

Highway blocked
KACHHI (PPI): Quetta-Sibi main highway was blocked on Friday for all kind of traffic after oil tanker caught fire on the highway near Punjra Pull area of Bolan in district Kachhi of Balochistan province. Long queues of vehicles were seen stuck on Quetta-Sibi main highway. According to detail, oil tanker caught fire near Punjra Pull area of Bolan in district Kachhi, causing long queues of vehicles moving between Quetta and Sibi.

Not seeking charity for our people: KP CM

— slams Centre on ‘high power tariff, worst load-shedding’ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

F.P. Report

DI KHAN: Lambasting the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led federal government over expensive electricity and “worst load-shedding”, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's outspoken Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Friday asked the Centre to pay its KP dues.

Speaking at a press conference in DI Khan, the provincial chief executive said: “Electricity is being supplied to our people at high rates.” “It would be their mistake if they [Centre] think that we will remain silent on this injustice,” he warned.

Moving on to the economic challenges and the upcoming first budget of the CM Gandapur-led government, the proviral chief executive said: “There is a deficit of more than Rs450 billion.” The federal government had to clear KP's Rs1.51 trillion dues under Net Hydrel Profit, he added.

“In the [previous] PTI's term, electricity was being provided at Rs15 per unit. [But] now, the utility's rate is Rs65 per unit and it is not even available.” “I am not seeking charity for our people,” he told the federal government. The KP CM, in March, warned the federal government that his province would move the

court of law to recover dues from the Centre. KP had fully restored the free treatment facility on Sehat Insaf Card across the province, the CM said, adding that they were making efforts to improve healthcare facilities at the public hospitals. He announced that they were working on new projects to produce cheap electricity, adding that the power generated by the projects would be supplied to the province. The KP chief minister noted that those who give and take bribes were equally guilty. He vowed to eliminate the culture of corruption from the institution and warned of strict punishment for those found involved in corrupt practices.

“I will not transfer anyone, but will fire,” In a bid to facilitate the masses, the chief minister said that they would launch an interest-free loan programme for jobless youth. “The individual will be sent to jail if found involved in the misuse of the loan.” Responding to a question about the next budget, the KP CM said: “It will be people-friendly.” To another query, the chief minister said that the government would introduce a new system to tackle the menace of drugs.

“Drug tests would be conducted at the education-

al institutions.” The chief minister said that the provincial government would legislate to hand down the death penalty to those involved in ice and heroin peddling. KP CM Gandapur threatened to march towards Islamabad if the “Centre does not clear” his province's dues soon.

Addressing an event in KP, the firebrand PTI leader had said: “They [centre] are making a mistake by denying the rights of the province.” The provincial chief executive had added that when he would take to the streets, all the people of the province would be behind him. “Clear the dues of my province as soon as possible, otherwise nobody will even thank you,” he told the federal government in Islamabad.

“I will ask the federal government not to take me easy,” Gandapur was of the view that KP should be given its due rights, as the province shares its resources with the entire country. He had also said that he would take the rights of his province from the federal government at all costs. “We will not let you sit in peace until our right is not given.” The chief minister urged the federal government to redress the grievances of his province.

SC fixes plea against verdict in NAB amends case

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) on Friday fixed govt's plea challenging the verdict in the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) amendments case for hearing. On September 15, 2023, the Supreme Court of Pakistan struck down amendments made to National Accountability Bureau laws as it announced its reserved verdict on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder's plea.

A five-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa will take up the plea on May 14. Justice Amin-Ud-Din Khan, Justice Jamal Mandokhail, Justice Athar Minallah and Justice Hassan Azhar are also part of the bench. The SC registrar's office has served notices to the respondents for May 14.

The federal government filed the review plea in the NAB amendments case under the SC Practice and Procedure Law and made the Federation of Pakistan, National Accountability Bureau and PTI founder respondents. Citing no violation of basic rights with the NAB amendments, the federal government pleaded with the SC to nullify its decision in the case. “Legislation is the right of the Parliament,” the plea said.

In a majority 2-1 verdict, the top court approved Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's petition challenging amendments made to the country's accountability laws during the tenure of the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led government. The top court also restored graft cases against public office holders that were closed down following the amendments to National Accountability Bureau laws.

Court grants bail to Gohar, Umar Ayub

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad's District and Sessions Court granted interim bail on Friday to several leaders of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in connection with a rally held on May 9th. The bail application, filed in anticipation of arrest, stemmed from a case lodged against the protest. Barrister Gohar, Umar Ayub, Aamir Mughal, and Shoaib Shaheen, all PTI leaders, appeared in court alongside their lawyers. Judicial Magistrate Arshad Mehmood Jasra granted interim bail to the aforementioned individuals, setting a bond of Rs. 5,500 each. The court also issued notices to all parties involved in the case.

The hearing was adjourned until May 21st, with the judge requesting arguments from both sides. This development comes after PTI announced national-wide rallies on May 9th. One such rally took place in Islamabad's G-Nine area, with Barrister Gohar, Aamir Mughal, and other PTI leaders in attendance. Reports indicate a confrontation between PTI supporters and police during the rally. Authorities reportedly attempted to arrest Barrister Gohar, but PTI workers successfully shielded him, preventing his apprehension.

Meanwhile, a case was registered against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Shehryar Riaz for holding an allegedly unauthorized rally in Rawalpindi.

The case was registered on the complaint of Sub-Inspector Mumtaz Khan at Bani Gala police station. The complaint cited Riaz and his colleagues shouting slogans against military authorities during the rally. By blocking roads, the PTI leader and supporters caused inconvenience to the public. According to the complaint, Riaz and his supporters had been informed that organizing rallies and gatherings was banned. Moreover, the rally participants allegedly tore off the uniform of a policeman and broke the windows of a car.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a review meeting on trade related matters.

PM for trade policies to facilitate businesses

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday directed the authorities concerned to formulate the trade policies with a core objective of facilitating the business sector, calling for urgent measures to enhance the competitiveness of the country's exports.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting on the trade sector, called for steps to promote exports of non-traditional goods and instructed for immediate payment of the certified duty drawback of the exporters. Highlighting the significance of the private sector, he instructed to ensure consultation with them during the policy-making and implement the deletion policy to uplift the auto sector.

Prime Minister Shehbaz directed the relevant ministry to devise a comprehensive strategy to scrutinize the performance of trade and investment officers posted in Pakistan's missions abroad, by rewarding the good performers and removing the incompetent ones. The prime minister told the meeting that he would personally carry out the fortnightly review of the export sectors.

In the meeting, the prime minister was told that the discussion on the Free Trade Agreement between Pakistan and the Gulf states was in the final stage and transit trade agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had already been materialized. It was told that during the recent Pak-Saudi Business Conference, around 450 business-to-business meetings were held and that the volume of e-commerce trade was witnessing a constant increase with the enlisting of over 3,000 firms on the Pakistan Trade Portal.

The meeting was also apprised of the strict monitoring of Afghan Transit Trade, double-digit premium growth of public sector insurance

Azeri minister calls on Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister of Ecology & Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Mukhtar Babayev Friday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at the PM House and handed over an invitation letter to him from President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev to participate in the COP-29 meeting to be held in Baku in November 2024.

The prime minister thanked the President of Azerbaijan for the invitation, and congratulated him and the Azeri people on Baku's selection for hosting COP-29, the most important gathering of world leaders this year to deliberate upon the challenges posed by climate change. He said that Pakistan was one of the most vulnerable countries that had borne the adverse impact of climate change in recent years, including the catastrophic floods of 2022.

He stressed the need for urgent action to enhance climate resilience. In this regard, he assured Azerbaijan of Pakistan's full support and cooperation in ensuring the success of COP-29. While accepting the invitation, the prime minister said he looked forward to participating in COP-29 where he would also have the opportunity to have detailed discussion with President Ilham Aliyev on the bilateral relationship, particularly to enhance bilateral trade and investment. PM Shehbaz also reiterated his invitation to President Aliyev to undertake an official visit Pakistan.

companies, finalising Gem Export Framework, and in-principle approval by Pakistan and Russia to operationalise the barter trade. It was told that consultation with the stakeholders was in progress on Preferential Trade Agreements with Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, as well as on the New Strategic Trade Policy. Moreover, necessary legislation was also being made to establish the Technology and Innovation Fund for industrial development.

Federal ministers Jam Kamal Khan, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Dr Musaddik Malik, Ahad Khan Cheema, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Jahanzeb Khan, State Bank governor and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Shehbaz tasks BOI to bring further EoDB for more investment, businesses: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday tasked the Board of Investment with the target to bring more ease for attracting investment and pave way for more businesses in the country.

The prime minister, who chaired a high-level review meeting on Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) for investment and business activities, said the minimum impediments were a must to attract investment. He told the meeting that during his previous tenure, he had taken priority measures to promote investment and business and that the Special Investment Facilitation Council had also played a supportive role in achieving the goals of economic revival.

He said the promotion of foreign investment and business activities in the country manifested the efforts by the government team for which they deserved an applause. The prime minister said that the visits of business delegations from friendly countries and surge in stock market reflected the trust of local and foreign investors in the government policies.

He instructed the BOI to formulate a mechanism on the pattern of one window operation in coordination with all the ministries and provincial governments.

IMF team reaches Pakistan to discuss new programme

ISLAMABAD (Reuters): An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team on Friday reached Pakistan to hold talks regarding the South Asian nation's request for a fresh bailout package under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

According to sources privy to the matter, a support team of the global lender will discuss the first phase of the next long-term loan programme with the country's financial team. Moreover, the sources said that the advance party has reached Pakistan for talks while the IMF mission will arrive on the night of May 16.

The team will receive data from different departments and will also discuss the upcoming budget for

the fiscal year 2025 (FY2025), with the Ministry of Finance officials. The sources also revealed that the team will stay in Pakistan for more than 10 days.

Pakistan sought a next bailout package in the range of \$6 to \$8 billion for the three years period under the EFF with possibility of augmentation through climate financing.

Last week, Reuters reported that the mission will discuss the FY25 budget, policies, and reforms under a potential new programme for the welfare of all Pakistanis. “Accelerating reforms now is more important than the size of the program, which will be guided by the package of reform and balance

of payments needs,” the IMF statement said.

Earlier, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, while speaking to Reuters, said that Pakistan hopes to agree on the contours of a new IMF loan in May. “We expect the IMF mission to be in Islamabad around the middle of May — and that is when some of these contours will start developing,” said Aurangzeb. He declined to outline what size programme the government hoped to secure, though Pakistan is expected to seek at least \$6 billion. Aurangzeb added that once the IMF loan was agreed, Pakistan would also request additional financing from the Fund under the Resilience and Sustainability Trust.

Big blow to PML-N as PA speaker suspends 27 MPAs

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In a major setback to the ruling alliance, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan on Friday suspended the membership of 27 MPAs on reserved seats in the light of the Supreme Court's decision.

Earlier this week, the Supreme Court had suspended the Peshawar High Court (PHC) and the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision to give the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) reserved seats to other parties. The opposition lawmakers welcomed the ruling and lauded the speaker with desk thumping.

According to details, MPA Rana Aftab of SIC had raised a point of order demanding the suspension of MPAs after the apex court ruling on reserved seats. Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan termed the point of order valid and suspended the membership of 27 MPAs on reserved seats. The speaker also read the judgement of Supreme Court in the house.

The speaker's ruling would be implemented from today and the entry of all the suspended MPAs

have also been banned. The ruling alliance lost 24 woman lawmakers and three minority MPAs in the light of the SC's judgement. The suspended MPAs included 23 from PML-N, two from PPP and one each from IPP and PML-Q. The number game also changed in the Punjab Assembly following the ruling of speaker.

Earlier, the PML-N had the support of 226 MPAs in the house and now it will stand at 203 after the suspension of its 23 lawmakers. On March 4 last, the ECP had accepted applications of the opposing parties and decided that the seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies would not remain vacant and would be allocated by a proportional representation process on the basis of seats won by political parties.

The development resulted in PTI-backed SIC losing a total of 77 reserved seats - 23 National Assembly seats (20 women and 3 minorities), 25 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly seats (21 women and 4 minorities), two Sindh Assembly seats (women) and 27 Punjab Assembly seats (24 women

and 3 minority). The Peshawar High Court had also rejected petitions filed by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) for the reserved seats of women and minorities. The party had challenged the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) verdict of not allocating the reserved women and minority seats to the SIC.

Saleem takes oath as Punjab Governor

F.P. Report

LAHORE: PPP Sardar Saleem Haider on Friday took oath as the 47th Punjab Governor. Chief Justice Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Shehzad Khan administered the oath to Sardar Saleem Haider in a ceremony held at the Governor House.

Sardar Saleem Haider took oath in Urdu. The swearing-in ceremony was also attended by the outgoing governor belonging to the PML-N Balighur Rehman and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

Image from iCube received F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The first image of the Moon by iCube Qamar has been received. Pakistan had launched a historic space mission to the moon. The launch of the satellite iCube Qamar was telecast live. The satellite was jointly developed by China's Shanghai University and SPARCO, to take pictures of the lunar surface. Qamar is equipped with two optical cameras.

UNGA backs Palestinian bid for membership

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The United Nations General Assembly Friday voted, by an overwhelming majority, to grant new “rights and privileges” to Palestine and called on the Security Council to favourably reconsider its request to become a full member of the UN.

The 193-member world body approved the Arab and Palestinian sponsored resolution by a vote of 143-9 with 25 abstentions. Pakistan backed the resolution which “determines” that a state of Palestine is qualified for membership and recommends that the Security Council reconsider its request “favourably.”

The renewed push for full Palestinian membership in the UN comes as Israeli aggression in Gaza has put the more than 75-year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict at center stage. At numerous Council and Assembly meetings, the humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinians in Gaza and the killing of more than 35,000 people in the enclave, have generated worldwide outrage over Israeli atrocities. The United States vetoed a widely backed Council resolution on April 18 that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for Palestine, a goal the Palestinians have long sought and Israel, with the support of its powerful allies, has worked to prevent.

US Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood made clear on Thursday that the Biden administration opposed the Assembly resolution. The United States was among the nine countries voting against it, along with Israel. Speaking before the vote, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Munir Akram said there would come a day when Israel would be held accountable for the crimes committed against Palestinians, especially in Gaza.

The insults hurled today - a reference to the highly provocative speech by Israel's UN Ambassador Gideon Erdan - were “the arrogance of the aggressor”, reflecting the impunity of the occupier, and trampling inherent and the UN Charter given rights of Palestinian people to self-determination, the Pakistani envoy said. He expressed the hope that the international community would appropriately respond.

“This is contrary to expectations of the member states, and standards and practice of the United Nations,” Ambassador Akram remarked. The resolution's adoption, he

added, would determine the widespread support for Palestine to be accorded full UN membership. Israel, Ambassador Akram said, had refused the calls by the Assembly, by the Security Council and even by its patrons and friends, to halt the massacre of innocents and accept an immediate ceasefire. The Israeli leadership had reneged on negotiated deals for a ceasefire, he said, noting it had now initiated its assault on Rafah.

Highlighting that the Palestinian people have been denied their right to self-determination since 1947 and, after 1967, obliged to live under Israel's brutal occupation, he said the General Assembly could partially redress the historic injustice by admitting Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. “The assertion that Palestine's admission can happen only through negotiations reflects the inequity of this position. Negotiations must have a level playing field. If Israel negotiates as a full member of the UN, so too should Palestine,” the Pakistani envoy said, referring to the US statement in opposing the Palestinian bid for full membership.

He added, “The adoption of this resolution will be a partial yet vital step towards redressing the historic injustice against the people of Palestine. It will reflect a political reality, which would facilitate the revival of a peace process to realize the universally agreed objective of creating a two-state solution, the objective of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State along the 4th June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds as its capital.” Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the observer State of Palestine, recounted the devastating impacts of the ongoing war in Gaza, with over 35,000 Palestinians killed, a further 80,000 injured and over two million displaced.

“No words can capture what such loss and trauma signify for Palestinians, their families, their communities and for our nation as whole,” he said. He added that the Palestinians in Gaza had been pushed to the “very edge” of the Strip, “to the very brink of life” with “bombs and bullets haunting them”. Mansour highlighted that despite the attacks and destruction, the flag of Palestine “flies high and proud” in Palestine and across the globe becoming a “symbol raised by all those who believe in freedom and its just rule”. “It is true that we will not disappear but the lives lost cannot be restored,” he stated.

50 dead in flooding in Afghanistan

KABUL (Reuters): At least 50 people have died in flooding following heavy rain in Afghanistan's northern province of Baghlan on Friday, a spokesman for the Ministry of the Interior said, adding that the death toll may rise.

Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qanee told Reuters that there had been flooding in more than five districts of Baghlan after heavy rains and that some families were stuck and in need of urgent help. He added that two heavy storms had been predicted for Friday night.

“The Ministry of Interior has sent teams and helicopters to the area, but due to a shortage of night vision lights in helicopters, the operation may not be successful,” he said. Last month, around 70 people were killed by heavy rains lashing Afghanistan, according to the government's disaster management department. Afghanistan was parched by an unusually dry winter that had desiccated the earth, exacerbating flash-flooding caused by spring downpours in most provinces.

Disaster management spokesman Janan Sayeq had said “approximately 70 people lost their lives” due to the rains. Fifty-six others were injured, he had said, while more than 2,600 houses were damaged or destroyed and 95,000 acres of farmland wiped away. The United Nations last year warned that “Afghanistan is experiencing major swings in extreme weather conditions”.



Drive against unregistered vehicles soon

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Excise and Taxation Department has completed preparations for the campaign against unregistered vehicles and tax evaders.

Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Excise, Taxation, and Narcotics Control, Sharjeel Inam Memon, announced the commencement of a campaign targeting individuals using counterfeit number plates, unregistered vehicles, and tax evaders.

He urged the public to promptly acquire their number plates from the City Excise Office to prevent inconvenience.

In a statement, he emphasized that citizens who have not paid their vehicle taxes should do so promptly, and those who have not renewed their vehicle registration should complete the renewal process without delay.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that the initiative aims to enforce legal regulations and streamline vehicle registration and taxation processes. He urged people to cooperate with the government to avoid any inconvenience.

LHC bars govt from distributing bikes

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court has stopped the Punjab government from distributing motorcycles among students.

Justice Shahid Karim on Friday remarked that motorcycles should not be distributed until a new policy is made. The court further remarked that the government should promote electric buses as providing buses to schools and colleges will help in reducing traffic pressure.

Father Name Correction:

My father correct name is Hina Marjan but it is written incorrectly as Noor Qalam son of Khnamar Jan by mistake. It is requested to correct my father in Master of Philosophy Degree as Noor Qalam son of Hina Marjan

Court Notice

In the court of Kashif Ali Syed civil Judge II Tangi, Case No.12/1 next date 14/5/2024, Case Title: Mohammed zahid vs Zubir etc, Notice to: Sazwali s/o Tjawal r/o ganjy daag moza moza Khan Tehseel tangi presently residing at Saudi Arabia (Defendant) In the case titled above, the above defendant is hereby informed by notice that on 14/5/2024, you must appear before the court as a lawyer or attorney and follow the case, otherwise unilateral action will be taken against you.

Syrian delegation visits Pakistan



F.P. Report

LAHORE: A delegation of 6 officials of the education ministry of Syria under the leadership of the deputy minister of education Mr Rami Al Dhulli visited Pakistan from 2-9 May 2024.

Besides, call on with the Federal Minister of Pakistan Mr Khalid Maqbool Siddique, the delegation visited HEC, Quaid-e-Azam University, AIOU, Air university, NAVVTC, NUST, bahria university, COMSATS AND Many other educational institutions.

The delegation also visited Punjab university Lahore and agricultural university Faisalabad.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Chaudhry Salik Hussain bidding farewell to pilgrims at Allama Iqbal International Airport. —APP Photo

CM Murad announces enhancing UCs funds

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that on the demand of union council representatives, he has decided to enhance the funds of union councils so they could serve people of their respective areas.

"I'll give you [UCs] more funds and will make you accountable for their judicious spending".

Mr Shah said that in the last election of 2018, PPP won three MNA seats and this time we have bagged seven MNAs and 12 MPA seats which is the manifestation of the party workers' hard work and ability to reach the message of Bilawal Bhutto to the people of Karachi.

The chief minister said that on the recommendation of party workers, his government would provide the people of Karachi with water supply, sanitation, and transport facilities, particularly in the under developed areas and directed the Excise & Taxation & Narcotic Control Minister to eliminate the drug mafia from the city.

Murad Shah said that a scheme of a sewerage treatment plant would be initiated for Rs135 billion in PPP mode so that treated wastewater could be used for industrial usage.

He said this on Friday while speaking at an interactive session of PPP representatives and party workers for budget 2024-25. The meeting was held at Banquet Hall of CM House and attended by Sindh PPP President Nisar Khuhro, General Secretary Waqar Mahdi, provincial Ministers- Sharjeel Memon, Nasir Shah, Saeed Ghani, Sardar Shah, Shaheen Sher Ali, Advisor Najmi Alam, Mayor and deputy mayor Karachi, MNAs – Qadir Patel, Hakim baloch, Nabeel Gabol, Dr Akhtiar Baiq, Senators – Nadeem Bhutto, Masroor

These meetings aimed at

Ahsan, MPAs, district presidents and general secretaries, representatives of local bodies and party workers.

Malir: Ms Sadia Majeed, the President PPP Women wing Malir district pointed out that the wastewater of the city and industrial waste was being released untreated in the sea damaging mangroves and marine life badly. At this, the CM assured her that the provincial government was trying to install Treatment plant so that wastewater could be treated and used for agriculture.

She pointed out that narcotics was being used by children in Rehri, Lath Basti and other nearby villages openly. The chief minister directed Commissioner Karachi to take strict action against the drug mafia in the areas. He added that his government has already initiated targeted operation against the drug mafia in the city.

Ms Sadia demanded the chief minister to establish a separate arts council and digital library in Malir so that healthy activities could be promoted. The chief minister appreciated Ms Sadia for making public-oriented demands and he assured her that he would meet her genuine demands.

A party worker from district Malir said that the party has won all the seats from Malir but Malir has not been given proper representation in the government. He demanded that appropriate representation of District Malir may be given. The CM told him that his demand would be brought in the knowledge of Chairman PPP, Slaman Murad also spoke on the occasion.

Keamari: Ms Shahida Rehmani, UC President Imran Bapra, and Moosa Mengal District Keamari raised the issues of water shortage, absence of health facilities at islands of Baba & Bhit and requested the chief minister to

provide them these facilities. He pointed out that patients from Baba & Bhit were transported to the city through boats and when the patients reached the Keamari road, it remained jammed. The also pointed out that there was a shortage of teachers in the schools of Kiamari district. The CM said that the Keamari district has been created recently and it would be provided with all the facilities the workers have pointed out in the meeting.

Shahida Rehmani pointed out transport issues and the shortage of girl college. She urged the chief minister get the Manghopir road constructed. Surjani park, Keamari and other areas have no playgrounds and parks. The CM directed local bodies of the area to develop playgrounds and develop parks. He said that he would finalize Manghopir road scheme shortly. District President Liaquat Askani complained that District Keamari and West have been ignored while launching Peoples Bus Service in Karachi. He also raised the issue of water shortage. The CM said that his government has constructed Maripur, and KANU-UP roads and vowed to resolve the issues of transport and water shortage. West: More Khan, a UC Chairman, said that the union councils were being given Rs500,000 per month budget which was not sufficient. Out of 35 Goths of the UC of Keamari, 30 have no water or electricity.

Mumtaz Tanoli chairman of UC requested for creation job opportunities for the youngsters and the provision of water to the villages of the West. Most of the UC Chairmen told the CM that they did not have offices for which the CM directed the Minister's Local government to establish UC offices where needed.

Punjab CM restores laptop scheme for students

LAHORE (PPI): In a decisive move aimed at bolstering educational opportunities, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Friday restored the laptop scheme for students across the province.

The decision, announced during a meeting held in Lahore, underscores the government's commitment to enhancing educational infrastructure, particularly in underprivileged regions.

During the meeting, Maryam stressed the crucial necessity of augmenting educational facilities, emphasizing the need to bridge the gap in access to education, especially in

disadvantaged areas. The discussion also focused on the promotion of higher education, the revival of the laptop scheme, and the provision of transport facilities for students.

Furthermore, the meeting resolved to prioritize the establishment of new universities and colleges in backward districts, aiming to address disparities in educational opportunities. Currently, over 650,000 students are enrolled in both private and public sector universities in Punjab, with a gender distribution of 44% boys and 56% girls.

