



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Pakistan Peoples Party called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday at PM House to discuss the federal budget.

Sirens sound in Tel Aviv Hammas says it fired rockets from Gaza

CAIRO/TEL AVIV (Agencies): Rocket sirens blared Sunday in Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv for the first time in months, with at least three blasts reported across central Israel, AFP correspondents said.

The Israeli military said sirens had been activated over central Israel as fighting raged in Gaza, including in the far-southern city of Rafah.

The armed wing of Palestinian militant group Hamas said it had launched a "large rocket barrage" on Tel Aviv.

The Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades said in a post on Telegram that they had targeted Tel Aviv "with a large rocket barrage in response to the Zionist massacres against civilians."

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage from the latest barrage.

Earlier on Sunday, aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month. But was unclear if humanitarian groups would be able to access the aid because of ongoing fighting in the area.

A total of "200 trucks" had moved from the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing, which has been shut since early May when Israel seized the Palestinian side of the terminal, to the Kerem Shalom crossing, some 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) to the south.

Egypt has refused to coordinate aid through Rafah as long as Israeli troops control the Palestinian side.

But on Friday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi agreed in a call with his US counterpart Joe Biden to allow aid through Kerem Shalom, the other entry point into southern Gaza, the White House said.

Al-Qahera News did not specify how many trucks had made their way through inspection into besieged Gaza, but said "four fuel trucks" had already crossed and were heading to hospitals.

All aid from Egypt is inspected by Israeli authorities and distributed via the United Nations.

The remainder of the 200 trucks were "expected to cross into Gaza today," Khaled Zayed, head of the Egyptian Red Crescent in Al-Arish — where the bulk of aid arrives — said.

Electricity shortfall 'rises' to 5,500 MW

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prolong power outage crippled the country as electricity shortfall climbed to 5,500 megawatts in Pakistan, sources said on Sunday.

The major cities are facing up to six hours of load shedding and up to eight hours in rural areas whereas in the areas with high line losses, load shedding of 12 to 14 hours is ongoing.

The country's electricity demand is 24,000 megawatts, while the total electricity production is 18,540 megawatts, according to Power Division sources.

Earlier, an official report of the power ministry stated that the circular debt of Pakistan's power sector soared to Rs 2,635 billion till January 2024.

According to a report released by the power division, the hike in circular debt continued despite the massive increase in power tariffs and fuel adjustments.

The circular debt increase was recorded at Rs2,310 billion till June 2023, showing an increase of Rs325 billion during the seven months (January 24).

The report stated that poor performance and low recoveries by the DISCOs added to the increase in the circular debt.

It is pertinent to mention here that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demanded further increase in electricity prices, citing an additional burden of Rs 150 billion on the power sector.

According to sources, the IMF has asked the Ministry of Energy to increase the electricity tariff from Rs5 to Rs7 per unit in July.

PM hails Norway's decision to recognize Palestine

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday during a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Store conveyed his deep appreciation for Norway's landmark decision to recognize the State of Palestine.

"He said that this principled decision by Norway would send a strong message of hope and solidarity to the brave Palestinian people who have been enduring Israel's brutality and suffering over seventy-five years of occupation and oppression," PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister also welcomed the ICJ's recent ruling regarding Rafah and Gaza and called for its full and effective implementation. The prime minister emphasized the importance of the two-state solution as the key to lasting peace in the Middle East.

He hoped that Norway's decision would encourage other countries to follow suit, paving the way for full UN membership of State of Palestine.

In this regard, he further said that the international community needed to focus its attention towards the plight of the oppressed people of Kashmir, who had been subjected to brutal occupation and denial of fundamental rights for the past seven and a half decades.

During the conversation, both leaders reiterated their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties in various sectors, including trade, investment, education, and renewable energy.

They also recognized the important role played by Norwegians of Pakistani origin in creating a vital connection between Pakistan and Norway and contributing to the economic development of both nations.

"The two leaders agreed to remain in touch and to meet soon, possibly on the margins of the UNGA Session later this year. The Prime Minister also extended a most cordial invitation to Prime Minister Store to undertake an official visit to Pakistan, at his earliest convenience," it was added.

In separate posts on X account, the prime minister expressed the hope that this bold and principled decision by Norway, Spain and Ireland would encourage other countries to follow suit in recognizing the statehood of Palestine.

The prime minister said that he had an excellent telephone call with the Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Store.

"Welcomed the recent ICJ decision ordering Israel to halt its heinous actions in Gaza & Rafah. Both Norway and Pakistan firmly believe that the UN backed two-state solution offers the best path to lasting peace in the Middle East," the prime minister further added.

In a related post on X, the prime minister further said that in conversation with the Norwegian counterpart, they also exchanged views on Pakistan-Norway ties and expressed a shared desire to further strengthen their friendly and cordial relations, especially in trade and investment.

Two Pak Army soldiers embraced martyrdom

Five terrorists eliminated in Peshawar operation

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Two soldiers of Pakistan Army on Sunday embraced martyrdom while gallantly fighting against terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in general area Hassan Khel, Peshawar District during which five terrorists were killed while three got injured. According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release, during conduct of the operation, the Army troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location.

However, during intense exchange of fire, leading his troops from the front, Captain Hussain Jahangir, age 25 years, resident of Rahim Yar Khan District, along with another brave son of the soil, Havildar Shafiq Ullah, age: 36 years, resident of District Karak, having fought gallantly, made the ultimate sacrifice and embraced Shahadat (martyrdom).

"Sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area. Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the ISPR said.

Funeral of Hassan Khel IBO martyrs held at Peshawar Garrison

The funeral prayer of Captain Hussain Jahangir Shaheed, age 25 years, resident of District Rahim Yar Khan and Havildar Shafiqullah Shaheed, age: 35 years, resident of District Karak, who embraced martyrdom during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Hasan Khel area of Peshawar District was offered at Peshawar Garrison on Sunday. The Corps Commander Peshawar along with the Pakistan Army officers, civil authorities, public and soldiers attended the funeral prayer.

The bodies of the martyrs have been sent to their native areas where they will be buried with full military honours. "The armed forces of Pakistan are committed to eradicating terrorism alongside the nation," the ISPR said.

PM lauds security forces for successful operation against terrorists

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday paid tribute to the security forces for their successful operation against terrorists in the Hasan Khel area of Peshawar, which resulted in killing of five terrorists.

The prime minister also offered his heartfelt condolence to the family members of Pakistan Army's Captain Hussain Jahangir and Havildar Shafiqullah, who embraced martyrdom during the operation.

In a message, he prayed to Allah Almighty to elevate the ranks of the martyrs in paradise.

He said the soldiers of the security forces carried out a successful operation against the terrorists by putting their lives at risk.

Paying tribute to the martyrs, the prime minister said, "We salute them for their bravery". The entire nation is proud of its brave forces, he added.

He resolved to eliminate the menace of terrorism in the country.

Gandapur meets Naqvi, Leghari to discuss load shedding in KP

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur met Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Federal Minister for Energy Awaiz Ahmad Khan Leghari at the Ministry of Interior.

During the meeting, the current situation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was discussed, in which important progress was made regarding electricity load shedding and other issues.

The Federal Ministers and Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa agreed to resolve all the issues through mutual consultation.

It was also decided to have another meeting on Monday.



US expected to lift ban on sale of offensive weapons to KSA

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The United States is expected to lift a ban on the sale of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia, potentially in the coming weeks, The Financial Times reported on Sunday.

The newspaper reported that Washington has already signalled to Saudi Arabia that it was prepared to lift the ban, citing a person familiar with the matter.

Soon after taking office in 2021, Biden adopted a tougher stance over Saudi Arabia's campaign against the Houthis in Yemen, which has inflicted heavy civilian casualties, and over Riyadh's human rights record, in particular the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist and political opponent Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi Arabia, the biggest US arms customer, has chafed under those restrictions, which froze the kind of weapons sales that previous US administrations had provided for decades.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday said the US and Saudi Arabia were very close to concluding a set of agreements on nuclear energy, security and defence cooperation, the bilateral component of a wider normalisation deal with Riyadh and Israel.

However, lifting the ban on offensive weapons sales was not directly linked to these talks, FT said.

The White House and Saudi Arabia's government communication office did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

12 people injured during turbulence on Qatar Airways flight

DOHA (CNN): Twelve people were injured after a Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Dublin was hit with turbulence on Sunday.

The flight, which landed in Dublin shortly before 1pm local time, was met by emergency services, including airport police and the fire and rescue department.

According to a statement from Dublin Airport, six passengers and six crew members were injured in the incident, eight of which were taken to hospital following assessment. The Qatar Airways flight QR107 experienced turbulence while flying over Turkey, the statement said.

Dublin Airport said it was assisting passengers and staff and that operations were unaffected. The plane's return flight to Doha, flight QR018, is scheduled to go ahead as expected, though its departure will be delayed, the airport said.

In a statement to CNN, Qatar Airways said that the flight landed safely in Dublin, but that "a small number of passengers and crew sustained minor injuries in flight and are now receiving medical attention."

"The matter is now subject to an internal investigation," the statement continued. "The safety and security of our passengers and crew are our top priority."

It comes days after 104 passengers were injured and a man with a heart condition was killed on a Singapore Airlines flight that was hit with severe turbulence.

Flight SQ321 from London to Singapore was cruising at 37,000 feet on Tuesday when the plane dropped sharply before climbing several hundred feet, according to flight tracking data. It then repeatedly dipped and ascended for about a minute.

About 65,000 aircraft suffer moderate turbulence every year in the US, and about 5,500 run into severe turbulence. These numbers, however, might be destined to grow.

Paul Williams, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom, told CNN in 2022 that he believes climate change is modifying turbulence.

"We ran some computer simulations and found that severe turbulence could double or triple in the coming decades," Williams said.

The findings, which were later confirmed by observations, highlight a type of turbulence called "clear air turbulence," which isn't connected to any visual clues such as storms or clouds. Unlike regular turbulence, it hits suddenly and is hard to avoid.

Singapore Airlines has previously said its flight encountered sudden turbulence. A spokesperson said Sunday that its investigations are ongoing. An earlier CNN analysis of satellite data found the flight entered an area where thunderstorms were developing, which can produce turbulence.

It is not yet known what kind of turbulence the Qatar Airways plane experienced.



LAHORE: Acting President Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani addressing to media after inauguration of the Zaheer ud Din RO plant at Military Accounts Cooperative Housing Society. —APP Photo

'Safe City' project to be completed in two phases

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Home Minister Zia ul Hassan Lanjar has announced the launch of "Safe City" project aimed at making Karachi one of the safest cities in the country. The project worth over Rs 3 billion will be completed in two phases with the first phase expected to be completed within 12 months. The minister stated that the project would not only reduce the crime rate but also help eliminate criminal elements. He said that the second phase of the project would focus on expanding the scope of the project to other cities in Sindh after its successful implementation in Karachi. The home minister also praised the efforts of the Sindh Police saying that they had taken effective measures to improve the law and order situation in the province with the support of the Sindh Government. He expressed satisfaction over the performance of the police and acknowledged that there was still room for improvement and the situation was improved significantly compared to the past.

20 dead, 1369 injured in 1273 accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least twenty persons were killed and 1369 injured in 1273 road accidents in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours. Out of these, 623 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 746 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams thus reducing the burden of Hospitals. Furthermore, the analysis showed those 741 drivers, 69 underage drivers, 155 pedestrians, and 441 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics show that 297 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 298 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by Faisalabad 85 in with 88 victims and at third Gujranwala with 77 RTCs and 77 victims. According to the data 1088 motorbikes, 68 autorickshaws, 138 motorcars, 35 vans, 14 passenger buses, 33 truck and 104 other types of auto vehicles and carts were involved in these road traffic accidents.

Alhamra and Qatar Islamic Art Museum forge partnership

LAHORE (APP): In a momentous event that promises to deepen cultural ties and enrich the world of Islamic art, Muhammad Saad Al Rumihi, Chief Executive of the Qatar Islamic Art Museum, visited the Alhamra Art Museum Cultural Complex here on Sunday. The delegation was warmly welcomed by Chairman Alhamra Razi Ahmed and Executive Director Sarah Rashid, setting the stage for a fruitful collaboration between the two esteemed institutions. The visit was marked by an engaging discussion with high officials and members of the Alhamra Artists Council, where they delved into literary, cultural, and historical themes. This vibrant exchange highlighted the mutual dedication to preserving and promoting Islamic heritage.

