Lepage, who is defending one of the cases.

The court's position "may mark a turning point in the global struggle for a livable future," said lawyer Gerry Liston, of the NGO Global Legal Action Network (GLAN).

"A victory in any of the three cases could constitute the most significant legal development on climate change for Europe since the signing of the Paris 2015 Agreement" that set new targets for governments to reduce emissions, he said.

Even if the Convention does not contain any explicit provision relating to the environment, the Court has already ruled

based on Article 8 of the Convention -- the right to respect for private and family life -- an obligation of States to maintain a "healthy environment", in cases relating to waste management or industrial activities. Of the three cases which will be decided on Tuesday, the first is brought by the Swiss association of Elders for Climate Protection -- 2,500 women aged 73 on average -- and four of its members who have also put forward individual complaints.

They complain about "failings of the Swiss authorities" in terms of climate protection, which "would seriously harm their state of health".

Damien Careme, former mayor of the northern French coastal town of Grande-Synthe, in his case attacks the "deficiencies" of the French state, arguing they pose a risk of his town being submerged under the North Sea.

In 2019, he already filed a case at France's Council of State -- its highest administrative court -- alleging "climate inaction" on the part of France. The

court ruled in favour of the municipality in July 2021, but rejected a case he'd brought in his own name, leading Careme to take it to the ECHR.

The third case was brought by a group of six Portuguese, aged 12 to 24, inspired to act after fires ravaged their country in 2017. Their case is not only against Portugal, but also 31 other states (every EU country, plus Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and Russia). Almost all European countries belong to the Council of Europe, not just EU members.

Russian was expelled from the COE after its invasion of Ukraine but cases against Moscow are still heard at the court.

The ECHR hears cases only when all domestic appeals have been exhausted. Its rulings are binding, although there have been problems with compliance of certain states such as Turkey. The three cases rely primarily on articles in the Convention that protect the "right to life" and the "right to respect for private life".



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## Gaza War and Arab Advocacy

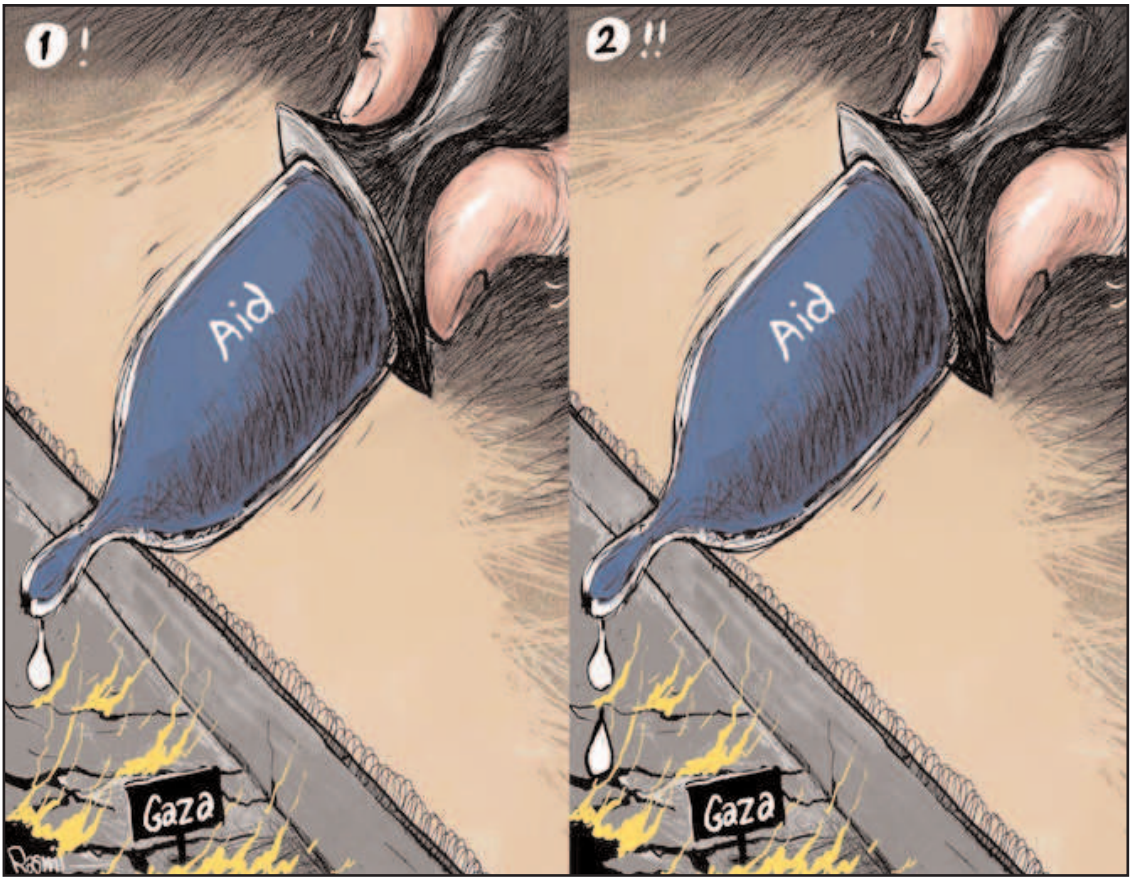
A group of Arab countries at the UN called on the Security Council to invoke Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, to force Israel to implement an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for the remainder of Ramadan and allow humanitarian workers to freely distribute aid and prevent a looming famine in the territory. This followed two separate resolutions demanding that Israeli authorities lift restrictions on humanitarian workers and allow the delivery of aid to the starving population of the enclave at the scale needed to address the growing crisis in the territory. Unfortunately, the Israeli military blatantly targets journalists, hospitals, and ambulances. medical staff, and aid workers without any remorse and fear of accountability. 14,000 children have been killed out of a total of 32000 deaths in the past six months of the war, and thousands are missing, presumed dead, and buried under the rubble. Palestinian infants are now dying of malnutrition and dehydration, while over 2 million people are suffering from hunger and famine. Amid such conditions, the entire world is shocked by the attack on humanitarian aid workers that killed seven volunteers engaged in providing dearly needed food items to the people incarcerated in open prison in Gaza. The killing of seven Western aid workers undoubtedly shocked the civilized world and put the rouge Israeli regime in a defensive position. There had been growing calls from within the Biden administration and Democrats to stop sending US military aid to Israel. Meanwhile, Israel's diplomatic isolation has increased many folds with strong criticism from multiple European nations including Poland, Norway, and others. Recently, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted a draft resolution calling 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 latest development has created immense pressure on Netanyahu's government compelling Tel Aviv to resume peace talks with Hamas under the Cairo initiative which was previously on pause due to Israel's adamant and hegemonism. Today, the Israeli aggression against unarmed, unprotected Gazans has marked six long months. The humanitarian situation in the war-hit Gaza enclave is very dire with no end in sight so far. Israel's inhumane territorial blockade and ruthless bombardment continued without any pause wherein the rouge Jewish state prepared to launch a full-fledged military offensive in Rafah, one of the major population centers in occupied territory. The UN Security Council recently adopted a resolution calling for a ceasefire during the Muslim holy month. This followed two separate resolutions demanding that Israeli authorities lift restrictions on humanitarian workers and allow the delivery of aid to the starving population of the enclave at the scale needed to address the growing crisis in Gaza. The force of international law backs Security Council resolutions which are legally binding. Chapter 7 of the UN Charter grants the Security Council the power to order military action and nonmilitary measures, such as sanctions, to ensure its resolutions are implemented and to restore international peace and security. The Arab coalition has now moved a draft resolution called upon the UN Security Council (UNSC) to adopt a resolution, under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, to ensure that Israel, the occupying power abides by a ceasefire, and gives access to humanitarian aid and put an end to the evil aggression on the Palestinian people. It is high time that the United Nations and its pivotal arm the UNSC fulfill their primary responsibility by implementing their resolution using all possible means including sanctions, political and diplomatic tools, and military power to get an immediate ceasefire in Gaza to secure over 2 million innocent lives facing acute hunger and reckless bombing all around from the air, ground and out of the sea. If the global forum fails to implement its decree by powerful states, it morally loses its respect and purpose in the comity of nations. Such extreme and repeated failures remind the world that the UN's end, sooner or later, will not be much different from the League of Nations.

## Public Issues in Erstwhile FATA

Local tribal elites and elders from various clans and tribes held demonstrations demanding government action against the illegal leasing of mines. The protestors were of the view that despite multiple requests and sensations, the district administration failed to halt the illegal lease, corruption, and misuse of national resources. The tribal elders emphasized the necessity of de-plotting officers aware of tribal customs, norms, and family traditions. The newly merged districts of KP, formerly known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) had met a hapless fate since the creation of the country. The people of the area had been largely ignored by the past governments because of its geography, and peculiar governance system under British rule coupled with tribal norms and traditions. Undoubtedly, the people of the erstwhile FATA (Federal Administered Tribal Area) have faced multiple economic, social, and law and order issues for the past seven decades, due to the absence of a regular governance system in the region. After the mainstreaming of erstwhile FATA, the federal government approved an annual 3% share under the Federal Divisible Pool of the NFC award to implement a 10-year development plan to bring the backward region at par with the rest of the country. Unfortunately, the FATA merger could not resolve the problems of local tribesmen and their issues persist in one or the other way. There are continuous complaints regarding the no-disbursement of a 3% share to implement the FATA development plan, while the giant of corruption and nepotism seriously hurts the development and upgradation of the highly marginalized region. Presently, the writ of the regular government is weak and theft of national resources and illegal issuance of government contracts and mining leases are on the rise. There is a dire need for concerted efforts by the Federal and provincial governments to urgently take steps for a complete transition of the newly merged districts into mainstream regions and establish the writ of the government. So, the theft of national resources and abuse of authority by public representatives and bureaucrats could be curbed. Whilst, the people of this backward region could benefit from the dividends of a regular citizenry life.

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## What does Egypt-Turkiye rapprochement mean for Libya?

Hafed Al-Ghwell

The rapprochement between Turkiye and Egypt, after years of frigid relations, heralds a new era of regional diplomacy, with consequential ripples across the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa.

The detente, crystallized by a series of diplomatic exchanges and culminating in a significant state visit by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Egypt, marks a turning of the page on bilateral tensions.

This warming of relations between Cairo and Ankara is especially significant for Libya, a nation that has been afflicted by internal divisions and foreign meddling since the fall of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

The Egypt-Turkiye rift has had profound implications for Libya, partly contributing to the country's east-west leadership divide amid the complex interplay of geopolitical interests and regional dynamics.

Both countries have become involved in Libya, with differing objectives and methods. Turkiye's support for the UN-recognized Government of National Accord has been multifaceted, including military assistance, the deployment of Syrian mercenaries, and diplomatic backing.

This support culminated in a maritime delimitation deal, signed by Ankara and the GNA in 2019 with the aim of securing Turkiye's interests in western Libya and parts of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Military reinforcements provided by Turkiye, particularly ahead of the GNA's counteroffensive in 2020, proved crucial in helping to repel the advance of the rival Libyan National Army toward Tripoli, leading to an enduring strategic stalemate.

Egypt, meanwhile, has primarily backed the LNA, led by Khalifa Haftar, through the provision of military aid and political support. Cairo's involvement is driven by concerns about border security, Islamist militants, and a desire for a friendly regime in eastern Libya. Its support for the LNA includes a declaration that Sirte, a strategically located city, represents a "red line" for Egyptian national security, and authorization for troop deployments to support the LNA.

This backing is also rooted in a broader regional strategy to contain Islamist militancy, which Cairo perceives as a threat to domestic stability.

The involvement of Egypt and Turkiye is just one aspect of the broader proxy dimensions to Libya's internal struggles, with each country supporting its respective allies through military, logistical, and diplomatic means.

This external support has not only exacerbated Libya's internal fragmentation, it has also complicated peace efforts by reinforcing the military and political divisions between the GNA in the west and the LNA in the east.

The deadlock has been further cemented by the strategic importance of Libya's vast oil and gas resources, over which both rival factions seek control, with significant implica-

tions for the nation's long-term economic stability and sovereignty.

Against this backdrop, Egypt-Turkiye rapprochement presents an incredible opportunity for the two nations to recalibrate their roles amid geopolitical realignments and shared concerns, potentially fostering an environment more conducive to Libya's future reconciliation.

The political fragmentation in Libya, made worse

approach by Egypt and Turkiye could significantly advance the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process in the country. This is particularly relevant during the disarmament and demobilization phases, in which both countries could leverage their relationships with Libyan armed groups and foreign mercenaries in a push toward peace-building efforts. An effective disarmament, demobilization,

**The deadlock has been further cemented by the strategic importance of Libya's vast oil and gas resources, over which both rival factions seek control, with significant implications for the nation's long-term economic stability and sovereignty. Against this backdrop, Egypt-Turkiye rapprochement presents an incredible opportunity for the two nations to recalibrate their roles amid geopolitical realignments and shared concerns, potentially fostering an environment more conducive to Libya's future reconciliation. The political fragmentation in Libya, made worse by the postponement of elections, is at a critical juncture where joint mediation by Egypt and Turkiye could help foster unity and stability. If both Cairo and Ankara were to take steps to leverage their influence in ways that facilitate an inclusive and irreproachable electoral process in Libya, it could serve as a cornerstone of their changing roles and afford both countries opportunities to preempt the emergence of shared threats. Given their respective influence on Libyan factions, a cooperative**

by the postponement of elections, is at a critical juncture where joint mediation by Egypt and Turkiye could help foster unity and stability.

If both Cairo and Ankara were to take steps to leverage their influence in ways that facilitate an inclusive and irreproachable electoral process in Libya, it could serve as a cornerstone of their changing roles and afford both countries opportunities to preempt the emergence of shared threats.

Given their respective influence on Libyan factions, a cooperative

and reintegration process is vital for the transition of combatants into civilian life, thereby reducing the power of militias and facilitating national unity.

Moreover, renewed cooperation would also help, albeit for different reasons. Given the potential for a fast-tracked 7.4 billion (\$8 billion) check from Brussels for its help to combat the flow of migrants to Europe, Egypt has an even greater incentive to shore up its efforts to do so.

Turkiye wants to protect its strategic and economic interests in the Eastern

Mediterranean, while Egypt has not been shy about prioritizing the integrity of its western border, while also seeking to ensure safety and employment opportunities for Egyptian workers in Libya.