In a bid to facilitate student mobility and access,

she announced the distribution of 20 thousand motorbikes across the province. This initiative aligns with the broader goal of fostering educational empowerment and inclusivity.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz also welcomed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's declaration of an "educational emergency," underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in both the school and higher education sectors. The reinstatement of the laptop scheme marks a significant milestone, bridging a seven-year gap in its implementation.

Drive against drug dealers in Sindh continue

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The campaign by the Sindh government against drug dealers is still ongoing. Due to the robust prosecution efforts of the Excise and Narcotics Control Department, seven accused individuals have been convicted by the courts in six drug-related cases in Hyderabad district during the month of April.

For instance, in the case involving the possession of 1400 grams of hashish, registered at the Market Police Station in Hyderabad, Fayyaz alias Tucker Qureshi was sentenced to nine years of imprisonment and fined 100,000 by the special judge.

Shafiq alias Jibran and Lal Muhammad Qambrani

were sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined Rs. 1 lakh for the crime of possessing 2500 grams of hashish in Hali Road Police Station. Additionally, the court has sentenced the accused Ehtsham Yousafzai to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1

lakh for the crime of possessing 1020 grams of hashish within the limits of A Section Hyderabad Police Station.

In a case of possession of 600 grams of hashish within the limits of Phalili Police Station, Azeem Khan Khaskheli was sentenced to five years in prison and fined Rs. 50,000. The court has sentenced Muhammad Mustabeen, the accused, to 10 years of imprisonment and fined him one lakh rupees for the possession of 1070 grams of hashish within the limits of Pinyari Police Station. These verdicts were delivered in five cases by the Model Criminal Court and in one case by the Special Judge's Court.

Commending the effective endeavors of the Excise and Narcotics Control Department in securing convictions, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Excise, and Narcotics Control, Sharjeel Inam Memon, highlighted

the collective engagement of law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and all relevant stakeholders in ensuring the accountability of wrongdoers. Expressing gratitude for the concerted efforts of individuals involved, he emphasized that these convictions send a clear message to those engaged in illicit drug trafficking that their unlawful actions will face zero tolerance.

He emphasized the commitment to persistently combat the menace of drugs in our society and ensure a secure environment for the next generation. Encouraging the public, he urged them to promptly report any suspicious drug-related activities to the authorities.

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that the Sindh government is resolute in safeguarding citizens from the menace of drugs.

He reiterated the government's unwavering commitment to continue the fight against drugs until victory is achieved.

TENDER NOTICE

- Sealed bids on the basis of "Items Rate System" are hereby invited from the contractors / firms already registered with this office for project **"Construction of 0.5 Megawatt Hydro Power Generation Plant and 2 separate Barracks at Tirah Malitia Khyber TD** for a total estimated cost of **Rs.224.802 million**.
- Tender form & complete set of bidding documents can be collected from the date of appearance of the advertisement in the press from the office of undersigned on production of call deposit (original) till **27 May 2024**.
- The bidding shall be carried out on the basis of "item rate system", wherein the bidders are required to Quote in % on project cost in the BOQ, in case of non schedule item no % will be allowed.
- The bids shall be accompanied with the earnest money/Bid security @ 2% of bid cost including stamp duty in favour of the IGFC KP (North) in shape of call deposit from any scheduled bank of Pakistan.
- As per provincial Govt. notification no. SO (FR)/FD/9-7/2011/VOI-1-11 Dated 05-11-2014, in case of quoting bid upto 10% below on the engineer estimate, the bidder will furnish an additional security with the bid, in shape of call deposit/bank guarantee. Further, in lieu of bank guarantee/call deposit, an equivalent insurance coverage of a company having at least AA rating from PACRAMR shall also be acceptable from contractors/bidders, subject to verification by the scheduled bank, whereas bank guarantees will be obtained from the contractors/bidders quoting more than 10% below on engineer estimate. These guarantees will be discharged on expiry of the defect liability period of the contract.
- The bids must reach to the office of the undersigned up to **27 May 2024** on 1200 hrs through registered courier services. Wherein the bids will be opened on the same day at 1400hrs in the presence of bidders / their representatives, who may like to attend, in the office of the IGFC KP (North), Works Branch HQ Frontier Corps KP Peshawar. The late bids received will not be entertained.
- Bids will be valid for 90 days from the date of acceptance of tender by the competent authority.
- Any item not reflected in the bill of quantities (BOQ) and required at the site, shall be paid in accordance with MRS rates, subject to prior approval.
- Incomplete/disfiguring/over-writing/by-hand/delayed bids will be considered non-responsive.
- In case of equal bids 1st, 2nd and 3rd etc, the lowest bidder would be decided through toss/ draw by the undersigned.
- The procuring entity may reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid or proposals. The procurement entity shall upon request communicate to any contractor who submitted a bid or proposal, the ground for rejection of all bids or proposals as per PPRA.
- The bidders are liberty to seek any clarification or further information from the office of undersigned, if desire on any working day during office hours.

**Lieutenant Colonel
GSO-I (Works)
For Inspector General Frontier Corps KP (North)**

FBR holds meetings with PTA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has engaged in a series of significant meetings with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and telecom operators across Pakistan to ensure the effective implementation of Income Tax General Order No. 1, issued under Section 114 B of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001.

These meetings aimed at

addressing the enforcement of measures to disable mobile phone SIMs of non-filers for tax year 2023. Multiple discussions were held to streamline the process and ensure compliance with tax regulations.

After several deliberations, the telecom operators have agreed to initiate the manual blocking process in small batches until their systems are fully equipped to automate it.

PAKISTAN NAVY

NOTICE INVITING BIDDING

Pakistan Navy (Sports & PT Directorate) invites bids from well reputed registered firms/ suppliers for supply of sports apparel and gears in accordance with PPRA Rules during FY 2024-25.

Tender documents can be obtained from "Sports & PT Dte through following contact No during working hours. Bids in sealed envelope should reach following address on or before **AM 27 May 24 at 1000 hrs** and will be opened on the same day at **1030 hrs:** **PID(I)6805/23**

**Sports & PT Directorate, NHQ,
Sector E-9, ISLAMABAD. Contact: 051-20062579**



KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA REVENUE AUTHORITY (KPRA)

KPRA HQ, Near Railways Track, Phase 3 Chowk, Hayatabad, Peshawar



INVITATION TO BID Procurement of HR Services at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA)

- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) intends to hire the services of Service provider for provision of human resources service in various categories that include; Drivers, Notice servers, photo state operators, Chowkidar, Naib Qasid, Cleaner/ Sanitary Workers
- Sealed proposal are invited from bidders registered with relevant Tax Authorities i.e. FBR for Income Tax and KPRA for sales Tax on Services.
- The method of procurement shall be single state-Two envelopes comprising a single package containing two envelopes separately sealed Technical & Financial Proposals clearly marked in bold & legible letters.
- Bid Solicitation Document containing complete details relating to eligibility criteria. Scope, Terms of Reference, Evaluation Criteria along with other related Terms & Conditions can be obtained from the office of the Deputy Director (HR) KPRA, Peshawar during office hours till 11:00 AM on 28/05/2024 against the non-refundable cash payment of Pak Rupees One Thousand (Rs. 1000 - PKR), the Bid Solicitation Document can also be downloaded from the following official **websites www.kpra.gov.pk**
- A pre bid meeting will be held on **23.05.2024, at 2:00 PM**, at Conference Room of KPRA. Peshawar. The bidders are requested to thoroughly study the BSD before pre-bid conference for any clarification of their queries during the said meeting.
- The bids shall reach to the office of the Director HR, Admin & Coordination KPRA. Through registered Dak or Courier Services or by hand through acknowledgement receipt on or before **28 05 2024 at 11:00 AM**. The bids shall be opened on the same day by the Procurement Committee in the presence of representatives of the bidders who choose to attend at **11:30 AM**. bid submitted after due date time shall be treated as non-responsive.
- Each Bid shall contain bid security of 2% of the bid price in shape of Pay Order (PO), Call Deposit Receipt (CDR) or Demand Drat (DD) in favor of Director General, KPRA.
- The Procurement Committee reserves the right to reject any or all the bids as per provisions contained in KPRA Procurement Rules 2014.

Director HR, Adnin & Coordination INF(P)0934/24
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA)



PESHAWAR: Police personnel's showing recovered artifacts to a media here at Police Line.

Police foils attempt of smuggling antiquities

PESHAWAR (APP): SSP Operations Kashif Zulfiqar and Director Archeology Abdul Samad in joint press conference confirmed that the Baharipura Police Station has taken an important action by failing the attempt of smuggling antiquities abroad.

They said that on receiving secret information, the attempt to smuggle antiquities

abroad has been foiled, says SSP Operation Kashif Zulfiqar. During the operation, the leader of the international smuggler network was also arrested, Kashif Zulfiqar said.

Director Archeology Abdul Samad said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken great action. KP Police is providing a peaceful environment to foreign tourists,

Abdul Samad said. Foreign tourists are also familiar with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, Abdul Samad said.

Exported goods are not original, but still worth millions, Abdul Samad said, adding, "There is a high demand for this type of antiquities in foreign countries." These antiquities were being smuggled to China, Abdul Samad said.

ASJ orders Jaghra to submit reply in defamation suit

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional Session Judge Peshawar Attaullah ordered former provincial Finance Minister Taimour Salim Jaghra to submit content in defamation suit filed by Member Provincial Assembly and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Jalal Khan, on

Friday.

The petitioner seeks damages of Rs 7 crore and 10 lakh while pleaded that Timur Saleem Jhagra, who lost the election, has been making false and baseless allegations against him, including calling him a criminal and an Afghan national.

The petition further stated PTI Leader

Taimour Jaghra running a smear campaign against him on social media, which has caused harm to his reputation and mental distress.

ASJ Attaullah ordered former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Minister Taimour Jaghra for submission of reply while adjourned further hearing.

Roots Millennium School opened in DHA



PESHAWAR (APP): Residents of Defence Housing Authority (DHA) Peshawar and School Administration gathered to celebrate the grand opening of the long-awaited Roots Millennium in DHA Peshawar, marking a significant milestone in the community's educational landscape.

The inauguration ceremony, attended by local dignitaries, educators, and enthusiastic parents, highlighted the promise of a brighter future for the youth of the area.

Nestled amidst, the state-of-the-art facility boasts modern infrastructure and cutting-edge amenities designed to foster a conducive learning environment.

From spacious classrooms equipped with interactive technology to well-equipped laborato-

ries and recreational areas, the school promises to provide holistic education to its students.

In his inaugural address, Chief Guest Lieutenant General Hassan Azhar Hayat, HI (M), Administrator DHA Peshawar Brig Haroon Rahim and esteemed CEO Faisal Mushtaq of Roots Millennium, emphasized the institution's commitment to academic excellence, character development, and inclusive education. He expressed gratitude to the DHA Peshawar Administration for their unwavering support throughout the school's journey from conception to reality.

The opening ceremony featured captivating performances by talented students, showcasing the diverse cultural heritage of the community. Parents and guests marveled at the

impressive display of talent and creativity, underscoring the vibrant spirit of the school.

The establishment of Roots Millennium is a testament to the community's dedication to investing in the future generations. With its focus on nurturing young minds and cultivating leaders of tomorrow, the school is poised to become a beacon of educational excellence in the region.

As the ribbon was cut amidst applause and cheers, a sense of pride and optimism filled the air, symbolizing the beginning of a new chapter in the community's educational journey. With the doors of opportunity wide open, Roots Millennium stands ready to empower students to realize their full potential and make a meaningful impact on the world.

Power to remain suspended

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: PESCO on Friday notified tha due to maintenance work, power supply will remain suspended from Jamrud Grid Station on 12th and 13th May from 8:00 a.m.to 2:00p.m., resultantly, consumers of Tajabad 2 feeder will face inconvenience.

Power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar University Grid Station on 12 th and 13 th May from 8:00a.m. to 2:00 p.m., resultantly consumers of University Campus, Canal Town, Malakandher, Engineering, Regi, Taj Abad, Taj Abad 2, Agriculture , Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Ghraib Abad, Rahatabad 1, CMB and Achini 1,2, Hassan Zai, Sufaid Dheri, Old Bara Roa, JAF, Academy Town, Circular Road, DHA, HBK, Askari 6 and Abdara feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar City Grid Station on 11 th and 14 th May from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. resultantly consumers of Sikandar Abad, Zaryab, Phandu Road, City Home, Bana Mari, Urmair, Islamabad, Faqir Abad, Sheikh Abad, Molvi G, Nishtarabad, NHA feeders will face inconvenience. . grid connected feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Peshawar Cantt Grid Station on 12 th and 13 th May from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. resultantly consumers of Tehkal, Islamia College, KTH, Commercial, Jahangir Abad,University Town, NCB, Airport, PAF Base, Saddar Road, Mall Road, MES 1,2, Old MES, Babu Ghari, Marble Industry , CAA, Palosi 1, Behari Colony, Tehkal Payan, Bank of Khyber, Scarp 1 feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Mansehra grid station on 11 th May from 9AM to 3 PM, resultantly Ghazikot, Ahsan Shaheed, Danish Abad, Attar Sheesha, Shaheen shaheed, Citi Dheri feeders will face inconvenience.

The power supply will remain suspended from Mingora Grid Station on 11 th and 13 th May from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., resultantly consumer of Malam Jaba, Express Saidu Hospital, Bandai, Mingora 1,2,3,4, 5,Kabal, Nawa Kali, Saidu Sharif, Barikot 2, Odigram, Kabal 4,Matta 2, Faiza Ghat, Kabal 2, Gulda, Marghuzar, Saidu Hospital, Kabal 3, Gogdara, Takhta Band, Qambar, Singar, MES, Haji Baba,Shin, Saidu Baba, Bara Bandai, Shah Dara, Hospital Express will face inconvenience.

Minister pleased with completion of training program for hospital staff

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Friday commended completion of training program for district headquarters hospitals staff on Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response System.

The Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah participated as chief guest in the concluding ceremony of the training program.

Alongside the Health Minister, the event was attended by Director Public Health Dr. Arshad Roghani, WHO KP Office in-charge Dr. Babar Alam, and representatives of IDSRS relevant staff and

partners.

Minister Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah distributed Certificates to 280 participants from 28 districts who completed the training program. Director Public Health was awarded a shield for the successful organization of the training, while complements were extended to the IDSRS staff for their achievements.

The Minister was also honored with a souvenir by the program organizers.

During his address to the ceremony, he emphasized the significance of proactive measures at the provincial level to prevent the spread of multiple dis-

eases and to promptly address epidemic situations.

He highlighted the establishment of Provincial Outbreak Committee as a precautionary measure before assuming the responsibility of adopting epidemic situations.

Furthermore, the expansion and timely implementation of the IDSRS system in district headquarters hospitals will enhance control over diseases and ensure timely responses, limiting the spread of diseases to respective areas.

He further elaborated that the IDSRS system is an indispensable component

of the health department, possessing enduring importance. Previously, Health Minister was briefed on the IDSRS, learning about the management of 42 notable diseases across government hospitals in the province.

He acknowledged the immediate medical responses deployed to control outbreaks, ensuring timely management of epidemic situations across the province.

Recommendations were also presented to Health Minister to further strengthen and activate the system, emphasizing the need for its sustainable operation.

KP set to introduce Road User Charge Bill 2024

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Treasury of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muzamil Islam, stated that the bill aims to levy road user charges on residents of the province, including those with registered vehicles from other provinces and the federal territory.

This announcement came during a meeting on tax reforms and revenue enhancement, chaired by Provincial Minister for

Excise Taxation and Narcotics Control, Mian Khaliqur Rehman, and attended by Secretary Excise and Taxation Syed Zafar Ali Shah, Deputy Secretary Finance Dr. Saniya, and other officials.

During the meeting, Adviser Muzamil Islam mentioned that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to impose road development tax on registered vehicles from outside the province.

He emphasized that the

Road User Charge Bill 2024 will be presented for approval very soon.

Minister Khaliqur Rehman also highlighted the expected announcement of online registration for vehicles, which is currently in progress.

He mentioned that the Excise Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has already implemented the Universal Number Plate system.

Furthermore, Adviser Muzamil Islam stated that reforms are also under-

way regarding commercial and residential property taxes to establish an effective system.

Both the Adviser to the Treasury and the Provincial Minister for Excise expressed concerns about the suspicion surrounding vehicles with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's number plates in other provinces.

They urged for an end to this practice, emphasizing the importance of registering vehicles in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Kundi vows to perform constitutional role for solution of peoples' problems

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governor Faiza Karim Kundi here Friday vowed to perform his constitutional role for provision of all basic facilities and better services to people of the province.

The governor said that he would play a constructive role in leveling the ways for welfare, development and prosperity of people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The governor said he

will make efforts to improve the working relationship between the federation and the province.

He was talking to a opposition leader in KP Assembly Dr Ebadullah Khan, members provincial assembly Jalal Khan and Sardar Shahjehan Yousaf, former PPP KP President Najmuddin Khan and others political and social figures at Governor.

They congratulated Faizal Karim Kundi on assuming the office of KP governor and expressed best wishes to him.

Talking to the delegation, the governor said that he was determined to address the collective problems of people and the province.

Meanwhile, Commandant Frontier Constabulary Moazam Jah Ansari here Friday called on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faizal Karim Kundi at Governor House and discussed law and order situation in the province including merged tribal districts.

Lauding the FC's role

in maintaining law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including merged tribal districts, the governor said that the province's development was linked with maintenance of law and order.

The governor held sacrifices of security forces, FC and police for the establishment of peace in high esteem.

Faisal Karim Kundi said that the people of KP stand with the security forces and other relevant departments for complete elimination of terrorism.

Steps taken for uplift of industries, socioeconomic conditions: SACM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Abdul Karim Khan has said that on the special directives of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, steps are being taken for promotion of industrialization, uplift of socioeconomic conditions of the people and utilization of the capabilities of the students of various universities.

He expressed these views while addressing a meeting at Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, Haripur on Friday.

Beside Rector of the University, Dr Mohammad Mujahid, Dr Abdul Mateen and large number of the stakeholders of industries and higher education also attended the meeting.

The participants of the meeting discussed in detail the best utilization of the capabilities of students in the industrial sector of the

province.

They said that the undergraduate students at various universities were the real asset, who would be imparted training while keeping in view the requirements of the industrial sector.

Therefore, they will not only find employment, rather they will also play their active role in the development of the country and the province, they said.

The Special Assistant thanked the participants and reaffirmed on behalf of the government for provision of full cooperation in enabling the students to play their due role in the development of the industrial sector.

He said that they were making efforts that the graduates of the universities could not need any recommendation in finding employment.

He said that the purpose of their efforts was that the graduate should not have a simple papered degree, rather they have practical expertise in their respective trade and a requirement of the industry.

Salim for utilizing of Turkish expertise in PIAs privatization

PESHAWAR (APP): Prominent Businessman and Honourary Consul General of the Republic of Turkey, Salim Saifullah Khan has called for the utilization of the expertise of Turkey in the privatization process of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

In a statement issued here on Friday, Salim Saifullah Khan said that Turkish Airline is a successful story and precedent for other countries to operate their airlines, saying the successful operation capabilities of the Turkish Airlines could manage the national flag carrier effectively.

The proposal underscores the deep-rooted and amicable relations between Pakistan and Turkey. Leveraging this bond, Salim Saifullah Khan believes that entrusting PIA to Turkey would not only ensure its efficient management but also strengthen bilateral ties between the two brotherly Islamic nations. The potential privatization of PIA represents a significant step in reforming and revitalizing Pakistan's aviation sector.

Pigeon flying — A serious hazard to flight operations



Izmi Herlani

PAKISTAN Air Force and Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority have launched a comprehensive public awareness

campaign to address the growing threat of pigeon and kite flying near military and civilian airfields across the country. These activities pose a significant risk to aircraft safety and can result in catastrophic damage to multi-million dollar machines, jeopardizing national assets and operational capabilities.

Bird strikes, including those involving pigeons, are a major concern for the aviation industry worldwide. In Pakistan, these incidents have caused millions of dollars in damages to aircraft and

engines. Airports are responsible for implementing bird control measures, such as deploying bird shooters near runways and taking other preventive actions, however, the public's participation is crucial to effectively mitigate this hazard.

The awareness campaign emphasizes the importance of responsible waste management and prohibition of pigeon flights close to airfields. Carcasses and offal left in open areas attract large birds like eagles and vultures, which can collide with high-speed aircraft

during takeoff and landing. These bird strikes can have devastating consequences, potentially leading to the loss of aircraft, pilots and precious lives. To address this issue, the authorities have taken several measures. Signboards and informative pamphlets have been placed around airports/ airfields urging the public to properly dispose off animal remains. Shopkeepers, food outlets and hotel owners have also been educated about the importance of proper waste management to prevent attracting birds. The campaign also targets the hazards posed by kite and

pigeon flying in the vicinity of PAF airfields. These activities can disrupt flight operations and pose a direct threat to aircraft safety. The authorities have directed the local police and district administration to enforce Section 144, which prohibits kite flying and selling, and to restrict pigeon flying near military and civilian airfields.

The awareness campaign is being implemented across the country, with dedicated efforts at major airports like Islamabad International Airport, Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore, Jinnah

International Airport in Karachi and Gilgit International Airport. At these airports, the management is collaborating with local authorities, community leaders and religious organizations to raise awareness and ensure effective waste management.

At Islamabad International Airport, a meeting of the Environmental Control Committee was also held to discuss the bird strike awareness campaign. Banners were displayed, and the authorities are working with the district administration and police

to conduct public outreach. Similar initiatives have been undertaken at other airports, with informative pamphlets distributed, disposal bags provided and awareness sessions conducted with residents.

Pakistan Air Force has also been actively involved in the campaign, with officers giving presentations on the threats posed by bird hazards and garbage dumping to national assets. The authorities have emphasized the need for joint efforts between the military, civil aviation and local communities to

address this critical issue.

The pigeon flying awareness campaign launched by the Pakistan Air Force and the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority is a crucial initiative to safeguard the country's aviation assets and ensure the safety of flight operations. So let us join hands together to support our Shaheens in educating the public, promoting responsible waste management and restricting hazardous activities near airfields, in order to mitigate the risk of bird strikes and protect the nation's valuable air power capabilities.



In brief

4 killed as crane hits rickshaw

GUJRANWALA (INP): At least four people were killed and four others injured when a crane hit a rickshaw here on Friday, rescue sources said. According to details, a crane rammed into a rickshaw due to failure of brakes near Awan Chowk of Gujranwala. As a result of accident, four people were killed on the spot while four others sustained serious injuries. The crane driver fled the scene. The bodies and injured were shifted to hospital and police after registering a case against driver at large started raids for his arrest.

AC visits exam centers
F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: According to details, Assistant Commissioner Kamalia Iqra Nasir visited examination centers and checked the examination process and the provision of transparent facilities in the examination centers. The Assistant Commissioner asked the students about the behavior of the examination staff and the provision of facilities, on which the students expressed their satisfaction with the examination process. He instructed the superintendent center to continue the examination process in a transparent and impartial manner and said that the delivery and distribution of papers should be ensured as per the procedure specified by the board. Place the students in the exam centers as per the staging plan. The Assistant Commissioner Iqra Nasir also checked the examination copies, roll numbers, slips and attendance sheets of the students.

Police issues report
F.P. Report

LARKANA: Deputy Inspector General Range Police Larkana has released the performance report of the last 6 months. According to the report, during the last 6 months, 19 dacoits were killed in 417 police encounters, while 110 accused were arrested while injured. Among the arrested prize-winning dacoits are Khair Muhammad Tighani who has won 70 lakhs from the government, Shakur Brohi who has won 20 lakhs, Chakar Brohi who has won 10 lakhs, Manwar Brohi who has won 05 lakhs and others. It is being stated that during the same period, a total of 10788 suspects including 4749 undercover 5234 wanted suspects and 805 drug dealers have been arrested, while 04 of IS in large quantities have been arrested in the ongoing crackdown against drug dealers in Larkana range. A huge amount of ammunition including LMG, Kalashnikovs, rifles, pistols, revolvers, shotguns have also been recovered from the arrested accused during the last 6 months. In all the five districts of Arakana range, the cases of robberies and thefts have been traced and the accused have been arrested, from which cars, motorcycles, tractors, mobile phones, illegal Iranian diesel, looted cash, gold jewelry have also been recovered. While 383 people have been kidnapped and rescued from Larkana range. All over the Larkana range, the accused involved in the cases of people killed over old disputes, including land and property transactions and other personal grudges, have been arrested and presented in the courts. After issuing the performance report, Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana Range Nasir Aftab Pathan while talking to the media said that operations against anti-social elements and crimes will continue throughout Larkana Range.