CM satisfied with performance of clinic on wheels

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's endeavours for the uplift of health sector bore fruit as thousands of patients benefited from the 'Field Hospitals' and 'Clinic-On-Wheels' projects in the rural and urban areas of the province. CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif, while expressing satisfaction over the 'Field Hospitals' and 'Clinic On Wheels' projects, said on Sunday that Cancer, TB, and Hepatitis patients were being provided with free medicines at their doorsteps. "We want to see every citizen of Punjab happy, prosperous and healthy. Every sector's

uplift is my priority but I have focused my utmost attention on the improvement of health facilities in the province." The CM said the efforts of doctors and paramedic staff engaged in providing treatment facilities to the people at their doorsteps in spite of the scorching heat are highly praiseworthy. "I am myself monitoring the provision of health and treatment services to thousands of patients through 'Field Hospitals' and 'Clinic On Wheels' projects. My public service spirit gains further strength on seeing fruitful benefits of health reforms. We are providing state-of-the-art

health facilities where they are found inadequate," she added. She said that upgradation and revamping of health centres and hospitals is ongoing across the province. "We are undertaking measures so as to make the first government cancer hospital functional in the province. Work has already been launched on the project to establish a complete cardiology and paedics block in every district of Punjab. I received a public service spirit in inheritance, and I want the provision of each and every facility for the masses across the province," she maintained.

Govt to ensure affordable, quality food to public: minister

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin has said that all possible measures are being taken to provide affordable and quality food items to the public. Presiding over an important meeting to reduce the prices of bakery items here on Sunday, he said that the government will ensure the reduction in the prices of bakery products. Secretary Food Punjab, DG Food Authority, DG Industries and Deputy Commissioner Lahore participated in the meeting. Bakery Association and representatives of 21

famous bakery brands also participated in the meeting. The food minister said that the prices of wheat, flour and fine have decreased by 30 to 48 percent in 2 months. "The prices of roti and naan have been reduced and we'll ensure that the prices of bakery products are also reduced." Bilal Yasin took suggestions for an immediate reduction in the prices of bakery products in the stakeholders' meeting. He said that on the request of bakery owners, they have been given time to volun-

tarily reduce prices till Monday, May 27. Bilal Yasin asked the bakery owners to voluntarily reduce the prices of their products and biscuit brands. On Monday, May 27, the final reduction of prices in bakery items will be determined in a meeting with the administration. The food minister said that the administration will ensure the availability of bakery products at low prices across Punjab. He added that the prices of 60 products made from wheat should be reduced systematically.

Sharmila asks stakeholders to tackle climate change

KARACHI (PPI): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) MNA Dr Sharmila Farooqui said on Sunday that it is high time that all stakeholders should come forward with a positive approach to tackle climate change that is badly affecting the country's food systems, public health and infrastructure. "The government is already tackling climate change with its available sources; however, stakeholders including government representatives, businesses, scientists, landowners, and local users of natural resources need to jointly contribute to the ongoing efforts to counter climate change effects by planting more and more trees besides generating and using solar energy which is easy and best way to counter the climate change," she said in a statement pertaining to ongoing warming affecting Pakistan and its people. She said: "Ongoing wave of extreme heat is affecting 26 districts of the country, and more severe heatwaves will hit the country hard in June. Glaciers are rapidly melting while sea level is rising. The Pakistan has temporarily shut down schools in most parts of the country to protect children from heatstroke and dehydration due to an ongoing climate-induced heat wave." "Devastating floods in 2022 left a trail of destruction across the country,

claiming the lives of more than 1,100 people. The flooding in Pakistan caused \$14.9 billion in damages and \$15.2 billion in economic losses. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year in the world including Pakistan," she said. Sharmila informed that Pakistan is ranked as the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change, even though the share of contribution of Pakistan in terms of emissions is far less as compared to other developed and developing countries. Earlier, such ranking was 10th, which has turned worse and severe. In view of this, government needs to make more investment in climate change projects so as to save food systems and public health. Sharmila said Pakistan is frequently plagued by heatwaves, droughts, river and flash floods, landslides, rainstorms, and cyclones. The impact of climate change has the potential to initiate extensive and potent negative feedback loops that affect both livelihoods and public health, Sharmila said. She said that the entire region where Pakistan is located is prone to extreme weather events, in particular, heavy rainfalls and flooding during monsoon season. The government also needs to develop appropri-

ate measures like projects, programmes and plans to protect the most vulnerable population. At the same time, Pakistan needs to require international assistance as the major contributor to climate change are developed countries, but not Pakistan and we are suffering from their carbon emission, she noted. "Climate change poses serious challenges to social, environmental and developmental activities, and leads to migration within and across national borders. The effects of global climate change in Pakistan are already evident in the form of growing frequency of droughts, floods, erratic weather behavior, changes in agricultural patterns, reduction in fresh water supply and the loss of biodiversity," the PPP MNA said. She said that mitigating and adapting actions are considered to be the two key ways of combating climate change, adding the immediate and pressing task for the country is to prepare itself for adaptation to climate change. Unfortunately, climatic conditions, rural poverty, dependence on natural resources, meager forest cover, and deforestation have rendered the country as one of the most vulnerable to climate change effects, hence, there is a need to raise forest cover to 33% of total country land from existing 5%.

Gilani affirms support for govt's welfare initiatives

LAHORE (APP): Acting President Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has said that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) would continue to support the government's welfare initiatives and also provide suggestions to make the upcoming budget favourable towards people, especially farmers, youths, and labourers. He expressed these views while talking to media after laying the foundation stone of a reverse osmosis (RO) plant here on Sunday. He highlighted that as a member of the United Nations, Pakistan was com-

mitted to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, which aimed to ensure "availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" by 2030. He expressed his appreciation for those working to provide clean drinking water, noting that their efforts were also in service to the state. He said that the provision of clean water was a global issue, which needed to be addressed on a priority basis with global support. Responding to a question, he highlighted Pakistan has the capability to address threats on the

eastern and western borders, as well as terrorism and extremism with national unity. The Acting President said his party believed in public welfare and political dialogue and had always preferred to adopt a conciliatory approach to address national issues. He further stated that his party had been supporting the government to provide relief to the people. Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani urged the need for dialogue and unity to make decisions in people's interest, adding that political instability led to economic instability.

Man injured in firing by sub-inspector

LAHORE (APP): A passerby was injured in firing by a police sub-inspector in the Gulshan Ravi area on Sunday. According to police, a sub-inspector allegedly beat up a citizen, Farhan, in a state of intoxication and after torturing him opened fire at him. However, Farhan remained unhurt but a bullet hit a passer-by, Haris. The police said that the injured man was shifted to Mayo Hospital for treatment, while a case had been registered against the sub-inspector under the provisions of attempted murder on the complaint of Farhan, but the accused is absconding. According to police, Sub-Inspector Fayaz, posted at Sherakot, had earlier tried to run over Farhan. Later, police arrested the accused. An investigation is ongoing.

Dacoit captured near Kachi

KARACHI (PPI): Haji Sher levies claimed to have arrested a dacoit in an operation conducted in Goth Bashika area of district Kachi in Balochistan province on Sunday. According to reports, dacoit injured one man namely Nadeem Abro for resisting robbery in Goth Bashika area of district Kachi and tried to escape. On information, staff of levies Haji Sher levies cordoned off the area and arrested one dacoit namely Muhammad Akbar Abro son of Ghulam Sarwar Abro, resident of Goth Madh Sherbut. Detained accused was later handed over to the authorities of levies station Bala Nari for further investigation. Further investigation is underway.

Governor wants consultation on defamation bill

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider on Sunday assured journalists that he would not sign the defamation bill without thorough consultation with the union. This announcement came during a meeting with the officials of the Joint Action Committee of Journalist Organizations, which included representatives from the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), the Council of Pakistan Newspaper

Editors (CPNE), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), and Association of Electronic Media Editors and News Directors (AEMEND). During the meeting, the journalist bodies expressed their concerns, stating that the defamation bill is an attempt to hinder freedom of expression. In response, Governor Punjab committed to further discussions with all stakeholders regarding the bill. He stressed the need to take stakeholders into confidence on the controversial

clauses and stated his intention to invite all concerned parties to the Governor House for these consultations. He acknowledged that the bill should have undergone a consultation earlier and repeated his commitment to not sign the bill without a comprehensive review process. Syed Hasan Murtaza from the People's Party affirmed the party's support for the media and clarified that they do not support the defamation bill in its current form.

Legendary actor Talat Hussain laid to rest

KARACHI (APP): The acting legend and renowned drama, stage and film actor Talat Hussain Warsi was laid to rest in a graveyard of DHA phase 8, here on Sunday. The legendary actor passed away at the age of 83 after a prolonged illness in the morning of May 26 and survived by a widow, two daughters and a son. The funeral prayer of the actor was held at Aisha Masjid, Khayaban e Ittehad, phase 8 attended by actors belonging to Pakistan showbiz industry, relatives, fans and a large number of people. Earlier, the Actress Tazeen Hussain, who is the daughter of, late actor Talat Hussain had confirmed the death of her father on Sunday. Late Talat Hussain had worked in various drama and stage plays as

well as in films including Indian movie 'Souten Ki Beti' and Norwegian movie 'Import-eksport'. His famous movies were Chiragh Jalta Raha, Gumnaam, Import-eksport, Insan aur Aadmi, Jinnah - The Movie, Laaj and Qurbani. The famous dramas of the actor were Aansoo telecasted on PTV, Arjuman PTV, Bandish PTV, Des Perdes PTV, Eid Ka Jora PTV, Fanooni Latifey PTV, Hawaaiyan PTV, Ik Naye Morr Pe PTV, Kashkol NTM, Perchaiyan PTV, Tariq bin Ziad PTV, The Castle- Aik Umeed PTV, Traffic on Channel Four and Typist PTV. The deceased actor Talat Hussain had received Pride of Performance Award in 1982, Amanda Award in 2006, Best Supporting Role for Import Eksport and National Film

Awards in 1985 for Best Actor in Gumnan film. He was born in Delhi, India and his parents were Altaf Hussain Warsi and Shaista Begum. Late actor's family migrated to Pakistan in 1947. The late actor married to Rakhshanda in 1972, a professor of University of Karachi. Talat Hussain's first television play was Arjuman. He moved to England and joined the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA). Talat also narrated the translation of the entire Holy Quran in the Urdu language in the early 1970s, then commercially produced on audiotape and CD. Late Talat also lent his voice to the person of Jesus in the Urdu dubbed version of the famous movie Jesus.

LESCO detects 85,055 power pilferers in 245 days

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 85,055 connections from where consumers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts: Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara in 245 days of grand anti-power theft campaign. A LESCO spokesman told the media here on Sunday that the company also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 78,971 FIRs were registered in respective police stations, while 32,925 accused were arrested. LESCO has so far charged a

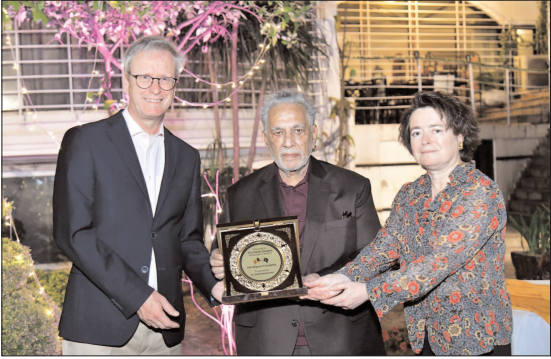
total of 98,986,108 detection units worth Rs 3,602,388,636 to all the power pilferers. The spokesman said LESCO found 462 customers stealing electricity through various means and 154 cases have been registered against the accused, while 38 accused were arrested during the last 24 hours. On the 245th consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, he mentioned that large commercial consumers were found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections, he explained,

11 were commercial, 04 agricultural and 447 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 396,425 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 11.178 million. Apprising the media about some major power pilferers, he mentioned that LESCO charged Rs 455,000 detection bill to an electricity pilferer in Sangla Hill area; Rs 215,000 detection bill to another power pilferer in Mandi Usmanwala area; Rs 170,000 fine in the form of detection bill to a customer stealing electricity in Shah Kot; and Rs 140,000 fine to a power pilferer also in Shahdara Town.