A cooperative stance on Libya would also greatly aid in efforts to mitigate the potential threats emanating from a volatile subregion, given the intensifying civil war in neighboring Sudan and a failed coup in Chad.

Egyptian and Turkish support for what is likely to be rapid post-transition economic and social development in Libya is another area in which their rapprochement can potentially have an impact. Investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which will be essential for the reconstruction of Libya, could benefit from joint initiatives by Cairo and Ankara.

Not only would this help advance the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process by facilitating the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, it would promote social cohesion. This would in turn help a nascent, unified government to swiftly and effectively address the socioeconomic fragilities that often enrage an embittered public, as seen repeatedly in post-invasion Iraq.

The current detente between Egypt and Turkiye signals a departure from their historically competitive relationship, creating a platform for a more harmonized approach in Libya and parts of the Eastern Mediterranean where frictions persist.

Though challenges remain, given the deeply entrenched regional and international interests in Libya, an alignment of objectives by Cairo and Ankara could promote a more stable and unified nation. This will entail a cautious but concerted effort to address electoral delays and security issues, thereby setting Libya on a trajectory of sustainable development and reform of governance.

The shift in dynamics toward cooperation between Egypt and Turkiye offers a unique opportunity for both nations to recalibrate their approaches to Libya. While there are still obstacles to overcome, including the reconciliation of differing national agendas and navigation of local complexities, shared strategic interests and the potential benefits of a stable Libya invite a rare note of cautious optimism.

A successful partnership between Egypt and Turkiye in Libya could serve as a cornerstone for broader regional peace and cooperation.

Instead of serving as a battleground for regional rivalries, Libya could benefit from becoming a theater of cooperation, in which the confluence of Egyptian and Turkish interests support the construction of a cohesive and prosperous state.

The key to achieving this vision lies in maintaining steady momentum in the process of rapprochement between Egypt and Turkiye, immune from other geopolitical perturbations, and the translation of diplomatic cordiality into effective collaboration on the Libyan file.

## Aid workers' deaths may well be a turning point in the Gaza war

Dr. Amal Mudallali

The killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers in Gaza is seen as the tipping point for humanitarian aid after six months of a war that has claimed the lives of more than 32,000 Palestinians, and 196 aid workers, most of them from UN agencies. This time, though, it was an organization and its founder, both household names in Washington, that brought the war to America's doorstep. Jose Andres is well known and respected in the US capital, with even President Joe Biden describing him as "a friend."

The deaths of seven of Andres' staff in Gaza, including an American, sparked outrage in Washington, from the president and his administration to Democrats in Congress and the wider policy community — this in addition to the worldwide fallout.

Many of the workers came from countries allied with the US, and their leaders made their voices heard loudly from Washington. This anger translated into a decisive phone call, some say months late, between Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The official White House statement was short and policy oriented, quoting the president telling Netanyahu that the "strikes on humanitarian workers and the overall humanitarian situation are unacceptable."

After asking for, announcing and implementing "a series of specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address civilian harm," it delivered a warning. The statement said the president "made clear that US policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by our assessment of Israel's immediate action on these steps."

But, most importantly, Biden "underscored that an immediate ceasefire is essential to stabilize and improve the humanitarian situation," asking Netanyahu to "empower his negotiators to conclude a deal without delay to bring the hostages home."

The president was telling Netanyahu "to bring this war to an end," as former US official Martin Indyk tweeted.

The US media picked up on the warning, and on what it called a threat of change in American policy if Israel did not change course, especially on humanitarian aid. "A blinking red light for Israel in American politics," headlined Politico. But this red light did not come easy or fast.

Even after the killing of the aid workers, the White House said there would be no change in policy, despite rising tensions in the Israel-American relationship, the immense pressure on Biden and the White House, and the bad news for the president's reelection campaign because of his stand on the Gaza war. The tension between Washington and Tel Aviv was best illustrated by a story on NBC News about the virtual meeting between top US and Israeli officials to discuss Israeli plans for a ground invasion of Rafah. The report recounted how an Israeli official "began yelling and waving his arms around" after the Americans appeared skeptical of Israel's plan to move the Palestinians in Rafah to tents north of the city. The Economist wrote "Israel's relations with America reach breaking point."

The leaked stories, and increased criticism of Israel's conduct of the war and behavior were not matched with the right US action, or sometimes were matched with a contradictory action, leading to confusion over the exact policy. On the

day of the aid workers' deaths, the Washington Post revealed that the Biden administration had approved "the transfer of thousands more bombs to Israel." The administrations' strategy on humanitarian issues, the "key pillar of its approach to the crisis, now seems to be failing," wrote Josh Rogin.

The impression in Washington was that Israel is not listening to the president, and this makes him look "weak."

A report on Israel's use of artificial intelligence to identify targets in Gaza had a chilling effect, even in a city as jaded as Washington, with some pointing to a "structural problem," and calling for addressing "a broader issue than a single strike," as Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of the advocacy group J Street, wrote.

But the most important pressure on Biden came from his strongest supporters in Congress, his fellow Democrats who were angered by the Israeli action, especially Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who reacted to the Israeli attack saying: "Enough is enough."

These Democratic lawmakers were outraged, widening the rift between them and the White House. They requested a halt to US military aid until an internal American investigation showed whether US rules concerning arms transfers were violated. In a letter last month, they urged the president "to enforce rules restricting US weapons transfers to countries that impeded humanitarian aid."

The president told Muslim community leaders at the White House that his wife, Jill, was urging him to end the war, telling him to "stop it, stop it now."

Andres' pain at the killing of seven of his staff made an indelible impact in Washington. First on his X account, and then in an op-ed in The New York Times, he called Israel out, saying the workers were "targeted deliberately," and wrote that the war in Gaza "is not a war against terrorism," anymore, but a "war against humanity itself."

In his op-ed, he admonished the Israelis, saying: "You cannot save the hostages by bombing every building in Gaza. You cannot win this war by starving an entire population." World Central Kitchen asked for an independent investigation into the killings, saying the Israeli army "cannot credibly investigate its own failure in Gaza." The charity also asked for systemic change.

The news from the primary elections are still sending a warning sign to Biden because the "uncommitted" movement is growing and extending to more states. The more the war rages on, with more civilians being killed or starved by Israel, the greater the threat the president's campaign sees for his reelection, especially since some polls show that former President Donald Trump is either ahead of him or head to head.

Now that Israel has promised to take steps to open more routes for aid, and has removed the two soldiers implicated in firing on the aid workers, people are waiting to see how serious it is about changing course, insisting that short of a permanent ceasefire, nothing will change.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the "real test is results," and this is exactly what the international community is looking for. It is not clear if this will prove to be a turning point in the war, but if it is, the lives of those seven people who died feeding hungry Palestinians will not have been in vain.



# Turkish election results reflect women’s growing role

In 1934, Turkish women accomplished a milestone that predated many other nations: They secured the right to vote and stand for elected positions. They exercised their electoral rights for the first time in the 1935 elections, in which 18 women were elected to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. One of them, Nakiye Elgun, emerged as a trail-blazer, becoming the first female MP to deliver a speech at the parliament, only about 12 years after the Republic of Turkey was founded. In a message she wanted to deliver to the world, Elgun said that “we are a complete whole together,” emphasizing the importance of men and women working together in politics.

Since then, women have been active in the Turkish national political landscape. Yet, despite their enduring presence, they are still striving to find equality in the political realm.

For decades, the number of women in the Grand National Assembly lagged and even dropped over the years. Up until 2007, they did not exceed 5 percent of the lawmakers. The latest parliamentary elections, held simultaneously with the presidential vote last May, brought an unprecedented number of women MPs: 119 in the 600-seat assembly.

The importance of women’s support in shaping electoral outcomes also became increasingly apparent ahead of the 2023 elections, as Turkish political parties, which have their own women’s branches that are connected to their headquarters, ramped up their efforts to gain the support of women.

This upward trajectory in female political involvement was further underscored by last Sunday’s local elections, which saw the main opposition Republican People’s Party,

known as the CHP, again claim victory in key cities like Istanbul and Ankara. The elections witnessed a surge in female mayors, with women elected to lead in a record 11 provinces out of 81, including five metropolitan municipalities.

Ten of the 11 female mayors were from opposition parties, with data from the Women’s Platform for Equality indicating that they garnered nearly 53 percent of the vote on average. Women won 64 of

Sinem Cengiz

tions. However, the underrepresentation of women in national politics is not a situation unique to Turkey, as similar challenges persist globally. According to studies, women account for half or more of the lawmakers in just five countries.

Despite the patriarchal underpinnings of the Turkish political arena, there is a growing societal consensus on the need for greater female participation

an inspiration for future generations.

Women have a significant presence in the opposition ranks, but the ruling Justice and Development Party, known as the AKP, has started to lose the support of conservative women voters, who are usually a pillar of the party’s voting base. This is considered to be one of the key reasons for the decline in AKP votes.

For a long time, conservative women have been

***The importance of women’s support in shaping electoral outcomes also became increasingly apparent ahead of the 2023 elections, as Turkish political parties, which have their own women’s branches that are connected to their headquarters, ramped up their efforts to gain the support of women. This upward trajectory in female political involvement was further underscored by last Sunday’s local elections, which saw the main opposition Republican People’s Party, known as the CHP, again claim victory in key cities like Istanbul and Ankara. The elections witnessed a surge in female mayors, with women elected to lead in a record 11 provinces out of 81, including five metropolitan municipalities. Ten of the 11 female mayors were from opposition parties, with data from the Women’s Platform for Equality indicating that they garnered nearly 53 percent of the vote on average. Women won 64 of Turkey’s 922 districts, including in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana and Antalya, with most of them being from the CHP. In the last local vote in 2019, only four female mayors were elected.***

Turkey’s 922 districts, including in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana and Antalya, with most of them being from the CHP. In the last local vote in 2019, only four female mayors were elected.

However, Turkish politics still wears a moustache, even after 90 years of women’s participation. Although women now have a relatively large presence in the assembly and 11 mayoralties, this number still lags behind expecta-

in policymaking. A recent survey conducted by KONDA revealed that 62 percent of respondents believe that female politicians can contribute to Turkey’s development and societal progress.

Therefore, the outcome of Sunday’s elections signifies a political shift and heralds a broader change in societal mindset. It also reflects the long struggle for women to be represented in the country’s decision-making mechanisms and serves as

central to the AKP’s electoral victories, largely due to its 2010 reversal of the headscarf ban that kept many women out of university. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his party often reminded the Turkish public of how the AKP helped strike down the headscarf ban. Erdogan believes he has done more for women than many of his predecessors, although many believe that this measure alone was not enough and more should

have been done for women.

Today, conservative women are not a homogeneous voting bloc in Turkey and AKP has lost the support of some of them. There are women who wear headscarves in the ranks of the CHP and other parties that have been critical of the government’s policy on women.

Turkey’s 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention — aka the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence — caused a backlash not only from the secular segments of society but also conservative ones. Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu condemned the AKP for withdrawing from the convention in the middle of the night, saying the move “trampled on the struggle women have led for years.”

In a 2021 Arab News column, I stated that the AKP needed the support of conservative women more than ever because losing their vote would indicate a major political stumble for the party. This is because the AKP owes much of its success to these women. It now needs to win back the hearts of those who supported the party in its early years.

Last Sunday’s elections gave significant messages in regard to people’s frustration over the economic situation, the future of Turkey’s foreign policy, shifting societal dynamics and the rise of women’s representation in Turkish politics. While Turkey has made significant strides in advancing women’s representation in politics, challenges persist on the path toward true gender parity.

The electoral outcomes underscore both the progress made and the work that lies ahead in ensuring equitable political participation for all citizens.

# Is Israel deterring Iran — or provoking it?

Yossi Mekelberg

ting out of hand is genuine.

In response to the attack, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has promised revenge and declared that “the evil Zionist regime will be punished at the hands of our brave men. We will make them regret this crime and the other ones.” For Iran the loss of Zahedi must be disruptive of its operations in Lebanon and Syria, but equally also of its sense of pride. Whether Tehran is capable of once more swallowing its pride and thus avoiding a possible direct confrontation with Israel and then with the US as a result, remains to be seen, but there are growing voices within the regime calling for immediate and forceful retaliation.

It has also become apparent that Washington is seeking to distance itself from this Israeli military operation. According to the US-based news website Axios, it has told Iran that

and preventing further humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza.

What is most baffling about the attack in Damascus is to decipher what Israel is trying to achieve by blatantly exacerbating another front when it is already deep in the quagmire of the war in Gaza and has lost most of the international support it enjoyed only six months ago. Israel is increasingly falling into a pattern of open-ended conflicts with no clear endgame, which rather than serving its interests, or those of any of its allies, is only helping to unnecessarily prolong its wars, which gives Netanyahu an excuse, albeit a flimsy one, to remain in power.

Iran’s hegemonic aspirations are a source of instability in the region and are hardly in question. Its support of Hamas and Hezbollah poses a threat to Israel, to which the latter must respond.

However, Israel has no

***Considering that Zahedi was the highest-ranking Iranian military commander to be killed since Qassem Soleimani, who led Iran’s IRGC operations in two of the most crucial countries for Iran in the region, died in a 2020 US drone strike, the fear of the situation getting out of hand is genuine. In response to the attack, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has promised revenge and declared that “the evil Zionist regime will be punished at the hands of our brave men. We will make them regret this crime and the other ones.” For Iran the loss of Zahedi must be disruptive of its operations in Lebanon and Syria, but equally also of its sense of pride. Whether Tehran is capable of once more swallowing its pride and thus avoiding a possible direct confrontation with Israel and then with the US as a result, remains to be seen, but there are growing voices within the regime calling for immediate and forceful retaliation. It has also become apparent that Washington is seeking to distance itself from this Israeli military operation.***

“it had no involvement or advanced knowledge of an Israeli strike on a diplomatic compound in Syria.” This is clearly a US attempt to prevent the incident from escalating, by almost suggesting that at least in this case Israel has gone rogue. Israel, by not sharing its intentions before embarking on such a sensitive operation — one with much wider implications for the US, too — is helping Washington by not implicating the US.

On the other hand, its action can only further anger a Biden administration that appears to be losing its ability to influence Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. By testing Tehran’s patience, but not coordinating such a significant operation with the Americans, Israel tests theirs, too, especially as relations between the two allies are more strained than ever as a result of the war in Gaza, and Israel’s ignoring calls for a truce,

means to militarily eliminate this threat altogether, and as the war in Gaza has proven, even a lesser military force such as Hamas cannot be eradicated.