PHC CJ reviews district judiciary progress

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: Mr. Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Honorable the Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, presided over a progress review meeting of District Judiciary and members of the Bar Associations of Malakand Division.

Honorable Chief Justice Peshawar High Court chaired a meeting of the District Judiciary, presidents of Peshawar High Court Mingora Bench Bar Association, District and Tehsil Bar Associations of Malakand Division and members of the KP Bar Council at Peshawar High Court, Mingora Bench (Swat) on Friday.

The objective of the meeting was to have progress review of the Court case pendency, address issues that hampers case dispensation and to develop liaison in between the Bench and Bars for speedy dispensation of justice.

During the meeting Honorable the Chief Justice put emphasis on collaboration between legal fraternity for easy & expeditious dispensation of Justice to the litigant public.

The Chief Justice further directed the District Judiciary to work with utmost dedication to overcome sufferings of the litigants and provide maximum assistance to them being the core legatee of judicial system.

The District & Sessions Judges presented the current status of pending cases in their respective districts and discussed the challenges being faced. The Bar representatives also shared their issues and requested Honorable the Chief Justice for resolution. The Chief Justice directed all district & sessions judges to gear up their efforts for effective court and case management within the available resources. He reiterated the

Peshawar High Court's firm stance against any malpractices within the judicial system, emphasizing a zero-tolerance policy. He urged District & Sessions Judges to remain vigilant, ensuring that any such misconduct is dealt with iron hand.

In matters relating to infrastructure projects of judiciary in Malakand division, hon'ble the Chief Justice assured that despite shortage of funds from the provincial government he is committed to utilize the available resources by prioritizing the schemes for timely completions.

Rebuilding public trust requires a collective effort from all stakeholder. Without our firm commitment, the chief justice said, achieving this milestone is not possible. He also assured his full support for the justice sector cause and said expected the same from all stockholders.

900 students read without building in a Dir school

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Taking notice of public and parents' complaints, the Lower Dir deputy commissioner Wasil Khan on Friday visited the government higher secondary school Rabat and noticed that more than 900 students were reading without proper building. District education officer male Mahboob Ilaahi, executive engineer communication and works, newly elected tehsil chairman Balambhat Shakir Shuiab, chairman village council Badshah ul Mulk, Dr Ali Bacha and Hassan Bacha also accompanied the deputy commissioner.

Principal of the school Muhammad Abbas Khan while briefing the visiting team said that most of the classrooms were demolished for reconstruction last year. He said that more than 900 students were enrolled in the school who lacked classrooms due to the building's demolition.

The C&W executive engineer said that according to the PC-I the project was to be completed within two years but due to lack of funds the project could be delayed. The deputy commissioner directed the concerned officials to arrange

an alternate building on rent within a week.

He said the rented building should be equipped with all facilities necessary for the teaching and learning process. He also directed the communication and works department to expedite reconstruction work on the school so that the students could get education with comfort. The DC said that a letter would soon be sent to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for release of funds meant for the project. Later the DC also visited the government primary school Asigay Rabat wherein he was informed that more than 400 students were enrolled in the school.

The official was informed that due to overcrowded classes and lack of classrooms, three classes had been adjusted in tents. The DC directed the DEO and authorities of the C&W department to prepare a feasibility report for additional classrooms and other facilities in the school. He said the administration would try its best to resolve this issue.

Meanwhile food inspector Shabir Ahmad on the directives of deputy commissioner paid surprise visits to fast food shops at

Shaheed Chowk Timergara and asked the Timergara police to register cases against two shopkeepers for violating the food act.

Business opportunities: Prominent social media activist and journalist Afsar Afghan has said the Lower Dir district has enough potential for business activities as locals have the wealth for investment. He was addressing a function after inaugurating a private hotel at Timergara as chief guest here the other day. The ANP leader Sajjad Yousafzai, PPP district secretary information Alam Zeb advocate, former tehsil nazim Imranud Din advocate, managing director of the hotel Subhan Akhunkhel, Mian Hazrat Hussain and others also spoke on the occasion.

Afsar Afghan shed light on the importance of the hotel industry and said that due to scenic and tourist spots in the region it was a profitable business. He said that most of Northern Pakistan had great potential for tourism development and hotels played a vital role in it. He said that it was the government's responsibility to provide basic facilities to tourists that was a major source of income for local residents.

Serving people to remain top priority, says Gilani

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani has said that serving the people of under-developed south Punjab with full determination and passion remains his top priority and he will make all out efforts to resolve problems of the people, upgrade infrastructure and improve their lifestyle.

These views were expressed by him during a meeting with former caretaker foreign minister and seasoned diplomat Syed Jalil Abbas Gilani who called on him at Multan Circuit House on Friday. During the meeting, the Chairman Senate and Jalil Abbas held detailed discussion on situation in the region and issues of mutual interest.

Meanwhile, Yusuf Raza Gilani was also called on by different other delegates including former district bar Multan president Allah Ditta Kashif, Niaz Khan Durrani, Malik Mohsin Khadal, Zulfiqar Vains, Asif Attar Vains and others at the local circuit house.

The delegates felicitated Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani on taking over as the Chairman of the Upper House of the parliament after being elected unanimously. Speaking on the occasion, the Chairman Senate said that he has full faith in Pakistani youth and women for being the real drivers of growth and added they possessed the potential to take Pakistan to the next level of prosperity and development.

He further stated that the way we have served the people of South Punjab was an open secret and pledged to continue to strive for resolving problems of the under-developed areas and improve their living standards. "We have always led from the front on issues concerning people of under-developed areas be it the elevation of funding or the infrastructure development and we will continue to do so in service of the people," he added Yusuf Raza Gilani said, he has firm belief in Pakistani youth and women adding that it was the youth that will take us forward on a development trajectory.

Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani has also urged the Pakistani pilgrims to maintain discipline and represent Pakistan with dignity during their stay in Saudi Arabia. Addressing the Hajj pilgrims, he expressed his satisfaction that Hajj operation has finally begun from Multan Airport. This was the first flight which, chairman Senate saw off from Multan Airport. The address of chairman Senate focused on the significance of the Hajj pilgrimage, the improved travel arrangements, and the importance of representing Pakistan with honor.

Yousaf Raza Gilani said, "It is a great pleasure to be here today to see off the pilgrims embarking on this sacred journey. The journey from Multan to Madinah now takes just four hours, thanks to the opening of Multan Airport. Your jour-

ney has become much easier as a result, allowing you to focus on your spiritual experience." "Hajj pilgrims should conduct themselves with respect and order, ensuring they bring pride to our country," he maintained.

Chairman Senate also called upon the pilgrims to pray for the progress and prosperity of the country. "We are faced with the threats of terrorism and valiant soldiers and civilians have martyred while fighting against terrorists. Remember them in your prayers," he stated. He expressed gratitude to the security agencies, including the Airport Security Force and the Federal Investigation Agency, for their diligent work ensuring a safe environment for travelers.

Yousaf Raza Gilani also highlighted that despite the challenging economic times, the cost of Hajj this year has been lower than last year, making it more accessible for many. He said that 13,000 people from South Punjab will be undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage this year. The Chairman Senate reminded the pilgrims of their role as ambassadors for Pakistan. "As you embark on this holy journey, remember that you are representing Pakistan. Be our ambassadors, and carry the spirit of our nation with you," he said. The event concluded with the Gilani's extending his best wishes to the pilgrims for a safe and spiritually fulfilling journey.



MULTAN: Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani in a meeting with former federal minister Jalil Abbas Gilani at Circuit House.

Residents demand repair of bridge
F.P. Report

WANA: The residents of Wana, including parents of school children, are deeply concerned about the decade-long delay in repairing the damaged Ghwakhwa Bridge. Despite politicians' promises, the bridge remains unrepaired, causing immense hardships for the local population, especially school children who cross it daily. Local people have collectively decided to hold current and former MNAs, MPAs, and district administration officials responsible.

They also accused authorities of neglecting the issue, using excuses like lack of funds and demands for commission by tribesmen to delay construction. Parents fear recent rains have made the road impassable, forcing children to wade through water to reach schools, risking being swept away by strong currents of floods.

"We demand immediate action to construct the bridge and prevent potential disasters," said a parent. Local resident Ghani ur Rehman Wazir warned, "If any harm comes to school children, present and former representatives and officials will be held accountable."

Human trafficker arrested

GUJRANWALA (INP): The Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) Gujranwala Zone conducted two major operations in response to instructions from Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi, further intensifying the crackdown on human traffickers and illegal financial activities. According to FIA spokesperson, the FIA Composite Circle teams in Gujarat and Gujranwala carried out the successful raids, resulting in the arrest of two suspects. The accused, identified as Shakeel Ahmed and Hameed Khan, were apprehended from separate locations in Nowshera Varkan and Wazirabad.

Shakeel Ahmed is alleged to be involved in a human trafficking operation. Investigations revealed that Ahmed facilitated the illegal transfer of innocent Pakistani citizens abroad for employment purposes. He reportedly extorted substantial sums of money from his victims under the guise of securing them jobs overseas. In one instance, Ahmed allegedly received 230,000 rupees for sending a woman to Iraq for employment, but subsequently absconded with the money.

Hameed Khan, on the other hand, was arrested from Wazirabad's Main Bazar for his involvement in illegal currency exchange and "reference handi," a suspected hawala or informal money transfer system. Authorities seized Pakistani rupees, UAE dirhams, and euros from Khan's possession, along with evidence linked to his illegal financial activities.

The FIA has taken both individuals into custody and initiated investigations. Further arrests are expected as authorities delve deeper into the networks involved.

Feb 8 polls, a darkest history of country

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT PTI never gives up its peaceful struggle for real freedom. KP Law Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Finance Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate has said that May 9 is not an ordinary day but it is the day of the struggle for the survival and security of Pakistan and the real freedom, therefore Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf will not give up its peaceful struggle for real freedom. He termed the overthrow of the Imran Khan's government through regime change and the imposition of the mandate theft government through Form 47 on February 8 as the darkest chapter in the country's history.

This he said while addressing the protest gathering held on May 9 at Kohat University Chowk. Members of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Daud Shah Afridi and Shafi Nazeem Afridi and other important local leaders also addressed the gathering. Participants strongly demanded to end the fake cases made against the Party Chairman Imran Khan, His Wife, Leaders and Workers and their early release. Aftab Alam said



that our silence and tolerance should not be taken as their weakness, they will not retreat even an inch from its rightful stance.

He said they are only waiting for the order of party leader Imran Khan to topple the puppet governments. He said that Chief Minister KP, the entire party leadership and the common workers are standing like a rock against the oppression. Our peaceful struggle for the country and people will continue, he added. Law Minister announced that both the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and the party leadership are considering a special package for the martyrs of May 9, which includes providing support to their families, children education and jobs for their sons.

Similarly, inquiry commissions are also being formed against the atrocities committed on PTI

workers in the entire province, under which the fake FIRs filed without evidence will be eliminated and justice will be provided to the affected families, he maintained. The Minister expressed with sorrow the way, through which the sanctity of the innocent families and innocent workers was violated and their businesses were destroyed, have no example in the history of the country.

Aftab Alam Advocate said that in 1947, the British were evacuated but their remnants are still imposed on the country's resources adding that for which we have to strive hard than 1947 movement. He while paying rich tributes to the endless sacrifices of elders, young and women to the party, said it will definitely brought fruits. Later, a collective prayer was also offered for the martyrs of May 9.

25K cattle vaccinated during free mobile camps

F.P. Report

ZHOB: "The livestock sector plays an important role in the rural economy in poverty-hit Balochistan. The livestock rearing is the primary source of livelihood as the rural economy is heavily reliant on livestock," said District Livestock Officer at Livestock and Dairy Development Zhob Dr Naseebullah Kakar.

He said, keeping in mind the crucial role of livestock sector in the rural economy, on the special directives of provincial minister Livestock and Dairy Development Bakht Muhammad Kakar, Secretary Muhammad Tayyab Lehri and Director General Dr Farooq Tareen, free mobile veterinary

camp have been organized in different villages of Dana Abdullah Zai - a remote and mountainous part of the district and Qamar Din Karez - close to Pak-Afghan border.

"Under the supervision of District Livestock Officer Dr Naseebullah Kakar, over 25,000 cattle have been vaccinated and free medicines have been provided to the cattle owners," he told journalist Rafiullah Mandokhail.

The people of the area have thanked the provincial minister and the livestock officer for organizing free vet camps and said that Dana Abdullah Zai and Qamar Din Karez are far-off hilly areas, where the only source of livelihood is livestock. By organizing free veterinary camps, vari-

ous animal diseases have been prevented through vaccination.

Dr. Naseebullah Kakar has said that the livestock sector has potential to support the livelihood of the rural population as it is a key source of employment for a large population of Balochistan. Sheep, goats, cows and camels are reared extensively in Balochistan. These cattle are not only part of the local diet, but their dairy products, such as milk, meat, and wool also have a commercial value. "Efforts are being made by the provincial government of Balochistan to develop and put the livestock sector on modern lines. So that the livelihood of the rural people can be improved," he vowed.

8 power pilferers booked

SARGODHA (INP): The Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) task force caught eight power pilferers during an ongoing crackdown, launched against electricity pilferage, here on Friday.

According to official sources, the task force raided various areas and caught the accused involved in electricity theft from main lines and through meter tampering. They were identified as Nisar Ahmad, Khadim Hussain, Deewan Ali, Arshad, Abu Abeda, Dost Muhammad, Ishtiaq and Aoun Muhammad. The police registered cases against pilferers.

Blood donation camp held: The National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) in Sargodha district organised a blood donation camp for children suffering from thalassemia, here on Friday.

The blood donation camp was arranged with the collaboration of the Social Work Department of University of Sargodha, Police Protection Centre Sargodha, Safe Life Organisation Sargodha, Give Life Foundation and Executive Council of Alumni University of

Sargodha.

At the blood donation camp, 24 students from the Social Work Department of the University of Sargodha and other citizens donated blood for free to children affected with thalassemia disease. Deputy Director NCHD Sargodha Mehr Umar Daraz Jhawari expressed his thoughts by saying that saving the life of one person is as if saving all of humanity. The NCHD Sargodha would continue to serve humanity with the support of all its stakeholders and welfare organisations, he vowed.

165,183 women benefiting from BISP programme: Deputy Director Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Sargodha Mazhar Awan said on Friday that 165,183 registered and eligible women were getting quarterly BISP payments of Rs10,500 in the district.

Talking to media here, he said that 22,540 beneficiaries in Kot Momin, 13,450 in Sahiwal, 72,335 in Sargodha, 16,714 deserving women in Shahpur, 17,034 in Sillanwali, 14,495 in Bhalwal and 8,612 women in Bhera were getting the

BISP payments. He said the BISP tranche for the month of May would be released soon. He said that a survey process under the BISP would continue till June 30, 2024.

Manshera receives rain
F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: Rain had turned the weather pleasant in Manshera and surrounding areas on Friday. According to details, rain and thunder had reduced the temperature, and citizens who were facing the challenge posed by scorching heat were pleased.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Meteorological Department had predicted that the weather in parts of the country would remain dry. It had been predicted that parts of South Punjab and upper Sindh would witness scorching heat. Moreover, the meeting office said that Jacobabad, Sukkur, Kashmore, and other surrounding areas are likely to witness rain.



Possible genocide committed in Sudan, report says

KHARTOUM (BBC): A genocide may have been committed in the West Darfur city of El Geneina in one of the worst atrocities of the year-long Sudanese civil war, according to a report released by Human Rights Watch (HRW). It says ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity have been committed against ethnic Massalit and non-Arab communities in the city by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and its Arab allies. The report calls for sanctions against those responsible for the atrocities, including the RSF leader, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, widely known as Hemedti. The UN says about 15,000 people are feared to have been killed in El Geneina last year. Warning: This article contains details that some readers may find distressing. The HRW report documents evidence of a systematic campaign by the RSF and allied militias to remove Massalit residents from El Geneina. Witnesses described how the RSF rounded up and shot men, women and children who attempted to escape the ethnic violence in the restive city. At least "thousands of people" were killed and "hundreds of thousands" left as refugees between April and November 2023, the 218-page report said. "The events are among the worst atrocities against civilians so far in the current conflict in Sudan," it added. The US and the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court have talked about war crimes in Darfur but they have not specifically mentioned genocide. The BBC has spoken to people from El Geneina who say they were victims of ethnic violence. One man told us he had joined others who

fled to a central gathering place after sites were attacked in different parts of the city. He said the RSF had a base nearby and eventually began bombing this area, Mudaris, with heavy guns. "We buried all the dead people at night," he said, "one day 186 people, another day 80, another day 50." The man, who asked not to be named, is now sheltering in neighbouring Chad. He told the BBC that armed men raped his wife, using degrading language as they did so: "They said: 'Now we are your husband, your people have all have been killed. You can be the servants of our wives and clean our houses.'" The HRW report says that RSF fighters and militias used derogatory racial slurs against Massalit and other racial groups, telling them that the land was not theirs and that that it would become "the land of the Arabs". It says the attacks culminated in a large-scale massacre on 15 June last year, when the RSF and its allies opened fire on a convoy of civilians desperately trying to flee. A 17-year-old boy described to HRW the killing of 12 children and 5 adults from several families: "Two RSF forces ... grabb[ed] the children from their parents and, as the parents started screaming, two other RSF forces shot the parents, killing them. Then they piled up the children and shot them. They threw their bodies into the river and their belongings in after them." The current violence has erupted out of a long history of tensions over resources between non-Arab farming communities, including the Massalit, and Arab pastoralist communities. Those tensions were harnessed by the for-

mer government of Omar al Bashir. It created Arab militias known as the Janjaweed to put down a Massalit rebellion in the 2000s, out of which the RSF was eventually formed. Many of the people who fled Janjaweed attacks 20 years ago found refuge in camps for internally displaced persons in El Geneina. Sudan's civil war has helped reignite the violence. It began as a power struggle between the leaders of the Sudanese army, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary RSF, Gen Hemedti, but has since drawn in other ethnic militias. Gen Hemedti has denied his fighters deliberately attacked civilians. But HRW says he is among those with command responsibility over the forces which carried out the atrocities. The HRW researchers interviewed more than 220 Sudanese refugees in Chad, Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan, as well as remotely between June 2023 and April 2024. They also reviewed and analysed over 120 photos and videos of the events, satellite imagery, and documents shared by humanitarian organisations to corroborate accounts of the abuses. The rights body called for further investigations to find out if there was an intention to eliminate the Massalit community, which would indicate a genocide. Last June, West Darfur Governor Khamis Abakar was killed hours after accusing RSF of committing genocide. He is the most senior official known to have been killed since the conflict began in April. The RSF says it is not involved in what it describes as a "tribal conflict" in Darfur.

Polish defense minister fends off criticism

WARSAW (AP): Poland's defense minister said that since early in Russia's war against Ukraine he has kept an emergency backpack ready, drawing detractors who said his comments did not send a reassuring message about the country's safety. The comment from a high government official reflected the anxieties that have taken hold in Europe, particularly among those in central and eastern Europe close to the war in Ukraine. But critics said the comments could make residents feel unsafe by signaling a willingness on his part to leave if the country were in trouble. W?adys?aw Kosiniak-Kamysz, who is both defense minister and deputy prime minister, was asked in a radio interview if he kept an emergency backpack. He answered that he had packed a bag with necessary items for a trip to Ukraine early in the war "and it is still packed today." "Having such a safety backpack is also good in the event of any natural disaster, any sudden event," he told private broadcaster Radio Zet. "You have to be ready for any situation."

A former defense minis-

ter said the comment was not reassuring. "Evacuation in times of danger is the last thing on the mind of a responsible minister of national defense. Such words - even if the intentions are good - do not make Poles feel safer," Mariusz B?aszczak, who was defense minister in the previous government, said on X. Following critical comments, Kosiniak-Kamysz issued a statement saying the words were being taken out of context. The defense minister said on X, that "Preparedness for crisis situations is not only an obligation, but also our responsibility." Poland's government launched a website last month recommending that people have backpacks prepared in the event of an emergency evacuation, which could include natural disasters or extreme weather events. It recommends having items such as a change of clothes, a battery-powered radio, flashlight and a first aid kit. Meanwhile, Poland's defense minister said his country is strengthening the metal barrier along its border with Belarus to deter illegal migration. "We are mending the barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border,

we are strengthening this barrier," Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said on private Radio Zet. "The spending on these purposes is the highest in (Poland's) history." Kosiniak-Kamysz said the increased presence of Polish and allied military forces in regions close to the border is also helping to tighten the eastern frontier of NATO and the European Union. That presence has been increased since Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022. He spoke in favor of Poland building a line of defensive bunkers, trenches and ditches along that border and the one with Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad, steps that the Baltic states have already taken. Poland says a massive wave of illegal migration from Belarus, especially in 2022, was orchestrated by that country and by Russia to destabilize Poland, a Ukrainian ally, and the European Union. The influx was largely curbed by the metal barrier that Poland completed last year, but some illegal crossings continue. The minister's comments also suggested that the barrier is seen as a wider defense measure during Russia's war with Ukraine, which borders Poland.

Lithuania holds presidential vote

VILNIUS (AP): Lithuania is holding a presidential election on Sunday at a time when Russian gains on the battlefield in Ukraine are fueling greater fears across all of Europe about Moscow's intentions, but particularly in the strategically important Baltic region. The popular incumbent, Gitanas Naus?da, is favored to win another five-year term. But there are eight candidates running in all, making it unlikely that he or any other candidate can win the 50% of the votes needed to win outright on Sunday. In that case, a runoff would be held two weeks later on May 26. The president's main tasks in Lithuania's political system are overseeing foreign and security policy, and acting as the supreme commander of the armed forces. Those duties and the nation's strategic location

along NATO's eastern flank amid a larger geopolitical standoff between Russia and the West add heft to the role despite Lithuania's relatively small size. There is great concern in Lithuania, and in neighboring Latvia and Estonia, about Russia's gaining momentum in Ukraine. All three Baltic states declared independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and took a determined westward course, joining both the European Union and NATO. Naus?da, a moderate conservative who turns 60 a week after Sunday's election day, has been a strong backer of Ukraine, a position shared across most of the political spectrum. During his time in office, Lithuania has also given refuge to many who have fled an authoritarian crack-down in neighboring

Belarus and increased repression in Russia. Naus?da, a former banker who entered politics with his successful presidential run in 2019, is seen as the "safe choice for voters of almost all ideological persuasions," said Tomas Janeli?nas, an analyst at Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science. Polls show that his main opponents are Ignas V?g?is, a populist lawyer, who is in second place according to recent opinion polls, and Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyt?, who is in third place in the surveys. Not all voters view Naus?da as the safer option. Asta Valanciene, a teacher from Vilnius, said that she would vote for Simonyt? because of the prime minister's longer experience in politics than newcomer Nausda.

Huge fire at a chemical storage tank in Thailand kills one

BANGKOK (AP): At least one person was killed and four others were injured after a huge fire broke out at a chemical storage tank in an Eastern Thailand industrial park. The fire in Mab Ta Phut Industrial Estate, which was first reported in the morning, was contained more than six hours later. Fire workers estimated it might take more than 10 hours to be able to fully extinguish the flames, according to the Rayong province's public relations department. About 400 workers and residents have been evacuated to a temporary shelter, the department said. Officials said the tank, which has a storage capacity of 2,500 cubic meters, belongs to the Mab Ta Phut Tank Terminal company, which operates a commercial port and storage terminal for petrochemical products. They said the tank contained Pyrolysis gasoline, a mixture of chemicals commonly used in gasoline blending. Videos and photos from the scene show a huge plume of black smoke and raging fire engulfing a white tank that was standing close to several others. The company said in a statement that it is investigating the cause of the fire and will implement measures to prevent it from happening again. It expressed its condolences and said the company is ready to provide compensation to those affected. In 2021, the company was ordered to cease operations temporarily after another one of its storage tanks erupted and caught fire, killing three and seriously injuring two.