Outgoing envoy of Belgium given farewell

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The outgoing ambassador of Belgium to Pakistan, Charles Delogon, has said that the citizens of Pakistan and Belgium have a key role in the development of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Belgium. During his stay in Pakistan, apart from the government ministers and other officials, he had many interactions and had a close relationship with personalities related to the business, social and cultural fields, all these people are important for the development of relations between the two countries. The people of Pakistan are very hospitable and the friends he has made in Pakistan will last a lifetime. These views were expressed by Charles Delogon at the farewell dinner reception hosted by Consul General Ghana, former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and well-known businessman Dr. Shahid Rashid Butt and



Vice Consul Ghana Umar Shahid Butt at their residence in Islamabad. Large number of foreign ambassadors, parliamentarians, social and business personalities participated in this event. Among those who participated in the ceremony were ambassadors of France, Nepal, Bulgaria, Poland, Jordan and Morocco, Deputy Head of Mission of Great Britain and Japan, former ambassador Ghalib Iqbal, former ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi and former ambassador Khalid Mahmood. On this occasion, a shield was also presented to the

ambassador of Belgium by Dr. Shahid Rashid Butt. Charles Delogon further said that there is a strong bilateral partnership between Pakistan and Belgium. During his tenure as an ambassador in Pakistan, he worked to promote mutual cooperation between the two countries. He emphasized that there is a lot of scope for cooperation and development in many different fields and hopefully relations between the two countries will get stronger in the future. Speaking on the occasion Dr. Shahid Rashid Butt said that the purpose of organiz-

ing this event is to acknowledge the services of Charles Delogon for the promotion of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Belgium. His efforts have promoted political, diplomatic, and commercial relations between the two countries. Vice Consul Ghana Umar Shahid Butt said on this occasion that the Belgian ambassador made immense efforts to promote bilateral trade relations between the two countries during his stay in Pakistan. During his tenure he also organized grand celebrations of King's Day and Belgium Week in Pakistan which also served as a celebration of the completion of 75 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Belgium. These events gave the citizens of Pakistan a great opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of Belgium. He said that I hope that the ambassador of Belgium will continue to work for the development of relations between the two countries in the future.

Govt to declare Gor Khatri as World Heritage Site

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has conceived a comprehensive plan to declare the historic buildings of the provincial capital as world heritage sites including the Gor Gatri and restore their grandeur through renovations and open them to domestic and foreign tourists. Sufficient funds have also been allocated in the provincial budget for this purpose.

This was revealed by the Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture and Archeology Zahid Chanzeb during a detailed visit to the ancient building Gor Khatri situated in the center of Peshawar. Director of Archeology and Museums Dr. Abdul Samad and Manager Marketing and Cultural Events of Provincial Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) Madam Haseena briefed the Tourism Advisor about the salient features of this magnificent 160 x 160 sq

ft fort and apprised him about its history from medieval to modern times besides taking a tour of the Peshawar-based historical picture gallery.

Zahid Chanzeb also witnessed the fire brigade vehicles and ambulances used in the English era during 1912 AD and the shops, furnaces and factories of artisans who had different skills on all four sides of the fort compound. He was told that during the excavation some decades ago, the fact was revealed that the fort located on the highest cliff of Peshawar valley was built by the Greeks, White Huns and Sassanis invaders between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD who named it Gor Khatri, because of the burial of their warrior hero Kanishka, as the name Gorkhatri, meant warrior hero's tomb, and this name gained popularity.

Later it came under Kushan, Sethi and Parthian, Kudra, Hindu Shahi, Ghaznavid, Suri, Mughal, Durrani, Sikh and British

rulers. Jahan Ara Begum, the daughter of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan, built an inn for travelers in the shape of the present building and, in addition to a mosque, also constructed two wells of cold potable water in it and named it as Jahan Abad inn. Sikh governor Abu Tabila declared it his Governor House and decisions of various cases were also started settling there. Jails were also built adjacent to the main gates for the prisoners.

The Advisor Tourism, calling Gorkhatri a home of diverse civilizations, directed the Manager Marketing and Cultural Events Madam Hasina to start a food street and cultural activities in the vast courtyard of Gorkhatri, while Director MIS Mahad Hasnain was asked to make it a part of virtual tourism gallery and expose it to the world after restoring the fort-like building to its original form. He also posed for taking his personal portraits in different galleries of the fort.



Health Secy takes action against Aabsenteeism of MOs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a decisive move to ensure accountability and efficiency within the healthcare system, Health Secretary Mehmood Aslam Wazir has initiated disciplinary measures against medical officers persistently absent from duty.

Following a sustained period of absenteeism, ten medical officers have been terminated from service. Mehmood Aslam Wazir emphasized the importance of punctuality and

commitment to duty within the health department, stating, "The health department will take strict action against any employee failing to report for duty. Remuneration comes with responsibilities."

In light of recent developments, the Health Department has issued a public notification regarding the dismissal of ten medical officers.

According to the announcement, medical officers who have been consistently absent from duty since 2022 were served notices to improve

attendance.

Failure to comply within 15 days of notice resulted in public notices of their dismissal being published in newspapers.

The announcement further clarified that despite repeated notices, ten Grade 17 doctors who failed to report for duty have been removed from their positions.

The Health Department remains committed to upholding standards of professionalism and ensuring the provision of quality healthcare services to the citizens.

CM condoles death of Talat Hussain

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur Sunday expressed grief over the death of renowned actor Talat Hussain.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur in his condolence message expressed his heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the family of the deceased. The Chief Minister condoled with the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss with patience.

Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur shares the grief of the bereaved family, saying that late Talat Hussain, Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, rendered valuable services in the field of art. Ali Amin Gandapur said that the services in acting, directing and sound will be remembered for a long time.

Dr. Ahmad Noor defends his PhD thesis

PESHAWAR (APP): Dr. Ahmad Noor, Ph.D Scholar of Institute of Development Studies, University of Agriculture, Peshawar, completed his Ph.D. in Development Studies under the supervision of supervisor Dr. Malik Muhammad Shafi.

He presented his research paper titled "Impact of Climate Change on the Unconfined Aquifer Resources and Factors Responsible for Decline of Groundwater in District Karak."

His thesis was endorsed by renowned professors from Rawalpindi, Pakistan, USA and Paris.

His research work will contribute to policy through cutting-edge studies on groundwater, climate change, and rural development.

Moore vows to collaborate with metropolitan govt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: US Consul General Shante Moore expressed readiness to collaborate with the Peshawar Metropolitan Government in various sectors, including education, health, and employment.

He acknowledged the ethical and economic cooperation of the American Consulate and USAID and expressed confidence in resolving several fundamental issues of Peshawar through mutual collaboration.

This was discussed during a meeting with Peshawar Mayor Haji Zubair Ali and former Governor Haji Ghulam Ali.

US Consul General Shante Moore stated that they are pleased to work with the Peshawar Metropolitan Government in sectors like education, health, skills, and employment. He was impressed by the welfare services provided by Mayor Haji Zubair Ali and former Governor Haji Ghulam

Ali, acknowledging that some families use politics to serve the public.

These thoughts were shared during a conversation at the residence of former Governor Haji Ghulam Ali. Shante Moore was warmly welcomed and received traditional Pashtun hospitality.

The former Governor briefed the US Consul General on his journey from being a councillor to Nazim, District Nazim, FPCCI President, SAARC Chamber President, Senator, and eventually Governor, highlighting his services for the business community and the public.

Mayor Haji Zubair Ali briefed the US Consul General on the initiatives taken by the Metropolitan Government of Peshawar.

These included improvements in sanitation, sewage systems, provision of clean drinking water, installation of solar panels in schools, colleges, mosques, and minority religious places, infrastructure enhance-



ment, planning for youth, tailoring projects for women, and improving the quality of life for the transgender community.

He noted that fostering cooperation with the US Consulate in these sectors would be a historic step. US Consul General Shante Moore praised the political and social efforts of both individuals, emphasizing the importance of a family dedicating their lives to improving others' lives.

He expressed great joy at the prospect of supporting the initiatives for the youth, women, transgender community, and minorities of Peshawar

alongside the Metropolitan Government. He mentioned that a memorandum of understanding would soon be signed to work together for the citizens of the city of flowers and hospitality.

The extended meeting was held in a very pleasant atmosphere, after which the US Consul General presented commemorative gifts to the former Governor and Mayor. In return, Haji Ghulam Ali and Haji Zubair Ali gifted Shante Moore a traditional Chitrali cloak and cap, which he accepted with delight, pledging to maintain this connection.

Halal Food Authority continue action against adulteration mafia

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority continues its crackdown on the adulteration mafia and counterfeit food products across the province.

In line with this, food safety teams conducted raids in Swabi, Nowshera, Malakand, and Mardan, seizing hundreds of liters of hazardous and fake beverages as well as substandard milk. Hefty fines were imposed on the violators, according to the Authority's spokesperson.

Providing details, the spokesperson said that the Swabi food safety team conducted a checkpoint on Jahangira Road, inspecting

vehicles carrying food items. During the checking, 800 liters of counterfeit beverages were recovered from one vehicle and seized. Similarly, acting on a tip-off, the Nowshera team pursued a vehicle and found 1,200 liters of fake beverages, on inspection.

The spokesperson further explained that the owners of the counterfeit beverages were fined heavily, and further action was initiated under the Food Safety Act.

In another operation according to details, the Malakand food safety team inspected food businesses in the Sakhakot Bazaar.

During the inspections, 200 liters of substandard milk were found and dis-

posed of, with fines imposed on the violators. The Mardan food safety team, meanwhile, also collected samples of various food items from Takht Bhai Bazar using a mobile food testing lab.

They discarded spoiled oil on the spot and seized 80 kg of prohibited and expired items, finding the owners.

Director General Wafiq Saeed commended the food safety teams for their successful operations and emphasized the need to continue efforts to eradicate the adulteration mafia from the province. He asserted that the crackdown on adulteration in food items would persist without any leniency.

Secretary Food Department, Zarif-ul-Maani appealed to citizens to promptly inform the food authority teams about elements involved in adulteration, urging them to fulfill their responsibility as vigilant citizens. KP Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru, in a statement issued from his office, praised the food authority for its continuous actions against the adulteration mafia.

He instructed the food safety teams to ensure the inspection of industries, distributors, and wholesalers.

Zahir Shah reiterated that providing hygiene and quality food to the citizens is the top priority of the provincial government.

KP Govt considers 5 to 10 rupee hike in BRT fares

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has taken decisive steps to address the financial challenges facing the Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. In response to the substantial annual losses exceeding 3 billion rupees, the government has allocated a significant subsidy of the same amount in the provincial budget. In a recent meeting chaired by Finance Advisor KP, Muzamil Aslam, strategies were deliberated upon to mitigate the financial strain on the BRT system. One of the key decisions under consideration is the adjustment of BRT fares, with a proposed increase ranging from 5 to 10 rupees. This measure aims to enhance revenue streams and alleviate the financial burden on the system. Expressing concern over the nominal rents charged for shops within BRT stations, the finance advisor emphasized the need for revising these rates. Currently set at 6,000 rupees per month, the government seeks to optimize revenue generation from commercial spaces within the BRT infrastructure. Furthermore, directives were issued to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mass Transit Authority (Kipoma) to formulate plans for the rental of three commercial plazas, while Trans Peshawar was tasked with streamlining operational procedures to achieve savings of up to 2 billion rupees.

Unhealthy junk food harming children health

PESHAWAR (APP): Unaware that an extra pocket money regularly paid to the granddaughter for school would be used for unhealthy junk food and land her to hospital, Riazul Haq is seen pushing the stretcher-trolley to quickly shift Anaya Bibi to operation theater in the government hospital Pabbi Nowshera for prompt medical care.