Military deterrence is an important element of dealing with the Iranian threat, but more importantly Israel needs astute political and diplomatic cooperation and coordination with its regional and international allies who are equally concerned about Iran’s adventurism, without provoking or humiliating Tehran.

To humiliate Iran rather than defeat it might give Israel some short-lived satisfaction, but it might also open another front, and this time while the international community is less sympathetic. And as past experience has made clear, whenever one senior Iranian figure is assassinated, a replacement is quickly found, while the root causes of the conflict remain and are further aggravated.

# Political May-hem looms for embattled UK leader

When Rishi Sunak became UK prime minister in 2022, the conventional wisdom was that he would help stabilize a flailing government, even if the ruling Conservatives were turfed out of office at the general election. However, next month could bring about another political meltdown, with a possible third change of prime minister in the same Parliament.

The trigger point for this possible next phase of political turmoil could come with the May 2 local elections. In last year’s equivalent ballots, the Conservatives for the first time in over two decades lost the mantle as the biggest party in English councils, and this rout looks likely to continue next month.

If the Conservatives lose big, it will only intensify the political pressure on the prime minister’s position. This could see a leadership challenge within his party.

Under present rules, such a challenge could be triggered if only 15 percent of Conservative MPs write to express lack of confidence in Sunak’s leadership. At that point, there would then be a secret ballot of those legislators, with a simple majority needed for victory on either side.

If Sunak loses, a leader-

ship election would begin in which he cannot stand. However, if he wins, he would lead the party into the general election, as another internal Conservative contest cannot be triggered for another year.

The most recent Conservative no-confidence vote came in 2022. Although Boris Johnson won the contest with almost 60 percent support from his party’s MPs, he was badly wounded, and ultimately forced to resign as prime minister weeks later.

A much less likely, but still plausible, scenario is that Sunak faces a House of Commons no-confidence vote. To govern, a prime minister has to have the confidence of the majority of the House, which should be the case given the significant Conservative majority.

To test this proposition, a motion of no confidence could be moved by the opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer to be voted on by all MPs, regardless of which party they represent. No-confidence motions can be on key pieces of legislation which the government regards as so important that it will potentially stand or fall on them.

The last time a government was defeated this way was in 1979. The then-Labour government under

Andrew Hammond

Prime Minister James Callaghan lost a confidence vote, which resulted in a general election being called, leading to Margaret Thatcher’s premiership.

It is in this troubled context that Sunak, often politically cautious, may decide to take a chance and call a summer election for June or July. There has been some speculation that King Charles, who constitutionally has to give permission to the prime minister to dissolve Parliament, might refuse.

The king could, in theory, act in this way if there is another party leader, another party, or a coalition of parties that is ready and able to govern. However, since Parliament is approaching the end of the five-year limit, it is improbable the king would block an election.

One variant of these scenarios is that Sunak simply decides he has had enough and quits. While this is unlikely, too, 2022 saw two such prime ministerial resignations from Johnson, and also Liz Truss amid the controversy over her mini-budget.

The reason why a resignation, allowing another Conservative to stand as prime minister, cannot be entirely ruled out is Sunak’s present exaspera-

tion. Since he assumed office, he has made numerous political reboots, thousands of policy announcements, but nothing has fundamentally changed the UK’s political weather.

In part, this is because the intellectual climate is shifting toward Labour, with many voters increasingly recognizing the poor state of public services, and that further investment is needed in them. Many think tanks, including the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies, have particularly highlighted the challenges facing the health service.

According to the most recent Electoral Calculus forecasts, based on latest opinion surveys, the probability of a Labour majority in the House of Commons is 95 percent. Meanwhile, the likelihood of Labour being the largest party is 99 percent. While polls may tighten in coming weeks, the direction of travel appears clear.

Almost a decade and a half since the Conservatives first took power in 2010, and five prime ministers later via David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, and now Sunak, the party looks increasingly tired and divided. This is shown in the growing numbers of the party’s MPs to announce their retirement

from politics — well over 60, at the time of writing.

History shows that Sunak and other recent “tail-end” prime ministers — beleaguered politicians who come into office at the end of a long period of rule by their parties — tend to want to put off big ballots as long as possible. This was true of previous Conservative Prime Ministers Alec Douglas-Home and John Major, who called the ballots in 1964 and 1997, respectively, close to the last possible legal date.

Despite the huge diversity of tail-end premiers in backgrounds, beliefs and styles, a common pattern is that they ultimately prove unable to stop the flow of the political tide. After multiple years in office, there is growing momentum for the opposition party that eventually proves insurmountable.

Taken together, Sunak’s attempt to win a fifth straight term for the Conservatives would defy political history, and it appears most unlikely that the government will be able to regain sustained, significant political momentum.

As May 2 approaches, his premiership is perilously positioned, with a growing possibility he may not lead the party into the general election.

Dr. Ajmal Shams

consistently failed to do by not delivering on their promises.

It is time for Islamic scholars from around the world to intervene and seek to convince the stubborn rulers of Afghanistan to give permission for female education and work. They can raise their voice in the media and visit the country as they make efforts to convince the Taliban of the proper interpretation of Islamic principles on seeking knowledge, which is compulsory for both men and women.

There is no harmony among Afghans who are opposed to the Taliban’s policy with regard to the female role in public life,

including their right to education and work. One group wants more international pressure, including greater isolation and harsher sanctions on the Taliban. There are some moderate voices that call for increased engagement and dialogue through a mix of diplomatic and political efforts aimed at convincing the radical group to make its government more inclusive.

There is also a minority group that wants to topple the Taliban through armed resistance. Given the current geopolitical environment, the best way to convince the Taliban to change their hard-line stance on women is increased

engagement, diplomacy and the involvement of religious voices in the overall efforts.

Any further sanctions or isolation of the country will only come at great cost to the country’s 40 million people, 90 percent of whom are already living in poverty, as per the UN.

There are also divisions within the Taliban leadership on their thinking on the status of women in society and the necessity of modern education. Some progressive voices seem to exist among the radical group. For instance, a viral video on social media features Mullah Yaqub, the Taliban defense minister, emphasizing the indispensable role of doctors, engineers

and pilots for the country alongside the importance of religious scholars in shaping society.

Yet, the Taliban’s supreme leader seems to be the major hurdle. The reclusive leader, who is reluctant to appear in public, has consistently hindered any efforts to reopen employment opportunities and education for women and girls. Such obstinacy is a major stumbling block that is stifling the international community’s efforts to move forward on any potential recognition of the de facto authorities.

There must also be an increasing realization among the Taliban that their continued policy of authoritarian rule is not sustainable in the long

run. Afghans’ patience will eventually run out if the group continues with its policy of exclusion without any hope for opening up.

The UN and the rest of the global community understands the gravity, complexity and delicacy of the situation in Afghanistan. Any move or policy regarding the country must be well calculated if any positive outcomes are to be expected. Isolating the country any further from the global political and economic system will only give the de facto Taliban authorities further reason to make their policies for ordinary Afghans even harsher. Increased engagement is the only path forward.

# Why engaging the Taliban is the only way forward

The UN’s Doha Conference on Afghanistan, which took place in February, was somewhat of a setback for both the international community and the de facto Taliban authorities. One would have expected some kind of constructive dialogue during the two-day event if the Taliban had attended. But the Taliban’s stance that they would refuse to attend the event unless given legitimate status to represent Afghanistan was unrealistic, given the fact that they have no official international recognition. The de facto authorities have done more damage to themselves than to the organizer of the event. This would have provided them with a platform to

speak to an international audience representing diverse stakeholders.

Ever since the return of Taliban rule to Afghanistan, the people have eagerly awaited the beginning of every Afghan New Year (falling on March 21), which is also the beginning of the school year, to hear some good news about girls being allowed to attend schools and colleges. March 21, 2024, was another disappointing day for Afghan girls above Grade 6, as they again found the school doors closed for them.

It is hard to understand the politics behind the Taliban’s policy on female work and education. When asked, they never deny women’s and

girls’ right to education and work and instead come up with pretexts of not being prepared to do so. They have kept the entire nation busy with the hope that the preparation of guidelines and procedures is underway to reopen schools and colleges for girls. Yet, in reality, nothing seems to be moving forward in that direction.

The ban on female education and work is the key point of contention between the international community and the Taliban authorities. The Taliban claim to have established a model state that is in full compliance with Shariah. However, Islamic principles emphasize keeping one’s word, which the Taliban have



# Kyrgyz traders want to collaborate with Pakistan

LAHORE (APP): The Honorary Consul of Kyrgyzstan, Meher Kashif Younis said on Sunday that tremendous positive response from Kyrgyzstan entrepreneurs to Pakistani counterpart underscores the potential for deeper economic ties between the two countries.

Sharing the outcome of his recent two-week long visit to Kyrgyzstan with a delegation of exporters and importers led by Chaudhry Faran Shahid Arain here, he said the Pakistani trade delegation under his leadership remained engaged in a series of fruitful and result-oriented meetings with representatives from both the private and public sectors. The primary focus was on

exploring avenues for cooperation in key sectors, notably pharmaceuticals, textiles and education etc.

He said the response from Kyrgyz counterparts was overwhelmingly positive, reflecting a shared enthusiasm for collaboration.

Meher said that beyond these specific sectors, the delegation also emphasized the importance of strengthening overall bilateral trade cooperation between the two countries.

By building upon existing economic ties and exploring new avenues for collaboration, they aimed to enhance mutual prosperity and contribute to regional stability.

He said as both countries continue to navigate

the complexities of the global economy, partnerships built on mutual respect, trust, and shared objectives would be instrumental in realizing their collective economic aspirations. This visit marked a significant step towards realizing those goals and lays the groundwork for a more robust and enduring partnership between the two countries.

He said the pharmaceutical industry holds promise for mutual growth and development, with both countries recognizing the potential for partnerships in research, manufacturing and distribution.

By leveraging each other's strengths and resources, they can enhance access to

essential medicines and contribute to the healthcare infrastructure of their respective nations.

Meher Kashif Younis, who is also Chairman of Kyrgyzstan Trade House Lahore, added that textile sector also presents opportunities for synergies in production, technology exchange, and market access.

Both Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan boast rich textile traditions and a skilled workforce, making collaboration in this area particularly advantageous.

He was of the view that joint ventures could lead to the creation of high-quality products competitively priced for both domestic and international markets.

# Pakistan's economy needs persistent, sound economic management: PIAF

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol has observed that amidst continuous hike in cost of production in the country, what the Pakistan's economy really needs is persistent and sound economic management. He asked the authorities for undertaking economic reforms and improving the regulatory environment to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be achieved in the long-run.

The PIAF chief stressed the need for reducing cost of doing business, besides evolving a new price control mechanism, as huge taxation, rising oil prices and constant jump in electricity and gas tariffs have lifted the inflation to decades high level.

Faheemur Rehman Saigol warned the authorities that inflation above 6 percent can hurt economic growth and a careful policy is required to keep it in control. He said that the pace of inflation is skyrocketing at a time when the economic

activity is slowing down. As the oil prices have been increased and power tariff has gone up further the PIAF chairman stated that the government has dropped a fuel bomb on the businessmen after it suffered an electric shock to meet the conditions of IMF for the revival of the stalled loan program- a recipe to shake the trade and industry.

He said that the decision would prove detrimental to the industries due to high cost of doing business and will also open the floodgates of inflation. In addition to making the electricity bills costlier and unaffordable for the consumers, the hike in base tariff would escalate prices of all household goods being widely used in every household, he added.

He termed the increase in tariff unlawful and a violation of NEPRA's own rules and regulations, as any increase in tariff has to be determined and implemented only after holding public hearings but unfortunately they have solely decided to raise the tariff without holding public hearings, he argued.

He condemned the

National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's decision to increase electricity tariffs, stating that the burden of power theft, mismanagement, and inefficiencies cannot be shifted to consumers on the pretext of fuel adjustment.

He said that Pakistan's industry had been harmed by the high cost of doing business, which discouraged investment in capacity and capability and called for easing the burden of heavy taxes on the power sector.

He stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry.

Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electricity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers.

Faheem Saigol urged the power ministry to identify system constraints and communicate targets to all concerned departments in order to launch a wartime

effort to upgrade the transmission system.

He urged the completion of all ongoing power projects well ahead of schedule. He stated that business-friendly policies must be adopted, similar to those adopted by other neighboring countries in the region.

The PIAF Chief suggested that the amount specified in trade policy be used to promote exports by providing incentives to trade and industry and by exploring new markets.

According to him, Pakistan's electricity prices were already on the high side, which was the primary reason for the country's price hikes.

He stated that providing affordable electricity would assist in lowering production costs, thereby benefiting the public. He stated that rising imports and a widening trade deficit posed a serious threat to economic growth and must be addressed urgently.

He said that the continuous increase in fuel and electricity rates will add to the miseries of the businessmen, who are already feeling the heat of runaway inflation.

# Traders want thorough consultation

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The businessmen, while highlighting the FBR's Tajir Dost Scheme shortcomings, have emphasized the need for a comprehensive consultation and a sustainable roadmap for fostering stakeholders' confidence and grassroots awareness via campaigns across every market in each major city.

The business community has sparked a diverse reaction to the Federal Board of Revenue's recently launched the Tajir Dost Scheme, aiming to register traders, wholesalers, and small retailers in tax compliance. The FBR champions the DTS as a progressive step towards enhancing tax registration and revenue generation; dissenting voices, particularly from business people, have raised sincere concerns regarding the scheme's efficacy and implementation.

In a joint statement, the Chairman of the Chainstore Association of Pakistan

(CAP), Rana Tariq Mehboob, and Co-founder CAP Asfandiyar Farrukh have raised concerns regarding the scheme's efficacy and implementation. The official trade body represents tax-paying Tier-1 retail enterprises, that contribute 90% of taxes from the retail sector but have been denied a level-playing field for the past 5 years.

Rana and Farrukh highlighted the scheme's shortcomings, emphasizing a need for comprehensive consultation and a sustainable roadmap for fostering stakeholder confidence and grassroots awareness via campaigns across every market in each major city. Amid the prevailing challenges, the ambitious plan to reportedly generate an additional Rs. 300-400 million in annual taxes is poised to crash and burn.

Unfortunately, the government has not bothered to take the sector's real stakeholders on board and imposes flawed policies

that serve the purposes of none. Rana underlined the need for broad-based consultation to remove the policy bugs and draw the desired outcomes.