US House blocks bid to remove Speaker

WASHINGTON: The United States House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly to defeat an effort by Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene to remove Speaker Mike Johnson, a fellow Republican. In an unusual move, Democrats joined Republicans in a 359-43 vote to keep Johnson in his leadership role and stave off further turmoil in the House. "I appreciate the show of confidence from my colleagues to defeat this misguided effort," Johnson said following the vote. "Hopefully this is the end of the character assassination that has characterized the current Congress." Hardline Representative Greene has, for weeks, sought to get Johnson kicked out after a string of compromises he made with Democrats over a \$95bn bill for security assistance to US allies Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. Greene is a leading voice of the far-right flank opposed to helping Ukraine. After the House passed the bill in April, she called Johnson a "lame duck". Johnson's leadership was "pathetic, weak, and unacceptable", Greene said as she triggered the "motion to vacate" measure. The same procedure was used to remove former Republican Speaker Kevin McCarthy in October, the first time in US history that the House voted to remove its leader. Republicans have a slim 217-213 majority in the House. Most opposed the vote to remove Johnson, with only 11 in favour and 196 against. "As I've said from the beginning, and I've made clear here every day, I intend to do my job," Johnson said. "And I'll let the chips fall where they may. In my view, that is leadership." Democrats, led by Representative Hakeem Jeffries, had promised to keep Johnson in his seat, with 163 against the motion. "Our decision to stop Marjorie Taylor Greene from plunging the country into further chaos is rooted in our commitment to solve problems," Jeffries, the House Minority Leader, said after the vote. Greene's move represented a rare Republican defiance of presumptive presidential candidate Donald Trump, who in a social media post following the House vote said it was "not the time" for Republicans to try to push out their own speaker. — Aljazeera

Hungary and China sign strategic cooperation agreement

BUDAPEST (AP): Hungary and China signed a number of new agreements to deepen their economic and cultural cooperation during a visit to the Central European country by Chinese President Xi Jinping, a trip meant to solidify China's economic footprint in the region. Xi and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks in the capital Budapest as part of the Chinese leader's final stop on a five-day European tour that also took in Serbia and France. During a press briefing following the talks, Orbán praised the "continuous, uninterrupted friendship" between the two countries since his tenure began in 2010, and promised that Hungary would continue to host further Chinese investments. "I would like to assure the president that Hungary will continue to provide fair conditions for Chinese companies investing in our country, and that we will create the opportunity for the most modern Western and the most modern Eastern technologies to meet and build cooperation in Hungary," Orbán said. Beijing has invested billions in Hungary and sees the European Union member as an important foothold inside the 27-member trading bloc. In December, Hungary announced that one of the world's largest EV manufacturers, China's BYD, will open its first European EV production factory in the south of the country - an inroad that could upend the competitiveness of the continent's auto industry. Hungary is also hosting several Chinese EV battery plants and hopes to become a global hub of lithium ion battery manufacturing, and has undertaken a railway project - part of Xi's Belt and Road Initiative - to connect the country with the Chinese-controlled port of Piraeus in Greece as an entry point for Chinese goods to Central and Eastern Europe. Xi said he and Orbán agreed the Belt and Road Initiative "is highly consistent with Hungary's strategy of opening to the east," and that China supports Hungary in playing a greater role within the EU on promoting China-EU relations. Hungarian and Chinese officials concluded a strategic partnership agreement and signed 18 other agreements and memoranda of understanding, but no major investments were



announced at the news briefing. However, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó later said in a video on Facebook that initial discussions had begun on China developing a freight railway bypass of Budapest and a rail link between the capital and Budapest Ferihegy airport. Orbán, a nationalist populist leader who has pursued deeper ties with Beijing while distancing himself from his more mainstream partners in the EU, noted during the news conference that three-quarters of investments in Hungary last year came from China, and spoke of Beijing's role in the world's shifting balance of power. "Looking back at the world economy and commerce of 20 years ago, it doesn't resemble at all what we're living in today," Orbán said. "Then, we lived in a single polar world, and now we live in a multi-polar world order, and one of the main columns of this new world order is China." He added that Hungary would seek to expand economic cooperation with China to the field of nuclear energy. Hungary is currently working with Russia on adding a new reactor to its Paks nuclear facility, which is expected to go online by the end of the decade. Budapest residents met with road closures and increased security during Xi's visit as groups of his supporters and critics gathered in various points of the city to demonstrate. Hundreds of people gathered near Budapest's Buda Castle waving Chinese and Hungarian flags, hoping to catch a glimpse of Xi's motorcade.

Many Chinese nationals in red baseball caps and claiming to be volunteers with China's embassy were present. A Hungarian lawmaker with the opposition Momentum party told The Associated Press that he and a colleague had been approached by a group of such men as they attempted to place EU flags on a bridge in Budapest. In a video obtained by the AP, the lawmaker, Márton Tompos, said that the men, all wearing red baseball caps, confronted him to make sure that no flags or symbols referencing China-claimed Tibet or Taiwan would be hung on the route of Xi's motorcade. "They told me that they were volunteers for the Chinese embassy here, and they said they wanted to make sure that there weren't Tibetan or Taiwanese flags, because that wouldn't be nice," Tompos said. The men wouldn't let his colleague proceed "until he showed them that it was an EU flag," he added. Other minor conflicts broke out during the day between Tibetan protesters and some of the red-capped Chinese nationals, who attempted to prevent activists from displaying Tibetan flags by obscuring them with their own Chinese national flags. One activist, Tenzin Yangzom, a campaign coordinator for the International Tibet Network, criticized Hungary's government for "allowing the Chinese police to be operating on Hungarian streets." "This is not China, is it? This is Hungary, it's a free country, you have freedom of speech," she said.

Japan proposes expanding commercial whaling to fin whales

TOKYO (AP): Japan's Fisheries Agency has proposed expanding commercial whaling along the country's coast to fin whales, a larger species than the three currently permitted. The proposal comes five years after Japan resumed commercial whaling within its exclusive economic zone after withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission in 2019. It ended 30 years of what Japan called "research whaling" that had been criticized by conservationists as a cover for commercial hunts banned by the commission in 1988. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi, whose electoral district is traditionally known for whaling, said the government supports sustainable use of whales as part of Japan's traditional food culture and plans to promote the industry. "Whales are an important food resource and we believe they should be sustainably utilized just like

any other marine resources, based on scientific evidence," Hayashi told reporters. "It is also important to carry on Japan's traditional food culture." The Fisheries Agency said it is seeking public comments until June 5 on the proposed plan and will seek its approval at the next review meeting in mid-June. The agency decided to propose adding fin whales to the allowable catch list after stock surveys confirmed a sufficient recovery of the fin whale population in the North Pacific. The plan is not meant to increase whale meat supply and whalers who catch fin whales do not necessarily have to meet a quota, an agency official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue. For this year, the agency has set a combined catch quota of 379 for the three other whale species. Last year, Japanese whalers caught 294 minke, Bryde's and sei whales - less than 80% of the quota and fewer

than the number once hunted in the Antarctic and the northwestern Pacific under the research program. Japan's whaling has long been a source of controversy and attacks from conservationists, but anti-whaling protests have largely subsided after Japan terminated its much-criticized Antarctic research hunts in 2019 and returned to commercial whaling limited to Japanese waters. Whale meat consumption in Japan was an affordable source of protein during the malnourished years after World War II, with annual consumption peaking at 233,000 tons in 1962. However, whale was quickly replaced by other meats and supply has since fallen to around 2,000 tons in recent years, according to Fisheries Agency statistics. Japanese officials want to increase that to about 5,000 tons, to keep the industry afloat. On a visit to the former Tsukiji fish market area in downtown Tokyo, Yuuka

Fujikawa from Hokkaido, said she has hardly seen whale meat sold at supermarkets. "I've actually never tried it myself," she said. "I want more people to appreciate the taste of whale," said Hideyuki Saito, from neighboring Saitama prefecture. "I want it to be more popularized." Carlos Sempere Santos, a 28-year-old tourist from Spain, said he couldn't imagine eating whale as whales are special and smart animals. Shirley Bosworth from Australia said she opposes whaling because whales "should be protected." Whales often get beached in Australia, where people unite to try and "push them back in the sea." A whaling operator Kyodo Senpaku Co. last year launched whale meat vending machines. The company also completed construction of its new 7.5 billion yen (\$48 million) Kangei Maru - a 9,300-ton mother ship - and pledges to use it for sustainable commercial whaling.

Philippines, US simulate mock invasions in largest ever war games

MANILA: Troops from the United States and the Philippines have launched Javelin missiles and fired howitzers to simulate repelling a maritime invasion along the coast of the South China Sea, in a show of force capping joint war games held in China's maritime backyard. The live fire exercises were held throughout the week along the shores of the coastal city of Laoag in northern Ilocos province, the closest mainland Philippine province to China. They capped the largest ever Balikatan, or "shoulder-to-shoulder," joint military exercises between US and Philippine troops, cementing a dramatic policy shift that has seen Washington and Manila become close allies since Ferdinand Marcos Jr became president in 2022. Tensions have risen amid multiple confrontations between Philippine vessels and the China Coast Guard in the South China Sea. China claims almost the entire area under its nine-dash line, which was rejected by an international tribunal in 2016. While the US and Philippine militaries would not name their adversaries,

this year's exercises were concentrated around the northern and western shores of the Philippines - close to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Parts of the drills were also staged in waters outside the Philippines' 19km (12-mile) territorial limit, and also outside Manila's exclusive economic zone, which extends for 200 nautical miles (about 370km). "The Philippines and US have a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific," US Marines Lieutenant General Michael Cederholm, commander of the Balikatan joint task force, told reporters. "It's grounded in the seeking of peaceful solutions." "Make no mistake, if there can't be a peaceful solution, we have an obligation to our countries to train together." Ilocos province lies southeast of China and just south of Taiwan, near areas of the South China Sea that would probably be at the centre of any regional conflict over the disputed waters. The US and Philippine militaries fired missiles and used howitzer guns stationed along the shore to sink five platoons standing in for amphibious warships. In

northern Batanes, an island province just south of Taiwan, US and Philippine forces simulated the recapture of Itbayat, the country's northernmost municipality. The war games elicited a strong response from China, which managed to disrupt at least one live fire exercise in the South China Sea. The Chinese embassy in Manila did not respond to a request for comment from Al Jazeera. A Chinese warship and two other vessels were spotted near Itbayat as the exercises were held, the Philippine Coast Guard said. The ships left after the coast-guard issued a challenge over the radio. This year's exercises also showcased new US weapons that could be stationed in the Philippines during a conflict. For the first time in the Asia Pacific, the US military deployed a new mid-range missile launcher, called the Typhon. From the northern Philippines, it is able to reach targets in Taiwan, along with Chinese bases and infrastructure in the South China Sea and mainland China. It is the first such weapon deployed in the region since the US with-

drew in 2019 from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty that barred the development of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 2,500km. While the Typhon system was not fired during Balikatan, its deployment now serves to identify launch sites that can be used during a conflict, said Collin Koh, a senior fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. "During wartime, all you need to do is just go straight to these launch sites and you can set it up and fire immediately without further preparation," Koh said. The US and Philippine militaries also used a hovercraft to land a HIMARS missile system on the western island of Palawan, close to contested areas of the South China Sea. Last year, the militaries tried and failed to land a HIMARS system at the main port of Batanes. This year, the US military upgraded the port, along with a warehouse and other military infrastructure, as part of an effort to develop functional seaports to offload equipment and troops. — Aljazeera

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

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Trump and American justice

THE former and possibly future president of the United States is now on trial in Lower Manhattan, the first criminal prosecution of an American elected to the nation's highest office. Donald Trump, who relentlessly undermined the justice system while in office and since, is enjoying the same protections and guarantees of fairness and due process before the law that he sought to deny to others during his term.

A jury of Americans will ultimately decide Mr. Trump's legal fate. It may be the only one of the four criminal cases against the former president that comes to trial before the November election. Though the election interference charges are not the most serious of those he faces, the case will determine whether 12 of his fellow Americans find him guilty of a felony — a result that most voters say they would consider to be serious.

In the first two days of this trial, Mr. Trump has offered a defense of himself to the public, in brief appearances between his courtroom table and the television cameras: He portrays himself as a victim of an unfair and politically motivated prosecution. That defense is built on lies. Mr. Trump is no victim. He is fortunate to live in a country where the rule of law guarantees a presumption of innocence and robust rights for defendants.

A guiding principle of the American experiment is that the law applies to everyone equally. At the same time, prosecuting any current or former elected official requires vigilance against bias and awareness about how the case will be perceived by the public. For this reason, judges and prosecutors have an obligation to hew to stringent standards of fairness, to reduce the risk that they appear to be interfering in electoral politics by using criminal cases to damage or favor one candidate over another.

The former president refers to the four prosecutions he faces as “witch hunts” motivated by partisanship and part of a nefarious scheme to keep him from returning to the White House. He has repeated this narrative even though the prosecutions have been brought by different prosecutors around the country, and even though different grand juries, each composed of a random selection of regular citizens in different states, handed up indictments that now total 88 felony charges against him.

In the weeks leading up to the start of this trial, Mr. Trump has argued, dishonestly, that the judge and the prosecutor have treated him unfairly, and that it will be impossible for him to get a fair trial in Manhattan because New Yorkers are biased against him. But the opening days of the trial, devoted to jury selection, have already demonstrated the great care and respect with which everyone involved in the trial, except for Mr. Trump, has treated the process. Joshua Steinglass, a member of the office of the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, told potential jurors on Tuesday that the case “has nothing to do with personal politics.”

“We don’t suggest you need to have been living under a rock for the last eight years, or the last 30 years,” he said. “We don’t expect you not to have heard about this, or not to have discussed this case with friends. What we do need is for you to keep an open mind.” Dozens of potential jurors took those instructions seriously and admitted they could not be impartial. One man was excused from service after telling the judge that it was “going to be hard for me to be impartial,” since many of his family members and friends were Republicans. Justice Juan Merchan, the judge overseeing the trial, excused him, as other potential jurors stepped up. So far, seven jurors have been seated. At least two potential jurors were dismissed by the judge because of social media posts.

The ability to file such appeals, successful or not, is essential to how the law functions in the United States. Despite having benefited from its protections, to Mr. Trump, the rule of law is nothing more than an obstacle to be overcome, an instrument of power to use at will. Mr. Trump's vision of an American legal system that protects his interests goes beyond his trial, of course, and extends in particular to the Justice Department. He has been explicit about his desire, if elected in November, to bring the Justice Department more fully under his control, to use it to protect his friends and, more important, punish his enemies. As president, Mr. Trump had an unparalleled record of abusing presidential pardons, and if he is re-elected, he appears likely to order the Justice Department to drop the criminal cases against him or to try to pardon himself for potential crimes. To Mr. Trump, independent prosecutors and Justice Department officials are precisely the problem. They will say no to him when he wants to do things that are illegal or unconstitutional, choosing to be faithful to the Constitution rather than to him. This Mr. Trump cannot abide. Mr. Trump has said he intends to find a prosecutor to “go after” Mr. Biden and his family, suggesting that he intends to pursue prosecution with little regard to evidence or facts. According to The Washington Post, he also wants to investigate figures in his administration whom he perceives as being disloyal to him, including John Kelly, his former chief of staff; William Barr, his former attorney general; and Gen. Mark Milley, the former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Mr. Trump has separately suggested General Milley should be executed for treason.) As Mr. Kelly told The Post, “There is no question in my mind he is going to go after people that have turned on him.”

Trump has also repeatedly said that his prosecution is like no other. In fact, there are numerous examples of politicians, of both parties, who faced prosecution, and in some cases were convicted, during their candidacies. The former Texas governor Rick Perry, a Republican, ran for president in 2016 while under indictment for abuse of power. (Those charges were later dismissed.) Senator Robert Menendez, a Democrat of New Jersey, was indicted on federal bribery charges, and may run for re-election as an independent. The former president is singular in one respect: As much as he accuses others of warping the justice system, he is the one who consistently demeans and disparages the role of the courts and the exercise of due process. The leaders of the Republican Party, echoing the views of Mr. Trump's fervent base of followers, have fallen in line behind him, indicating that they will continue to support his candidacy even if he is a convicted felon.

While a Manhattan jury weighs the evidence of Mr. Trump's alleged crimes, it's the American people who will weigh the evidence of Mr. Trump's actions. His party has allowed him to act with impunity, but voters still have the power to deliver accountability. They should consider not only the facts presented during the trial — the details about his judgment, his character and the way he conducted his life and his business — but also his disregard for the rule of law and his willingness to demean American justice when it suits his interests. Those actions render him manifestly unfit for office and would pose unique dangers to United States during a second term. The greatest of those dangers, and the one that Americans should be most attuned to, is the damage that a second Trump presidency would inflict on the rule of law.

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WHO's naive global vaccine plan won't withstand contact with reality

Fraser Nelson

THE AstraZeneca vaccine was, for a while, the most celebrated product in Britain. The UK was one of only a handful of countries with the skills and apparatus not just to invent an effective Covid jab but to administer it at speed.

A vaccine taskforce saw the Army, NHS and Civil Service combine to make Britain a world leader in the rollout. Its co-inventor, Sarah Gilbert, was given a standing ovation at Wimbledon. But the wonderjab was withdrawn this week amid mutterings that it had been overhyped all along. It's certainly true that Britain's vaccine triumph did not release us from lockdown. But that's because Boris Johnson failed to seize the moment, deterred by Sage's now-notorious doom graphs. Lockdown may turn out to have been a dud policy launched on a false premise, but the vaccines worked and were just as safe as we were promised.

It's also true that AstraZeneca struggled with the omicron variant, but for earlier waves it cut death risk by 80 per cent. Its rapid development and rollout saved countless lives. Learning the right lessons from the vaccine rollout is important because the World Health Organisation (WHO) is trying to assert global governance for next time, where countries promise not to stockpile jabs and give away a fifth of their supplies.

Britain looks likely to opt out, and rightly so. It would be impossible to justify politically. The AstraZeneca experience proved that we can make our own quickly, and protect our most vulnerable. It also showed there's no case for a Fortress Britain: it was the German-American jabs which, in the end, worked best. The first duty of any country is to its people, a point the WHO misses in suggesting that rich countries sign some kind of global pact. The virus showed how it's hard to rely on global suppliers. When panic sets in, each country has a tendency to look out for its own.

At one stage, France and Germany banned PPE equipment being sent to Switzerland. Britain agreed decent contracts and priority delivery of Pfizer from a Belgian factory, which at one stage Emmanuel Macron

was talking about impounding. He didn't, but the drama showed people's instincts. The Americans didn't even think about exporting Pfizer until their own people had been protected: as you'd expect. It's naive to expect any country to really behave differently. But we did see that Pfizer and others were

releases. The blood clot issue was serious enough to have AstraZeneca phased out for British under-40s here and removed entirely from Denmark, Canada and some other countries. Another political problem was the disastrous idea of vaccine passports. When it

take the jab.

Britain now looks more vaccine hesitant, as a country, than before, with childhood jabs dropping to a worrying level. Just 50 per cent of frontline NHS workers took the flu jab in the winter before last, the lowest uptake in a decade.

The WHO's remit is global and the obvious role for it to play now is in highlighting the calamitous effects that lockdowns had on the world's poor. Shutting down economies is bad enough for rich countries, but furlough was dished out to help people cope. There was no such help for those who were indirectly affected. The United Nations has claimed that 50 million people in Africa “fell into extreme poverty as a result of Covid”. The WHO could point out that this was as a result of lockdowns, not Covid: the effects of the drawbridge-up mentality that decimated global trade. And perhaps took more lives in the third world than the virus.

The effects of lockdowns on normal vaccinations and healthcare in the developing world will take some time to become clear. If the WHO could count the damage and draw lessons for next time, the advice — if followed — could perhaps save as many lives as the vaccines. But even now, there's a reluctance among global poverty campaigners to talk about the lives lost as a result not of the virus but of avoidable mistakes.

The WHO is right to say that there are lessons to be learnt. The main one is that, in a pandemic, countries panic. A bunker mentality becomes inevitable. When Macron moved to block vaccines being exported from the European Union, he said he was declaring the “end of naivety”. The naivety, in this case, is a belief that contracts and laws would be honoured when political leaders can't get enough of the vaccines they need. This is likely to happen the next time, no matter what the WHO asks world leaders to agree now.

But if the WHO were to produce a comprehensive and globally-read report on the result of lockdowns, it could perhaps push for something more viable: to ensure that, next time, the death toll inflicted by a pandemic is not multiplied by a botched response.

The Telegraph

generous with sharing information and with making it under licence.

The lesson is that countries should invest in vaccine-making (and distributing) capability for next time. But to donate it in a crisis? The WHO's 42-page draft treaty will not find many signatures for that. One big problem was the deeply politicised nature of all of the debate. As AstraZeneca was rolled out, rare issues with blood clots emerged — as this newspaper was the first to report. But when they did, an official from the MHRA — the UK's medicines regulator — phoned up in a rage to say that, if the coverage did not soften, the Daily Telegraph would be banned from future press briefings, even from receiving press

became clear that the Covid vaccines did protect the individual but weren't so good at stopping the spread, the logic for these passports collapsed. But ministers were not very honest about this, and the idea rumbled on after its scientific justification had vanished.

This was soft coercion: changing vaccines from something you get because you want the protection, to something that you get because the authorities will make your life difficult if you don't. Vaccines should have been positioned as a life-saver, with officials welcoming all questions — no matter how tricky. But the vaccine passport idea brought a hint of menace, as did the plan to fire any NHS workers who did not

Why is Britain's mental health so incredibly poor?

George Monbiot

THE news should have stopped us in our tracks. Astonishingly, however, it was scarcely reported here. The latest map of mental wellbeing published by the Global Mind Project reveals that, out of the 71 countries it assessed, the United Kingdom, alongside South Africa, has the highest proportion of people in mental distress — and the second worst overall measure of mental health (we beat only Uzbekistan). Mental wellbeing has plummeted in the UK further than in any comparable nation. How was this not headline news?

More importantly, why has it happened? The Global Mind Project blames smartphones and ultra-processed food. They doubtless play a role, but they're hardly peculiar to the UK. I think part of the reason is the sense that life here is, visibly and obviously, spiralling backwards.

There was a time when almost everyone in the UK believed the following promises. That a rising economic tide would lift all boats. That everybody would have a good home. That drudge work would diminish and jobs would become more interesting. That we would enjoy greater economic security and more leisure time. That educational attainment would keep rising across all social classes. That our healthcare and health would inexorably improve. That the UK would become ever cleaner and greener. That governance and democratic engagement would get better by the year.

We could easily have had all of these things. A vast amount of money has flushed through this country. Science has advanced by leaps and bounds; health and labour-saving technologies have greatly improved; we know exactly how to build good homes, treat sewage and improve democracy.

Instead (literally, in the case of our rivers) almost everything has gone to shit. The five giant evils identified in 1942 by William Beveridge, who helped design the welfare state, have returned with a vengeance. He called them “want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness”. His paternalistic language translates today into poverty, morbidity, educational exclusion, wretched housing and crumbling infrastructure, and bad employment or an inability to work.

As they come thundering back, the five evil giants have brought some friends to the party: environmental chaos, extreme political dysfunction and misuse, impunity for the powerful and performative cruelty towards the powerless, and state-sponsored culture wars to distract us from the rest of the horror show.

There is a reason for these broken promises and dysfunctions, which explains why the UK suffers more from them than most comparable nations. It's called neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an ideology that sees competition as our defining feature. It insists that our wellbeing is best realised not through political choice but through economic choice. What it calls “the market” will, if

left to its own devices, determine who deserves to succeed and who does not. Everything that impedes the creation of this “natural order” of winners and losers — tax and the redistribution of wealth, welfare and public housing, publicly run and funded services, regulation, trade unions, protest, the power of politics itself — should, albeit often subtly and gradually, be shoved aside. It has dominated life in this country, to a degree unparalleled in similar nations, for 45 years.

Yet it is seldom discussed in public, or even properly identified. When people on the left try to explain our predicament, they often use terms such as Thatcherism, austerity, laissez-faire economics, supply-side economics, neo-classical economics or libertarianism. All these terms are either inadequate, misleading or plain wrong. Neoliberalism is a distinct ideology, named by its leading thinkers in 1938. Its development was funded, from the 1940s onwards, by some of the richest people on Earth. They built its infrastructure of persuasion until, in the late 1970s, when Keynesianism ran into trouble, it could occupy the ideological vacuum.

Neoliberalism is the means by which capital seeks to solve its biggest problem — a problem called democracy. Unlike laissez-faire economics or classical liberalism, which prevailed before most adults had the vote, neoliberalism uses the state in coherent and repeatable ways to impose its unpopular policies. The state is the force behind market forces, the whip enforcing “economic freedom”.

Neoliberalism's greatest triumph is to persuade us that, in Margaret Thatcher's words, “there is no alternative”. In reality, the doctrine is an alternative to the much better lives we might have led. In the new book I've written with the filmmaker Peter Hutchison, *The Invisible Doctrine*, we seek to drag this ideology and its disastrous impacts into the light and show how it can be overthrown to fulfil the promise of a better world.