Sitting on a steel-chair outside of the operation theater with stretched hands praying for her successful surgery, Riaz said she was complaining about the piles, stomach pain and irritable bowel syndrome for the last two weeks due to an excessive eating of unhealthy junk foods including shawarma, samosa, chips and snacks being sold unchecked openly in front of schools, shops and markets in villages and towns of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Called her Gorya (doll), he said the piles, irritable bowel syndrome and obesity problems diagnosed by doctors citing overeating of

an expired chickens mostly used in shawarma, chicken rolls, chips, snacks, burgers besides low fat yogurt and cheese, high carbohydrate fatty food along with beverages and operated immediately.

Like Anaya, thousands of school children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were exposed to unhealthy junk foods being sold openly outside of educational institutions, villages and cities which are adversely affecting their health.

Abundance of such shops and vendors foods stalls could be seen at historic Qissa Khwani bazaar, Namak Mandai, Karimpura, Charsadda Road, Faqirabad, Hastnagri, Tehkal, Board bazaar, Lateef Abad, Hayatabad, Warsak Road, Dalazak Road, Chamkani and other localities selling unsafe cuisines and expired foods, exposing many to different diseases including obesity, overweight, piles and stomach disorders.

Dr Malik Riaz Khan, Principal Medical Officer and Head of Children

Ward, Government Hospital Pabbi Nowshera said that Pakistan like other countries is also confronted with the monster challenge of overweight, piles and obesity mostly contracted by children excessively consuming unhygienic and substandard food.

Declaring obesity, piles and overweight mostly caused by eating unhygienic and substandard fast food was the fifth leading cause of global deaths; he said that obesity attributes 60-70% deaths besides non-communicable diseases in the world including Pakistan.

Dr Malik Riaz while referring to a WHO report said that the number of children aged five to 19 with obesity has increased from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 in the world including Pakistan due to consumption of excessive unhealthy junk food during school time.

Terming obesity a salient killer, he said that about 30 percent of the world population was overweight while 44 percent of the bur-

den of diabetes, 23 percent of heart diseases and seven to 41 percent of certain cancers was attributed to being overweight and obesity.

He said Pakistan has ranked 10th out of 188 countries with about 50 percent population being overweight or obese, and according to World Obesity Foundation report, about 5.4 million school-aged children in our country would be obese by 2030 if the unchecked open sale and manufacturing of unsafe food including chips and snacks continued with such a high rate in markets including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Dr Riaz while referring to Pakistan Health Commission Report 2018 said that about 11 percent of children in the country were suffering from overweight and more than five percent of obesity while data compiled from hospitals revealed that 40 percent to 50 percent of children were either overweight or obese that was quite alarming and health policy makers need to take prompt

measures for its prevention.

The lack of attention to children's food needs, publicity of substandard foods on mushroom growth of digital and social media, limited sports events and its unchecked sale at union council and village levels had largely contributed to the rise of obesity cases in KP.

While recommending daily exercises and a healthy balanced diet besides sports, he said that sale of substandard shawarma, chicken rolls, potato chips and beverages needs to be regulated and unsafe foods including harmful sugary drinks and high calories should be banned to protect our loved ones from fatal diseases.

Khan Ghalib, Spokesman of KP Food Safety and Halal Food Authority (KPFSA&HFA) told APP that operation against unsafe and substandard food has been accelerated across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where over 136,690 inspections conducted and 539,982 kilograms and litres of substan-

dard food items discarded last year.

Thousands of litres of counterfeit beverages and adulterated milk were discarded after its detailed examination being not safe for human consumption. He said zero tolerance has been adopted against elements involved in sale and purchase of adulterated food items in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said mobile food testing laboratories were established in all divisional headquarters with latest

technology testing's equipment with an ability to test over 20 food items instantly.

These labs cover a range of food tests, including testing of milk, flour, edible oil, ghee, water, and other food items on the spot. He said the government has planned to establish such labs in all districts of the province.

Set up under the KP Food Safety Authority Act of 2014, the authority had hired volunteers to monitor food safety and quality,

working alongside regular staff in the field for prompt action.

He said KP Food Authority, operating under the province's Health Department, is the second such regulatory body in the country after Punjab set up its Food Authority in 2011.

The Spokesperson urged people to inform the authority in case of selling expired or substandard food items by the restaurants or hotels so that strict action could be taken against them.





In brief

Accidental fire kills girl

OKARA (INP): Accidental fire claimed life of a 9-year-old girl in Satghara police station jurisdiction in Okara on Sunday. According to details, a girl was playing with a pistol under use of her father to protect property. The girl mistakenly pushed the trigger of loaded and accidental bullet resulted in death of 9-year-old Laiba on the spot. The body was shifted to hospital for medico-legal formalities. The police registered a case into the incident and started an investigation.

46C recorded in Sargodha

SARGODHA (INP): Sargodha faced heat wave as the maximum temperature was 46 degree centigrade in the city here on Sunday. Meanwhile, the local Met Office has forecast dry and very hot weather for city for next 24 hours. The highest maximum temperature 46 centigrade and the lowest minimum 27 centigrade were recorded during the last 24 hours.

110 power pilferers netted

MULTAN (INP): The operation against power pilferers was underway as 110 power pilferers were caught while stealing electricity in a day across South Punjab under the directions of Chief Executive Officer MEPCO Engineer Rana Muhammad Ayub Khan. A fine sum of over Rs 8.3 million was imposed on power pilferers over stealing 1,86,000 electricity units and near about Rs 1.8 million was recovered and deposited into the National exchequer.

Woman killed in Larkana

LARKANA (INP): One woman was killed and another injured in firing of armed men over domestic disputes here, police said on Sunday. According to details, the incident took place in village Bahadur Khan of Larkana where an accused long with his son after exchange of hot words over domestic issues opened fire at two women. As a result of firing, one woman was killed on the spot while other sustained bullet wounds. The culprits fled the scene of crime. Heavy contingent of police reached the scene of crime, shifted the body and injured to hospital. A case was registered against the culprits and raids were being conducted for their arrest.

Man stabs wife to death

SHUJABAD (INP): A drug addict stabbed his wife after exchange of hot words over domestic disputes here on Sunday. Police arrested the accused. According to details, the incident took place in Shujabad city of tehsil Shujabad where a couple exchanged hot words over domestic issues. The enraged drug addict stabbed his wife to death with sharp edged weapon after exchange of hot words. The body was shifted to hospital for postmortem. Police arrested the accused and after registering a case against him started investigations.

Three-day medical camp

BAHAWALNAGAR (INP): Pakistan Army and Saylani Welfare Trust jointly organized a three-day medical camp in Manchanabad, Bahawalnagar. Free medical facilities were provided to more than three thousand people during the medical camp. The local population appreciated this initiative of the Pakistan Army and thanked them for the excellent treatment facilities.

BS classes for female at Balambhat college demanded

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Parents of female students and religious circles on Sunday demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to launch BS classes at the government girls' degree college Balambhat without wasting time.

Talking to local journalists at Timergara they said that over 1000 female students were getting BS classes at the Post Graduate College for boys Timergara where over 4000 male students were also enrolled. They said that coeducation and mixed classes were against the teachings of Islam and local norms and tradition.

The parents pointed out that building for the government girls' degree college Balambhat had been constructed while intermediate classes had been started at the facility.

They demanded the KP minister for higher education and chief minister to take notice of the matter and appoint female lecturers and professors at the government girls' degree college Balambhat so that BS classes for girls could be started there from the next academic session.

BABY DROWNED: A three-year baby identified as Alia d/o Imran drowned

in a nearby stream at Kandaro area in the jurisdiction of Balambhat police station here on Sunday. A local elder fished out the baby and shifted her to the district headquarters hospital Timergara wherein the doctors announced her dead. Later the baby was laid to rest at Kandaro.

CLASS IV EMPLOYEES: The class IV employees working at government colleges on Sunday while rejecting the 10 percent increase in salaries demanded the government to increase their salaries at least by 35 percent.

The class IV employees' president Muhammad Iqbal told local journalists that the lawmakers had increased their salaries and privileges by 200 percent while they were also getting free electricity, gas and luxurious cars with fuel.

He said the class IV employees who got Rs 30000 per month had to afford their utility bills, children fees and medical treatment.

He said that due to record inflation the class IV employees were finding it difficult to run their houses so the government should increase their salaries by 35 percent.

PARAMEDICS ELECTION: The provin-

cial president of the People Paramedics Khurshid Iqbal Yousafzai has said that he would try to unite different paramedical unions under a single platform for the elections of paramedical association to be held on Jul 1st. He was addressing a function at Malikabad here on Sunday. The function was arranged in the honour of retiring health workers. Leaders of the People Paramedics, Islamic Paramedics, Malagari Paramedics, Jamiat Paramedics, Insaf Paramedics and Muttahida Paramedics attended the function. Besides Khurshid Iqbal, Nasrullah, Naik Zada, Humayun Khan, Shahid Hussain, Haroon ur Rashid and Javed also spoke on the occasion.

Khurshid Iqbal said that due to the efforts of the paramedical association, hundreds of health workers were promoted to grade 16, 16 and 17 in the province while 40 class iv employees were also promoted to class III. He said that paramedics played a key role in the entire health sector. He said that he would try to unite different unions under a single platform for the July election so that the paramedical leadership could work together for the welfare of the community.



HYDERABAD: Policeman stand guard on the main gate of Hyderabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry after a dispute between two groups of traders.

Prices of roti, bakery items reduced

SARGODHA (APP): Deputy Commissioner Capt (ret'd) Aurangzeb Haider Khan has further reduced the prices of bread and bakery items according to the people-friendly policies of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. According to the new notification, under the Chief Minister's public relief vision, the new price for 100 grams of bread (roti) has been set at 14 rupees. Bakery items, bread simple (400 grams) Rs.100, bread milky (400 grams) Rs.110, bread double milky (700 grams) Rs.190, bread double (700 grams) Rs.200, rusk special (500 grams) at Rs 280 , simple rusk (500 grams) at Rs 240, Sheer Mal (100 grams) Rs 70 and bread (round 60 grams) price has been fixed at Rs 30.

The DC directed price control magistrates to ensure strict implementation of the new prices for bread and bakery items.

Heavy fines would be imposed on anyone found overcharging at any tandoor, bakery, or hotel, he warned.

The new prescribed prices should be prominently displayed with bold words at bakeries, naan shops, and other visible places, the DC added.

Tarab reviews medical facilities at DHQ Hangu



Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Member Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly from Hangu Shah Tarab Khan made a detailed visit to District Headquarters Hospital Hangu on Sunday where he went to different wards and reviewed the medical facilities and cleanliness condition.

He also met the patients and inquired about their health and medical facilities being provided in the hospital. Shah Tarab MPA also held a special meeting with the District Health

Officer and the Hospital administration and directed them to provide maximum relief to the patients.

It may be recalled that Shah Tarab Khan brought medicines worth millions of rupees to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital and now to the District Headquarters Hospital in Hangu, from which the patients are now getting benefits.

The MPA said that now there will be a monthly check and balance of medicines and only deserving people will benefit from

government drugs. Meanwhile, Shah Tarab MPA also visited 1122 and directed its management to take the refer patients not only to Kohat but to Peshawar also.

He said that he would talk to the highups of 1122 in this regard and get it done as soon as possible for the people welfare.

He added that he will try his level best to provide maximum relief to the brave people of Hangu at all levels and will not disappoint the people at all.

PAC organizes first Punjab Music Competition

JHELMUM (INP): The Punjab Arts Council Rawalpindi organized first Punjab Music Competition at Government Postgraduate College Jhelum on Sunday.

Principal Government Postgraduate College, Mr. Nasir Mehmood was the chief guest of the competition. Dozens of candidates aged between 14 and 30 participated in the music competition.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Nasir Mehmood remarked that music is a universal art that is formed by the harmonious arrangement of sound and silence. It is an important branch of fine arts and a powerful medium for expressing human emotions, feelings, and imagination, he added.