Both the community leaders skepticized the requirement for unregistered traders to file monthly returns when they are not even filing once a year, coupled with major inaccuracies in property valuations for the purpose of business tax assessment.

In a related development, media reports indicate a shortfall in tax collection targets for March 2024, presumably due to economic stagnation, high rates on the already taxed segments and perennially weak enforcement.

Despite reported efforts to boost tax revenues, only half-hearted measures against tax evasion and irregularities are observed due to which, achievement of revenue targets lags behind. The issue of delayed refunds further

compounds the challenges faced by genuine taxpayers. With refunds withheld for extended periods without compensation, businesses experience cash flow constraints, hindering their growth and operational sustainability.

Commenting on the 'Pakistan Honour Card Scheme' aim to recognize top taxpayers, they said concerns persist regarding the effectiveness, inclusivity and longevity of such programs.

Instead, the formal sector longs for a more equitable and simplified tax regime, devoid of unnecessary bureaucracy and continuous harassment, to enable progressive SMEs to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

The CAP urged the Ministry of Finance and FBR to sincerely address stakeholders' concerns and foster an environment conducive to sustainable private-sector led economic growth.

# Court Notice

In the Court of Shadab C.J-IX Kohat, Suit No. 108/1 date of hearing 08-04-2024. Titled:- Yasir Ibrar Vs. Excise and Taxation (etc) Notice against:- (2) Mashood Aslam Son of Muhammad Aslam R/o Mir Poor Khas A.J.K presently R/o (now in abroad 10 Somerville Road Small Health, Birmingham, B10 9EL, West Midlands United Kingdom) (Defendant). Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendant in which date of hearing 08-04-2024 is fixed for your appearance. Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 08-04-2024 otherwise Court shall be proceeded in accordance with law. Order issued on 26-03-2024 (Court of CJ-IX Kohat).

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel has warned that the continued escalation of energy prices could result in the closure of numerous industries, amplifying unemployment rates and diminishing Pakistan's export capabilities, appealing to the government to reverse the decision promptly and establish a fixed gas price for industries.

The FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, emphasizing the need for the government to explore and provide affordable energy alternatives for the industry, stressed that such measures are crucial for ensuring the competitiveness of Pakistani products in the global market. As the industrial sector grapples with the ramifications of the gas price hike, the BMP

leader's stance advocates for the preservation of industrial stability and the prevention of potential economic setbacks for Pakistan.

He said that the repeated increase in the gas and electricity prices to an unbearable level by the government has left the trade and industry uncompetitive; blaming it for trapping the country in the IMF plans.

The FPCCI former president, strongly opposing gas price surge, said that the gas tariff hike has threatened the industrial sector, besides increasing unemployment, saying that the every government had poor economic policies that unleashed the free fall of rupee against the dollar, ensuing in pull cost escalation to input down the manufacturing growth.

The BMP Chairman condemned the recent increase in gas tariff as approved by the Economic Coordination Committee and the caretaker

govt. He has demanded the government to take back the decision of hike in gas tariff in the larger interest of national economy and to save the industries from collapse. He warned that in case, the decision is not withdrawn; the industries will close down, resulting in decline in exports and mass unemployment.

In an appeal, he said that the business community was given assurance for 9 cents per KWh electricity tariff by the caretaker government. The assurance brought a sigh of relief and hope for the business community that the new tariff will help in reduction of production cost and they will be able to continue production unabated and deliver export orders on time. However, contrary to the assurance given, POL, electricity and gas tariff are being increased constantly by the caretaker government. He said that current-



RAWALPINDI: A worker hanging vermicelli for dry at his workplace as demand increased for upcoming Eidul Fitr Festival.

## Association wants representation

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Hitech Hybrid Seed Association (PHHSA) Sunday voiced its demand for inclusion as a stakeholder in the National Seed Development and Regulatory Authority (NSDRA) to make it an effective national body for achieving desired results crystal clearly enshrined in its mandate.

PHHSA Chairman Shahzad Ali Malik said the genuine call stems from the association's commitment to enhancing the quality of seeds and combating the detrimental activities of the seed mafia, which continue to inflict substantial losses to farmers and agricultural production.

"The PHHSA's genuine demand as a stakeholder in the NSDRA underscores the importance of industry representation in regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing seed development. By participating in decision-making processes, the association aims to contribute its expertise and insights towards the formulation of effective policies and regulations that safeguard the interests of farmers," he maintained.

Shahzad Ali Malik, who had pioneered hybrid rice seed three decades ago in Pakistan with Chinese collaboration, said that one of the primary objectives behind the PHHSA's advocacy for enhanced representation is to address the pervasive issue of counterfeit and substandard seeds proliferated by unscrupulous elements within the seed mafia.

## Prices of poultry, ghee surged

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Prices of poultry, ghee, and cooking oil have surged in Bahawalpur, however, the price of eggs has decreased. APP learned on Sunday that the poultry meat was sold out at Rs 619 per kilogram, and Banaspati ghee was sold out at Rs 440 per kilogram which earlier, was sold out at Rs 430 per kilogram.

Cooking oil was sold out at Rs 450 to 550 per kilogram as per different varieties, respectively. However, eggs per dozen were sold out at Rs 243 which earlier, were sold out at Rs 480 per dozen.

## SNGPL's gas theft crackdown: 138 connections disconnected

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 138 connections; Rs 5.42 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 12 connections on illegal use of gas and 1 FIR Lodged against gas thief. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.5 million against gas theft cases.

In Multan 6 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas and amount

of Rs 0.1 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

In Rawalpindi the team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas and amount of Rs 0.1 million have been booked against gas theft cases.

In Bahawalpur the regional team disconnected 3 connections on illegal use of gas.

In Karak and Peshawar the regional team disconnected 100 connections on illegal use of gas and 6 FIRs Lodged against gas thieves. The team also imposed fine of Rs 4.3 million against gas theft cases.

In Faisalabad the regional team disconnected 5 connections on illegal use of gas. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.1million against gas theft cases.

In Gujranwala, 4 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.41 million against gas theft cases

In Gujrat, 3 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas. The team also imposed fine of Rs 13 thousand against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal, 2 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas.

## PCMEA demands supports for carpet sector

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) has forwarded a set of 12-point proposals for upcoming budget 2024-25 to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other authorities concerned.

In the budget proposals sent by PCMEA Senior Vice Chairman Usman Ashraf, the Association termed various SROs and duties an obstacle to the promotion of exports of hand-woven carpets, according to PCMEA

spokesman here Sunday. It has been demanded that duty tariffs, international freight charges should be reduced to be competitive in global markets. Usman Ashraf also demanded that in case of export of handwoven carpets as luxury item status, the credit period shall be extended to 270 days in addition to 120 days. It is also proposed that Lahore to Karachi railway bonded cargo should be resumed in view of low tariff and security perspective and besides this, support should be provided in awareness of e-

commerce and digital marketing.

Usman Ashraf said that FBR circular 545 should be aligned with circular 492 which clearly mentions the time frame of 18 months and in order to give relief to carpet industry, under the 5th schedule of sales tax, commercial importers should be given relief in SR 146 para 3 of custom tariff.

He further suggested that a special budget should be allocated for research and development and exploration of new global markets to increase the exports of handmade carpets.

## PFC team to participate in Canton Fair China

LAHORE (APP): A delegation of Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) will participate in the five-day 135th Canton Fair China to explore export markets and foster bilateral trade relations.

Chairing a meeting of the Council's board of directors meeting here Sunday, PFC Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq said that this strategic move underscores Pakistan's commitment to expanding its footprint in the global furniture industry.

He said the PFC delegation's agenda would be net-

working with potential buyers, engaging in business-to-business meetings, and gaining insights into emerging trends and consumer preferences in the global furniture market. By actively participating in events like the Canton Fair commencing from April 23, 2024, the PFC aims to bolster Pakistan's presence in the international furniture trade arena and establish long-term partnerships with key stakeholders.

Main Kashif said that this initiative aligns with Pakistan's broader economic obj-

ectives of enhancing exports, attracting foreign investment and promoting entrepreneurship within the furniture sector. The Canton Fair, held biannually in Guangzhou China, is renowned as one of the largest trade fairs worldwide, attracting thousands of exhibitors and buyers from various industries. He said, the PFC participation in such a prestigious event presents an invaluable opportunity to showcase Pakistan's craftsmanship, innovation, and diverse range of furniture products to an international buyers.

# BMP emphasizes need for affordable energy alternatives for industry

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overall gave a steep rise of 191 percent to the gas prices to the historic levels, he added. The exports industry is also compelled to pay the exorbitant gas price, which is tagged with the cross subsidy that the fertilizer, feedstock, domestic consumers and power generation sector enjoy, he pointed.

Mian Anjum Nisar said the government should prioritize resolving the energy crisis by providing sufficient and affordable electricity and gas to industries. The import bill should be reduced by imposing bans on luxury products. He highlighted controlling inflation to ensure affordable living costs for the masses and containing the cost of production for businesses at a local level.

He stressed the need for a revisit of the economic policies, as the economic indicators throughout the 2023 remained very depressed amidst high inflation,

low exports, depleting foreign reserves and continued uncertain position of the local currency.

FPCCI former president Anjum Nisar said that almost all indicators of the economy continued to show poor performance during 2023, including volatile exchange rate, unprecedented hike in markup rate, repeated increases in electricity rates, gas shortage, price spiral, mismanagement and bad governance, becoming the hallmarks of the government.

He said that massive fall of rupee value continued to damage the economy, as the rupee witnessed a huge depreciation; one of the highest devaluations of local currency in Pakistan's history in this period. Mian Anjum urged the policy makers to concentrate on increasing tax-to-GDP ratio which was the lowest in Pakistan in the region in 2023.





In brief

Pak team leaves for Melbourne

K A R A C H I (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's Junior Squash Players team leaves for Australia to participate in Australia's Junior Squash Championship, which is going to start in Melbourne from April 8. Before leaving for Australia, Pakistan's Squash team coach Naveed Alam along with players Huzaifa Shahid, Syeda Sara and Sameera Shahid met with Pakistan Navy Commodore Tauqir Khawaja. On the occasion, Tauqir Khawaja said Pakistan Navy will continue to support Squash players. He hoped that Pakistan team will brighten the name of Pakistan in Australia. It is pertinent to mention that Huzaifa Shahid, who belonged to Pakistan Navy team, is the top seed in junior category of Australian Squash Championship.

Messi scores for Inter Miami

MIAMI (Agencies): Lionel Messi scored for Inter Miami in a 2-2 MLS draw with Colorado Rapids as he made his return from injury. The Argentine had missed four games with a hamstring issue and came on for the second half with his side 1-0 down following a Rafael Navarro penalty. Messi equalised with a left-foot shot before helping set up a goal for team-mate Leonardo Afonso. Miami could not hold on to the lead, with Cole Bassett equalising for the Rapids in the 88th minute. "What Leo did is the usual for him, what he provokes in our team, in his team-mates, in the people," said Miami boss Gerard Martino. "The most important thing is that he felt comfortable, he felt good, he felt loose. "This will help him to be more confident, especially with regard to the injury, for the second leg in Monterrey." Miami are away at Monterrey in the return leg of their Concacaf Champions Cup quarter-final on Wednesday having been beaten 2-1 by the Mexican side in the first leg.

Nikola Jokic triple-double

NEW YORK (Agencies): Nikola Jokic posted his 25th triple-double of the season to help the Denver Nuggets beat the Atlanta Hawks 142-110 and move top of the Western Conference. Jokic registered 19 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists, while team-mate Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored a game-high 24 points. Jamal Murray was back from injury for the Nuggets and scored 16 points. The Los Angeles Lakers earned their ninth win in 10 games as they beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 116-97. D'Angelo Russell scored a game-high 28 points for the Lakers, while team-mates LeBron James and Anthony Davis made double-doubles as they moved up a place to eighth in the Western Conference. James scored 24 points with 12 assists, while Davis registered 22 points and 13 rebounds in a win which included a 19-0 run in the third quarter for the Lakers. Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored 30 points to lead the Philadelphia 76ers to a 116-96 victory against the Memphis Grizzlies. Embiid, who was the NBA's most valuable player last season and has recently returned from a lengthy injury, also registered 12 rebounds in a 23 minutes on the court.

## Mathieu van der Poel defends Paris-Roubaix in record time



ROUBAIX (AFP): Mathieu van der Poel broke his own record time to defend the Paris-Roubaix title after a stunning solo attack. The Dutch world champion, 29, pounced 60km from the finish and went on to beat the mark he set last year by almost three minutes. It was his sixth win in a Monument - the name given to road cycling's five most prestigious one-day races. "I never could have dreamed of this as a child," he said, after adding to last weekend's Tour of Flanders victory. "I was super motivated this year, I wanted to show off the [rainbow] jersey [as world champion] in a nice way. It goes beyond expectations. I am lost for words to be honest with you, but I am really enjoying this moment." Paris-Roubaix is the third Monument of the season, after Milan-San Remo and the Tour of Flanders, with Liege-Bastogne-Liege

(21 April) and the Giro di Lombardia (12 October) to come. Organisers had made tweaks to the notoriously difficult course in a bid to protect riders following a number of recent high-profile crashes. Belgian rider Wout van Aert, who would have been one of Van der Poel's main rivals, suffered a broken collarbone and several broken ribs in a heavy crash at the Dwars door Vlaanderen one-day race in March. But while the race, which includes 57km of perilous cobblestones, was punctuated by a series of bumps and falls, Van Der Poel's Alpecin-Deceuninck team helped keep him out of danger before providing the platform to launch his attack. The Dutch rider quickly opened a significant lead as the chasing pack started to battle among themselves for the minor places. He rode alone into the

famous Roubaix velodrome, where the race traditionally finishes, and crossed the finish line in five hours 25 minutes 58 seconds - completing the route at the fastest average speed in the history of the event, which was first held in 1896. Van der Poel's Belgian team-mate Jasper Philipsen finished in second place, three minutes behind, pipping Denmark's Mads Pedersen in a sprint finish. Fred Wright was the first British rider home, in 13th place in a group four minutes 47 seconds back, while former junior and under-23s winner Tom Pidcock was 17th on his senior debut. Meanwhile, Britain's Josh Turling was disqualified early in the race after being judged to have gained an illegal tow from his Ineos Grenadiers team car as he attempted to rejoin the peloton following a puncture.