How have successive governments got away with it? Through the endless promise of jam tomorrow. If we keep working harder, one day we'll pay for the public services we need; one day we'll earn the economic security we crave; one day we'll have more leisure time. Will this magic day ever arrive? Of course not. Strong public services and economic security were never part of the plan. But to have us working ever-longer hours on behalf of capital? That is very much part of the plan.

Interestingly, when environmentalists say we need to make sacrifices today to secure our future prosperity, the same government ministers insist that voters will never tolerate delayed gratification. In these and other ways, governance in the UK feels like one long trick played on the public. So they keep us hanging on. And the endless promises and the endless breaking of those promises grind us down. It would perhaps be more surprising if we found ourselves anywhere else on the mental health rankings.

The Guardian

We've been desperate for a real alternative to Macron and Le Pen

Alexander Hurst

MAYBE it's the result of having moved to Europe with a North American point of view, but it has always stunned me that Europe's nations — crammed together into an elbow of a landmass — could ever think of their sort as anything but inextricably linked. Regardless of what river, mountain range or narrow channel of water their borders run along, anything but a united Europe will be a playing thing in a world split between the unchallenged economic power of the US and China.

Emmanuel Macron understands this. It's why he's often at his most prescient and convincing when he talks about Europe. As far as a vision for Europe goes, the first speech he gave at the Sorbonne won me over in 2017; when he returned in late April this year for Europe Speech 2.0, I once again found myself

agreeing with his calls for greater European federalism.

But in the 9 June European elections, in which I have a vote — my first ever as a French and European citizen — I'm not sure that I'll vote for the French president's party, Renaissance. First, because I'm not sure that Macron, the object of so much domestic division, is well-placed to bring France along with him for all the ways that Europe urgently needs to evolve. And second, because France desperately needs a left wing that is genuinely committed to the European project. The 9 June poll is a chance for that French left to reassert itself (to “take back control”, if you will) by regrouping behind Raphaël Glucksmann.

At 44, two years younger than Macron, Glucksmann has made his mark as an MEP by being vocal about the need for European integration as essential to

accelerating the green transition, promoting human rights globally and solidifying democracy against authoritarianism. To his credit, support for these things goes deeper than his career in electoral politics. As a young journalist, Glucksmann made a 2004 documentary, *Tuez-les tous!*, about France's role in the Rwandan genocide, and he was in Kyiv for the 2013 Euromaidan protests. Perhaps his long experience with Ukraine is why Glucksmann has always been clear-eyed about the danger Vladimir Putin poses to Europe as a whole. And in the context of rising illiberalism across the political spectrum, he has cut ties with the far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

The downside of what Macron accomplished in 2017 and held together in 2022 —uniting the mainstream left and right under the banner of radical centrism — is that it has reinforced the horseshoe theory of politics fuelling an even more radical opposition on the far left and far right. (It certainly didn't help that after his 2017 election, Macron quickly and repeatedly stepped into an easy caricature of himself as arrogant and lacking empathy.)

No country can long sustain a politics that has become extractive, where a significant chunk of its political class seeks destruction in the hopes of one day ruling over the rubble. In the US, one half plays this game unilaterally against the other half; in France, both poles of the horseshoe have played it against the centre.

We know what the far-right vision for Europe is: hostility to immigrants, a lack of green investment and regulation, open season for illiberal leaders to erode

the rule of law, judicial independence and a free press, and a far more friendly turn towards the Kremlin. By retreating behind the useful word of 28-year-old Jordan Bardella, Marine Le Pen has achieved ever-increasing normalisation for the National Rally, which now leads pre-election polls with 32% of the vote.

And the far left, under Mélenchon's leadership, has spent the past two years helping to do her job. The French are more afraid of seeing Mélenchon in power than they are Le Pen. Mélenchon has cast a solid left-Euroscptic shadow over French politics. Glucksmann has a chance to change that by convincingly marking the argument that many of the left's priorities — a wealth tax, public contracting with local producers, reorganising subsidies to farmers around regenerative agriculture, protecting strict climate regulations, massive green

investment in everything from renewables to affordable train travel — only make real sense at a European level.

With 14% of French voters supporting Glucksmann's party, Place Publique, there is a significant portion of the French electorate that doesn't fully align with Macron domestically, but that wants none of the Euroscpticism Mélenchon is offering, and that has come to Glucksmann from both Macron's camp (on 17% support) and Mélenchon's (on 7%). These voters understand that in the face of behemoth economies like China and the US, and unflinching aggression from Putin, sovereignty is nothing if not European. They desire greater integration in order to have real impact on the climate crisis and ecology, and they know that Europe's strongest global lever of influence on behalf of both is access — or not — to its single market.

One reason America’s population isn’t about to start shrinking

LAST week, President Joe Biden committed a diplomatic faux pas when he chided India and Japan, two critical US allies, for being “xenophobic.” Attributing America’s success to its historic openness to immigration, the president suggested that Delhi and Tokyo’s aversion to foreigners constrained their economic growth and population stability.

Tactless as it may have been, Biden was not wrong. Japan, in particular, is expected to see its population drop by a third in the next half-century. But a few months ago, the US Census Bureau released new projections showing that America’s own population will — for the first time ever — shrink after 2080. Only one thing is preventing the nation from reaching this milestone next year: immigration.

The consistent arrival of newcomers is expected to keep America from aging as rapidly as Japan and other major economies. If immigration opponents were to cut annual admissions in half, the US would start to shrink in 2044. All countries’ populations change with trends in birth rates and life expectancy. And like many high-income nations, the US has witnessed a drop in fertility over the last half-century. Combined with longer life expectancy, this has contributed to severe demographic aging.

Aging is problematic for two reasons. It promises insolvency when too few working-age people pay into pension and health care funds that have obligations to support higher numbers of retirement-age seniors. Population decline also spells the decline of economic power and market size — one of America’s greatest geopolitical assets. The primary demographic antidote for low fertility is immigration. Disproportionately working-age and reaching higher fertility rates, immigrants inject youth, labor and innovation into societies, and — at high enough numbers — they offset aging trends. As Biden touted, this has been a core part of America’s economic growth over the last few decades, but also our demographic stability. Nearly all US population increases have been attributable to immigrant arrivals, as opposed to births outpacing deaths.

What makes the new Census Bureau projections especially bleak is that the shrinkage is expected to take place even if the

Justin Gest

US government keeps immigrant admissions at their present levels. And in case you haven’t downloaded Truth Social, present levels are unacceptable to today’s Republican Party. In an interview with Time magazine published last week, former President Donald Trump said he wants to place new arrivals in detention camps and deport millions of immigrants that

The US population is projected to reach a high of nearly 370 million in 2080 before beginning its historic downward turn. But if immigration were to be cut approximately in half, Census Bureau demographers estimate that this milestone would occur in 2044. If borders close completely, as many Republican public officials advocate, the decline would start next year. The immediacy of this impact should not be surprising. If US population growth is attributable to immigrant arrivals, which it now is, then America will cease to grow when no newcomers are admitted. Of course, Republicans’ self-defeating anxiety around immigration is informed, to some extent, by an earlier Census report — the March 2015 release that anticipated a “majority minority” milestone in 2044.

Census projections assume will otherwise remain in the US — both of which will only hasten our country’s demographic decline.

According to the Census report, the number of Americans over 64 years old will surpass the number of Americans under 18 by 2029. At that point, only 60% of the US population will be between 18 and 64 — down from close to 70% in 2010. Deaths in America are projected to outpace births by 2038 for the first time ever. At that point, there will be 13,000 more deaths than births in the US, but the shortfall increases to 1.2 million more deaths annually by 2100 — double the annual shortfall in Japan today. The US population is projected to reach a high of nearly 370 million in 2080 before beginning its historic downward turn. But if immigration were to be cut approximately in half, Census Bureau demographers estimate that this milestone would occur in 2044. If borders close completely, as many Republican public officials advocate, the decline would start next

year.

The immediacy of this impact should not be surprising. If US population growth is attributable to immigrant arrivals, which it now is, then America will cease to grow when no newcomers are admitted. Of course, Republicans’ self-defeating anxiety around immigration is informed, to some extent, by an earlier Census report — the

research suggests that information about the realities of demographic aging persuades people — especially moderates and centrists — to open their minds about immigration. My coauthors and I surveyed more than 20,000 adults across 19 European countries. A subset of these respondents was informed about real demographic trends, much like those revealed by the recent US Census report according to demographers, birth rates in their country “are significantly below the level needed to maintain the native population.”

The same subset of respondents was also told that, even though many immigrants have already entered their country over the years, to maintain current population levels, the government will need to accept “significantly more immigrants from countries outside of Europe with higher birth rates, such as Muslim-majority and African countries.” Remarkably, despite the invocation of the minority outgroups that rattle some voters, respondents in the subset were more likely to support increased immigration numbers than those who were not exposed to the news about demographic decline at all.

In Western European countries — where elevated minority fertility rates are tempering the effects of demographic aging — respondents were even resistant to far-right fearmongering narratives about “replacement theory” after immigration was portrayed as critical to the nation’s endurance. This was especially true for respondents with centrist political ideologies, those who were over 35 years old and those with average educational backgrounds. Rather than see immigrants as a threat to “replace” the nation, these respondents grew more likely to see them as a way to “replenish” the nation.

The findings from this experiment and the Census Bureau report emerge at a moment when American and European political leaders are scrambling to fortify their borders. But just as people want a well-managed admissions system, there is a countervailing desire to sustain the national population. As much as the world polarizes over foreigners’ arrival, demographic aging is an unwavering, intensifying reality that remains unaddressed, and a good reason to invest in an orderly immigration system that sustains the nation into the future.

CNN

March 2015 release that anticipated a “majority minority” milestone in 2044. Unlike the new study, the projected decline of America’s “White” population to an under-50% share of the population made headlines everywhere. The numbers — which are problematic for numerous reasons — both emboldened liberals about their electoral prospects and generated fierce backlash to immigration among conservatives.

Once a bureaucratic matter so insignificant to conservatives that the Reagan administration endorsed amnesty for all undocumented foreigners, immigration has now become the central pillar of the post-2015 Republican Party. Immigration is the top issue priority for conservatives entering the 2024 general election, and a hindrance for Biden’s prospects among independents. But if the 2015 Census projections inflamed anti-immigrant sentiment, the recent report might have the opposite effect.

That’s because my newest

AI becomes latest frontier in China-US race for Africa

Kate Bartlett

Intel. “The AI hubs across the country are partnering with strong partners from the international community to achieve the objectives of the AI institutes,” said Anish Kurien, Acting Director of the university’s AIISA hub. Earlier this month, South Africa’s Department of Defense launched a Defense Artificial Intelligence Research Unit at the country’s military academy.

“There is a need for African solutions to African challenges, and AI is an enabling technology of the [Fourth Industrial Revolution] which will play a role in solving many of the social issues facing our beloved continent,” Wayne Dalton, the deputy director of the new research unit, told VOA. When asked about US-China involvement, Dalton said, “South Africa’s AI strategy and goals are in their infancy” but “there will be plenty of opportunities for the US and China to help us achieve these goals.”

The increased focus on AI in South Africa comes at a time when public opinion has increased for China and slightly decreased for the US, according to a new Gallup report released in April. Trends in public opinion may not necessarily apply to collaboration on the AI front, and African nations will partner with parties that can offer the most value, said Okolo. “While the US government has provided substantial aid to African countries, China took a different approach by leading with infrastructure investments, which will increasingly become important as African countries aim to bolster their telecommunications and data infrastructure,” she said.

The US has already invested in AI in Africa. Silicon Valley giant Google opened its first AI lab in Ghana, while IBM has research facilities in Kenya and South Africa. At an American Chamber of Commerce Business Summit in Nairobi last month, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo announced a partnership to enable US companies to invest in AI and data centers in Kenya.

Lisa Walker, managing director for Africa operations at Prosper Africa, a US government trade initiative, told VOA the organization is advancing partnerships under US President Joe Biden’s Digital Transformation with Africa strategy. “Prosper Africa launched the Africa Tech for Trade Alliance in April of last year. Today, there are 24 private sector partners under this Alliance including industry leaders like Google, AWS, Intel, Cisco Systems, Visa, Mastercard, PayPal, UPS, DHL, FedEx

and others,” she said. China also has taken an interest in AI in Africa. For over a decade, China has been investing in the continent’s internet infrastructure and connectivity through President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative.

In April, a China-Africa Internet Development and Cooperation Forum was held in the China’s south-eastern coastal city of Xiamen and attended by representatives from some 20 African countries. “Africa is an important participant in scientific and technological progress. The development and application of AI is of great significance to the developing countries, including China and African countries,” Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, told VOA.

As for US-China competition in AI, Liu said, “China is willing to carry out communication, exchanges and practical cooperation with all parties, including Africa and the United States, on AI global governance to ensure that AI always develops in the direction of human civilization and progress.” During their meeting in San Francisco last year and a recent phone call, Liu said, Chinese and US leaders agreed to promote cooperation in the field of AI. Liu added that the two sides will soon hold the first intergovernmental dialogue on AI.

Prosper Africa’s Walker had a different take when asked about US-China competition, saying US companies had “incompatible brand value.” “It’s the focus on mutual growth, local job creation and shared prosperity that continues to set American tech companies apart from international competitors,” she said.

However, Brookings Institution fellow Okolo is more pessimistic about US-China involvement in Africa. “While I’ve seen rising interest in Africa from the US and China, I believe it’s honestly hard to say how well these countries are interested in specifically working with African countries to advance AI innovation,” said Okolo. “While American and Chinese researchers often collaborate with each other in academic AI research, these countries themselves are vying to be leaders within the ‘AI race.’”

According to the recently released AI Index Report from Stanford University’s Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, the US was the leading source of top computer programs known as AI models last year, with 61 compared to China’s 15. However, it found that China led globally in terms of AI patents with 61.1%, while the US accounted for only 20%.

Visits showcase good examples of international relations

Chen Weihua

A week-long visit to Hungary was like a breath of fresh air to me, not only because Hungary, notably its capital Budapest, is beautiful but also because the officials, businesspeople, academics, teachers and students I talked with in the country made so much more sense than those ideologues in Washington and Brussels, where I have been based for the past decade.

That’s why I’m not surprised to see China-Hungary relations getting better by the day. And that’s what I heard from multiple people including Balazs Orban, political director for Prime Minister Viktor Orban, and Gyorgy Matolcsy, governor of the Magyar Nemzeti Bank, Hungary’s central bank.

They were not trying to please a Chinese journalist, because, as they said, improving relations with China is in Hungary’s national interest. For example, Hungary’s “Eastern Opening” policy has been described by several experts as being very similar to the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative: both want to improve connectivity and expand cooperation, rather than building walls, forming political blocs and sowing discord as the United States has been doing. The

fact that Chinese enterprises and investors including the CATL, BYD and Huawei have been warmly welcomed in Hungary explains why China is the top source of foreign direct investment in the Central European country. The fearmongering about Chinese companies, a common phenomenon in Washington and Brussels, does not exist in Hungary.

Contrary to Western disinformation, about 80 percent of the staff, including senior executives, in the CATL and NIO Inc. offices I visited in Budapest comprised local people. In fact, it was fun to talk to teachers and students at the Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual School, the only public school in Central and Eastern Europe where learning Chinese is mandatory; it’s the same as learning one’s mother language.

“Learning Chinese is hard”, some students told me teasingly, stressing Chinese and Hungarian are the two most difficult languages to learn. But learning another language is also learning about another culture, another country’s or region’s history and traditions. Many of the global problems are caused by the lack of mutual understanding, and learning another language or about another country clears misunderstandings.

That’s why it’s shocking to see some US and European politicians claiming that they know China, even though they spent less than a week or, in many cases, just a couple of days in the country. It is in this context that China’s short-stay visa-exemption policy for citizens of 12 countries, mostly European countries, which earlier this week was extended till the end of 2025, is good news. It will allow more people to visit China and see for themselves its achievements in different fields and the rapid transformation it is undergoing. It’s also good news for tourists and the tourism industry, for it will facilitate the return of Chinese tourists to Europe after the three-year-long COVID-19 pandemic. I overheard many people speaking Chinese on the streets of Budapest and Paris, which I visited last month, and Brussels, where I’m posted.

The China-Hungary relationship is an excellent example of how international relations should be conducted despite the differences in two countries’ cultures, histories, standing, and learning another language or about another country clears misunderstandings. That’s why it’s shocking to see some US and European politicians claiming that they know China, even though they spent less than a week or, in many cases, just a couple of days in the country. It is in this context that China’s short-stay visa-exemption policy for citizens of 12 countries, mostly European countries, which earlier this week was extended till the end of 2025, is good news. It will allow more people to visit China and see for themselves its achievements in different fields and the rapid transformation it is undergoing. It’s also good news for tourists and the tourism industry, for it will facilitate the return of Chinese tourists to Europe after the three-year-long COVID-19 pandemic. I overheard many people speaking Chinese on the streets of Budapest and Paris, which I visited last month, and Brussels, where I’m posted.

Following five years of reflection and deliberations since the end of World War II, then French foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed the Schuman Declaration — creating a European Coal and Steel Community under the control of a common High Authority — on May 9, 1950, in the hope of ending the conflict between France and Germany and preventing another war in Europe. That formed the embryo of what we know as the European Union today — and since then, the day has been observed as Europe Day, to remind future generations to learn from history and cherish peace.

Now, 79 years later, Europe once again faces the specter of an armed conflict. To maintain peace in Europe, the EU should distance itself from the US-led NATO’s military maneuverings and instead work toward reconciliation with Russia. The root cause of the Ukraine crisis can be traced to NATO’s incessant eastward expansion despite Russia’s warning that, by doing so, NATO was threatening its national security. China, too, has been a victim of

standing, and learning another language or about another country clears misunderstandings.

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The China-Hungary relationship is an excellent example of how international relations should be conducted despite the differences in two countries’ cultures, histories,

territories and political systems. Sino-Hungarian ties are also about mutual respect, mutual exchanges, and practical and win-win cooperation which benefit both countries and their peoples.

The same is true for China-Serbia relations, as well as China-France relations. And the bonds between China and France, Serbia and Hungary will further strengthen after the Chinese leader’s visit to the three European countries this week. While China-Serbia relations are ironclad, China-France ties are strong given the \$79 billion Sino-French trade last year and the strong people-to-people exchanges. Unlike some Western countries, France is known for its independent foreign policy since the days of General Charles de Gaulle, while incumbent President Emmanuel Macron is against the European Union becoming a US vassal and forming political blocs. Macron is opposed to such geopolitical games because, he knows, they will lead to a brutal new Cold War, which would be a disaster for future generations considering what our generation and our parents’ generation suffered during the Cold War.

Unable to provide a stable supply of goods for the EU, the prices of many essentials have reached historic highs, aggravating inflation in Europe and dealing a serious blow to poor families. The best way for EU to step out of the geopolitical vortex is to strengthen its own common security and collective defense, by adhering to a foreign policy free of US interference and influence. In March, the EU released its defense industrial strategy and industrial program, in a bid to better cope with geopolitical threats and reduce its dependency on the US for military equipment manufacturing.

Yet Europe is divided on having a collective defense and security policy. Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, French President Emmanuel Macron has been accusing German Chancellor Olaf Scholz of over-relying on the US and doing nothing to advance the EU’s common security and defense policy. This shows intra-EU differences on security and defense are far from being resolved. As such, the EU should first try to devise independent security and defense policy, rather than blame others for its woes, and look inward and correct its faults in order to maintain peace on the continent.

The China Daily

Europe can only seek peace from within

Chen Siyang

IT is no surprise that during the ongoing visit of the top Chinese leader to Europe, certain Western media outlets are playing up the Russia-Ukraine conflict in their effort to shift the blame for the Ukraine crisis onto China. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has indeed cast a shadow of war over Europe. Yet it is essential that Europe seeks peace from within, not from external sources. The European Union, in particular, should abandon its holier-than-thou attitude and veneer of infallibility, and instead indulge in some introspection to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

China has been engaged in mediating peace between Moscow and Kyiv, by urging them to return to the negotiation table. But one should remember that China is not a participant in the conflict nor did it trigger it. Nazi Germany’s unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, brought to an end World War II in Europe. Since then May 8 has been celebrated as Victory in Europe Day by many European countries to express their love for peace. Russia celebrates VE Day on May 9, because by the time all combat in Europe ended, it was already May 9 in the Soviet

Union. Following five years of reflection and deliberations since the end of World War II, then French foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed the Schuman Declaration — creating a European Coal and Steel Community under the control of a common High Authority — on May 9, 1950, in the hope of ending the conflict between France and Germany and preventing another war in Europe. That formed the embryo of what we know as the European Union today — and since then, the day has been observed as Europe Day, to remind future generations to learn from history and cherish peace.

Now, 79 years later, Europe once again faces the specter of an armed conflict. To maintain peace in Europe, the EU should distance itself from the US-led NATO’s military maneuverings and instead work toward reconciliation with Russia. The root cause of the Ukraine crisis can be traced to NATO’s incessant eastward expansion despite Russia’s warning that, by doing so, NATO was threatening its national security. China, too, has been a victim of NATO’s military adventurism. In 1999, the United States-led NATO launched air strikes on a sovereign state, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, without the approval of the UN Security Council, and bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese journalists and injuring dozens of Chinese nationals. The EU itself, should address the root cause of the Ukraine crisis and do more to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. More than 30,000 people have been killed or wounded in the Ukraine conflict, and thousands of refugees have entered the EU via Poland and other Eastern European countries, causing one of the largest refugee waves in European history and plunging the EU into a humanitarian crisis that has become an immense burden on its social welfare system, and a risk to its social stability. Additionally, the economic sanctions the EU has imposed on Russia have backfired — the EU registered a 0.4 percent GDP growth in 2023, with zero growth in the last quarter. Now that Russia and Ukraine, which used to be important energy and agricultural product suppliers for Europe,

Navigating ethical landscape of AI on road

IN the vibrant city Rafael Hernandez De Santiago of Techville, a new debate has taken center stage: The ethics of artificial intelligence, particularly in the realm of driverless cars. Picture this: A bustling intersection, a driverless car, and a family of ducks waddling across the road. It’s a dilemma straight out of Punch and Judy. Punch, the ever-optimistic puppet, argues: “Driverless cars, my dear Judy, are the future! They’ll make our roads safer, reduce traffic jams and maybe even find a parking spot downtown on a Friday night. What’s not to love?”

Ah, but Judy, ever the skeptic, counters: “But Punch, what happens when the car faces the classic ethical dilemma? Does it swerve to avoid hitting a group of pedestrians, potentially endangering its passenger, or does it stay the course and risk harming the pedestrians?” But behind the whimsy lies a serious conundrum. Should our autonomous vehicles prioritize the safety of their passengers above all else, even if it means squashing innocent ducklings? Or should they take a more democratic approach, where the needs of the many, or in this case the many webbed feet, outweigh the needs of the few? In Techville, opinions vary. “I bought my driverless car to protect me,” argues Mr. Pennyworth, an avid collector of vintage

gadgets and frequent patron of the city’s hipster coffee shops. “If it’s not going to prioritize my safety, then what’s the point?” But not everyone is on Team Pennyworth. “We can’t just trample over the little guys,” protests Ms. Haversham, a self-proclaimed environmentalist and founder of the Techville Birdwatchers Society. “If our driverless cars start mowing down wildlife left and right, we might as well go back to riding bicycles.” Meanwhile, the city’s residents continue to grapple with more practical concerns.

“I don’t care if my driverless car runs on organic kale smoothies or solar power,” declares Ms. Rodriguez, a wellness influencer with a penchant for Instagram-worthy yoga poses. “As long as it gets me to my juice cleanse appointments on time, I’m golden.” As the debate rages on, one thing becomes abundantly clear: The future of transportation in Techville is anything but predictable.

Will our driverless cars become beacons of ethical virtue, cruising the streets with the grace of a ballerina in a tutu? Or will they succumb to the same moral pitfalls as their human counterparts, engaging in petty road rage and aggressive honking? Enter the philosophical musings of Immanuel Kant, who once said: “Act only according

to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

In other words, if you wouldn’t want everyone else doing the same thing in the same situation, maybe it’s not such a great idea. Apply this to driverless cars and suddenly Punch and Judy are in a full-blown moral quandary. Only time will tell. But one thing is for certain: The ethical implications of artificial intelligence are never far from our minds. So, the next time you find yourself behind the wheel of a self-driving car, just remember to keep your eyes on the road — and your heart in the right place.