He said, "Music has a very ancient history and has evolved in different forms across various cultures and societies. It is an art form that transcends the bounds of time and space. It acts as a bridge between languages, cultures, and nations."

The power of music lies in its ability to captivate listeners, evoke emotions and touch the depths of human experience."

Director Arts Council Sajjad Hussain stated that the primary purpose of the first Punjab Music Competition is to promote the development and proliferation of art and culture.

He said that the Punjab Council of the Arts has been

playing a significant role in fulfilling this responsibility for decades through various programs and projects. The aim of the first Punjab Music Competition 2024 is to highlight the hidden talents of melodious voices among the youth from across Punjab by organizing a healthy competition, he added.

Nawazish Ali Khizravi, Afzal Latifi, and Rubina Khanum served as judges for the competition. In the district Jhelum competitions, Haider Ali secured the first position, Simon the second, and Saman Zahra the third. The winners were awarded prizes of 20, 15, and 10 thousand rupees respectively, along with certificates of appreciation.

Fakhar vows to promote sports in KP

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, visited Abbottabad and participated as a chief guest in the final match of the Inter-Departmental Cricket Tournament organized by the Sports Department in the region.

During his visit, he distributed prizes among the winning and runner-up teams and praised their performance shown in the event.

On this occasion he also watched the final match between the Police and Anti-Corruption

Departments teams and distributed trophies among the final teams.

In the tournament, including administration department, a total of 32 teams from various line departments participated, wherein the teams of Police and Anti-Corruption Departments reached to the final match.

During the final match ceremony, Syed Fakhar Jehan expressed his commitment to promoting sports in the province and providing facilities and infrastructure to support the players of every sport.

He told that more sports competitions and events will be held in the

Hazara region and that shooting competitions will also be organized for police and other departments.

He emphasized that the provincial government is working to provide facilities and infrastructure for sports across the province and is committed to supporting athletes and players being the assets of the province.

The Advisor praised the tournament as a great initiative for promoting sports and providing a healthy recreational activity for government officials. He expressed his hope to bring international cricket to the province soon.

Provision of health, education services top priority: Saira

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Former Federal Minister and Chairperson District Development Coordination Committee, Hafizabad, Saira Afzal Tarar said that provision of health-care, educational and Municipal Services is the top priority of the present Punjab government led by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif whereas field hospital and clinic on wheel programme launched to ensure availability of treatment facilities to the people at their doorsteps across the province including district Hafizabad.

She was addressing a meeting of District Development Coordination Committee, Hafizabad, at district complex. Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad, MPAs Mian Shahid Hussain Bhatti, Aoun Jhangir Bhatti, prominent political personality Sheikh Gulzar Ahmad, DPO

Faisal Gulzar, ADCG Hamadullah and other offices attended the meeting.

Saira Afzal Tarar said that all resources were being utilized to improve performance of all government departments besides elimination of criminals involved in drugs trafficking, theft, dacoities and other anti-social activities and to ensure protection of lives, property and honour of the people.

She also said that government was committed to provide maximum relief to people including cheaper roti, non and bakery items and prices of roti, non and bakery items were decreased in the great extent in the Punjab.

The meeting was reviewed availability of healthcare facilities in the hospital, Performance of government schools, pace of work on different development schemes, under construction Flyover at Gujranwala-

Sargodha bypass, mess of traffic, removal of encroachments, ongoing cleanliness campaign.

DC Sundas Irshad said that district administration was focusing of implementation on Public Welfare Initiatives of the Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif and price magistrates were visiting markets to ensure sale of roti, not and other edibles on price list issued by the Price Control Committee and officers were taking practical measures in this regards.

DC also said that practical steps were being taken to improve treatment facilities in the hospitals of the district while significantly improvement in cleanliness in rural areas was witnessed and officers of local government, district council and Municipal Committees were struggling for improving cleanliness and removing encroachments in the district.



QUETTA: A flock of pigeons picking up grains thrown by people at the roadside. — INP photo

DER ISMAIL KHAN

(INP): The district emergency service-Rescue 1122 has launched an awareness campaign to educate people about precautionary measures against heat-stroke and the adverse effects of extreme heat.

According to the Rescue 1122 spokesman, the awareness drive has been launched in line with Director General Rescue 1122 Dr Ayaz Ahmad Khan and Director Operations South Imran Yusufzai under the supervision of District Emergency Officer Engineer Faseeh Ullah

across the district.

In this regard, the spokesman said various measures were being taken to educate the public through this campaign. He added that the pamphlets and brochures were being distributed among citizens, a door-to-door campaign and community-based efforts were underway. Similarly, he said that social media platforms were also being utilized to safeguard lives of people by spreading awareness about the heatstroke.

He said that Rescue 1122 ambulances were equipped with ORS (Oral

Rehydration Solution), cold water, and other essential medicines to provide immediate assistance in case of such emergencies.

Moreover, the public has been advised to drink plenty of water, stay in shades and cool places, wear loose and light clothing, and avoid unnecessary exposure to the sun.

It has also asked the people if it was necessary to go outside then cover their head with a wet cloth.

The Rescue 1122 urges the public to call 1122 for free emergency assistance in case of any emergency.

Bus carrying 29 plunges into ravine

GILGIT (INP): In a tragic incident, a bus carrying 29 passengers plunged into ravine near Mansehra on Sunday. As per details, the incident occurred near Manshera on Hazara Motorway when the bus traveling from Ghizer to Rawalpindi fell into a ravine.

According to police, the tyre of the bus burst and it fell into the ravine, fire also broke out in the bus due to a short circuit. Police officials said rescue teams quickly arrived at the scene and rescued all passengers, who were later shifted to a safe location.

No casualties have been reported, and an investigation into the incident is underway. In a separate incident, at least 13 including children dead as a mini truck carrying a family plunged into a ravine in Punj Pir area of Khushab. As per details, the incident occurred in Punj Pir where a minitruck fell into a ravine, resulting in the deaths of 13 people, including 5 children and four others sustained injuries.



South African opposition puts ANC majority in its sights

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): South Africa's opposition parties mounted an 11th-hour assault Sunday on the ruling ANC's 30-year-old grip on power, staging large-scale rallies three days before what promises to be an historic general election.

From the right, the Democratic Alliance (DA), was gathering in the town of Benoni outside Johannesburg to cheer on leader John Steenhuisen under a pair of national flags ahead of Wednesday's vote.

The party picked a smaller 20,000-seat stadium than the African National Congress had chosen for its huge Johannesburg rally the day before, but blue-clad supporters amply filled it, kept on their feet by DJs and bands playing amapiano and country songs.

"We don't offer empty promises, we show concrete facts and the facts are undeniable," Steenhuisen told the crowd, shielded from the winter sun by blue umbrellas

"Today our people are suffering under the unbearable burden of poverty, unemployment, crime. These disasters are not inevitable but were created by the ANC," he said.

"On Wednesday, the ANC will lose the outright majority is has abused for decades ... On Wednesday, we close the ANC chapter of our history."

Opinion polls suggest the DA will not overtake the ANC to become South Africa's biggest single party, but it hopes to unite with a coalition of smaller outfits to take power.

"I want change. It's too bad right now: no jobs, no nothing," said 66-year-old job-seeker Isaac Tembo, who has voted for the ANC every five years since the advent of democracy in 1994.

From the left, former president

Jacob Zuma, not legally a candidate because of a conviction for contempt of court, is marshalling his uMkonto weSizwe (MK) party for a final push.

Zuma, who served as the ANC's fourth president between 2009 and 2018 but left office dogged by graft allegations, can not stand for election but may still take votes from his former party.

- Rescue mission? -

He was due to address a final weekend rally in one of the ANC's rural strongholds, in the eastern province of Mpumalanga.

President Cyril Ramaphosa is the fifth and latest in an unbroken line of African National Congress presidents dating back to Nelson Mandela's post-apartheid victory in 1994.

The party retains support among black South Africans grateful for the country's democracy and support for the welfare state and economic empowerment programmes.

But a younger generation, both black and white, which has grown up since the fall of apartheid is troubled by South Africa's power cuts, high crime rate and soaring joblessness.

Polls suggest the ANC could win fewer than 201 seats in the 400-member National Assembly for the first time and be unable to elect a president without support from other parties.

The DA, whose 48-year-old leader Steenhuisen is white, is hoping to capitalise on the discontent with a promise to "Rescue South Africa" through liberal economic reform and privatisations.

The ANC has played on fears that the DA would reverse 30 years of progress on economic and political equality and return power to a wealthy white elite.

But in Benoni, black DA supporters dismissed this fear.

"The DA will do better than ANC who lies," said 42-year-old mother-of-three Maria Choene.

The DA had bussed her more than 900 kilometres (560 miles) from her Aston Bay home with her eight-year-old daughter for the rally.

"I don't know why most of us are afraid of the DA. We should give them a chance first and vote them out if they fail, like the ANC," she argued.

The opposition is represented by 51 parties large and small on the ballot, and the DA leader would also face a post-election battle to assemble a coalition of MPs to put him in power.

"To drive this economy, the people need a stable government with economic policies that will grow the private sector," said Graham Gersback, 68, a local DA ward councillor at the rally.

- Crime and power cuts -

The ANC sliding under 50 percent would put the party and South Africa in uncharted waters, but analysts and opinion polls agree this is the most likely outcome.

The ANC won freedom for black South Africans after decades of apartheid, helped build democracy and lifted millions out of poverty by creating a social welfare system.

But many in the country of 62 million are fed up with high and growing unemployment, currently at 32.9 percent, as well as rampant crime, power cuts and water shortages. The economy grew a meagre 0.6 percent in 2023.

About 27 million people are registered to vote on May 29. They will elect the 400 members of the National Assembly, which then chooses the president.



DHAKA: Around 4,000 cyclone shelters have been readied along the country's lengthy coast on the Bay of Bengal

5 dead in Texas after severe weather hits Texas, Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP):

Powerful storms across Texas and Oklahoma obliterated homes and struck a highway travel center where drivers had rushed to take shelter, leaving thousands of people without power and a wide trail of damage Sunday. A sheriff said at least five people were dead in one rural community in Texas and many more were injured.

The destructive storms began Saturday night and included a tornado that overturned heavy recreational vehicles and shut down an interstate near Dallas. Officials said multiple people were transported to hospitals by ambulance and helicopter in the Texas county of Denton but did not immediately know the full extent of injuries.

In neighboring Cooke County, Sheriff Ray Sappington told The Associated Press that the five dead included three family members who were found in one home near Valley View, a rural community near the border with Oklahoma.

"We do have five confirmed (dead), but sadly, we think that that number is probably going to go up," Sappington said. "There's nothing left of this house. It's just a trail of debris left. The devastation is pretty severe."

Forecasters had issued tornado and severe thunderstorm warnings for parts of both states, as some heat records were broken during the day in South Texas and residents received triple-digit temperature warnings over the long holiday weekend.

In Arkansas, damaged buildings, uprooted trees and downed power lines were reported across the northwest edge of the state. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses reported power outages. Benton County Judge Barry Moehring confirmed one death. The destruction continued a grim month of deadly severe weather in the U.S.

Tornadoes in Iowa this week left at least five people dead and dozens injured. The deadly twisters have spawned during a historically bad season in the country for tornadoes, at a time when climate change is heightening the severity of storms around the world. April had the second-highest number of tornadoes

on record in the country.

Late Saturday, a tornado crossed into northern Denton County in Texas and overturned tractor-trailer trucks, stopping traffic on Interstate 35, Denton County Community Relations Director Dawn Cobb said in a statement.

The tornado was confirmed near Valley View, moving east at 40 mph (64 kph), prompting the National Weather Service to issue a tornado warning for northern Denton County, Cobb said.

The storm damaged homes, overturned motorhomes and knocked down power lines and trees throughout the area including points in Sanger, Pilot Point, Ray Roberts Lake and Isle du Bois State Park, Cobb said.

People who suffered injuries in the storm were transported to area hospitals by ground and air ambulances, but the number of injuries in the county was not immediately known, Cobb said, while a shelter was opened in Sanger.

The fire department in the city of Denton, about 37 miles (59.5 kilometers) north of Forth Worth, Texas, posted on X that emergency personnel were responding to a marina "for multiple victims, some reported trapped."