## Ajax suffer 6-0 humiliation in Dutch 'Klassieker'



THE HAGUE (AFP): The horror season for Dutch giants Ajax hit a new low on Sunday as they suffered a record 6-0 defeat at the hands of arch-rivals Feyenoord in the Dutch "Klassieker". Feyenoord dominated the match in every department and were 3-0 up at half-time thanks to goals from Igor Paixao, Yankuba Minteh, and David Hancko to the delight of the home fans in De Kuip. The second half was a procession for Feyenoord, who seemed able to cut open the Ajax defence at will, Paixao and Minteh each netting a second, the latter with a sweetly curling strike. Quinten Timber completed the humiliation and Feyenoord could have had a seventh but the goal was ruled out for offside.

It was a record margin of victory for Feyenoord in a Dutch Klassieker, topping the 9-4 win from 1964. Four-time European champions Ajax have endured a catastrophic season both on and off the field. They had their worst-ever start to a Dutch top flight season, briefly propping up the Eredivisie table, with fans' frustration boiling over into violence. The club of Johan Cruyff, Marco van Basten and Dennis Bergkamp, Ajax have fought back somewhat since those dark days but still sit in an unfamiliar sixth place in the Dutch top flight. They are 31 points behind runaway Eredivisie leaders PSV Eindhoven and European football looks a distant prospect next season. To make matters worse,

the club revealed two embarrassing financial slip-ups this week. On Tuesday, they announced they were suspending CEO and chairman Alex Kroes on suspicion of insider trading. Kroes bought more than 17,000 shares a week before his appointment was announced on August 2, 2023. And on Friday, it emerged that club chairman Michael van Praag, who had vocally criticised Kroes during the week, had "forgotten" to declare his own shares in the club to the correct authorities. As for Feyenoord, they enjoyed an extraordinary double over their rivals, having beaten them 4-0 away earlier in the season. They sit second in the table, nine points behind PSV.

## Sinner seeks winning clay start in his Monte Carlo base

MONTE CARLO (AFP): Jannik Sinner said on Sunday he is hoping to build upon his semi-final a year ago at the Monte Carlo Masters as the Italian begins the clay season in his tennis comfort zone. The 22-year-old who has been based in the principality since the age of 18, is riding a wave of confidence which began as Italy won the Davis Cup last November. It continued with titles already this year at the Australian Open, in Rotterdam and last weekend at the Miami Masters. "Last year I played well here but didn't play well afterwards," Sinner said as he waits to start the event in

the second round against the winner from Sebastian Korda and Alejandra Davidovich Fokina. "This is a surface where I struggle a little bit, But I'm excited to come back (home) and hopefully do better." The Italian can rely on 'home' support as his fans traditionally cross the nearby border in their thousands for the spring tennis week. His 22-1 record this season makes him a top target as the build-up to Roland Garros and the Olympics on clay in Paris gathers early momentum. "I like this tournament, I live here so I train frequently at the club," Sinner said. "There are a lot of Italians in the crowd.

"I love to play here, but my expectations are not that high for this beginning on clay." The goal is to be ready for Roland Garros and hopefully the Olympics... it's like that for all players." Sinner said he would treat the outing as a "practice week." "I want to play good matches - hopefully more than one. Hopefully I can perform in a good way." The world number two said that gaining form on the dirt can be a slow process for him. "It's not the surface where I feel the most comfortable; but that does not mean I'm not a good clay player," added the 2020 French Open quarter-finalist.

## Babar Azam hails successful pre-season camp in Kakul

PESHAWAR (APP):Pakistan captain Babar Azam described the pre-season camp in Kakul as highly successful, stating that it played a crucial role in preparing the players for the upcoming cricket season. He emphasized that the camp helped strengthen unity and understanding among the team members through strategically planned team bonding exercises and drills. Babar Azam was joined by Aamer Jamal, Azam Khan, Imad Wasim, Naseem Shah, and Shadab Khan in paying tribute to the facilities, atmosphere, and support provided by the highly trained and skilled instructors. They also believe that the 11 days spent at the location will help them successfully overcome the demands of upcoming challenges and contribute to producing strong performances. Twenty-nine elite cricketers attended the pre-season camp at the historic and iconic Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul from March 26 to April 6, with the training and drills designed by Pakistan Army experts and strategists. During the camp, there was a focus on team building aimed to enhance the physical and mental strength of the players, ensuring they were in the best condition to face the challenges ahead. Under the guidance of experienced trainers and coaches, the players underwent a comprehensive training regime tailored to elevate their fitness levels, agility, leadership, strategic thinking and overall performance on the field. Pakistan captain Babar Azam said, "This was my third boot camp, and with each visit, I've gleaned new insights. This time, our focus extended beyond physical fitness to encompass team bonding activities and per-

formance-improving lectures. These elements are crucial considering our team environment where collective performance is paramount for achieving desired results, he added. He said that the notable absence from previous camps was the deviation of cricket-centric activities. Instead, he said the emphasis was squarely on physical conditioning, teamwork and mental resilience. "Immersed in such an inspiring facility, guided by top-notch instructors and a well-structured program, all the players have experienced significant growth. I'm confident that we'll return to competitive cricket as better, fitter and mentally tougher athletes, thereby enhancing our overall performance", he maintained. He further said, "Unlike our usual routine during other camps and international series, we engaged in confidence-building exercises and team-building activities. Notably, we opted to share rooms, facilitating deeper connections among team members. These shared spaces fostered discussions ranging from strategic planning and team combinations to the evolution of cricket, latest innovations in the sport, analysis of opponents and our approach to each day's challenges". All-rounder Aamer Jamal said that those sessions were instrumental in enhancing their speed and endurance. "Given the high altitude of this location, unique training methods were necessary to ensure sufficient oxygen flow to our muscles, and I believe this aspect was one of the most valuable takeaways from our time here in Kakul", he added. Wicketkeeper-batter Azam Khan said that the rigorous training at higher altitudes has not only pushed us to their limits but has also markedly enhanced their overall

fitness and strength. He said, "My primary focus has been on enhancing my endurance, and the instructors have been incredibly supportive in this endeavor. While I understand that this is a gradual process, I feel well-prepared and equipped to assimilate all the learnings from this camp and continue working towards achieving the required standards". All-rounder Imad Wasim said, "Personally, I benefited tremendously as I was already focused on my rehabilitation and strength. These sessions and drills were markedly different from cricket-related training, but we dedicated extra hours that I'm confident will benefit us all in match situations". He said that the time in Kakul was also crucial from a team bonding perspective. "I've sensed, and I'm sure other players have too, that it was valuable to be here, spend time together, and grow closer to each other. This closeness will undoubtedly play a significant role in our performances", he said. Fast bowler Naseem Shah said that after some time apart due to the HBL Pakistan Super League, it was truly gratifying to come together and recharge for the cricket challenges that lie ahead. Undoubtedly, he said, there was a significant emphasis on physical fitness, as every athlete aspires to reach peak condition. All-rounder Shadab Khan said that it has been a new experience training at these marvelous facilities under the watchful eyes of the Pakistan Army trainers. He said that all the cricketers will return with improved fitness levels and standards that will significantly contribute when they take the field in the upcoming challenges.

## Dominant Verstappen wins Japanese GP in Red Bull one-two

SUZUKA (AFP): Max Verstappen said Red Bull must capitalise on their early season dominance after romping to victory in Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix ahead of teammate Sergio Perez. The triple world champion claimed his third win in the four races so far this year and on this evidence the Dutchman and Red Bull will take some stopping once again. Verstappen failed to finish in Australia a fortnight ago because of a brake issue but starting from pole he controlled the race at Suzuka from start to finish. "I know there will be tracks coming up that might not be so favourable for us," said Verstappen, who took the chequered flag 12.5sec ahead of the Mexican Perez. "But then of course when we do get to the tracks where we can be quick, we have to really take advantage of it and score maximum points as a team." Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, who triumphed in Melbourne, was third in dry, sunny conditions at Suzuka. Verstappen has taken an early stranglehold on the world championship on 77 points, with Perez on 64 and Sainz's Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc on 59. Mercedes boss Toto Wolff told reporters after the race that "no one is



going to catch Max this year." "Basically the rest of the season now is the best of the rest, that's the fact," said Wolff. Verstappen said this week that Suzuka was one of his favourite circuits and he has now won the Japanese Grand Prix three times in a row. "Of course Melbourne felt like a bit of a hiccup," he said. "But what we did today was what we need to do, and that's what we aim to do every single weekend." Perez was also coming off a weekend to forget after finishing fifth in Australia. He did not complete the race last year at Suzuka but was comfortable in holding off Sainz for second. "I think we have a good momentum," said Perez. "Last year here was probably my worst weekend, so I think if we are

strong here, I think we can be strong anywhere else. "It's been a good weekend." Early drama Leclerc, who started from eighth on the grid, came home in fourth. McLaren's Lando Norris, second in last year's race, was fifth ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso. Mercedes' George Russell edged out McLaren's Oscar Piastri for seventh, while Lewis Hamilton was ninth in the other Mercedes. Japan's Yuki Tsunoda was 10th for RB, scoring points at his home grand prix for the first time. Verstappen was starting from pole for the fourth time in as many grands prix, but the race was almost immediately red-flagged after RB's Daniel Ricciardo and Williams' Alex Albon collided in a frenetic start.

Albon's front wing clipped into the rear of Ricciardo's car as they jockeyed for position and both slammed into the wall before getting out unscathed, but their race was over. The action resumed from a standing start and Verstappen picked up from where he left off ahead of Perez. "Whenever I needed to go faster I could, whenever I needed to look after my tyres I could," said Verstappen. "That's always a nice feeling to have when you're driving." Verstappen and Perez consolidated their positions, leaving Norris fighting for third against the two Ferraris. A late lock-up cost the McLaren driver his chance of a podium finish. Sainz said finishing third was "very satisfying". "We kind of knew our race pace was better than our qualifying pace -- still probably not enough to go for a win," said the Spaniard. "Given how the race pace on the Red Bull is, it's almost impossible to think about a win." The championship resumes in a fortnight's time with the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. It will be the first time the event has been held since 2019, before it was curtailed by the pandemic.

## Devine leads NZ to consolation ODI win over England

HAMILTON (Agencies): Twelve runs needed for victory, 12 runs needed to reach a century, all the time in the world, but why wait? In the space of three balls, Sophie Devine twice hauled Charlie Dean over the fence at deep midwicket to seal a breath-taking ton and an emphatic consolation win for New Zealand in Hamilton in their final match of the ODI series, which England won 2-1. Devine came to the crease with her side 14 for 2 and smashed a 93-ball century to reel in a target of 195 with 11 overs to spare. She was well supported by Maddy Green, with whom she shared an unbroken partnership worth 105, and Amelia Kerr, who scored 29 of her 31 runs in a 76-run stand with her captain. There was no sign of the quad strain that had kept Devine out of action since the fourth T20I in her impeccable footwork as she took to England's attack - particularly off-spinner Dean and quick Lauren Filer - in a typically powerful innings which underlined her importance to the White Ferns, just as they looked in danger of squandering a golden opportunity to beat England. The visitors were bowled out inside 50 overs for the second match

in a row, seamers Jess Kerr and Hannah Rowe taking three wickets each to restrict them to 194 with 3.3 overs to spare. Yet again England had to lean on Player of the Series Amy Jones, whose scores of 92 not out, 48 and 50 lifted her side after middle-order collapses throughout. On this occasion, she reached a run-a-ball half-century and shared a 73-run partnership for the seventh wicket with Dean, the pair having put on a record 130-run stand in the previous match. But this time it wasn't enough to combat what was to come from Devine. Kate Cross struck in the third over of the run-chase as Georgia Plimmer - opening for Bernadine Bezuidenhout, who injured her hamstring while fielding in the second ODI - chased one outside off stump and edged to wicketkeeper Jones. Then Suzie Bates sent a leading edge straight to Maia Bouchier at mid-wicket attempting to turn Nat Sciver-Brunst squarer to the leg side. At the end of the powerplay, the hosts were 31 for 2 as Devine and Amelia Kerr settled into the early stages of their partnership. Devine was on 13 when she sent a sharp, difficult chance off Filer through the hands of Heather Knight at slip. Devine

clubbed Dean over deep midwicket for twin sixes in three balls and brought up her fifty over the course of four fours in five balls off Dean's next over. In between, Sophie Ecclestone pulled up with what appeared to be a calf problem at the start of her seventh over, but she broke the stand when she trapped Amelia Kerr lbw before leaving the field to seek treatment. Ecclestone returned to action and saw Jones fumble a stumping chance off Green with New Zealand needing 43 runs off 88 balls. Filer, who replaced fellow seamer Lauren Bell in the XI to play the fourth ODI of her fledgling international career, conceded 17 runs off her sixth over, 12 of those in fours clubbed down the ground by Devine. With 12 needed, Devine cleared the deep midwicket fence by some distance off Dean to move within one identical strike of a century and she repeated the effort two balls later. Earlier, Rowe struck in her second over, the fourth of the match, when she struck Tammy Beaumont on the back thigh with a ball that was on track to ping the top of leg stump and Jess Kerr had Maia Bouchier caught by Georgia Plimmer at extra cover with a leg-cutter for 19.





## In brief

### Rwp safe city project

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer, (RPO) Rawalpindi, Babar Sarfraz Alpa has directed the authorities concerned to accelerate work on Rawalpindi safe city project. According to a RPO Office spokesman, over 70 percent work on Rawalpindi Safe City project had been completed. He informed that the RPO while reviewing the progress of the Safe City project had directed the officers concerned to complete the project as soon as possible. He said that the officers concerned briefed the RPO about the current progress on the Safe City project. The RPO instructed that no compromise should be made on quality of work. The RPO further said that a weekly meeting would be held to review the progress of the Safe City project. Babar Sarfraz said that Safe City project would be an important milestone for the protection of life and property of the citizens.