But fear not, dear citizens of Techville, for amid the chaos and confusion, there is hope. Engineers and ethicists are working tirelessly to program AI with a moral compass, teaching it to navigate the murky waters of right and wrong. In conclusion, let us heed the words of that wise old philosopher Plato, who famously said: “We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.” Let us not be afraid to shine a light on the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, for only then can we truly navigate the path to a brighter future — one where Punch and Judy can finally set aside their differences.

Arab News

Pakistan, Korea sign Aide-Mémoire for enhanced development cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MoEA) here on Friday signed an Aide-Mémoire to chart a mid-term plan for implementation of development projects between 2024-2026.

The Aide-Mémoire, which was signed at the conclusion of visit by EDCF Country Programme Mission from the Export-Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM), represents a key milestone in deepening economic ties between Pakistan and the Republic of Korea.

According to MoEA press release, the Aide-Mémoire was signed by Joint Secretary, Ministry

of Economic Affairs, Sajid Manzoor Asadi and Director of the Asia Team, EDCF Mission, Bonhyun Koo.

The signing was witnessed by Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Dr Kazim Niaz and other officials from the MoEA and EDCF. Additionally, a project concept for the construction of a Pediatric Hospital in Jamshoro was signed, with EDCF committing USD 60 million in financing for the hospital's construction in Sindh.

During the course of the visit, the EDCF Mission engaged with various government departments in Pakistan, including the Ministry of Planning, the National

Highway Authority, Provincial Planning & Development Departments, and others, to discuss and refine the proposed development agenda.

The EDCF mission's objectives also included knowledge sharing and capacity building, which both sides agreed to further enhance in the coming years.

In total, the EDCF has committed an indicative USD 900 million for lending to Pakistan over the next three years, with an additional USD 2 million allocated for technical assistance.

This commitment will support high-priority projects, which will be further refined during an upcoming Policy Dialogue.

The Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Director, Asia team, EDCF Mission, emphasized their shared commitment to promoting sustainable development and fostering stronger economic cooperation.

They highlighted that the Aide-Mémoire underscores the commitment of both sides to work towards sustainable development through projects in priority sectors, including transport, healthcare, energy, and information and communication technology (ICT).

They expressed gratitude to all stakeholders for their support and collaboration, the press release added.



ISLAMABAD: Sajid Manzoor Asadi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Bonhyun Koo, Director of the Asia Team, EDCF Mission sing and Aide-Memoire.

CCP approves acquisition in thermal power sector

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved a merger in the thermal power sector.

The approved transaction entails the acquisition of 20.97% shareholding of M/s. Orient Power Company (Private) Limited (OPCOL) by M/s. Whistler Enterprises (Private) Limited (WEL). M/s. Whistler Enterprises (Private) Limited, a recently incorporated private limited company under the Laws of Pakistan, focuses on setting up, acquiring, or carrying on power generation businesses and related products or services.

While M/s. Orient Power Company (Private) Limited is an independent power producer operating a 225 MW power plant in Balloki, Kasur. The shares are being acquired from M/s. Mahmood Textile Mills Limited and Mr. Khawaja Mehr Ali, pursuant to a Share Purchase Agreement.

The Phase I competition assessment identified 'Power Generation – Thermal' as the relevant product market, revealing that the market share of OPCOL in the Thermal power generation segment is less than 1%, which will remain unchanged post-transaction.

Given that the proposed transaction will not lead to the dominance

of WEL in the relevant market post-transaction, the merger was authorized under Section 31 of the Competition Act, 2010. Investment in the power sector is vital for its growth and its broader impact on the economy.

The approval of this merger not only reflects the confidence of investors in the country's power sector but also highlights the importance of competition in driving efficiency and innovation in the industry.

This approval underscores the CCP's commitment to facilitating competition while ensuring the efficiency and growth of the power sector in Pakistan.

Consumers haven't felt this bad about the economy since November

New York (CNN): Consumer sentiment plunged to the lowest level in six months as price increases reaccelerated, according to the latest University of Michigan survey of consumers, released Friday.

Additionally, consumers are bracing for even higher price increases in the year ahead compared to readings from prior months, the survey found.

The gauge, which is

closely tracked by the Biden administration, plunged 13% from April's 77.2% reading, to 67.4%. Economists polled by FactSet were expecting consumer expectations to fall to just 76.9%. However, the latest reading is still better than last May, when inflation was running at 4%, versus the latest reading of 3.5%.

Even though inflation is lower compared to a year ago, it's been moving in the

wrong direction recently, shifting expectations for a rate cut from the Federal Reserve to the back burner.

Perhaps the most daunting piece of the report for the Fed was year-ahead inflation expectations rising to 3.5% from 3.2% in April, even further away from the central bank's 2% target. Long-run inflation expectations also rose, to 3.1% from 3.0% in April.

Since inflation expecta-

tions can effectively control the pace of price hikes, businesses take those expectations into account when pricing goods and services.

The survey suggests that the recent optimism consumers had about the state of the economy is waning. Beyond inflation, they're also concerned about higher rates of unemployment, Joanne Hsu, the university's Surveys of Consumers director, said in a release.

Apple faces growing labor unrest at its retail stores

New York (CNN): Apple faces plenty of challenges this year including regulatory scrutiny in Washington, sluggish sales in China and a competitive landscape in AI. Now, its leaders also have to contend with labor unrest.

Apple store workers in Towson, Maryland, made history in June 2022 when they voted to form the first union at one of the tech giant's sleek US stores. Since 2023, the worker group outside of Baltimore has been in contract negotiations with Apple management. Now, workers are weighing a strike.

Saying management has yet to meet their core demands, the Maryland workers are holding a strike authorization vote on Saturday, one of the strongest labor actions taken against the Big Tech company yet. And it's far from the only labor challenge Apple is battling in the US.

Employees in New Jersey are holding a union election this weekend. In addition, the National Labor Relations Board this week upheld a decision alleging Apple's union-busting tactics in New York City. The company also has unfair labor practice complaints against it in front of labor judges right now (Apple denies these allegations).

The labor wave that has hit Apple retail stores echoes the mass organizing that began at other influential companies in the United States, such as Starbucks and Amazon. As Apple grew to become the world's first \$3 trillion company, a tight labor market coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic exposed labor conditions

and inequalities front-facing workers in places such as stores and warehouses faced.

"It speaks to a growing frustration among workers and also a contagion in labor activity, which is when one group of workers stands up and inspires others," Kate Bronfenbrenner, the Director of Labor Education Research at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, said.

So far, workers at two Apple store locations – Towson, Maryland and Oklahoma City – have voted to unionize. But the union vote in New Jersey this weekend, along with other efforts across the country, could just be the beginning.

Apple is a high profile company – and many, many Americans have at least one Apple product.

"This whole segment of the economy that didn't have a lot of activity, suddenly has activity. The Apple workers (possibly) going on strike is going to be a spark for other workers," Bronfenbrenner said.

"At Apple we work hard to provide an excellent experience for our retail team members and empower them to deliver exceptional service for our customers. We deeply value our team members and we're proud to provide them with industry leading compensation and exceptional benefits. As always, we will engage with the union representing our team in Towson respectfully and in good faith," an Apple spokesperson said in an emailed statement to CNN.

The Maryland workers are considering a strike because after over a year of

negotiations, management had yet to come up with solutions to core issues such as "work-life balance, unpredictable scheduling practices that disrupt personal lives, and wages that do not reflect the cost of living in the area," a release by the union said.

A strike sanction vote doesn't mean the store is going on strike. It's one step of a longer process that ends with a final strike authorization vote.

The workers at the Maryland Apple store are members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers Coalition of Organized Retail Employees (IAM COTE).

"This strike sanction vote sends a strong message that the workers want Apple to recognize the need for an equitable and respectful work environment for all its employees," IAM District 4 Directing Business Representative Jay Wadleigh said in a statement.

Workers at the Towson Town Center Apple hold their new union T-shirts after their store employees decided to join the International Association of Machinists Union. Theirs is the first Apple store in the US to vote for union representation. (Barbara Haddock Taylor/The Baltimore Sun/Tribune News Service/Getty Images) Barbara Haddock Taylor/The Baltimore Sun/Tribune News Service/Getty Images

The Maryland store has an ongoing complaint filed against Apple, which alleges the company provided improved health and education benefits to non-union employees and not the unionized employees.

Bronfenbrenner said a big motivation behind organizing is the gap between corporate profits in America's biggest companies – such as Apple, Amazon and Google – and worker wages and benefits, especially for workers in retail stores or warehouses.

"There's just a lot of anger. And the corporations like Apple have made huge profits while the workers feel like their wages have stagnated," Bronfenbrenner said.

Apple, like other big companies, is cracking down on union activities. The NLRB found that Apple went too far in trying to crack down on a union drive in New York City.

The NLRB ruled this month that Apple unlawfully interrogated employees and confiscated and prohibited union flyers while allowing non-union materials at the World Trade Center location in 2022.

The NLRB held up the US Labor Board judge's decision from last year – which was the first time a labor judge ruled against Apple. The affirmation from the NLRB is a win for labor organizers.

But across the river in New Jersey, there is a union election for employees in Short Hills, a New York City suburb.

There are other unfair labor practice complaints against Apple before labor judges at the moment.

Similar to New York City, workers in Atlanta issued a complaint in 2022 alleging Apple illegally interrogated employees about union support and tried to convince them not to join one.

The labor action is not just taking place at Apple's front-facing retail stores.

Abu Dhabi National Hotels Q1-2024 net profit surge

DUBAI (Gulf News): Abu Dhabi National Hotels sure did not stint on its net profit surge. The company, bolstered by a series of deals, saw its first quarter net profit weigh in with a substantial Dh1.02 billion from just Dh148 million a year ago.

This was brought on by recognising fair value gains on its equity interests to the tune of Dh916 million. This was from the acquisition of the UK entity Compass' stake in the hospitality services joint venture ADNHH Compass, for Dh227 million.

Thus ADNHH turned all three UAE entities into fully-owned subsidiaries, which then resulted in the Dh916 million fair value gain. (This is split into an intangible asset by way of customer relationships (for Dh181 million) and goodwill.)

ADNH operates two key divisions, one around its hotels and hospitality services, and the other being transport services. The hotel side of the business had revenues of Dh386 million, and then accounted for EBITDA of Dh189 million from Dh194 million.

The segment profit before tax decreased by Dh4 million to Dh117 million.

The drop was in line with 'management's anticipated temporary impact from five Dubai-based hotels' rebranding and the impact of Ramadan during (Q1) 2024'.

ADNH had issued stock dividends of 5 per cent of issued share capital, which then led to an increase of 600 million shares to 12.6 billion. Earlier, the company had gone in for a stock split at 10:1. (The stock price on ADX as of March 31 was Dh0.64 against Dh0.93 a share as of end Q4-23.)

PTCL's 'Flash Fiber' reaches 500,000 users

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's fastest Fiber-To-The-Home (FTTH) service, PTCL's Flash Fiber has demonstrated swift growth to reach the milestone of 500,000 customers nationwide. The service revolutionizes internet connectivity in Pakistan, besides offering a host of integrated ICT services to transform the experience of its customers.

PTCL Group is rapidly expanding its fiber network in Pakistan, upgrading from copper to improve digital experiences and customer satisfaction. Currently, PTCL's Flash Fiber service links 79 cities across the nation and is expanding further, said a news release issued here on Friday.

Flash Fiber achieved this milestone at an unmatched pace in Pakistan's telecom sector, highlighting its exceptional popularity due to its rapid speeds, flawless connectivity, and a range of complementary digital offerings, such as PTCL Group's premier OTT service, SHOQ.

Celebrating this significant milestone, Hatem Bamatraf, President and Group CEO of PTCL & Ufone 4G, expressed, "We are thrilled by the enthusiastic response to our FTTH service 'Flash Fiber', which is designed to revolutionize user experiences, support smart home setups and enhance digital lifestyles in Pakistan.

We firmly believe that high-speed and reliable internet connectivity acts as a catalyst for economic growth and social advancement, as it drives a substantial portion of the economy and opens doors to progress and development. We are strategically expanding our fiber network with the aim of making high-quality connectivity easily accessible to every internet user in Pakistan."

High-speed connectivity also touches upon softer

aspects including leisure and entertainment. On the back of Flash Fiber's blazing speeds, PTCL is enriching user experience by providing premium content through its IPTV (SHOQ TV) and OTT App (SHOQ) services. Flash Fiber customers can also enjoy Flash Eye Security Solution for their house or office that is designed to meet all their security needs. Not only this, but Flash Fiber customers can also avail medical insurance.

PTCL's FTTH service provides fastest connectivity that fosters innovation and drives socio-economic growth.

The widespread adoption of fiber connectivity presents a valuable opportunity to unlock Pakistan's growth potential across agriculture, health, education, e-commerce, entrepreneurship, and the digital economy, promoting sustainable and inclusive progress.

Digitalization of tax system discussed

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level meeting was held at the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Headquarters, following the signing of the contract by the global consulting firm, McKinsey & Company, for the Digitalization of the Tax System.

The meeting was attended by officials from the Ministry of Finance, FBR, Karandaaz and the consulting firm.

The digitalization of the tax system is a pivotal step towards modernizing tax collection which will enhance transparency and revenue growth.

At the meeting, the Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, sharing the GOP's vision stated, "Digital transformation is a key priority for the government, and this collaboration underscores the Government's commitment to improving tax collection for promoting sustained economic growth.

We look forward to seeing the positive impact of this initiative on Pakistan's economy," FBR Chairman, Mr. Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana, emphasized FBR's commitment to enhance revenue collection via leveraging technology to modernize its operations.

He highlighted "This

project is a significant step towards achieving FBR's goals of transparency and efficiency to better serve the people of Pakistan." CEO of Karandaaz Pakistan, Waqas ul Hasan, expressed confidence that this collaboration will help FBR in defining and implementing its digital strategy and highlighted that the experience, the contracted firm brings for this assignment would contribute to realizing the broader vision of the Pakistan Digital Stack initiative.

He also thanked the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for providing financial assistance for this project of critical importance.

Spinneys to expand presence in UAE and Saudi Arabia

ABU DHABI (Khaleej Times): Spinneys sees bright outlook for retail industry and will capitalise on business opportunities in the region after a successful initial public offering (IPO) and listing on Dubai Financial Market on Thursday, its top official says.

The franchisee of the supermarket chain in the UAE and Oman will expand its footprint in the UAE and Saudi Arabia due to growing demand of retail products in the region. "We have identified multiple avenues to accelerate the profitable growth of our business through our network of stores and broader omnichannel platform. This includes like-for-like growth for existing mature stores, driven by growth in our target market and an increase in Spinneys' offering, private label and e-commerce penetration," Sunil Kumar, chief executive officer of Spinneys, told Khaleej Times during an interview.

Spinneys operates 75 premium grocery retail supermarkets under the Spinneys, Waitrose and Al Fair brands in Oman and the UAE, where it plans to open new stores this year. It has a 27 per cent share in its target market in Dubai and 12 per cent of the Dh23 billion target market in the UAE in 2022 amid continued growth in its online sales, its private label brands and its fresh food offerings.

"We are also focussing on further expansion within our home market in the UAE, in addition to further expansion in Saudi Arabia. Lastly, the introduction of The Kitchen, by Spinneys, an innovative concept, in 2024, alongside operational efficien-

cies across our business and supply chain will benefit the company," he said.

About the strategy for expanding Spinneys' presence in the UAE and the GCC region, he said Spinneys will capitalise on business opportunities in the region.

"We see a large whitespace opportunity in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, an important factor in our plans for continued expansion of our store network," he said.

In the UAE alone, backed by strong population growth and accelerating real estate development, whitespace is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.2 per cent to 2028, he said while referring to latest Kearney's market report.

"To put that in context, such an increase is the equivalent to adding nearly 540 new Spinneys or Waitrose stores, surpassing our current count of 70 Spinneys, Waitrose, and Al Fair stores. This presents a huge opportunity for us to tap," he said.

Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, the whitespace opportunity demonstrates even more compelling potential, enabled by a growing and increasingly affluent urban population. It is projected to grow at a CAGR of 2.8 per cent to 2028, according to Kearney's market report which is equivalent to almost 1,200 Spinneys or Waitrose stores.

"While it would not be possible to occupy all the whitespace available in these markets, it goes a long way to showing how much growth potential there really is for us," he said.

In reply to a question about the outlook for retail market over the next three years, he said: "We are seeing an increased focus on convenience as customers increasingly choose time-saving options. Given our strong online presence and positive customer feedback, we are well-positioned to benefit from the expected surge in online activity.

"We are also seeing an uptick in private label penetration. We consider the cost advantage and quality of our private label as vital, especially in a market where promotions play a dominant role."

Kumar said Spinneys is well-positioned to capitalise on business opportunities as well as address the potential challenges to the retail industry.

One of the key challenges for the industry at present is a consumer cost-of-living crunch and supply chain disruption. Spinneys is ideally placed to deflect both of these challenges, he said.

"We are well-positioned to capitalise on the robust economic landscape of the UAE, where the economy is expected to grow at a CAGR of 3.4 per cent from 2022 to 2028, with high average disposable income per capita, expected to grow at a CAGR of 2.3 per cent over the same period.

"While the UAE's population is projected to grow at a CAGR of 0.7 per cent from 2022 to 2028, the affluent population in the UAE is projected to grow faster, at a CAGR of 4.3 per cent from 2022 to 2028, driving sustained demand for premium food," he said.



In brief

Babar breaks Kohli's record

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan captain Babar Azam's supremacy in the shortest format of the game continues as he equalled another record currently held by India's Virat Kohli. Babar Azam equalled Kohli's record of the most 50-plus scores in the T20Is during the first Twenty20 against Ireland that is currently underway in Dublin, Ireland. Babar Azam reached his fifty off just 39 balls that included seven fours and a six. It was the 35th half-century for Babar along with three centuries to his name. Babar took just 108 innings in 115 matches to reach 38 50-plus scores in the T20i format while Kohli took 109 innings in 117 matches to score 38 50-plus scores. Kohli hit 37 half-centuries and one century. With one less innings mean, Babar surpassed Kohli in this elusive list. Third on the list is Rohit Sharma with 34 50+ scores. Muhammad Rizwan and David Warner are fourth and fifth with 27 50+ scores each.

NBA fines Pacers coach

NEW YORK (AFP): Indiana Pacers head coach Rick Carlisle was fined \$35,000 by the NBA on Friday for public criticism of referees and questioning the integrity of the league and its officials. Carlisle's remarks came after Indiana's 130-121 loss at New York on Wednesday, which gave the Knicks a 2-0 lead in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference second round playoff series. Carlisle wondered if the Knicks were getting preferred calls as a big-city squad compared to the Pacers from the relatively small market of Indianapolis. "Small-market teams deserve an equal shot," Carlisle said after Wednesday's game. "They deserve a fair shot no matter where they are playing." The Pacers reportedly sent the league 78 examples on Thursday of referee calls or non-calls the team felt unhappy with from the first two games against the Knicks. "We're always talking to our guys about not making it about the officials, but we deserve a fair shot," Carlisle said. "Give New York credit for the physicality that they're playing with, but their physicality is rewarded and ours is penalized just time after time." The Knicks made 18-of-22 free throws in game two while the Pacers made 10-of-17 attempts from the line.

Pak women to take on England

LAHORE (PPI): Pakistan women's cricket team are all geared up to take on England in the first of the three-match T20I series starting tomorrow at the Edgbaston Cricket Ground in Birmingham. The second and third T20Is will be played in Northampton and Leeds on 17 and 19 May, respectively. Three ODIs – part of the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25, will be played from 23 to 29 May in Derby, Taunton and Chelmsford. Pakistan women's team captain, Nida Dar said: "We have been working hard to fine-tune our skills and strategies ahead of this series. Each member of the team has showcased great dedication and discipline during the practice sessions, and I have full faith in their abilities to deliver in the forthcoming series. Playing against a top side like England is always a challenge, but it is also a great opportunity for our players to test themselves

Balbirnie-inspired Ireland stun Pakistan in first T20I

DUBLIN (Agencies): Andy Balbirnie's blistering 77-run knock after a combined bowling display led Ireland to stun Pakistan in the first T20I of the three-match series here on Friday.

Set to chase 183, Ireland amassed the total for the loss of five wickets and a ball to spare, at the back of a strong third-wicket partnership between Harry Tector and Balbirnie.

The home side, however, had a contrasting start to the pursuit as they lost their captain Paul Stirling and Lorcan Tucker inside the batting powerplay with just 27 runs on the board. Balbirnie and Tector then pulled the hosts out of trouble with a sensible partnership. The duo added 77 runs for the third wicket before Imad Wasim provided a much-needed breakthrough to Pakistan by dismissing Tector, who scored 36 off 27 deliveries.

Ireland's batting mainstay Balbirnie was then involved in an important partnership with George Dockrell.

The 39-run partnership was dominated by Dockrell, who scored a blazing 24 off just 12 deliveries with the help of four boundaries including two sixes.

Balbirnie then put together a brief 24-run partnership with Gareth Delany before finally perishing in the penultimate over with the home side needing 16 off eight deliveries. Andy Balbirnie top-scored for Pakistan with 77 off 55 deliveries, peppered with 10 boundaries and two sixes.

Following his dismissal, Delany (10) and Curtis Campher (15) displayed nerves of steel and played match-winning cameos to guide Ireland to a historic victory. Abbas Afridi took two wickets for Pakistan while Naseem Shah, Imad Wasim and Shaheen Shah Afridi picked one apiece.

Put into bat first, Pakistan's new opening pair of Mohammad Rizwan (1) and Saim Ayub failed to give them a steady start as the former got run out in the second over, courtesy of Herry Tector's direct hit.

Following the early blow, Pakistan captain Babar Azam joined Saim in the middle and launched recovery. The duo batted sensibly and added 85 runs for the second wicket until the left-handed opener faltered.

Saim fell rigorously short of his maiden T20I hundred

and walked back in the 12th over after scoring a brisk 45. His 29-ball knock featured four boundaries and three sixes. Babar switched gears after Saim's dismissal and soon brought up his 38th T20I century in 39 deliveries.

He, however, failed to get going and miscued Craig Young's short-pitched delivery to Mark Adair at long-on.

Babar Azam remained the top-scorer for Pakistan with a 43-ball 57 with the help of eight boundaries and a six.

Pakistan then lost two more wickets in quick succession as both Azam Khan and Shadab Khan fell for a duck and thus consequently slipped to 123/5 in 15.2 overs. Coming out to bat at No.7, Iftikhar Ahmed launched the attack on Ireland's bowlers and bolstered Pakistan's total.

He smashed three boundaries and three sixes on his way to an unbeaten 37 off 15 deliveries. Iftikhar also put together an important partnership with Fakhar Zaman, who scored a scratchy 20. Craig Young spearheaded Ireland's bowling charge with 2/27 in his four overs while Adair and Gareth Delany chipped in with a wicket apiece.



DUBLIN: Andy Balbirnie and Harry Tector added 77 off 52 balls for the third wicket.

FIFA deny 'imposing' 2025 Club WC schedule

PARIS (Agencies): FIFA on Friday strenuously denied "imposing" its scheduling for the 2025 Club World Cup amid the threat of legal action from leagues and unions.

In a letter to the World Leagues Association (WLA) and FIFPRO, Matthias Grafstrom, secretary general of world football's governing body, insisted they had consulted widely on the new international calendar.

"From the outset we reject any suggestion or inference that FIFA somehow 'imposes' the International Match Calendar (IMC) on the football community without adequate consultation or to suit its own 'business strategy'," Grafstrom said in a letter seen by AFP.

On Thursday, the leagues and unions had called on FIFA to reschedule the 32-team Club World Cup, due to be staged between June 13 and July 15 next year, or face legal action.

A letter sent by the WLA and FIFPRO, the international players' union, to FIFA president Gianni Infantino, claimed the sport's worldwide schedule is now "beyond saturation". Grafstrom said FIFA is "like any other competition organiser" and "fully within our rights to set the parameters of our competitions whilst respecting the regulatory framework in place".

He also took aim at domestic leagues, such as the Premier League, organising summer competitions.

"We are also well aware that there are other competition organisers, including those represented by the WLA, who are similarly entitled to exercise their rights in the same manner, including the ability to introduce, abolish or replace competitions, and to review their formats in a reasonable way," he said.

"This ability has been demonstrated by the introduction of international tours by members of the WLA in recent years, by way of example.

Pakistan-New Zealand match ends in 1-1 draw

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and New Zealand ended their match in a 1-1 draw in the 30th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in Ipoh, Malaysia on Friday.