The Claremore, Oklahoma, police announced on social media that the city about 28 miles (45 kilometers) east of Tulsa was "shut down" as a result of storm damage including downed power lines and trees and inaccessible roads.

Earlier Saturday night, the National Weather Service's office in Norman, Oklahoma, said via the social platform X that the warning was for northern Noble and far southern Kay counties, an area located to the north of Oklahoma City. "If you are in the path of this storm take cover now!" it said.

A following post at 10:05 p.m. said storms had exited the area but warned of a storm moving across north Texas that could affect portions of south central Oklahoma.

At 10:24 p.m., the weather service office in Fort Worth posted a message warning residents in Era and Valley View they were in the direct path of a possible tornado and to immediately seek shelter.

The Forth Worth office continued to post notices and shelter warnings tracking the movement of the storm through midnight and separately issued a severe thunderstorm warning with "golf ball sized hail" possible.

The weather service office in Tulsa, Oklahoma, warned on X of a dangerous storm moving across the northeast part of the state through 2 a.m. and issued severe thunderstorm notices for communities including Hugo, Boswell, Fort Towson, Grainola, Foraker and Herd.

Excessive heat, especially for May, was the danger in South Texas, where the heat index was forecast to approach 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius) in some spots during the weekend. Actual temperatures will be lower, although still in triple-digit territory, but the humidity will make it feel that much hotter.

The region is on the north end of a heat dome stretching from Mexico to South America, National Weather Service meteorologist Zack Taylor said.

Sunday looks like the hottest day with record highs for late May forecast for Austin, Brownsville, Dallas and San Antonio, Taylor said.

Brownsville and Harlingen near the Texas-Mexico border already set new records Saturday for the May 25 calendar date — 99 degrees Fahrenheit (37 degrees Celsius) and 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius), respectively — according to the weather service.

April and May have been a busy month for tornadoes, especially in the Midwest. Iowa was hit hard last week, when a deadly twister devastated Greenfield. And other storms brought flooding and wind damage elsewhere in the state.

The storm system causing the severe weather was expected to move east as the Memorial Day weekend continues, bringing rain that could delay the Indianapolis 500 auto race Sunday in Indiana and more severe storms in Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Kentucky.

The risk of severe weather moves into North Carolina and Virginia on Monday, forecasters said.

The dreams of a 60-year-old beauty contestant come to an abrupt end

BUENOS

AIRES, Argentina (AP): A 60-year-old woman saw her dreams of becoming the oldest Miss Universe contestant in history melt away in a haze of sequins and selfies Saturday at Argentina's annual beauty pageant.

Alejandra Marisa Rodríguez told The Associated Press backstage after the event, still dressed in her red cocktail dress with slits revealing her legs. "It was adventure and I had no expectations of this other than taking on a new challenge."

For the swimsuit portion of the Miss Argentina contest, Rodríguez chose a modest one-piece suit with a shawl draped over her shoulders, giving the crowd a shimmy as fans whooped and blew air horns.

But the judges preferred Magali Benejam, a 29-year-old actress and model from Cordoba who donned a skimpy blue bikini and sky-high stilettos to win "best swimsuit" and ultimately beat out the 27 other contestants to be crowned Miss Argentina.

"I'm so excited and so grateful to be here because the competition

was not easy," Benejam told AP. She will represent Argentina in Mexico City for the global competition in November.

Even Benejam's victory would have been impossible a year ago, as the pageant had long capped the age of contestants at 28. This year, for the first time in its 73-year-history, the Miss Universe contest is welcoming any participant over age 18.

It's just the latest in a series of changes for a contest that has been a lightning rod for feminist criticism since "bra-burning" protests upended the 1968 Miss America contest.

For decades, the Miss Universe pageant openly described itself as an extravaganza of unmarried women in their late teens and twenties strutting around for judges to rate their looks and personalities.

As more and more people found that troubling, organizers realized how far the contest trailed behind the culture.

Over recent years, as #MeToo and social justice movements swept the globe, Miss Universe raced to persuade skeptics

it was more about minds and spirits than bodies.

It stripped away many controversial eligibility requirements, opening the field for married, pregnant, and transgender women, and it nixed all mentions of "beauty" from its website.

Yet, as the contest stressed empathy, confidence and authenticity as feminine ideals, the mentions of "young woman" remained in place, and with it, the ban on crow's-feet.

While many women praised Rodríguez's decision to compete at age 60, others questioned whether she was setting an unreasonable standard for older women. Her award-winning face, statuesque figure and sculptured features made her blend in with the younger cohort onstage.

"It's contributing to a sense that everyone should be able to look like this, all 60-year-old women should have the appearance of youth and freshness, as if they were 25," said Lala Pasquinelli, an Argentine feminist activist. "If they don't, it's because they aren't willing to make the sacrifices."

800,000 seek shelter as Bangladesh braces for cyclone

DHAKA (AFP): At least 800,000 Bangladeshis fled their coastal villages Sunday for concrete storm shelters further inland as the low-lying nation prepared for crashing waves when a cyclone makes landfall, top government disaster officials said.

Cyclone Remal is set to hit the southern coast and parts of neighbouring India late Sunday evening, with Bangladesh's weather department predicting howling gales and gusts of up to 130 kilometres (81 miles) per hour.

Cyclones have killed hundreds of thousands of people in Bangladesh in recent decades, but the number of superstorms hitting its densely populated coast has increased sharply -- from one a year to as many as three -- due to the impact of climate change.

"The cyclone could unleash a storm surge of up to 12 feet (four metres) above normal astronomical tide, which can be dangerous," senior weather official Muhammad Abul Kalam Mallik told AFP.

Most of Bangladesh's coastal areas are a metre or two above sea level and high storm surges can

devastate villages.

Authorities have raised the danger signal to its highest level, warning fishermen against going to the sea and triggering an evacuation order for those in at-risk areas.

"We are terrified," said 35-year-old fisherman Yusuf Fakir at Kuakata, a town on the very southern tip of Bangladesh -- right in the predicted route of the storm.

He has sent his wife and children to a relative's home inland while he stays to look after their belongings.

"Our daily life is disrupted," he said, recalling the destruction of past cyclones.

- Ferry sinks -

As people fled, police said that a heavily laden ferry carrying more than 50 passengers -- double its capacity -- was swamped by rough waters and sank near Mongla, a port in the expected path of the storm.

"At least 13 people were injured and were taken to a hospital," local police chief Mushfiqur Rahman Tushar told AFP, adding that other boats plucked the passengers to safety.

The government's disaster management secretary Kamrul Hasan told

AFP that orders had been given to ensure people moved from "unsafe and vulnerable" homes.

"At least 800,000 people have been shifted to cyclone shelters in the country's coastal districts," Hasan said.

The authorities have mobilised tens of thousands of volunteers to alert people to the danger, but local officials said many people were staying home as they feared their property would be stolen if they left.

He said around 4,000 cyclone shelters have been readied along the country's lengthy coast on the Bay of Bengal, with the cyclone expected to hit a 220-kilometre stretch from India's Sagar Island to Khepupara in Bangladesh.

The state-run Bangladesh Meteorological Department said Cyclone Remal would make landfall on Sunday by midnight (1800 GMT).

- 'Vulnerable' -

In addition to the villages and fishermen, many of the multi-storey centres have space to shelter their cattle, buffaloes and goats, as well as their pets.

On the low-lying Bhashan Char island,

which is home to 36,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, 57 cyclone centres have been readied, deputy refugee commissioner Mohammad Rafiqul Haque told AFP.

The country's three seaports and the airport in the second-largest city Chittagong were closed, officials said.

India's Kolkata airport closed Sunday with "predicted heavy winds and heavy to very heavy rainfall", airport authorities said.

The Indian Navy said Sunday it had prepared two ships equipped with aid and medical supplies for "immediate deployment to ensure the safety and welfare of the affected populace".

While scientists say climate change is fuelling more storms, better forecasting and more effective evacuation planning have dramatically reduced the death toll.

In the Great Bhola Cyclone in November 1970, an estimated half a million people died -- mostly drowned by the storm surge.

In May last year, Cyclone Mocha became the most powerful storm to hit Bangladesh since Cyclone Sidr in November 2007.

US lawmakers visiting Taiwan this week

TAIPEI (Reuters): A delegation of U.S. lawmakers led by Michael McCaul, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, is visiting Taiwan this week, the de facto U.S. embassy said on Sunday.

The delegation is in Taiwan from Sunday to Thursday, the American Institute in Taiwan said in a statement, a trip that comes shortly after China ended two days of war games around the island.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te extended goodwill towards and offered cooperation with China on Sunday following two days of Chinese war games near the island, as a group of U.S. lawmakers arrived in Taipei.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, carried out the military drills on Thursday and Friday, calling them "punishment" after Lai's inau-

guration speech on Monday which Beijing called another push for the island's formal independence.

China has repeatedly lambasted Lai as a "separatist". Lai rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims and says only Taiwan's people can decide their future. He has repeatedly offered talks but been rebuffed.

Speaking at a meeting of his ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the southern city of Tainan, Lai called on China to "share the heavy responsibility of regional stability with Taiwan", according to comments provided by his party.

Lai, who won election in January, said he also "looked forward to enhancing mutual understanding and reconciliation with China via exchanges and cooperation, creating mutual benefit and moving towards a position of peace

and common prosperity".

He thanked the United States and other countries for their expressions of concern about the Chinese exercises.

"The international community will not accept any country creating waves in the Taiwan Strait and affecting regional stability," Lai added.

The first group of U.S. lawmakers to visit Taiwan since Lai took office arrived on the island on Sunday for a four-day visit, led by Michael McCaul, the Republican chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

McCaul, joined by a bipartisan group of five other lawmakers, will meet Lai on Monday morning to "exchange views on peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific", Taiwan's presidential office said.

"Taiwan is a thriving democracy. The U.S. will continue to stand by our

steadfast partner and work to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait," McCaul said in a statement.

Taiwan's government has condemned China's war games.

Over the past four years, China has staged regular military activities around Taiwan as it seeks to pressure the island's government.

On Sunday, Taiwan's defence ministry said the garrison on Erdan islet, part of the Taiwan-controlled Kinmen islands that sit next to China's Xiamen and Quanzhou cities, had discovered a "crude" cardboard box containing paper with political slogans on it, written in the simplified Chinese characters used in China. The ministry said the box was suspected of being dropped by a drone outside the line of sight, adding, "It is a typical cognitive operation trick."

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Strategic autonomy of Seoul and Tokyo

THE positive outcomes of the meeting between visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang with Republic of Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol in Seoul on Sunday have undoubtedly raised hopes that the ninth Trilateral Summit Meeting among China, Japan and Republic of Korea being held in the ROK capital on Monday can help repair the fraught regional economic relations.

That Li and Yoon agreed to launch a diplomatic and security dialogue and resume talks on a free trade agreement represents a good beginning for the two sides to make joint efforts to address their common concerns and to expand their common interests.

After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the ROK over 30 years ago, relations between the two neighbors developed rapidly on the basis of mutual respect, openness and inclusiveness, mutual benefit and win-win results, and their booming economic and trade cooperation yielded fruitful results, bringing tangible benefits to the two peoples.

As Li said, these valuable experiences are worth cherishing and persisting with in the long term.

China is willing to work with the ROK to accelerate the second phase of negotiations on their bilateral free trade agreement on a pragmatic and balanced basis. That shows the goodwill, openness and earnestness of the Chinese side's efforts to keep China-ROK ties on the right track. The ROK should respond positively in kind.

It was therefore good to hear Yoon reiterate the ROK's commitment to the one-China principle, and to developing bilateral relations by maintaining high-level exchanges and close communication on the basis of mutual respect, expanding economic and trade cooperation, and enhancing people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

That the trilateral summit mechanism has been suspended since 2019 indicates how much external influence has affected the relations among China, Japan and the ROK in the past few years. But to what extent the meeting on Monday can help return the trilateral ties back to their right track depends on how far Japan and the ROK can focus on the common interests of the region and practice strategic independence.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also struck a positive note in that respect, saying Japan is willing to maintain and strengthen its cooperation with China, when he met with Premier Li on Sunday in Seoul, which hopefully augurs well for the trilateral talks.