### IRSA releases 81,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 81,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 84,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1419.29 feet and was 21.29 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and out-flow in the dam was recorded as 19,200 cusecs and 30,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1101.50 feet, which was 51.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 33,200 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 44,400, 34,100, 29,000 and 7,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 18,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 7,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Cleanliness plan for Eid

RAWALPINDI (APP): Waste Management Company had finalized a comprehensive plan to make the city neat and clean during Eid-ul-Fitr days. According to the RWMC spokesman, the department has cancelled the Eid holidays of sanitary workers and officials of the department to ensure cleanliness during the three days of Eid from Chand Raat. He said that a special cleaning campaign had been started around all the mosques, and Eidgahs while mechanical sweeping and washing of roads was being done. He said that all graveyards of Rawalpindi and its tehsils would be provided special services and the surroundings would be kept free from waste during these days while sanitary workers would be deployed in parks and recreational places across the city to ensure the waste picking, adding lime powder would also be sprinkled around all masjids, Eidgahs and public places. He said the cleanliness of bazaars and commercial areas would also be maintained on Chand Raat and Eid days. The spokesman informed that all collected waste would be lifted before the Eid prayers. He said after completion of the cleanliness task, all collection points and other areas would be cleaned properly and sprayed. He appealed to the citizens not to throw garbage and plastic bags in nullahs, drains and open, which cause obstruction.



ISLAMABAD: Tailors are busy in stitching clothes at their workplace in Islampura in connection with upcoming Eidul Fitr.

## IFA inspects 1291 food outlets, issues fines worth Rs 2.8 mln

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Director Operations (DDO) of Islamabad Food Authority (IFA), Dr. Tahira Saddique, while sharing a monthly report of the authority, stated that the authority inspected 1,291 food outlets and imposed fines totaling Rs 2.8 million on errant shopkeepers found flouting regulations. Talking to APP, she said that with an unwavering commitment to quality assurance, the authority's latest report underscored its relentless pursuit of adherence to food safety standards across the Federal Capital. On the directions of Director Food, Irfan Nawaz Memon, she accompanied by the Food Safety Teams (FSTs) inspected 1,291 establishments and sealed 16 outlets due to substandard food quality and inadequate arrangements, with legal actions initiated against three offenders, she said. Additionally, She

said a staggering total of 664 oral warnings and 446 written notices were issued, signaling a zero-tolerance approach towards violations. Responding promptly to citizens' concerns, the authority diligently addressed 14 complaints, ensuring accountability and responsiveness in its operations, Dr Tahira said. She said that during the holy month of Ramadan, the IFA intensified its oversight, conducting thorough inspections at 360 points within Ramadan Bazaars. Furthermore, in a bid to streamline operations and promote compliance, licenses were granted to 43 food establishments, bolstering the regulatory framework.

Highlighting its commitment to combating adulteration and excess, Dr Tahira said the IFA disposed of 6,500 kilograms of compromised food items, reaffirming its dedication to upholding strin-

gent quality standards and protecting consumer welfare.

On the occasion, she appealed to the masses to cooperate with the food department in identifying illegal food production units that were operating in small houses to ensure public safety.

Notably, the authority imposed a complete ban on the sale of Chinese salt, and gutka, emphasizing its commitment to upholding stringent standards of food safety and hygiene.

Dr Tahira Saddique reiterated the IFA's dedication to fostering a healthy environment for the citizens of the federal capital. She emphasized that strict action would be continued against those food outlets that were involved in selling adulterated or unhygienic food items.

The safety of citizens was the topmost priority of the IFA and no negligence would be tolerated in this regard, she warned.

### ICP launches search, combing operation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Sunday jointly conducted a search and combing operation within Secretariat police station jurisdiction.

A public relations officer said that, following the special directives of SSP (CTD) the search and combing operations are being conducted in different areas of the city, to ensure the safety and security of the Islamabad citizens. Following these orders, a search and combing operation was conducted in different areas of Secretariat police station by CTD and local police teams. During the search and combing operation 61 suspicious persons, 49 houses, 39 motorcycles and 22 motor vehicles were thoroughly checked. SSP Counter Terrorism Department said that, the purpose of the search and combing operations was to heighten the security in the federal capital.

## NAB asks AAA Associates' victims to submit compensation claims within fortnight

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has instructed individuals robbed by AAA Associates to submit their compensation claims to the NAB Rawalpindi bureau within the next two weeks. Those who have already submitted claims are advised not to resubmit their applications.

According to NAB, Rawalpindi sources, the Bureau was investigating the allegations of extortion of money, fraud, cheating, and false promises perpetrated by individuals such as Fawad Bashir, Shahzad Ali Kayani, and others from AAA Associates, targeting the general public.

The Bureau is probing allegations of money extortion, fraud, cheating and false promises perpetrated by individuals like Fawad Bashir, Shahzad Ali Kayani, and others associated with AAA Associates. Their alleged activities, centered at office no. 20121 on the Second Floor of the Business Centre in Bahria Town, National

Rawalpindi, have targeted the general public. The NAB has asked individuals deceived by AAA Associates with false promises to submit their claims for the return of their stolen money. These individuals are required to provide supporting documentation, including a copy of their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) and receipts, either via post or email within next fifteen days. This will enable the commencement of legal proceedings against the culprits.

Victims are asked to submit their claims, along with required documents, to the office of the Director General, NAB Rawalpindi, the Investigation Officer at Investigation Wing-II, National Accountability Bureau (Rawalpindi), situated at Melody, Islamabad, G-6, Civic Centre. Contact details for inquiries include Fax: 051-9220832, Phone: 051-9222064, and email: rawalpindi@nab.gov.pk.

## 994 electricity thieves arrested in Rwp division; over Rs 88 mln recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): The administration had managed arrest of 994 accused under special campaign launched against electricity theft in Rawalpindi division while over Rs 88 million were recovered from them, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak.

He informed that 1186 FIRs were registered since 7 September 2023 and all available resources were being used to prevent electricity theft.

He directed the authorities to ensure 100 percent electricity theft recoveries in all districts of the division. He ordered to complete all the arrangements for power supply especially in Murree during Eid days. He also directed that additional manpower should be deployed in Murree for Eid holidays and a backup plan should also be prepared for uninterrupted power supply during Eid holidays.

The performance of Rawalpindi

Division is best in the province in terms of anti-electricity theft, Engr. Aamir Khattak informed. He said that special attention should be given to commercial settlements as there is a high risk of power theft.

All Deputy Commissioners of the division should ensure checking in their respective districts, he instructed.

Many hotels in Murree use electric heaters which should also be checked, he ordered. The provincial government had directed that the feeders where there are heavy line losses, the electricity thieves should be identified and sent behind the bars with a special focus on these feeders. Recovery from them should be ensured, he directed. Individual recovery should be done from electricity thieves and not the entire area or village should be fined, Aamir Khattak said. Rawalpindi district police on the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab, have also accelerated their ongoing operation against electricity theft.

## Transport owners warned against overcharging

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Rawalpindi has warned the transporters against overcharging public transport fares from people going to hometowns to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr with their families.

According to a RTA spokesman, it is common feature that with the coming of Eid people go to their hometowns to celebrate the festival with their loved ones.

People from abroad as well as major cities make it a point to be home with their kith and kin for the festivities. However, the transporters have a habit of fleeing the home bound citizens by charging exorbitant rates, he said.

He informed that stern action would be taken against transporters found overcharging and overloading the passengers. The staff concerned had been directed to check overcharging and overloading of passengers in buses and vans especially before Eid-ul-Fitr, he said.

The checking was being carried out randomly at different places, he said adding, strict action would be taken on the spot and excess fares would be returned to the passengers. The Commissioner had also directed the RTA Rawalpindi to control fares of Public Service Vehicles (PSVs) and take strict action against the violators without any discrimination.

According to the spokesman, the RTA on the directives of the Commissioner had finalized arrangements to conduct raids for checking fares of the public transport. The RTA under the supervision of Secretary RTA, was taking

strict action in accordance with the law against overcharging.

The Secretary RTA had instructed the officials concerned to make arrangements to control fares of public transport as people started going to their hometowns to celebrate Eid ul Fitr, he added.

Special squads had also been formed and deployed at bus and wagon stands to control overcharging and overloading, he said adding, a special control room had also been set up at RTA office to monitor teams checking fares of buses and wagons in the bus stands.

The transporters and the management of the bus terminals had also been instructed to ensure implementation of the orders in letter and spirit, else strict action would be taken against the violators without any discrimination, he added.

Transporters were asked not to create an artificial shortage of buses and bring all their vehicles on roads otherwise their licenses would be canceled.

According to the Secretary RTA, they had canceled Eid holidays of their checking staff. "We are trying to control the phenomenon of overcharging ahead of Eid."

He advised the passengers to note numbers of buses and wagons which are overcharging. "Passengers should inform us and we will take strict action against transporters," he claimed. Meanwhile, all bus and wagon terminals including railway station on Saturday and Sunday remained jam packed with passengers who were leaving for their native towns to celebrate Eid ul Fitr with

their families. The passengers were seen running from one bus stand to the other in search of tickets, while the transporters taking full advantage of the situation were demanding enhanced fares from them.

Huge rush of passengers could be witnessed at all bus terminals and also at Rawalpindi Railway Station here on Saturday and Sunday. On the other hand, as per ugly practices long route transporters were openly looting helpless passengers by charging enhanced fares apart from charges of luggage.

The transporters at Pirwadhai, Faizabad, Rawat, Humrahi and Soan Bus/Wagon Terminals were demanding enhanced fares from the passengers. The official Eid holidays will begin on Wednesday (April 10) but the non-locals have started departing the twin cities for their hometowns on Saturday and Sunday which are off days, while the remaining would likely go till 'Chand Raat'.

Similarly, a large number of passengers could be witnessed at Rawalpindi Railway Station waiting for trains. Majority of the passengers have already booked their seats but others are facing difficulties in hunt of seats.

The influx of people returning to their hometowns has caused a surge in traffic at all 44 major and minor transport hubs throughout the district, including the Pirwadhai general bus stand. The transport terminals of Pirwadhai, Peshawar Morr, Sawan, Faizabad, Pirwadhai GBS, and Pirwadhai Morr are experiencing a surge in passenger crowds.

## Eid-ul-Fitr preparations; shopping in full swing

RAWALPINDI (APP): With Eid-ul-Fitr just around the corner, Eid-ul-Fitr preparations and shopping have gained momentum in the city markets with a large number of people, particularly women and children, flocking to main city markets, bazaars and malls.

A festive environment in shopping was noticed here on Saturday night at the busy markets including Saddar, Lalkurti, Commercial Market, Moti Bazar, Tench Bhatta, Peoples Colony, Raja Bazaar and various other markets of the town.

Several local and international brands had displayed their latest Eid editions of dresses, shoes, and other essential accessories to attract the buyers and gain maximum profits with the start of last Ashra of Ramadan.

The residents can be seen thronging shopping malls and other city markets. People are seen rushing to buy dresses and household items.

The shopkeepers have decorated their shops with colourful lights to attract the customers. The shopping frenzy is expected to reach its peak on Monday and Tuesday. Families come out for shopping

soon after iftar and seen buying shoes, cosmetics, ready-made garments, eye-catching artificial jewellery, multi-coloured bangles, and other items for the upcoming festival of Eid ul Fitr. Women are busy in buying clothes, footwear, cosmetics, henna, bangles and other items.

Big crowds of girls were witnessed on Saturday night on bangles and henna stalls in various areas of city.

Taking advantage of the shopping rush, some shopkeepers have also started to fleece the shoppers with both hands.

A bangle seller said, "The number of customers is gradually picking up and hopefully it will go further up as Eid ul Firt approaches."

A customer said, "I have completed shopping for my kids and I have bought clothes and matching shoes." Hawkers are also making brisk sales of clothes, footwear, cosmetics, and other goods as these products are generally purchased by low-income people ahead of Eid, said another citizen.

Temporary stalls selling ready made clothes, bangles, earrings and cosmetics have also sprung

up throughout the city.

Several Eid shoppers also complained of overpricing, especially of women's and kids' clothing.

They said that only the people with deep pockets could afford to complete their shopping lists as it is difficult to buy clothes, footwear and other accessories during these inflationary times. "The prevailing price-hike is limiting me to be content with buying clothes only for my children," said Amina, a visitor to Chota Bazaar Saddar.

Sobia, a visitor to the Commercial Market, said buying bangles and henna were always one of the greatest Eid thrills.

She complained that the shopkeepers were exploiting the Eid shopping frenzy and overcharge the customers. A shopkeeper at Raja Bazar said a great number of shoppers were thronging markets and that he was having a good business.

Rawalpindi police have increased the security of the bazaars and markets by deploying additional personnel. Meanwhile, special arrangements have also been made by the City Traffic Police to ensure traffic flow.

## Fire breaks out in LPG refilling shop

RAWALPINDI (APP): District Emergency Service averted a major tragedy by timely responding to a gas explosions incident here on Saturday night. According to a Rescue 1122 spokesman, fire broke out suddenly in an LPG refilling station in Gulzar e Quaid area late at night on Saturday.

The fire swiftly engulfed other gas cylinders placed nearby causing several gas explosions.

Rescue 1122 teams comprising fire fighters and fire tenders rushed to the incident spot and prevented the fire from further spread.

The spokesman further informed that

the incident took place in the basement of a 3-storey building.

Rescue teams successfully controlled the fire which could further reach to residential flats of the building.

According to details several explosions took place in the LPG refilling shop resulting in fire and damage to the shop.

Reports confirmed one man suffered from burn injuries who was rescued and shifted to a hospital. While residential portions of the building remained unharmed.

The spokesman informed that more than 25 rescue personnel along with 5 fire tenders participated in successful rescue and fire fighting operation.



ISLAMABAD: An elderly couple on the way carrying bags on their head in Federal Capital.



Hamid Mubarez passes away

KABUL (Khaama Press): Abdul Hamid Mubarez, a journalist and author of several books, passed away after decades of media activities and political experience. Mubarez's relatives confirmed his death to Khama Press on Sunday, April 7th, and his burial ceremony will be held this evening in Kabul's Qul-e-Ab-Chakhan. Abdulhamid Mubarez has decades of experience in media activities and has left behind at least eight book titles.

The Frontier Post

AFGHANISTAN

Ramazan 28, 1445 — Monday, April 08, 2024

18m depend on health aid

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Health Organization announced that 18 million people in Afghanistan rely on health assistance in honour of April 7, World Health Day. The organization added that access to quality healthcare remains a fundamental challenge in Afghanistan. The World Health Organization emphasized fair access to health services in Afghanistan by publishing a video on Sunday, April 7.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Report: Taliban shift to methamphetamine production after poppy ban

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Australian weekly "Saturday Paper" reported that the Taliban, following the announcement of the poppy cultivation ban, has shifted its focus to the production and trafficking of methamphetamine instead of heroin. According to the report, a significant portion of methamphetamine (crystal meth) originates from Afghanistan and reaches drug markets in Australia.