According to information made available here by the Pakistan Hockey Federation, in the fifth pool match both Pakistan and New Zealand struggled to break the deadlock until halftime.

It was not until the 35th minute when New Zealand managed to find the net, taking the lead. However, Pakistan's resilience paid off when they equalized through a penalty corner executed by Abu Bakar in the 43rd minute, ultimately resulting in a 1-1 draw.

With a total of 11 points from five matches, Pakistan has successfully secured its place in the final. Pakistan

had clinched the third position in the previous edition of the event.

In the final, to be contested on Saturday, Pakistan will take on Japan.

This prestigious event, featuring six teams including hosts Malaysia, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada, has garnered immense attention from hockey enthusiasts from across the world.

Pogacar turns screw on Giro with stage 7 time trial win



ROME (AFP): Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar won stage 7 of the Giro d'Italia, a 40-kilometre time trial, to extend his race lead in Perugia on Friday.

Pogacar, who had already won stage 2, finished 17 seconds ahead of Italian time-trial specialist Filippo Ganna and two minutes in front of his great rival, Welsh rider Geraint Thomas. The UAE Team Emirates team leader is now 2min 36sec ahead of Colombian rider Daniel Martinez in the overall standings.

"I prepared well for this time trial and worked a lot on the time trials, my position on the time-trial bike," said Pogacar. "I felt good after the world championships last year, today was my first race on the time-trial bike again.

"It was a lot of preparation for this and a lot of ups and downs since last year in the time trial so I'm super

happy that today I felt good." After Ganna set a testing time of 52:01 all eyes were on Martinez, who began the day 47sec off the lead, Thomas, who was one second ahead of him, and Pogacar.

While Thomas, who turns 38 on May 25, and Martinez struggled to chew up the tarmac between Foligno and Perugia, Pogacar shifted into overdrive clocking 51.44 at an average speed of 47.1 km/h.

Only 11th at the halfway point, 44 seconds behind Ganna, Pogacar finished very strongly indeed, taking advantage of the last six kilometres of uphill sections to knock out the competition. "I remained cautious until the last climb when I gave it my all," he said, admitting he did not have a lot of information from the team car.

"I heard only two times the time gap, and also I

wasn't so sure what they said on the radio. I was just focusing on myself," said Pogacar. "I knew the climb suits me, suits me better than other people for sure. That was my advantage on the climb, especially because it was quite steep."

'Bad day' for Thomas Martinez (Bora) was eighth quickest on the day but gave up 1:49 to Pogacar. He did, however, move up to second place in the GC with a 10-second advantage over a weary Thomas.

"I got stuck," said the Welsh Ineos rider who won the Tour de France in 2018. "I gave it my best shot, but I was having a bad day." "I tried to ride within myself and when it was time to go, I felt OK but just lacked it a bit," he admitted. "I just couldn't get on top of it over those kickers. Yeah, it is what it is. It was just one of those days."

Saturday's 8th stage, which concludes with a fearsome final 14km climb to the finish at 1,452m altitude, could enable Pogacar, a keen climber, to extend his lead even further. The Slovenian, who is taking part in the Giro for the first time in his career, is aiming to become the first rider since Italy's Marco Pantani in 1998 to win both the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France in the same year.

Jabeur's woes continue with early Rome exit

ROME (AFP): Ons Jabeur's tough 2024 continued on Friday after being dumped out of the Rome Open in the second round by Sofia Kenin 7-5, 2-6, 6-4 as Novak Djokovic prepares to begin his tilt at a seventh title in the Italian capital.

Tunisia's Jabeur, who is ranked ninth in the world, was beaten by unseeded American Kenin in a gruelling match which lasted two hours and 17 minutes in the hot Rome sunshine.

Jabeur, who in 2022 became the first Arab and Tunisian player to win a WTA 1000 title, looked to be on the right track after reaching the quarter-finals in Madrid.

But she slumped to a poor defeat on Friday, continuing a dreadful season so far in which the 29-year-old has had to deal with a chronic knee injury resurfacing.

Jabeur has a losing record for the year, a far cry from the woman who looked like she had the world at her feet ahead of

last year's Wimbledon final, which she lost in straight sets to unfancied Marketa Vondrousova after blasting through a series of Grand Slam champions.

World number 42 Kenin will face either Rebecca Sramkova or Katie Boulter in the third round.

Earlier fifth seed Maria Sakkari swept past qualifier Varvara Gracheva in straight sets, 6-2, 6-2.

Elena Rybakina was supposed to open her title defence against Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu but dropped out with an illness and was replaced by French lucky loser Oceane Dodin.

"I am disappointed to have to withdraw from Rome this year, but unfortunately I do not feel well enough to compete," world number four Rybakina said in a statement.

Djokovic begins bid Top seed Djokovic takes on lucky loser Corentin Moutet in his opening match on centre court on Friday evening with a great chance to add to his six titles in Rome.

The 24-time Grand Slam winner has made no secret in the past that he loves playing in Italy and with a clutch of big names either out injured or struggling he will fancy his chances of a record-extending 41st Masters 1000 crown.

The Rome tournament, which runs until May 19, is missing two of its biggest stars with Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz both withdrawing from the men's draw before the start.

Meanwhile clay court icon Rafael Nadal had a creaky start in the first round against qualifier Zizou Bergs on Thursday and is on the opposite side of the draw to his great rival, meaning the only way that the pair could face each other would be in an unlikely final.

One of Djokovic's potential threats, third seed Alexander Zverev, breezed into the third round with a 6-0, 6-4 win over Australia's Aleksandar Vukic.

This year Zverev has

Colin Munro announces retirement from cricket

WELLINGTON (Agencies): New Zealand batter Colin Munro has announced his retirement from international cricket on Friday after he was left out of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 squad.

Munro, who last played for New Zealand in 2020 against India, made himself available for the mega-event, starting from June 1 in the West Indies and the United States of America (USA). However, he failed to make it to the Kiwi squad.

"Playing for the Black Caps has always been the biggest achievement in my playing career," Munro said in a statement.

"I never felt prouder than donning that jersey, and the fact that I've been able to do that 123 times across all formats is something I will always be incredibly proud of.

"Although it has been a while since my last appearance, I never gave up hope that I might be able to return off the back of my franchise T20 form. With the announcement of the Black Caps squad for the T20 World Cup now is the perfect time to close that chapter officially."

Colin Munro represented New Zealand in one Test, 57 ODIs and 65 T20Is, since making his international debut in 2012.

He scored a mere 15 runs in his solitary Test, while in 57 ODI appearances, he managed 1271 runs at an average of 24.92.

However, he proved his mettle in T20I cricket, scoring 1724 runs in 62 innings at an average of 31.34 and a healthy strike rate of 156.44, including three centuries.

He also scored a 14-ball half-century against Sri Lanka in 2016, which is the fastest by a New Zealand player and the fourth fastest in overall T20Is.

"Colin [Munro] was one of our first players to embrace the aggressive, 360-degree style batting that is now accepted all around the world as best practice," New Zealand Cricket chief executive Scott Weenink said.

"He was one of the pioneers of the new game, an innovative batsman who took calculated risk-taking to a new level, and led what was to become a revolution in the way short-form cricket was played."

"We thank him for his amazing contribution in more than hundred international games, and wish him well in his future pursuits."



In brief

CDA chairman inspects projects

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa visited ongoing development projects on Friday, focusing on completing maintenance work, landscaping, and ensuring cost-effective implementation. The projects visited included Iran Avenue, Margalla Avenue, Margalla Avenue Extension from GT Road to M-I, and 10th Avenue, said a news release. During his inspection of Iran Avenue, Muhammad Ali examined the median strips and surrounding landscaping. He instructed that the light poles installed along the Avenue should be aesthetically enhanced. An official briefed the Chairman about the Iran Avenue project, highlighting its 5.8-kilometer length with dual carriageways on both sides. Initially budgeted at Rs 3.9 billion, the project is now expected to be completed within Rs 3.5 billion. The chairman CDA also assessed Margalla Avenue, where maintenance work is nearing completion. The official informed the chairman CDA that Margalla Avenue spans 10.5 kilometers with dual carriageways and is expected to be completed within a budget of Rs 2.6 billion. Muhammad Ali then visited Margalla Avenue Extension from GT Road to M-I, where a 3.5-kilometer road with dual carriageways is currently under construction. Interchanges are part of this project, which is expected to be completed within a budget of Rs 3.6 billion. Later, chairman CDA visited 10th Avenue, where an official reported that 25 percent of the construction work has been completed.

FIA foiled smuggling bid

RAWALPINDI (INP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration foiled a smuggling attempt at Islamabad Airport, arresting two travelers and seizing millions of rupees worth of mobile phones. The suspects, identified as Babar Ayub and Muhammad Salman, arrived in Pakistan from Dubai on Flight Number PK 234. Their travel history, which revealed frequent trips abroad in recent weeks, raised red flags for the FIA officers. A thorough search of the suspects' belongings authorities discovered a substantial cache of electronic devices, including 50 iPhone 15 Pros, 16 iPhone 15s, along with 100 data cables, and 3 Apple MacBook. The explanation provided by the suspects regarding these items failed to satisfy the authorities. Consequently, both individuals have been handed over to customs authorities for further legal proceedings. This incident underscores the vigilance of FIA Immigration in combating illegal activities at the country's entry points.

AIOU inks MoU with PDC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Premium Diagnostic Center, Islamabad (PDC) to provide lab facilities to employees at discounted rates. Vice Chancellor, of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood presided over the ceremony. Dr. Nasir said that the welfare and good health of our employees and their families is our priority, healthy person always performs his duties with full zest.



ISLAMABAD: Secretary BISP, Amer Ali Ahmad briefing Chairperson BISP Ms Rubina Khalid on newly launched initiatives.

Unified efforts to combat dengue in twin cities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioners of Islamabad and Rawalpindi on Friday chaired a high-level meeting here at DC Office which was aimed at synchronizing strategies for dengue prevention in the twin cities. According to the Spokesman of ICT Administration, the administrations of Islamabad and Rawalpindi have joined hands, in a bid to curb the spread of dengue fever.

The meeting was attended by administrative officers, district health officers, and the CEO of DHA Rawalpindi. Additionally,

representatives from CDA, MCI, and relevant departments also participated in the meeting.

The primary focus of the discussions was on collaborative action plans, with particular attention to border areas shared by the two districts. Joint operations will be conducted to target these regions, aiming to eliminate dengue larvae and halt the transmission of the disease.

The decision to coordinate efforts reflects a proactive approach by the authorities to address the pressing issue of dengue

fever.

By pooling resources and expertise, Islamabad and Rawalpindi aim to bolster their defenses against the disease, safeguarding the health and well-being of residents across both cities. These unified efforts against dengue are a significant step toward the ongoing battle to protect communities from vector-borne diseases. With coordinated strategies and a shared commitment to public health, Islamabad and Rawalpindi administrations combat the dengue fever thread.

Housing Ministry prioritizes transparency

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a bid to uphold transparency and fairness in providing accommodations to federal government employees, the Ministry of Housing and Works, under the directives of Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Secretary Housing has taken decisive action.

Notices being issued to all illegal and non-entitled allottees residing in Federal Lodges, Gulshan-e-Jinnah complex, Chunni Lodge, and Ministry hostels of Ministry. In this

regard, Ministry of Housing and Works provided an opportunity for a personal hearing to the allottees.

Following the hearings, notices are being served to all such allottees who are not civil servants to vacate the accommodations.

Once vacated, these accommodations will be allotted to entitled civil servants who have been waiting in the queue for official accommodation for an extended period of time. Housing Ministry has made new rules for allotments of temporary accommodation in the Federal Lodges and Hostels. According to the

new rules accommodations shall be allotted only to the Civil Servants posted at respective station of Lodges/ Hostels, holding substantive posts in BS-17 & above on regular basis.

There is a strict policy in place to ensure the vacation of apartments by unauthorized allottees.

This aligns with the vision of Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada emphasizing that no relief shall be given to any such allottee.

This proactive approach underscores the Ministry's commitment to fairness, equity, and efficient accommodation allocation to the entitled federal government employees.

PTI leader booked for holding unauthorized rally

RAWALPINDI (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Shehryar Riaz is facing legal action after an allegedly unauthorized rally in Rawalpindi as such case was registered against him at Bani Gala police station.

The complaint filed by Sub-Inspector Mumtaz Khan states that Riaz and his associates shouted slogans against military authorities during the

rally, causing inconvenience to the public due to the blocking of the roads.

The complaint further states that Riaz and his supporters were informed of the ban on organizing rallies and gatherings.

This incident comes amidst a backdrop of political turmoil, with multiple rallies held on Thursday in support of PTI and its incarcerated leader, Imran Khan. Conversely, other demon-

strations were organized across the country to denounce the violent incidents following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan on May 9, 2023.

The legal proceedings against Riaz underscore the heightened tensions surrounding political activities in Pakistan, as the country grapples with dissenting voices and diverging opinions on its political landscape.

Dy Chairman Senate attends flower exhibition

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate, Syedaal Khan on Friday attended a flower exhibition at FG Public School on Madrasah Road, Quetta.

This event was organized by the school's children in collaboration with school administration, which showcased a variety of beautifully arranged flowers, said a news release received here.

During his visit, the Deputy Chairman praised Lt. Col. Abdul Mustafa, Regional Director FGEL, Principal Nasir Ali Mughal, and the students for their efforts in managing such an impressive display with limited resources.

He noted that the quality of the event reflected the professionalism of the school management and the creativity of the students.

The Deputy Chairman Senate visited various stalls at the exhibition and commended the children for their work, highlighting that events like these in educational institutions help foster creativity among students and promote environmental awareness in the younger generation.

He emphasized that the creativity and talent demonstrated by the children would guide Pakistan towards development and prosperity.

Encouraging the school administration, he suggested for organizing similar events annually to further develop creativity and resourcefulness, skills that are valuable in both personal and professional life.

He stressed the importance of nurturing these talents for a brighter future for the children and the country as a whole, expressing hope for continued success and a positive impact on the community.

The Deputy Chairman assured them that he would work to resolve the various issues and challenges faced by the engineers, officers and employees at QESCO.

Rubina Khalid assumes charge as Chairperson BISP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Ms. Rubina Khalid, a prominent figure known for her advocacy in social welfare and community development, has officially taken the helm as the Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

In a heartfelt address to BISP employees, she underscored the significance of the program's namesake, Shaheed Mohterma Benazir Bhutto, and pledged to uphold her legacy as a guiding light for the organization.

"LET PEOPLE LEARN, HOW TO EARN," declared Ms. Khalid in her inaugural address, encapsulating her vision for the empowerment of marginalized communities through education and economic opportunities. She emphasized the sacred nature of the Benazir Income Support Programme and its role in honoring the memory of

Benazir Bhutto, whose mission continues to inspire their work.

Speaking passionately to the gathered staff, Ms. Khalid emphasized, "the name of Benazir Income Support Programme is sacred to me as it is named after our beloved Shaheed Mohterma Benazir Bhutto, whose mission is our work." She further urged employees to maintain the highest standards of integrity and transparency in serving the program's beneficiaries, who are predominantly orphans and widows.

"We have a solemn duty to ensure that every penny reaches those who need it most," she added. Acknowledging the pivotal role of the BISP team, Ms. Khalid expressed her expectations for unwavering dedication and honesty.

"I expect that we will work together with complete honesty as this is the

money of poor people. We have to ensure transparency in payment disbursement, and I need your full support in this regard," she affirmed. Prior to Ms. Rubina Khalid's address, Dr. Amjad Saqib, the former Chairperson of BISP, extended a warm welcome to her, praising her long-standing commitment to the welfare of the people.

Dr. Saqib's endorsement further solidified Ms. Khalid's reputation as a dedicated advocate for social justice. In a separate meeting, Secretary BISP, Amer Ali Ahmed, provided Ms. Rubina Khalid with a comprehensive briefing on the organization's core initiatives and recently launched programs. Ms. Khalid expressed keen interest in enhancing skill development opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and emphasized the importance of maintaining dignity and respect in the disbursement process.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting the under construction Model Prison.

Naqvi wants model jail operational in six months

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Friday visited the under-construction model jail in Sector-H of Islamabad and ordered to complete the construction work within six months.

During an inspection of the under-construction jail, the minister said that the

project of construction of jail in Islamabad has been stalled for 13 year but now it will be completed in 6 months.

Naqvi tasked the officials concerned to complete the first phase of the prison construction in 6 months.

Keeping the project on hold for 7 year is clearly incompetence, Mohsin

Naqvi observed, adding that the construction work in jail should continue day and night in the timeline.

The process of appointment of necessary staff should also be started immediately, he ordered adding that the provision of resources for the completion of the project will be ensured.

Twin-cities receive rain, turns weather pleasant

ISLAMABAD (INP): Rain in twin cities Islamabad and Rawalpindi made weather pleasant on Friday.

The showers and hail-storm broke the spell of heat wave and Islamabad is still under the cloud cover. It also rained in Attock and some other parts of Punjab where wind made the weather pleasant.

In Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa's Mansehra district, people heaved a sigh of relief as rain brought the temperature down. The Meteorological Department says the rainy weather will continue till Saturday.

A rain-generating system is expected to enter Balochistan on Friday and showers are likely to fall in nine districts. The Met

office says weather will remain mild due to rain on May 10 and 11.

Meanwhile, Lahore continues to have harsh weather as the minimum temperature is expected to be 26 degrees Celsius and the maximum can soar up to 41 degrees Celsius. Light rain is expected in Lahore on Sunday according to the forecast.

Plastic pandemic could prolong Pakistan's climate battle



ISLAMABAD (APP): As Pakistan endeavors to combat climate change, the looming specter of the plastic pandemic emerges as a formidable obstacle. From polluted waterways to compromised ecosystems, plastic pollution threatens to prolong the nation's fight against

environmental challenges.

The climate and health experts have warned to address this pressing issue on urgent basis to protect Pakistan's sustainability efforts.

"Despite strides in environmental policy and activism, the pervasive

presence of plastic pollution threatens to prolong the nation's fight against climate instability. From clogged waterways to compromised ecosystems, the detrimental effects of plastic cast a shadow over Pakistan's sustainability aspirations, underscoring the urgency

of concerted action" warned a renowned environmentalist Dr. Ejaz Ahmed, a former Director at WWF-Pakistan.

Dr. Ejaz Ahmed also advocated the potential of recycling initiatives and scientific advancements in transforming plastic waste into a valuable resource for the country's benefits. From co-processing fuel in cement production to construction materials, innovative solutions promise to mitigate the plastic menace while reducing carbon emissions, he remarked.

Highlighting the adverse effects of plastic in everyday human life and health, Dr. Ejaz said the repercussions of plastic pervasiveness are manifold, from endangering aquatic life to clogging drainage systems and health woes. Despite concerted efforts to raise awareness and enforce regulations, the insidious spread of plastic persists,

permeating daily life from household items to food packaging, he lamented.

Plastic pollution, omnipresent and insidious, is wreaking havoc and from production to disposal, its detrimental effects reverberate across ecosystems, posing a daunting challenge to Pakistan's sustainability efforts, he expressed dismay.

In Pakistan, where the specter of climate change looms large, the battle against plastic pollution has assumed paramount importance. With over 300 million tons of plastic churned out globally each year, and a staggering half of it comprising single-use plastics, the urgency to stem this tide has never been more pressing.

While countries like Bangladesh, France, and Rwanda have taken decisive steps to curb plastic proliferation, Pakistan

stands at a pivotal juncture, grappling with the highest percentage of mismanaged plastic in South Asia. The issuance of a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) banning plastic bags in key cities like Islamabad, Lahore, and Hunza marks a significant stride, albeit amidst a lack of comprehensive policy frameworks at the federal and provincial levels.

Shafee Muhammad Marwat, a Director at the Capital's civic body, that periodically launches campaigns against pollution, highlighted the dangers of plastic, citing its harm to both human and aquatic life, as well as its detrimental effects on infrastructure. Despite previous efforts to discourage its use through campaigns and fines, plastic remains pervasive, even being used for food and waste disposal, he admitted.

Climate and Health

experts echoed unanimous concerns on the dire health consequences of plastic proliferation, citing the emergence of lung diseases, cancers, and dermatological ailments as harbingers of a looming crisis.

Endorsing Marwat and Dr. Ejaz's concerns, Dr. Shazia Aslam, a well-known Lahore-based dermatologist, underscores the health risks posed by plastic, including the release of toxic chemicals when heated, leading to lung diseases and cancers.

Highlighting the deleterious effects of plastic on human health, Dr. Shazia Aslam stresses the urgent need to transition to biodegradable alternatives.

As Pakistan navigates the treacherous waters of climate change, the battle against plastic pollution emerges as a defining frontier in its quest for environmental sustainability.

Herat women seeks training

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Some women in western Herat province involved in online sales businesses demanded training to promote the newly introduced trend which according to them could help explore new markets. The fact that the development of technology and the Internet has grown as an effective tool in global business so it had also grown in Afghanistan, especially in Herat City.

The Frontier Post AFGHANISTAN

Zil-Qadah 02, 1445 — Saturday, May 11, 2024

Afghans will have a good future

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani has said in a meeting with the European Union envoy in Kabul that Afghans will have a good future in peace and under the shadow of the Islamic system. According to a statement released by the Ministry of Interior on Friday, Haqqani, in his meeting with Raffaella Iodice, the European Union's Chargé d'affaires to Afghanistan, said that Afghans will work hard, endure hardships and will be on the path of progress.

Three million children suffer from malnutrition in Afghanistan: WFP



KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Food Programme has recently published statistics showing that currently, three million children in Afghanistan are suffering from malnutrition. On Friday, May 10, the organization announced on its social platform X that the World Food Programme can only support one of every three children.

The World Food Programme has empha-

sized that the reduction in aid in Afghanistan directly affects the children there. The organization adds that addressing their situation requires sustainable financing. Previously, the health section of the United Nations had reported that the number of women suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan last year reached 1.2 million. Mona Sheikh, the head of nutrition at the World

Food Programme, had earlier stated that the number of women suffering from malnutrition is expected to increase this year. She also mentioned that the number of children suffering from malnutrition in the country this year will reach 3 million, but only 1.6 million will receive assistance. While the World Food Programme has released these statistics, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) says that 23.7 million people will need immediate humanitarian aid in 2024. The agency announced that despite the reduction in conflicts, the people of Afghanistan still have a serious need for humanitarian aid. The agency's statement mentions that out of the 23.7 million people who need humanitarian assistance, 5.9 million are women, and 5.4 million are men.

Over 2m children, mothers vaccinated last year



KABUL (TOLO News): In observance of World Immunization Week, the Ministry of Public Health said that last year over two million children and mothers in the country received various vaccines. The Ministry added that within the next four years, all children under five years will be vaccinated. The Acting Minister of Health said: "For health, and especially for primary health, vaccination is an important part. Without vaccination, I think we will lose a major area, especially for newborn children and children under five years. Therefore, as we work day and night as a government and as a ministry, we also ask our partners to help us in this area."

Abdul Wali Haqqani, Deputy Minister of Public Health said: "Approximately 1.6 million targeted children, which is 81% of vaccinated children, and 794,098 mothers, which is 91%, have been vaccinated against tetanus."

Representatives of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund said that they support the vaccination process in Afghanistan.

The UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons said it's very important that the children of Afghanistan fully benefit from the advances in global vaccination. To advance this goal, there are new initiatives that can ensure that more Afghan children receive vaccines to protect them from disease and death.

A UNICEF representative said: "UNICEF will continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Public Health, development and humanitarian partners and donors to work towards strengthening routine immunization so that every child in Afghanistan has the chance to grow up healthy and with their full potential and contribute to the development of the country."

The Deputy Minister of Finance and Administration of Public Health urged humanitarian aid organizations to continue their humanitarian aid in the health sector, regardless of political issues.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Public Health, 13 types of vaccines are administered to children at 3,049 centers across the country.

2 killed, 4 injured during protests in Nangarhar

NANGARHAR (TOLO News): Following the deaths of two individuals in Nangarhar, local officials state that it is unclear who fired upon the protesters.

The day before, after the Kuchi protests in the ninth district of Jalalabad and subsequent gunfire, two were killed and four others were injured.

Local authorities in Nangarhar say the purpose of the land clearance related to the customs is to expand the Nangarhar customs area. Prior notice had been given to the residents of this area to evacuate.

Abdul Basir Zabuli, the spokesperson for the Nangarhar Security Command, stated: "When security forces and customs officials started their work here, the Kuchis launched an armed attack on the security personnel, which according to unconfirmed reports resulted in two Kuchis killed and four others injured."