With the crises in Gaza and Ukraine having shown how quickly conflicts can be triggered and how hard it is to contain their effects, the three countries have a new prism with which to view their relations and the situation in East Asia.

If Japan and the ROK can show they are willing and able to uphold their strategic autonomy, then their relations with China can certainly produce more than just handshakes.

Putin ready for ceasefire

THE Western news agency Reuters has put out a report quoting anonymous sources – five of them to be exact – saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed willingness to negotiate a ceasefire in the two-year-and-more war with Ukraine, but Putin wants it to be settled at the present battle-lines.

It would mean that Russia would retain Crimea which it has occupied in 2014, and four other smaller republics – Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson – which were incorporated in the Russian Federation in September 2022. But Russia has no control over the territories.

Initially, Putin was not agreeable to any talks with Ukraine saying that through his “special military operation” – a term he used to describe Russian military invasion – was to clear the “Nazis” in Kiev. Again, that was Putin's way of describing Ukrainian nationalism.

It was true that a right-wing Ukrainian militia had fought the war on the eastern front in Ukraine in the early phase of the war. In 2023, Russia began to say that it was willing to stop the war and negotiate. And it was the turn of popular Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to say that he would not agree to any talks unless he retrieves every bit of Russian-occupied Ukrainian land, including Crimea. And given the state of the war it looked an impossibility.

But recently Ukraine too relented and agreed to peace talks arranged by Switzerland but with no direct contact with Russia. Ukraine was interested in China, a key Russian ally, to attend the talks. But Moscow responded saying that there can be no peace negotiations between the two sides if it was not involved.

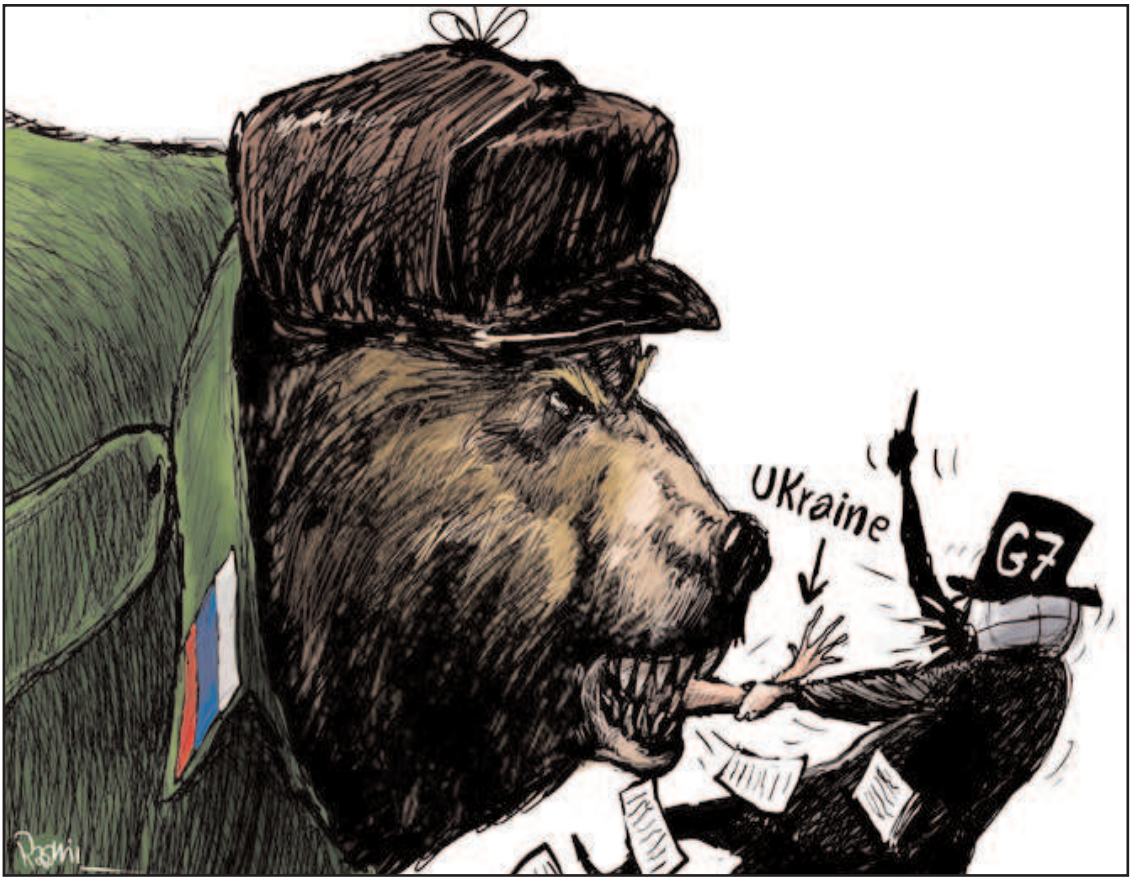
If Russia is feeling the strain of the war, so is Ukraine. The US, the UK and the EU are quite vocal in their support of Ukraine, and they have even pumped in financial aid as well as arms supplies. But the help, especially in terms of weapons, is not reaching Ukraine on time and in adequate measure. This has made Ukraine militarily vulnerable against renewed Russian surge in operations. So, it is not surprising that Zelensky too is looking for an exit strategy which would save national honour and hold Ukraine together.

The Moscow sources indicated that Putin does not want to let the war go on because he might have to fall back on conscription, an unpopular move. When he announced it in 2022, Putin's popularity ratings fell in the country, and the discontent among the young was palpable. Many of the eligible youth crossed over to neighbouring Georgia to escape being sent to the battlefield. And he is also looking for a face-saver. The advantage that Putin is seeking through the offer of a ceasefire with his own set of conditions, according to one of the sources, is: “Putin will say that we won, that NATO attacked us and we kept our sovereignty, that we have a land corridor to Crimea, which is true.”

It is not surprising that Putin is looking for a way to end the war which is advantageous to Russia despite the fact he has not been able to force Ukraine into submission which was its initial aim. Putin wants to extricate Russia out of the military tangle. Russia had said time and again that it was willing to talk. The latest statement on talks by Putin was on a visit to Beijing last week. But Ukraine has said that it does not trust any Russian offer of peace. This deep distrust can only be removed if the US and EU get guarantees from Russia regarding peace. And China standing as a guarantor of Russia's promise.

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Migration becomes a ‘dirty war’

Hafed Al-Ghwel

In an era marked by geopolitical upheaval and humanitarian crises, the surge in migration from the areas around the Sahara to the southern shores of Europe perfectly encapsulates the distressing narratives of our time: struggle, desperation, and exploitation.

The mass movement of people along this migrant corridor, long a subject of international concern, has descended into what might most aptly be described as a “dirty war,” given the convergence of conflict, political autocracy, and geopolitical maneuverings inherent to the issue; especially when we consider Russia's recent forays into a restless region abandoned by France, and later this year, those of the US.

The Sahel, a region that lies between the Sudan's savannas to the south and the Sahara to the north, and stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, remains fraught with multifaceted crises resulting from combinations of environmental degradation, extreme poverty, persistent jihadism, intercommunal violence, and decades of instability.

Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso bear the brunt of this, as malign actors continue to exploit local grievances and failures of governance to extend their own spheres of influence, enhance their operations, and entrench themselves in the region's expansive ungoverned spaces.

Every year, thousands of people die and many more are displaced as a result of violent escalations linked to extremist groups. This persistent human insecurity not only devastates local economies but also uproots communities, compelling vast numbers of people to embark on perilous journeys in the hope of finding refuge or a better life in Europe.

The exodus from the Sahel is intricately linked to shifting regional dynamics, including the political collapse and ensuing chaos in Libya that began in 2011, which has transformed the country into a key transit point for migrants. The International Organization for Migration and other agencies consistently report on migrants in their thousands who attempt to traverse perilous routes via Libya, only to end up facing abhorrent human rights abuses. Many perish along the way.

Critics and humanitarian organizations also decry the fact that official data tends to underreport the severity of an unfolding crisis that is not fueled solely by the quest for better economic opportunities.

Between untenable situations in their home countries and the horrific uncertainties about what lies in store at the end of their journeys, for many of the migrants who have already attempted dangerous journeys, and the many more sure to follow, their actions are a desperate bid simply to survive.

Worryingly, Tunisia, once hailed as a beacon of democracy in the Arab world, is now stuck in a seemingly irreversible descent into autocracy. This shift has not only intensified internal dissent but significantly contributed to a worsening migration crisis at its borders and on its shores.

Clampdowns on personal liberties and political opposition, as well as the public vilification of sub-Saharan migrants, mean Tunisia is now both a source and transit point for migrants trying to reach Europe, in search of what they have lost under the ever-tightening grip of the current regime.

This dangerous drift, egregiously compounded by economic miseries and social strife, paints a grim picture of a nation in decline. Tunisia's embrace of controversial ideologies

ing a humanitarian debacle with both immediate and long-term implications for the wider Mediterranean migration crisis. Given its historical ties to Europe, Tunisia's lurch toward autocracy, and its corollary effects on migration, add a layer of complexity to the EU's engagement with North African states. Europe, already struggling with striking a balance between its democratic values and migration control, is increasingly finding its policies tested as the situation in Tunisia con-

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Clampdowns on personal liberties and political opposition, as well as the public vilification of sub-Saharan migrants, mean Tunisia is now both a source and transit point for migrants trying to reach Europe, in search of what they have lost under the ever-tightening grip of the current regime. This dangerous drift, egregiously compounded by economic miseries and social strife, paints a grim picture of a nation in decline. Tunisia's embrace of controversial ideologies such as the “great replacement” theory — publicly supported by the current regime, which in February last year accused sub-Saharan Africans of diluting the Tunisian identity — reflects a dangerous trend of scapegoating that inflames social tensions. The result is that Tunisian authorities are cracking down on migrants, forcibly displacing hundreds of them to desert regions on the nation's borders with Libya and Algeria, and in doing so displaying a chilling sense of indifference to humanitarian norms.

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The result is that Tunisian authorities are cracking down on migrants, forcibly displacing hundreds of them to desert regions on the nation's borders with Libya and Algeria, and in doing so displaying a chilling sense of indifference to humanitarian norms.

These sweeping actions not only shine a glaring spotlight on a wayward regime's disregard for its international obligations but place additional burdens on already precarious migrant routes, precipitat-

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Europe, already struggling with striking a balance between its democratic values and migration control, is increasingly finding its policies tested as the situation in Tunisia con-

cal engagement in these regions is to counter Western influence but it has a more insidious side effect: the further destabilization of already volatile regions.

This not only intensifies local conflicts but also potentially accelerates flows of migrants toward Europe, in a scenario that is eerily similar to the 2015 European migrant crisis, during which Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Afghans and Eritreans attempted to reach Europe to escape war, intercommunal violence or severe hardship.

As this disheartening narrative and its wide-ranging implications continue to unfold, Europe appears fragmented and indecisive. A partnership agreement with Egypt to curb migration through North Africa, alongside similar deals with Libya, Morocco, and Mauritania, reflects a strange strategy of externalizing migration controls through the southern extension of Europe's borders.

Likewise, the relocation of European political discourse on the issue to the other side of the Mediterranean, by political leaders such as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, is a tactical but potentially futile attempt to manage migration flows at source and transit points.

Such measures are indicative of a broader European retreat from a cohesive policy on migration. This plays into the hands of autocrats and external powers such as Russia, which seem to be a step ahead in their geopolitical calculations.

What Europe should have done, and still could do, is approach migration management from the standpoint of regional collaboration, rather than attempt to compartmentalize engagement. This could help to discourage countries such as Tunisia from pushing migrants toward Libya and Algeria or, as an investigation by the Washington Post discovered was happening, simply abandoning them in the middle of the desert.

By treating migration as the shared challenge it undoubtedly is, Brussels would then be able to speak and engage with one voice, both within the bloc and with nations in North Africa, to help insulate its coordinated efforts on migration from shifting political winds.