The efforts by the Taliban to replace heroin with methamphetamine began before the complete takeover of Afghanistan by this group, as stated in the report.

An expert from a global drug control agency told "Saturday Paper" that in the early days of the Taliban, alongside heroin packages, they would also send a package of methamphetamine for free to their customers to familiarize them with this substance.

The expert stated, "They send you a hundred kilograms of heroin and add five kilograms of methamphetamine for free." According to him, the aim of this was to attract cus-

tomers to this substance in the initial stage.

According to this report, the shift towards methamphetamine has allowed the Taliban to transform their "vast heroin empire into a more profitable, more dangerous, and deadlier trade" and fund their rule in Afghanistan through it.

The ban on poppy cultivation by the Taliban is referred to as "part of the group's agenda" in the report, as this order has boosted the value of larger reserves of raw opium, "which appears to be held by some senior leaders of the group." "Saturday Paper" wrote that it seems unlikely that these reserves will diminish for many years.

The Weekly noted that while the Taliban issued the order to ban poppy cultivation in 2022, this order was not implemented practically during the year, and drug producers had plenty of time to increase production and stockpile.

According to the report, during this time, the Taliban also focused more on methamphetamine production and product diversification.

The media outlet wrote that according to experts and evidence, the rise of methamphetamine "is set to make the Taliban endlessly wealthy, strengthen their power, and simultaneously fund dozens of terrorist and jihadist organizations that currently enjoy Taliban support in Afghanistan."

As an example, the report mentioned that the price of one kilogram of heroin from Afghanistan was \$250,000 before the issuance of the ban, while the same amount of methamphetamine was valued at \$700,000.

So far, the Taliban has not commented on this report.

In September 2023, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed a twelvefold increase in the smuggling of crystal meth from Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Seizures surged from 2.5 tons in 2017 to 29.7 tons in 2021, as reported. Additionally, Iran's Drug Control Headquarters highlighted the daily production of industrial drugs, including methamphetamine, in Afghanistan.

UNESCO to reconstruct Gholghola, Zuhak cities

BAMIYAN (TOLOnews): Local officials in Bamiyan said that the reconstruction of ancient sites in this province, including the second part of the Gholghola and Zuhak cities, will begin soon by UNESCO.

Safiullah Raed, head of Information and Culture of Bamiyan, said: "The reconstruction of the second part of the city of Gholghola and Zuhak will begin, the quality of the work this year is better, and many people will be employed, which is beneficial to the people of Bamiyan."

A number of archaeologists and tourism analysts said that the reconstruction of historical sites and attracting tourists has a positive effect on strengthening the income of the government and the residents of this province.

Dozens of ancient monuments, including caves, towers, and small statues, are located in the Kakrak Valley southeast of the city of Bamiyan; however, some of these caves have been used by local residents as places for keeping livestock over the years, which has caused parts of these ancient monuments to be destroyed.

"When these places are reconstructed, people should pay attention to their protection and keep them clean," Zamen, a resident of Bamiyan, told TOLOnews.

"Every year, many people come to see this ancient site, but rain and snow have damaged parts of this place, the government should pay attention to its reconstruction," Abdul Fattah, another resident of Bamiyan, also told TOLOnews.

"If historical places are reconstructed and restored, it will definitely have a positive impact on attracting tourists," Mohammad Reza Ebrahim, a tourism analyst.

"The protection and reconstruction of historical monuments will boost tourism and prevent further destruction of ancient sites," said Sayed Abdul Sajjadi, a professor at Bamiyan University.

With security provision, in most of the country's highways, especially in Bamiyan over the past two years, thousands of citizens of the country and foreign tourists go to Bamiyan province annually to visit its natural attractions and ancient sites.

Daesh suppressed in Afghanistan: Deputy PM



KABUL (Ariana News): Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlawi Abdul Kabir said that the Islamic Emirate has suppressed Daesh in Afghanistan and no one should lobby to make the group appear strong.

Speaking at an iftar dinner reception for diplomats in Kabul, Abdul Kabir said that some circles in the region and beyond spread propaganda about Daesh in Afghanistan, while the group is not only an enemy of Afghanistan, but also of

the region and the world.

He emphasized that the Islamic Emirate is interested in having political, economic and cultural relations with the world, participating in regional projects and acting as a connecting point.

He added that considering the same, Afghanistan's neighbors should be assured that the Islamic Emirate will not allow anyone to threaten any country from Afghanistan.

He said: "For those who

have failed in Afghanistan, extensive regional relations and engagement, carrying out infrastructure and development works, eliminating drugs and corruption, and ensuring nation-wide security are not tolerable."

According to the official, many positive changes have taken place in Afghanistan after the takeover of the Islamic Emirate and the country has been pushed towards a stable path.

He once again called on

countries to stop forced repatriation of Afghan refugees and to work diligently in this area, keeping in mind the international laws.

While expressing hope for the reopening of more embassies in Kabul, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir emphasized that the Islamic Emirate wants to have good relations with all countries based on its economy-oriented foreign policy, and the regional countries can create and strengthen regional initiatives.

UN stresses meaningful participation of women in all aspects of public life

KABUL (Khaama Press): Indrika Ratwatte, Deputy Coordinator of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

report indicates that only \$290 million of the requested \$3.03 billion budget has been secured in Afghanistan.

He noted that the short-

of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs emphasized the cultural sensitivities surrounding women's cooperation in



(OCHA), reiterated the organization's commitment to empowering and meaningfully engaging women in all aspects of public life in Afghanistan.

The OCHA, in a published report, stated that only 6% of the required budget for aid delivery in Afghanistan has been secured.

Ratwatte also expressed deep concern over budget cuts, emphasizing the UN's support for gender equality and the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan.

According to this official, the UN's focus is on continuing to create widespread and secure spaces for women and girls, as over 90% of those affected are women and children.

The organization's

age of funds for aid delivery in Afghanistan would hinder the provision of vital assistance, urging the international community to double their commitment to the people of Afghanistan by increasing their financial support.

The report from this organization states: "The National Security Council also emphasized the UN's steadfast commitment to gender equality and the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan and the need to continue creating comprehensive and safe spaces for women and girls, supporting their empowerment and meaningful and active participation in all aspects of public life."

The Deputy Coordinator

Afghanistan and underscored the importance of continuous support for women and girls.

The Deputy Coordinator of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said: "I have been coming to Afghanistan for over 20 years. I have dear friends here. This country has always had a special place in my heart. That's why I'm here. I believe we can make a difference for the people of Afghanistan and I am fully committed to this effort."

This comes as global support in the private sector and trade has increased following the suspension of education and work for women in Afghanistan over the past two years.

Iran tells illegal immigrants to return home

KABUL (Ariana News): Iran does not provide welfare services for illegal immigrants and they should return home, the head of the General Department of Foreign Nationals and Immigrant Affairs of Tehran Ehsan Haidari said.

According to ISNA news agency, Haidari added that if illegal immigrants are employed, they and their employers will face legal action. However, he stressed that this does not apply to documented refugees, rather the government will seek to serve people with high potential in the best way possible.

He said that there are refugees who have lived in Iran for more than 40 years.

Haidari said that the government will also issue smart cards for refugees. There are about 6 million Afghan refugees in Iran.



under my care. My husband is an elderly man."

Abdul Rahim, a resident of Kandahar's Dand district, said: "The assistance we receive every day means a lot. We also need

some help for the future.

Many residents of this village in Kandahar's Dand district are facing severe economic problems and poverty, but they say the assistance from the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Charity Foundation during Ramadan has solved some of their problems.

Mohammad Rahman, a resident of Kandahar's Dand district, said: "These people are desperately poor, there's a lot of unemployment, a lot of poverty, certainly, I live in this area, there are houses that don't even have a single meal in the evening."

Muhammad Rasool, another resident of Kandahar's Dand district, said: "The day I found out, I hadn't prepared anything for Ramadan, I was eating dry bread with water, so this initiative that has been introduced is very active."

Another resident of Kandahar's Dand district, Abdul Sattar, said: "There are people who haven't

eaten rice even before the Ramadan began."

A representative of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Charity Foundation in Kandahar says, since the beginning of Ramadan, they have been distributing fresh and hot meals to about a thousand families daily across various districts including Dand, Panjwai, Zherai, and Daman, in addition to the provincial center.

Habib ur Rahman Rahmani, an official of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Humanitarian Foundation, told TOLOnews: "On a daily basis, our group provides Iftar meals to 500 individuals."

Since the beginning of Ramadan, in addition to food, the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Charity Foundation has also initiated a series of assistance with food items for impoverished families across various parts of the country, which is still ongoing.

23 killed, 19 wounded in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, some global organizations and Japan announced \$21 million in aid to Afghanistan, with Russia hinting at removing IEA from the terrorist list — a move hailed by the caretaker government.

Casualties

Last week, 23 people were killed and 19 others wounded across Afghanistan in various incidents.

According to reports, about 12 people, including children, lost their lives and 12 others were wounded as a result of explosions of old ordnance in Badakhshan, Herat, Ghazni, Farah, Parwan and Kandahar provinces.

Local officials in Balkh said one Daesh member had been killed and another injured in a blast while making explosives in

Dehdadi district.

Based on reports, one person was killed in a clash between two families in Ghazni. Separately, three individuals were killed and a fourth wounded in a fight between cousins over activities of a health centre in Uruzgan province.

Five people were injured as a protest by shopkeepers against the municipality turned violent in Helmand province.

In Farah, three people were killed while offering Taraweeh prayers. A couple was shot dead in Kandahar and an armed robber killed in a clash with security forces in Takhar.

According to reports, during the previous week, 16 people had been killed and six others injured in different incidents nationwide.

Before the regime change in Afghanistan in August 2021, hundreds of civilians and security personnel would be killed and injured every week.

Russia may remove IEA from terrorist list

Russia is considering the removal of the "Taliban movement" from the list of terrorist organisations. "As for terminating the Taliban movement's status of a terrorist organisation, this issue is being considered by the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Justice and other agencies."

A final decision on the issue would be made by Russia's top political leadership, the Foreign Ministry in Moscow said.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, meanwhile, welcomed Moscow's move as important for trust-build-

ing between the two countries.

"This will greatly enhance trust between both countries and also facilitate further cooperation in the economic field and beyond. It sends a positive message to other countries to remove similar obstacles. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan represents a nation and has emerged as a movement for the freedom of its country," IEA spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told TOLOnews.

Additionally, Moscow invited IEA to the "Russia – Islamic World: Kazan Forum" which will be held from May 14 to 19.

Hafiz Zia Ahmad Takal, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), told Pajhwok Afghan News Tatarstan republic head

Rustam Minnikhanov invited Commerce Minister Nooruddin Aziz and ACCI Director Mohammad Younus Momand to participate in the Kazan huddle.

Drones violating Afghanistan's airspace

According to reports, drones are using Afghan airspace in Panjsher, Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Nimroz and Kandahar provinces.

Mujahid said patrols by American drones over Afghan was a blatant infringement of law and contrary to international law.

"We consider it... a blatant violation of international law and also this is a breach of our airspace. It should be stopped. If they continue, we can decide then."

Mujahid added: "These drones undoubtedly belong

to the US, flying and entering from some neighbouring countries into Afghanistan. Everyone should understand their responsibilities and stop this aggression."

IEA confirms arrest of US citizens

Last week, NBC News reported two American citizens were being held by the interim Afghan government.

The foreign citizens had been detained for violating Afghanistan's laws, the IEA spokesman said in an interview.

Mujahid said: "I think there are two Americans, and the reasons for their visit (to Afghanistan) are not clear yet."

He stressed: "Whatever the reasons, anyone coming here is obliged to observe the laws of Afghanistan. Anyone who gets an

Afghan visa means they agree to follow our laws."

Manizha Sediqi: Not tortured in custody

Manizha Sediqi told a press conference she had not been tortured in jail and that her health condition was good.

Sediqi, a female protester, who is still in IEA custody, denied rumours about her torture and beatings.

Earlier, the Rafa Foundation for Women and Children and Amnesty International claimed Sediqi did not have access to health and legal services, and could not meet family members.

Sentenced to 18 months in prison on charges of actions "against the principles" of IEA, she has been in jail for about six months.

Continuation of aid

The United Nations

Coordination Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced Japan had donated \$600,000 to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

The World Bank allocated 16 million US dollars to support women's businesses in Afghanistan by granting them loans.

The European Union (EU) allocated 150,000 (over 11 million afghanis) to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to families affected by extreme cold temperatures that hit Afghanistan in early March.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) supplied medical kits and medicine worth over \$ 4.4 million to 25 hospitals across 15 provinces of Afghanistan since September 2023.





**BEIJING: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (L) meets with Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.**

# Islamabad starts work to complete 80-km section of Pak-Iran gas pipeline

ISLAMABAD (INP): With Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's expected visit to Pakistan on April 22, authorities have commenced the work to begin the construction of the 80-kilometre section of the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline from Gwadar to a point where it can be connected with the Iranian section of the project, reported an English daily on Sunday.

As per the publication, citing a senior official of the Energy Ministry, the Inter-State Gas Company (ISGS) has already issued tenders seeking the much-delayed re-validation of survey and Front-End Engineering Design (FEED) by consultants.

The development comes amid the United States's explicit opposition to the bilateral project, coupled with warnings of potential sanctions, which has faced a nearly decade-long delay as it was set to be

completed in December 2014 followed by its operationalisation in January 2015.

Over the years, Pakistan maintained that it could not materialise the project in its territory because of the US sanctions imposed on Iran, a view which authorities in Tehran have never subscribed, saying the US sanctions are not justified.

However, in January, Tehran issued the last notice to Islamabad seeking the completion of its side of the pipeline by February-March 2024 or face a \$18 billion penalty under the penalty clause of the Gas Sales Purchase Agreement (GSPA) of the 781-kilometre project.

According to the official, the laying down of the 80-km section of the pipeline is essential to avoid arbitration in France which may lead to the imposition of the aforementioned penalty on Pakistan. Furthermore, he also added that re-

validation of early survey and FEED is crucial as the 80-km section provisions two compressors one at the border and one at Gwadar as the 80-km part of pipelines would absorb 100mmcfcd initially compared to the 750mmcfcd which the project is expected to take-off for 25 years.

Once this process is completed, the authorities will commence the land acquisition process which will then be followed by the awarding of Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract.