Qureshi Badloon, Director of Information for the Nangarhar Department of Information and Culture, said: "In the area where there was controversy and the customs wall was cross-



ing, it was decided that no work would proceed from the customs side and the people would also stop their protests. The matter has now been sent to the leadership, and everyone is waiting for a decision."

This comes after the commencement of clearance work on the lands related to the Nangarhar customs from the presence of Kuchi residents who had illegally built homes and settled there, leading to

their protests. Local residents say that more than 7,000 families have been living in this area for about 30 years.

They add that they are not opposed to the development of the Nangarhar customs, but the area should be legally handed over to them. Nematullah Baz, a prominent Kuchi leader, said: "Previous governments had also told us not to build homes on a thousand jeribs of customs land, and

that we could build homes in the plains instead." Minedar Ahmadzai, a local resident, said: "We ask the government to identify the perpetrators of yesterday's incident." However, local officials in Nangarhar report that a commission has been appointed to investigate and identify the killers and to also resolve the controversies that have arisen between customs officials and local residents.

Afghanistan facing humanitarian crises: IOM

KABUL (TOLO News): The International Organization for Migration reported that Afghanistan is one of the countries facing the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

The report noted that increased poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, cessation of aid, and lack of liquidity are challenges that Afghan citizens have faced for nearly three years.

The latest report from the International Organization for Migration on Afghanistan added: "Afghanistan remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. In 2024, an estimated 23.7 million people – more than half of Afghanistan's population – are projected to require humanitarian assistance."

The report also mentioned that consecutive droughts over the past three years and resulting floods in Afghanistan have had negative impacts.

According to the report, in 2023, about 21,000 people were affected by floods.

"Floods usually cause significant damage to the rural areas, destroying farms in the villages, reducing our yields, and affecting food security," said Wasim Safi, CEO of the Chamber of



Agriculture and Livestock. The acting Minister of Economy also discussed with the heads of United Nations offices and funding agencies about improving work, coordination, and humanitarian and developmental aid in Afghanistan.

Abdul Rahman Habib, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, said: "The acting Minister of Economy emphasized coordination and focus on priorities to improve the economic situation of the people, calling humanitarian aid a necessity under the current conditions."

Economic analysts said discussions with donor institutions and aid agencies are beneficial for the country's economic growth.

"Afghanistan is an untouched country where any economic movement can end up benefiting the country, so negotiations with donor institutions and aid agencies can accelerate economic growth," said Abdul Zuhoor, an economic analyst.

"In the past three years, we have witnessed a contraction in GDP growth, and the decline in investment and economic activities has led to an increase in poverty and unemployment in the country," said Siyar Quraishi, another economic analyst.

This year, the United Nations requested three billion dollars to assist the people of Afghanistan, of which only a small amount has been received so far.

Over 500,000 tons of goods transported

KABUL (TOLO News): The Afghanistan Railway Authority reports that since the beginning of Hamal (solar calendar), nearly 500,000 tons of commercial goods have been exported and imported via the four railways of the country.

Abdul Sami Durani, the spokesperson for the Railway Authority, says that the majority of the transports are conducted through the Hairatan, Torghundi, Roznak, and Aqina railways.

Durani stated: "During this period, more than 7,100 tons have been exported and transited through the railways. These transports were conducted from the four railways: Roznak in Herat, Torghundi in Herat, Aqina Port in Faryab, and Hairatan in Balkh."

The Chamber of Commerce and Investment states that the development of railways in the country plays a significant role in increasing exports and reducing transportation costs.

Khanjan Alkozai, a member of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce and



Investment, said: "The importance of railways worldwide is second only to ships as the cheapest and fastest mode of transport, through which a significant amount of cargo is moved with minimal cost."

Moreover, the Chamber of Industries and Mines believes that in order to develop Afghanistan's trade with regional and world countries, more investment in constructing railways is needed.

Sakhi Ahmad Payman, the first deputy of the Chamber of Industries and Mines, said: "If the relevant countries want to connect, they should use this Afghan transit as a crossroad."

Shaker Yaqubi, an economic expert, said: "Afghanistan should seriously invest in the railway line, as if the railway lines in Afghanistan are secured, it can have a special effectiveness on increasing the volume of Afghanistan's trade and the speed of transports, and it can provide significant commercial opportunities for Afghanistan."

Based on the information from the Railway Authority, about 230 kilometers of railways are active across the country, and transports to various countries are conducted daily through these routes.

Contract for Takhar Gold Mine signed

TAKHAR (TOLO News): The mining contract for the gold mine in Takhar province, worth \$310 million, was signed between the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum and a Chinese company.

The spokesman for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Homayoun Afghan, spoke about stabilizing and surveying gold mines in the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Faryab, and added that efforts are being made to establish gold processing plants in the country.

"Currently, we have only one contract in Takhar province with a Chinese company that has Afghan partners. This mine is located in the Chah Ab district of Takhar province and is one of the large-scale mines with an area of 12 square kilometers. It has been contracted with a Chinese company for five years and is currently in the exploration phase and will then enter the extraction phase," Homayoun



Afghan told TOLONews. A number of economic analysts told TOLONews that the money obtained from these mines should be spent on infrastructure projects and that gold processing plants should also be established in the country to increase employment opportunities.

"If the extraction of these mines, especially gold mines, is carried out in a standard and economical manner and processed within the country, it can directly impact the country's economy, including increasing employment and purchasing power," said Abdul Zuhoor Modaber, an economic analyst.

"We should extract our mines, prioritize the ones that should be prioritized, and from their profits, we can initiate large projects, such as building dams to generate energy," said Abdul Nasir Reshtia, another economic analyst.

Earlier, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum announced the distribution of permits in the provinces of Badakhshan, Panjshir, Kabul, Nooristan, Kunar, and parts of Laghman for the extraction of rubies, lapis lazuli, and beryl.

Talks with neighboring countries underway for fresh fruit exports: Azizi

KABUL (Ariana News): Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi has said that talks with neighboring countries have started for the export of fresh fruit this year.

Azizi added that the Ministry of Industry and Commerce wants the country's fresh fruit to be exported to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Iran in addition to Pakistan.

Members of the private sector call on the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to step up efforts to find new markets for Afghan exporters.

"We ask the authorities to determine the export routes before the harvesting season. We should find new markets instead of Pakistan. There is capacity for Afghanistan's exports in the region, and action should be taken in this regard," said Mirwais Hajizada, the deputy of Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock.

Economic experts say that the Ministry of Industry and Commerce should hold talks with Iran and Uzbekistan in addition to Pakistan for Afghanistan's exports.

"There are many opportunities to sell our products in markets other than Pakistan. I hope the authorities will think about this. Grounds should be paved to access the markets of South Asia and the Gulf countries through Iran, and the markets of Central Asia through Uzbekistan," said Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic expert.

Members of the private sector say that although Pakistan is the closest and largest market for Afghanistan's dry and fresh fruits, doing business with it has always been challenging.

3,485 Pakistani Hujjaj arrive in Madinah

MADINAH AL MUNAWWARAH (APP): A month-long pre-Haji flight operation, which started on May 9, is taking momentum with each passing day as different airlines operated 15 flights in two days to transport around 3,485 Pakistani Hujjaj to Madinah Al Munawwarah in first leg of their spiritual journey to perform Hajj.

Out of these, seven flights have been operated from Islamabad and Karachi under the Road to Makkah project, an initiative of the Saudi government to streamline the immigration process for pilgrims to Makkah. The initiative, launched in 2019, has so far been implemented in five countries including Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Morocco and Bangladesh.

Under the Road to Makkah initiative, pilgrims are able to complete their immigration requirements at their home country's airport before they depart for Saudi Arabia. This saves pilgrims several hours upon arrival in the Kingdom, as they can simply enter the country without having to go through immigration again. Currently, only two major airports of Pakistan including Islamabad and Karachi are being operated under the initiatives during the hajj days for facilitation of the pilgrims.

Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony has made elaborate arrangements to extend maximum facilities to intending pilgrims both in Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Before start of the pre-Haji flight operation, the ministry held extensive training sessions for weeks to teach the intending pilgrims about the obligatory acts, aware about necessary information to make their pilgrimage hassle-free, facilities including assistance at airports, transport to residential buildings, three-time meal and medical healthcare.

The Prince Mohammad Bin Abdulaziz International Airport (Madina Airport) on Thursday received all 11 scheduled flights, carrying a total of 2,160 intending Hajj pilgrims from various major cities of Pakistan to the holy land. "There was a little delay in the departure of Hajj flights

from Allama Iqbal International Airport due to a small fire incident. All Hajj flights from Lahore are being operated as per the scheduled days." Spokesman for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Muhammad Umar Butt told APP.

The Hajj pilgrims were warmly received by Pakistan's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ahmad Farooq, Director General of Hajj Abdul Wahab Soomro, Consul General Khalid Mehmood, Director of Hajj in Madinah Zia-ur-Rehman, Director of Facilitation and Coordination Ahmed Nadeem Khan, Director Moavineen Asghar Yusufza, and Director Hajj Medical Mission Brigadier Jamil Lakhia. Filled with excitement and devotion, the pilgrims, who have been preparing for this moment for years, stepped foot in the Prophet's (SAW) city, marking the beginning of the Hajj season. Approximately three million pilgrims from around the world, including 179,210 Pakistanis, will converge on the holy cities to perform the sacred Hajj.

From the airport, the passengers were transported to residential buildings located in Markazia, just a 15-20-minute walk from Masjid e Nabvi and Roza-e-Rasool (SAW), via luxurious buses. On first day of the Hajj-flight Operation, Pakistan Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ahmad Farooq along with the Director General Hajj Abdul Wahab Soomro welcomed the guests of Allah Almighty.

Upon arrival of the intending pilgrims at their residential buildings, gifts and bouquets were presented to the guests of Allah Almighty, extending a traditional welcome with playing 'Duff' and singing welcome notes in Arabic language. Following the arrival of faithful from parts of the world for Hajj, a great rush was witnessed at the Masjid-e-Nabvi (SAW) where pilgrims started gathering at early in the morning for offering Jumma prayer. This year around three million Muslims are expected to perform the religious obligation of Hajj including 1,79,210 Pakistanis.

President for global efforts to address climate change

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has underlined the need for global efforts to address the challenge of climate change by adopting environment-friendly technology, promoting a forestation, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He highlighted that global warming and climate change were affecting the glaciers as well as causing water scarcity and tackling these challenges required global support to mitigate their adverse impacts.

The President expressed these views while talking to the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan/COP 29 President-designate, Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, who along with his delegation called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Azerbaijan is going to host the 29th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 29) in Baku in November 2024 and the Minister, in his capacity as the President-designate of COP 29, is here to invite the President to the Conference.

Welcoming the Minister, the President congratulated Azerbaijan on winning the bid to host COP 29 and expressed the hope that COP 29 would result in setting the New Collective Quantified Goal on Finance that would help developing countries fulfill their climate finance needs. He highlighted that Pakistan had planted mangrove forests over hundreds of thousands of hectares that would help protect the environment, besides earning carbon credits for Pakistan.

The President said that Pakistan highly valued its relations with Azerbaijan and wanted to further expand bilateral cooperation in the areas of common interest. He called for promoting more interactions, bilateral exchanges and people-to-people contacts to further cement relations between the two brotherly countries.

Mukhtar Babayev underlined the need for further enhancing bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, particularly in the area of tourism and culture. He also delivered the invitation to the President to participate in COP 29 in Baku in November 2024. The President conveyed his best wishes for the successful hosting of COP 29 and expressed the hope that Azerbaijan would play its role to secure the interest of developing countries in meeting their financing needs for climate adaptation.

Lawyers strike: LHC takes notice of closure of courts

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Shehzad Ahmed Khan has raised serious concerns over the closure of courts and the suspension of case hearings due to strike call by the lawyers.

In a letter addressed to the Punjab interior minister, with copies sent to the Punjab Inspector General (IG) and Lahore Chief City Police Officer (CCPO), the LHC expressed dismay over the failure of law enforcement agencies to comply with court orders. The letter emphasized that under no circumstances should courts be allowed to close, asserting that such actions undermine the rule of law.

The Punjab IG and Lahore CCPO were instructed to ensure fool-proof security measures for all courts. The LHC condemned the decision of the LHC Bar secretary to forcefully suspend case proceedings, equating it to contempt of court. The Letter stated the court displayed patience by refraining from initiating contempt proceedings against the LHC Bar secretary and others involved.

The letter concluded with an expectation that there would be no future attacks on courts, underscoring the need for a secure and uninterrupted judicial process. Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) and the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) had issued a nationwide strike call for all courts, including the Supreme Court, high courts, and subordinate judiciary.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, Mukhtar Babayev, along with delegation, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Cabinet meeting emphasizes economic development in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet Friday approved budget for the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24 to be presented in the upcoming budget session of the assembly as required under the constitution.

The special cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur via video-link, also approved revised estimates for the Financial Year 2022-23, essential expenditures for the current month of May (i.e till May 31st 2024) and the budget strategy for the next financial year (2024-25) after comprehensive discussions.

It is worth mentioning that budgets for the financial year 2022-23 (revised) and 2023-24 could not be approved from the Assembly as affairs of the Province were run and administered by the caretaker Government in the absence of the Assembly. The financial requirements of the Province were approved from the cabinet with different intervals as per the constitution and the law. The constitution requires that these decisions and expenditure shall have to be now presented before the Assembly after approval of the Cabinet.

The Special Cabinet meeting was convened at the Cabinet Room of the Civil Secretariat to deliberate on the Annual Provincial Budgets, with a specific focus on the province's development sector. Comprehensive discussions aimed at fostering industrialization to bolster revenue generation and provide substantial employment opportunities across the province was noted during the meeting. Ministers, Advisors, Special Assistants, Chief Secretary, Administrative Secretaries and other government officials participated in

the meeting.

The Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa underscored the paramount importance of proposals from all departments to drive industrial growth. He emphasized on the cabinet members to move beyond the politics of basic infrastructure development, such as street paving and drainage, and instead prioritize initiatives that enhance the purchasing power of the general populace.

The Chief Minister reiterated that fostering a conducive business environment is fundamental to attracting investors and boosting revenue streams. He highlighted the success of the provincial government's wheeling model, which ensures affordable electricity for industrialists, alongside burgeoning investor interest in the establishment of solar parks for cheap energy generation.

Furthermore, Chief Minister outlined the government's steadfast commitment to farmer-friendly policies, citing the retention of Rs 12 Billion within the province instead of allocating it to PASSCO for wheat procurement. This decision underscores the administration's dedication to empowering local agricultural communities and retaining financial resources for indigenous development initiatives.

In an address to key administrative officials, Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur underscored the importance of adhering to principles of financial discipline and prudent resource management across all departments. Stressing the need for fiscal responsibility, the Chief Minister urged officials to minimize expenses and ensure the judicious use of available financial resources.

Highlighting the significance of revenue generation, the Chief Minister directed all concerned

departments to focus on increasing their income streams and optimizing the utilization of assets. He emphasized the imperative of transitioning to online tax collection systems for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.

"It is our foremost priority to bolster provincial revenue streams rather than relying on external loans," stated the Chief Minister, underscoring the government's commitment to financial self-sufficiency. Addressing employment generation and industrial development, the Chief Minister outlined plans to shift focus from traditional employment avenues to entrepreneurship. Soft loans will be extended to empower the youth in establishing their businesses, thereby fostering economic growth and job creation.

During deliberations on developmental portfolios, the Chief Minister reiterated the government's investment in human development, with a primary focus on income-generating projects. Priority will be accorded to initiatives benefiting a broad spectrum of the population and fostering regional development he said.

Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur underscored the importance of formalized documented engagement with the Federal Government regarding Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) projects. Highlighting the prioritization of projects pertaining to law and order and security, Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur emphasized their preferential inclusion in foreign-funded initiatives. Additionally, the Chief Minister reiterated the government's commitment to timely allocation of funds for essential healthcare requirements, including the procurement of medicines in government hospitals.

Graduation ceremony of Combat Commanders' course held

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Graduation Ceremony of No 59 Combat Commanders' Course was held at PAF Airpower Centre of Excellence (ACE). Air Vice Marshal Aurangzeb Ahmed, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (Operations), was the Chief Guest at the occasion.

Addressing the graduating Officers, the Chief Guest said that in future conflict Air Power would be the decisive factor, therefore, as guardians of the aerial frontiers of the country, every individual of Pakistan Air Force has to prove equal to the task. He also emphasized the strategic goal of ensuring operational agility and readiness. Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (Operations) highlighted that as per Worthy Chief of the Air Staff's vision, a transformative rebalancing drive is up and running in PAF which is premised on smart inductions on a fast operationalization cycle.



He reiterated the pivotal role of Combat Commanders in steering Pakistan Air Force towards its goal to become a "Next Generation Air Force". The Chief Guest also appreciated the tremendous efforts of the faculty and expressed his satisfaction that all schools of PAF ACE are working in complete harmony for training the future combat leadership of Pakistan Air Force.

Earlier, the Chief Guest awarded certificates and

trophies to the graduating officers who underwent a strenuous and professionally demanding course. Chief of the Air Staff Trophy for overall best performance amongst Combat Pilots was awarded to Squadron Leader Bilal Malik, while Air Officer Commanding Air Defence Trophy for overall best performance amongst Combat Controllers was awarded to Squadron Leader Atta Ullah Shahibzada.

SPI weekly inflation witnesses 1.39% decline

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 1.39 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on May 09, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 312.56 points as compared to 316.95 points during the past week. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 22.32 per cent.

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

to Rs. 17,732, decreased by 0.99 per cent and went down to 303.24 points from last week's 306.26 points. The SPI for consumption groups from Rs. 17,732-22,888, Rs. 22,889-29,517; Rs. 29,518-44,175 and above Rs. 44,175, decreased by 1.00 percent, 1.35 percent, 1.49 and 1.53 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 12 (23.53%) items increased, 13 (25.49%) items decreased and 26 (50.98%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included onions (19.22%), chicken (18.83%), wheat flour (4.00%), LPG (3.67%), bananas (2.32%), garlic (1.44%), rice basmati broken (0.75%), mustard oil & sugar (0.48%) each, and firewood (0.23%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on week-on-week basis included tomatoes

(19.24%), eggs (4.73%), potatoes (4.38%), pulse gram (0.91%), cooking oil 5 litre (0.89%), beef (0.64%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (0.44%) and milk fresh (0.41%). On Year-on-Year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included bananas (38.79%), wheat flour (28.21%), chicken (20.27%), cooking oil 5 litre (19.74%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (16.73%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (16.67%), mustard oil (13.11%), LPG (10.52%), eggs (7.91%) and diesel (2.04%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included gas charges for q1 (570.00%), onions (118.58%), tomatoes (101.24%), garlic (72.38%), chillies powder (71.96%), salt powder (32.59%), energy saver (29.83%), shirting (29.71%), gents sandal (25.01%), pulse mash (23.70%), beef (23.30%) and tea prepared (20.08%).

Gaza aid could grind to a halt within days

LONDON (Reuters, AFP): Dwindling food and fuel stocks could force aid operations to grind to a halt within days in Gaza as vital crossings remain shut, forcing hospitals to close down and leading to more malnutrition, United Nations aid agencies warned on Friday.

Humanitarian workers have sounded the alarm this week over the closure of the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings for aid and people as part of Israel's military operation in Rafah, where around 1 million uprooted people have been sheltering. The Israeli military said a limited operation in Rafah was meant to kill fighters and dismantle infrastructure used by Hamas, which governs the besieged Palestinian territory.

"For five days, no fuel and virtually no humanitarian aid entered the Gaza Strip, and we are scraping the bottom of the barrel," said the UNICEF Senior Emergency Coordinator in the Gaza Strip, Hamish Young. "This is already a huge issue for the population and for all humanitarian actors but in a matter of days, if not corrected, the lack of fuel could grind humanitarian operations to a halt," he told a virtual briefing. More than 100,000 people have fled Rafah in recent days, said Young.

Israel's military on Monday called for Gazans to leave eastern Rafah, which triggered widespread international alarm. The UN children's agency UNICEF said more than 100,000 had left, with the UN humanitarian agency OCHA putting the figure at more than 110,000. All eyes have been on Rafah in recent weeks, where the population had swelled to around 1.5 million after hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled fighting in other areas of Gaza.

Georgios Petropoulos, head of OCHA's sub-office in Gaza, said the situation in the besieged Palestinian territory had reached "even more unprecedented levels of emergency."

Tarar for steps to counter misuse of social media

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Friday that there was a need for measures at the global level to counter the misuse of social media and the spread of fake news.

"The Government of Pakistan recognizes the importance of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and it is determined to protect the rights of journalists", he said while talking to a delegation of Bangladeshi journalists visiting Pakistan who met him here. In the meeting, various important issues were discussed including freedom of expression and economic initiatives of the government.

The minister said that the government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was fully focused on economic stability. After the present government

came to power, he said economic indicators were becoming positive, international journals were also predicting improvement in Pakistan's economy.

"The government is also taking steps to invest in infrastructure projects in Pakistan," the minister said adding these projects would not only boost the economy but also create employment opportunities. The government, he said had established a special Investment Facilitation Council to attract foreign investment and facilitate investors.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif was determined to provide relief to the people, he maintained. Tarar said that the tax collection system was being improved in Pakistan, and in this context, tax reforms were being introduced in the Federal Bureau of Revenue.

He thanked the Bangladeshi journalists who visited Pakistan and

took interest in learning about the government's economic initiatives. The delegation of Bangladeshi journalists thanked the Government of Pakistan, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and journalism institutions for hosting and providing support to them in Pakistan.

The members of the delegation said it was very good to visit Pakistan and expressed the hope that such visits would promote relations between the two countries and people-to-people contacts. The delegation of Bangladeshi journalists included Iqtadar Ahmed, Mukram Hussain, Riaz Ahmed, Sheikh Sajid, Muhammad Abdul Wadud, Jaboon Ahmed Sarkar, Qamar-ul-Zaman and Moin-ul-Haq. Executive Director General External Publicity Wing Ambrin Jan and other senior officers of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting were also present on this occasion.

KP PA passes surplus budget for eight months

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly on Friday passed a surplus budget of Rs 1,360.37 billion for 11 months of the fiscal year (FY) 2023-24 including the last eight months and the last two months of the current elected government.

The budget included Rs 1,059.276 billion ongoing expenses and Rs 301.094 billion development expenses. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister Aftab Alam Afridi presented the budget in the assembly session chaired by Speaker Babar Saleem Swati.

He said in his speech that the current financial and economic difficulties have made this budget more difficult because on the one hand most of the infrastructure of the province was destroyed due to the disastrous floods of 2022 and on the other hand terrorism. He said successive incidents have also adversely affected the provincial economy, adding that under Article 126 of the Constitution, the caretaker government approved the expenditure for four months from July 1, 2023 to October 31, 2023 after that, the interim government, in consultation with the law department, also approved the expenditure for another four months, from November 1, 2023 to February 29, 2024.

Meanwhile, general elections were held on February 8, 2024, but the new provincial cabinet had not been

formed by that time, due to which, under Article 125, the provincial assembly approved the expenses for one month from March 1, 2024 to March 29, 2024, he informed.

The Minister said that similarly, the provincial cabinet also approved the necessary expenses for the two months of April 2024 and May 2024. While informing the House about the details and important points of the total budget of the current financial year, including the budget of the last ten months, the Minister said that the federal tax revenue was Rs 764.611 billion while amount received under war on terror was Rs 91.873 billion and Rs 38.661 billion were received under royalties and surcharges on oil and gas.

The windfall levy was Rs 91.795 billion, the revenue under net profit of hydropower was Rs 31.519 billion and revenue (arrears) in the form of net profit of hydropower was Rs.53.442 billion. Similarly, tax revenues in the form of provincial revenues were Rs 56.490 billion, non-tax revenues were Rs 28.510 billion, capital in other products was Rs 0.250 billion rupees, the non development grant for the merged districts was Rs 66billion, additional grant for ongoing expenditure was Rs 50.867 billion, annual development program was Rs 26 billion and Rs 31 billion rupees for the accelerated implementation program.

Cop martyred

F.P. Report

LAHORE: One policeman was martyred and another injured while one accused also killed and another injured and held after fire exchange during an encounter here on Friday.

According to details, the Elite Force personnel conducted raid in jurisdiction of Nawab Town police station in Lahore for arrest of culprits. The culprits started fire at raiding team resultantly cop Khalil was martyred while ASI Abdul Ghafoor was injured. The martyred and injured cope hailed from Pakpattan.

In retaliatory firing of police, one accused identified as Faisal was killed while another was injured and arrested.