With the project slated for completion in 24 months at the cost of Rs44 billion, the Energy Ministry official noted that the Petroleum Division would seek a substantial amount for the project in the budget 2024-25 from PSDP amid the Finance Ministry's expected inability to provide the necessary funds from the head of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC).

## Govt to launch crackdown against Wapda officers

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The federal government has decided to launch a crackdown on Wapda officers and officials who were found involved in power theft and in this respect, the Power Division Ministry has sought surety certificates from Senior Superintendents to Linesmen of Walda.

According to a report on Sunday, now all power distribution companies' officers and other staff will submit surety certificates to the government that their areas are free from power theft and if any irregularity is found in the area then the concerned officer and official will be held responsible. The Pakistani government has announced a crackdown on electricity theft in the country in a bid to reduce power bills. Last week, protests erupted across the country with electricity consumers burning copies of their bills and vowing not to pay them alleging they were inflated and beyond their means.

A partial shutter-down strike was observed in different parts of the country, prompting the government to take measures to reduce power bills without violating the terms set by the International Monetary Fund. The government has announced a strategy to crackdown on power theft and reduce bills without compromising on the IMF conditions. The minister clarified that because of the electricity theft and refusal by some consumers to pay bills, the loss gets transferred to those who dutifully pay their bills.

## Yemen's Houthis say they targeted Western ships

CAIRO (Reuters): Houthi forces in Yemen said on Sunday they had launched rockets and drones at British, U.S. and Israeli ships, the latest in a campaign of attacks on shipping in support of Palestinians in the Gaza war.

The Iran-aligned group said it had targeted a British ship and a number of U.S. frigates in the Red Sea, while in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean it had attacked two Israeli vessels heading to Israeli ports. The operations took place during the last 72 hours, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said in a televised statement, without providing further details of the attacks. Britain and the United States have also been launching retaliatory strikes against the Houthis.

U.S. forces destroyed a mobile surface-to-air missile system in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen Saturday, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said. U.S. forces also shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle over the Red Sea, its statement said, adding that a coalition vessel also detected, engaged and destroyed one inbound anti-ship missile. No injuries or damage were reported.

Earlier, British security firm Ambrey said it had received information indicating that a vessel was attacked on Sunday in the Gulf of Aden about 102 nautical miles southwest of Mukalla in Yemen.

"Vessels in the vicinity were advised to exercise caution and report any suspicious activity," the firm said. It did not say who was responsible for the attack or give further details.

Separately, a missile landed near a vessel in the Gulf of Aden on Sunday but there was no damage to the ship or injuries to crew in the incident, 59 nautical miles southwest of the Yemeni port of Aden, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency said.

"The Master of the vessel reports a missile impacted the water in close proximity to the vessel's port quarter," UKMTO said in an advisory note. "No damage to the vessel reported and crew reported safe," it added.

It did not say who fired the missile or give further details. It was not immediately clear if the attacks reported by the British agencies were the same as the latest incidents claimed by the Houthis.

Houthi attacks have disrupted global shipping through the Suez Canal, forcing firms to re-route to longer and more expensive journeys around southern Africa. The United States and Britain have launched strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.

# Pakistan prepared to give befitting response to any Indian aggression: Asif

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Defence, Khawaja Muhammad Asif has said that Pakistan was fully prepared to give befitting response to any aggression from Indian.

While talking to a private news channel on Sunday, he emphasized Pakistan's readiness to defend itself against any potential threat, stating, "If India takes any action, it will receive a full reply."

Khawaja Muhammad Asif clarified, "We are prepared, and if anything occurs, we will not hold back."

He highlighted Pakistan's unwavering commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty against any form of aggression.

The minister pointed to Pakistan's decisive response to India's reckless incursion in February 2019 as evidence of its

resolve. Pakistan has consistent history of exposing India's hollow claims of military superiority, he added.

Khawaja Asif said, "We've consistently responded to India swiftly, and history is bound to repeat itself. For instance, in 2019, we exhibited restraint by returning an Indian pilot as a goodwill gesture, despite India's incursion following the Pulwama incident." He further asserted that terrorism in Pakistan had ties to India, suggesting that India was seeking to escalate tensions for political gain.

He accused Indian ministers of making statements aimed at securing political benefits. The defence minister reiterated Pakistan's determination to defend its sovereignty and protect its citizens against any hostile actions from India.

# UK sends Royal Navy ship to boost aid for Gaza and set up a new maritime corridor

LONDON (INP): A British Royal Navy ship will supply aid to Gaza as part of an international effort to help set up a new humanitarian maritime corridor in early May, the foreign office and ministry of defence said.

The multinational effort, involving the United States, Cyprus and other partners, will develop a new temporary pier off the coast of Gaza, British foreign minister David Cameron said.

"The situation in Gaza is dire and the prospect of famine is real. We remain committed to getting aid to those who so desperately need it," Cameron said in a statement. Cameron has

also pledged 9.7 million pounds (\$12.26 million) for aid equipment and logistical expertise to help set up the maritime corridor from Cyprus to Gaza, his office said. The initiative will see aid pre-screened in Cyprus and delivered directly to Gaza, through the new US temporary pier being constructed off the coast or via Ashdod Port after Israel agreed to open it, the foreign ministry said.

British defence minister Grant Shapps said the new temporary pier on the coast of Gaza will host cargo ships to deliver aid by sea.

The government said British military teams had

been embedded with planning teams in the US operational headquarters in Tampa, Florida, as well as in Cyprus for several weeks to develop the safest and most effective maritime route. Last week, the killing of the seven aid workers, including three British nationals, in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, stirred global outrage and saw the dismissal of two Israeli military officers. Britain said it would continue to call for "reform of deconfliction mechanisms", along with assurances that guarantee the safety and security of aid workers.

# Trump rakes in \$50 mn as fundraising war with Biden heats up

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): Donald Trump's campaign said it took in more than \$50 million at a single fundraising event Saturday in Florida -- the latest salvo in a swaggering, high-stakes battle for big money with Joe Biden.

While spending huge sums of money on campaigning may not be something to brag about in some countries, it's often a source of pride for US political candidates.

And this year, raising big bucks is as important as ever, with the November 5 presidential election expected to be the most expensive electoral cycle in US history. The Republican former president and the Democratic incumbent have been working to out-raise each other for months, boasting about each new significant cash infusion.

Biden, 81, raised the stakes at the end of March when he headlined a huge event in New York with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at his side, raking in at least \$25 million -- a record, according to his team.

But the 77-year-old Trump's campaign said he doubled that figure at the event at the Palm Beach home of billionaire hedge fund manager John

Paulson, not far from Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort.

In a joint statement with the Republican National Committee, Team Trump said the event raised more than \$50.5 million, calling Biden's event last week in New York "desperate" in comparison.

As he entered the venue with wife Melania at his side, Trump said: "This has been some incredible evening before it even starts, because people -- they wanted to contribute to a cause of making America great again. And that's what's happened."

In a statement, Paulson said: "This sold-out event has raised the most in a single political fundraiser in history. This overwhelming support demonstrates the enthusiasm for President Trump and his policies."

The Palm Beach guest list included businessman Robert Bigelow, who made a fortune in the hotel industry before launching an aerospace research company, and John Catsimatidis, owner of a major grocery store chain. Both are major Republican donors.

Some of Trump's former Republican rivals were also on the list, including Senator Tim Scott, tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and North

Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

After suspending their presidential campaigns, the trio have fully endorsed Trump, perhaps angling for a job in his administration if he succeeds in returning to the White House.

According to The Washington Post, a seat at Trump's table cost \$814,600. Such astronomical sums are used to finance candidates' travel, pay their aides, commission opinion polls and, the costliest of all -- buy television ads.

Biden, who portrays himself as a product and champion of the middle class, was quick to criticize Trump's fundraiser.

"While Trump is raising money from a bunch of hedge fund billionaires, our grassroots campaign raised \$187M this quarter because of folks like you," he said Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. At the moment, Biden's campaign war chest is bigger than Trump's, as the former president faces mounting legal fees stemming from multiple criminal indictments. Biden's campaign was all too happy to point that out, referring to Trump as "Broke Don" in a recent statement about the billionaire, who himself is known for using mean nicknames.

# MQM-P blasts Sindh govt over alarming rise in Karachi street crimes

KARACHI (INP): The rising crimes in Karachi are not possible without police acting as accomplices, said MQM-P leader Faisal Subzwari who also asked why the federal government wasn't taking notice of the alarming situation.

Regretting the fact that nothing is being done check the increase in street in crimes in the port city, he said most of the criminals at the end had always been found to be from the police, as he blasted the PPP government over the killing of dozens of people by criminals during robberies.

Subzwari censured the Sindh home minister over his comments in which he had blamed media for disproportional coverage of crimes in Karachi. He must speak only after thinking properly, otherwise, remaining silent was the best option, he remarked.

The MQM-P leader said how it was possible that the police didn't receive a share from the criminals snatching mobile phones from citizens when they had been getting money from those involved in illegal business of Iranian oil and the goods meant for Afghan transit trade.

Subzwari, who was addressing a press conference along with other party leaders, announced that they would formed neighbour committees to keep an eye on the illegal activities and criminal elements. The provincial government had failed miserably in protecting the lives and property of people, he noted.

The law and order was worsening in not just Karachi but also in the entire province, he added -- a clear reference to the dacoits operating freely in the Katcha area located along Indus River in upper

Sindh. Subzwari also mentioned that the mobile phones and bikes snatched or stolen in Karachi were not "airlifted" to other parts of the country. The goods were transported by road, he said and questioned how and why the police were no able to confiscate the same.

Speaking on the occasion, another MQM-P leader Khawaja Izharul Hassan said the PPP government in Sindh had no excuse to justify its failure to control the situation given that the party had been able to get appointed the very person it wanted to see as the provincial police chief. Khawaja also claimed that the PPP had blackmailed the PML-N's government in Centre for the appointment of a favourite as the Sindh IGP and that the Katcha area dacoits were seemingly celebrating the move.

# PM renews pledge to ensure health facilities to all

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday renewed the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to provide and ensure health facilities for all of population.

"Towards our destination of a healthier nation, I once again reiterate the commitment to transform Pakistan's healthcare sector at all levels that will ensure that each and every Pakistani has access to quality healthcare," the prime minister said in a message on World Health Day being observed on Sunday.

He said that the year's theme "My health, my right" aptly encapsulated every citizen's right to quality health services.

In order to ensure health for all

and as promised to the nation in the PML-N manifesto, the prime minister said their focus would remain on improving primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, medical education, preventive healthcare and improved governance.

"We will partner and encourage provincial governments to expand and upgrade health facilities, launch mobile health clinics for enhanced access, re-energize immunization and improve mental health services," PM Office Media Wing, in a press release, quoted the prime minister as saying.

The prime minister said that the establishment and operationalization of Medical City, establishment of Cancer Care Hospital and Pakistan Kidney & Liver Institute

facilities in each province remained their key priority.

"We take pride in having launched the Health Card during PMLN's 2013-18 tenure.

We remain committed to universal health coverage and universal health insurance for our population, particularly providing free-of-cost healthcare services to low and middle-income families," Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif added.

On the World Health Day, the prime minister also applauded the services of health professionals, paramedical staff, nurses, and other health workers who selflessly worked day and night to provide health services to the nation.

# ‘Worst floods in decades’ hit Kazakhstan and Russia

ORSK (BBC): Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from 10 northern regions in Kazakhstan because of floods in the area, the authorities have said.

The worse than usual seasonal floods have been caused by melting snow. Across the border in Russia, an oil refinery in the city of Orsk, 1,800km southeast of Moscow, has stopped operations because of the floods.

The Kremlin has warned that water levels in some areas are rising faster than at any time in the last 100 years. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said President Putin had ordered the governors of the Siberian regions of Tyumen and

Kurgan, further to the east, to prepare for "expected sharp rise in water levels" and "inevitable" floods. Russian authorities said on Saturday that they had evacuated almost 4,500 people in Orenburg region in the area around Orsk.

During a visit to Orsk on Sunday, Russian Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Kurenkov, warned that "a critical situation" had developed after a dam was breached on Friday. Russia's weather monitor has warned that water levels on the Ural river in the city of Orenburg will reach dangerous levels over the next three days.

Regional authorities said they expected the "peak" of the flood on

Tuesday and for the situation to stabilise after 20 April.

Meanwhile in Kazakhstan, the emergency ministry said on Sunday that some 12,000 people were being housed in temporary shelters.

It said rescuers also managed to move about 60,000 farm animals to safe areas.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said on Saturday that it was the worst natural disaster to hit Kazakhstan for 80 years.

In a televised address to the nation, Mr Tokayev said the government had ramped up efforts to mitigate the impacts of the floods and that all necessary assistance would be provided.

# Israeli embassies ‘no longer safe’ after Syria strike: Iran

TEHRAN (AFP): An adviser to Iran's supreme leader warned on Sunday that Israeli embassies are "no longer safe" after a strike in Syria which Tehran blamed on Israel killed seven Revolutionary Guards members.

"The embassies of the Zionist regime are no longer safe," Yahya Rahim Safavi, senior adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency. Tehran has vowed to avenge Monday's air strike on Damascus that levelled the Iranian embassy's consular annex, killing seven Islamic Revolutionary

Guard Corps (IRGC) members including two generals.

"The resistance front is ready; how it (the response) will be, we have to wait," Safavi said, noting that "confronting this brutal regime is a legal and legitimate right". He also noted that multiple Israeli embassies around the region "have been shuttered".

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Monday's attack, which Britain-based war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said killed 16 people, was the fifth raid on Syria in a week blamed on Israel. Among the dead

were generals Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi who were senior commanders in the Quds Force, the IRGC's foreign operations arm.

Zahedi, 63, had held several commands during a career spanning more than 40 years.

He was the most senior Iranian soldier killed since a United States missile strike at Baghdad airport in 2020 killed Quds Force chief General Qasem Soleimani.

Monday's strike in Damascus took place against the backdrop of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, which began with Hamas's October 7

attack on Israel which killed 1,170 people, according to Israeli officials. Tehran backs Hamas but has denied any direct involvement in the attack which sparked massive Israeli retaliation against the Gaza Strip.

According to the health ministry in Gaza, at least 33,175 people have been killed during six months of bombardment.

Iran does not recognise Israel, and the two countries have fought a shadow war for years.

The Islamic republic accuses Israel of having carried out a wave of sabotage attacks and assassinations targeting its nuclear programme.