In the run up to the European elections in June, the issue of migration and the bumbling responses to it have created a rift between the frontline countries that bear the brunt of the influx and countries in the north of the continent that are wary of funding futile interventions.

The dizzying web of political, military, and humanitarian issues that entangle the issue of migration from areas around the Sahara to Europe paints a very grim picture that is likely to get even worse as clandestine, opportunistic actors continue to capitalize on the collapse of state structures and the weakening of security.

Moreover, the decline of European willpower in its efforts to craft decisive policies on migration simply compounds a crisis that is as much about the displaced as it is about the geopolitics on which their fates are dependent.

Gantz puts Netanyahu on a three-week notice

Yossi Mekelberg

When he called a press conference at the end of the Jewish sabbath last week, Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's war Cabinet and leader of the National Unity Party, raised expectations of a dramatic announcement.

Many anticipated that he and his party had decided to part company with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, as it has become obvious that the supposedly moderating influence of Gantz on the far-right tendencies of the coalition was no longer able to serve such a purpose, if it ever did.

True to his usual, hesitant form, however, Gantz could not find in himself the courage to resign from the government on the spot. Instead, he put Netanyahu on a three-week notice as he issued an ultimatum that included six conditions for their political partnership to continue. If they are not met by June 8, the government will revert to a “pure” far-right version, without the more moderate safety net provided by his party.

There was some rationale for National Unity to join the government in the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas, given the need to respond to the outrage. It quickly became apparent that Netanyahu was barely functioning as a leader as he presided over a government that included far-right messianic-fanatic elements with hardly any diplomatic or military experience.

However, it could equally be argued that a decision to remain in opposition, as leader of the opposition Yair Lapid and his Yesh Atid party did, might have been even more effective. From that position, support for the government could have been provided when merited but, equally, constructive criticism could have been delivered when required.

Either way, when it became apparent that Netanyahu, for his own egotistical reasons, had no interest in ending the war or securing the release of hostages, and that the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza and the utter devastation inflicted on the tiny territory had become reckless, it was surely time for National Unity to leave the government to avoid becoming complicit in its actions and tainted by its disastrous conduct.

It was actually Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, from Netanyahu's own Likud party, who in a televised address this month confirmed what we have all known for some time: that Israel under its current prime minister has no plan for “the day after.”

He urged Netanyahu to make “tough decisions” to advance the non-Hamas governance of Gaza, whatever the personal or political cost, because what he described as the “gains” of the war were being eroded, compromising Israel's long-term security.

In a rare demonstration of civil courage, which is a characteristic Netanyahu completely lacks, Gallant made it clear in no uncertain terms that he would not allow the establishment of Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip because “the end of the military campaign must be a political act.”

Astonishingly, he then confirmed: “Unfortunately, no such plan has been brought for debate and, worse yet, no alternative has been presented in its place.”

In other words, straight from the horse's mouth, more than seven months into the war, the Israeli government still has no plan for the day after.

Gantz, a former chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, added his voice to this sentiment several days later when he stated the imperative need to establish a vision for ending the war and for the future of Gaza as one of his conditions for remaining in the government.

Another is that the return of all remaining

hostages is secured. Gantz knows full well that the chances of bringing any of them back alive are fading, which is something Netanyahu and the far-right elements in his government seem to be completely indifferent about.

However, when Gantz claimed that personal and political considerations had “begun to enter the most sacred parts of Israel's defense,” it was hard to avoid the feeling he was “playing the innocent” on this point. Only someone who has been on a different planet for at least the year-and-a-half since the current Israeli government was formed could try to claim that only now have ulterior motives started to creep into Netanyahu's decision making.

This government has been one big exercise in serving Netanyahu's personal and political interests — mainly to help him to avoid justice — and in return for that he has been happy to hand the country's steering wheel to elements intent on taking Israel on a destructive journey of deadly confrontation with the Palestinians, isolation from the international community, the demolition of its democratic system, and complete moral bankruptcy.

For these elements, Oct. 7 was a blessing; not a curse or a disaster but a sign that Israel must return to Gaza, take complete control of the territory, build Jewish settlements there, and take steps that eventually lead to annexation of the West Bank.

In the absence of any desire by Netanyahu to instantly quash such senseless and dangerous ideas, there was no justification for either Gantz or his most senior political partner, Gadi Eisenkot, to remain in the government, especially since there is no end in sight to the war, the hostages have not returned, and Gaza is becoming yet another failed conflict with no political horizon.

In the meantime, families of the hostages have faced constant, vicious, and sometimes violent attacks from supporters of the government, actively enabled by the police, resulting in ever-deeper divisions within a society more fragmented than ever before.

The situation cries out for a strong opposition that demands a State Commission of Inquiry to investigate the failures that led to Oct. 7 and everything that has followed, and for an election so that the people of the country can choose the kind of government opinion polls suggest they want.

Can anyone still delude themselves into believing that the current Israeli government, given who leads it and who calls the shots, is capable of meeting the challenges the country faces and extricating it from the mess it has got itself into? Of course not; this crass coalition is more likely to further exacerbate Israel's predicaments than resolve them.

Some of the strategic goals Gantz set out in his ultimatum to Netanyahu are unrealistic, and not even compatible with each other, as long as the current government remains in power.

The overthrow of Hamas, for example, even if achievable would require many more months, or even years, of Israeli presence in Gaza.

This is, therefore, incompatible with his other demands for the establishment of a joint US, European, Arab, and Palestinian administration that would manage Gaza's civilian affairs, and the repatriation of residents of northern Israel who were evacuated from their homes.

Netanyahu's response to Gantz was utterly dismissive, which should be a clear indication to his party that its time is up and that its coalition government has passed its sell-by date. The sooner he quits, the better he will serve his people.

Saudi Arabia’s message of cooperation to all Iraqis

The visit of Saudi Ambassador to Iraq Abdulaziz Al-Shammari to Karbala on May 13 was no ordinary visit. It was considered a significant and historic event.

The visit of the Saudi ambassador to the shrine of Hussein bin Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, was the highlight. The shrine is a significant pilgrimage destination for millions of Shiites, including Saudi citizens.

The visit of the Saudi ambassador to a city revered by Shiites marks an important milestone. By visiting the shrine of Imam Hussein and expressing admiration for its beauty, the ambassador sent a strong message of Saudi Arabia’s inclusivity toward all Iraqi communities, regardless of their sect or cultural background. This visit demonstrates that the Kingdom remains impartial and does not favor any particular sect.

Iraqi sources expressed their support for the visit, stating that it reflected a shared desire between Riyadh and Baghdad to enhance cooperation and strengthen official and popular relations. The same sources also indicated that the majority of Iraqis received news of the visit with great joy.

The religious authority in Najaf, which has great influence on millions of Shiite Muslims in Iraq and beyond, also endorsed the visit of Al-Shammari. A reliable source informed

me that “the religious authority knew about the visit in advance and gave the green light to the officials at the Al-Husseiniya shrine to arrange the ambassador’s arrival and reception in the best way

Hassan Al-Mustafa

Kingdom’s religious diplomacy, which aims to foster respectful relationships between moderate parties. The visit also conveyed Riyadh’s appreciation for

announcing a plan for direct flights from Dammam in the east of the Kingdom to the Iraqi city of Najaf, where the headquarters of the “Hawza” (a seminary where Shiite Muslim clerics are trained) and the

popular relations. It could also boost future trade exchanges.

The first direct Saudi flight to Najaf will be on June 1. Most likely, Al-Shammari will be there to welcome it, which means that the ambassador will visit Najaf. If Al-Shammari were to visit Najaf, it would be a trip to the holiest city in Iraq for Shiite Muslims and would show that he is welcome by the religious authority there. This gesture goes beyond Al-Shammari individually and sends a positive message from the religious authority to the government of Saudi Arabia.

It is also possible that Al-Shammari will meet with Sheikh Ishaq Al-Fayyad in Najaf. Al-Fayyad holds a prominent position among Hawza scholars and is considered the second most influential religious authority in Iraq after Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani. If this meeting takes place, it would send a strong message about cooperation between moderate forces that seek to promote the values of civil peace and mutual respect among Muslims.

Of course, the extremists in both sects will not be happy with such meetings. However, they are part of a Saudi strategy, not just a temporary stance. This strategy aims to combat violent sectarian rhetoric and increase cooperation with all Iraqis. Riyadh considers this to be in the interests of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf.

The religious authority in Najaf, which has great influence on millions of Shiite Muslims in Iraq and beyond, also endorsed the visit of Al-Shammari. A reliable source informed me that “the religious authority knew about the visit in advance and gave the green light to the officials at the Al-Husseiniya shrine to arrange the ambassador’s arrival and reception in the best way possible.” The source added: “The religious authority believes that Iraq should have strong relations with the Kingdom because it is in the interest of both peoples and the entire region.” Al-Shammari’s visit to Karbala was part of the Kingdom’s religious diplomacy, which aims to foster respectful relationships between moderate parties. The visit also conveyed Riyadh’s appreciation for religious diversity, its endorsement of communication between different groups, and its opposition to any extremist sectarian rhetoric that creates problems among Muslims.

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religious diversity, its endorsement of communication between different groups, and its opposition to any extremist sectarian rhetoric that creates problems among Muslims.

This visit was preceded on April 26 by the Saudi Civil Aviation Authority

shrine of Caliph Ali bin Abi Taleb are located. Najaf holds a unique position due to its cultural, religious and historical significance.

The intention to operate direct flights via Saudi carriers from Dammam to Najaf comes within the context of strengthening

A greener future for the Kingdom through forestation

Princess Abeer bint Saud bin Farhan Al-Saud

Climate change and the health of the world’s forests are intricately linked, with the loss of these natural carbon sinks to fires, logging and desertification contributing to greater emissions and rising temperatures.

According to the Spanish renewable energy company Iberdrola, the loss of forests is harming the world’s biodiversity, depleting the number of pollinating insects, leading to crop failures, increasing food insecurity and risking the emergence of zoonotic diseases like COVID-19.

Forestation is seen as one way to halt and even reverse these dangers. By using technology to convert desert regions into green, nutrient-rich landscapes, forestation can repair the damage caused by climate change and even slow its effects.

As Korena Di Roma Howley wrote in the science news magazine Eos, one of the reasons that climate change is such a dangerous process is that, in time, it leads to a “snowball effect,” in which environmental degradation and extreme temperatures accelerate in tandem.

Forestation can help capture greenhouse gases. Indeed, the Amazon rainforest alone can hold 48 billion tonnes of carbon.

In Saudi Arabia, forestation has become a key focus for many organizations attempting to harness desert land, restore degraded territory and protect what precious forests the Kingdom already has.

The Saudi Green

hectares of land. The Middle East Green Initiative, meanwhile, will plant 40 billion trees across the wider region.

This effort, first unveiled in 2021, could not come soon enough. Saudi Arabia suffered a 47

2010 and 2020, the UN estimates an annual loss of 4.7 million hectares of forest.

The UN has acknowledged Saudi Arabia’s leadership in forestation, noting the Kingdom’s steadfast commitment to adapt-

In Saudi Arabia, forestation has become a key focus for many organizations attempting to harness desert land, restore degraded territory and protect what precious forests the Kingdom already has. The Saudi Green Initiative has already begun the process of planting some 10 billion trees throughout the Kingdom, with a view to restoring more than 40 million hectares of land. The Middle East Green Initiative, meanwhile, will plant 40 billion trees across the wider region. This effort, first unveiled in 2021, could not come soon enough. Saudi Arabia suffered a 47 percent net loss of tree cover between 2000 and 2020. This ran parallel with an even larger deforestation trend worldwide. Between 2010 and 2020, the UN estimates an annual loss of 4.7 million hectares of forest.

Initiative has already begun the process of planting some 10 billion trees throughout the Kingdom, with a view to restoring more than 40 million

percent net loss of tree cover between 2000 and 2020.

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ing to climate change.

Experts at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, southwest London, say clear guidelines must be followed to optimize

forestation, including the prioritization of forests that already exist, collaborating with local communities for sustainability, maximizing biodiversity and carefully choosing where to plant.

In one particularly impressive case of forestation, South Korea experienced an increase in forested land from 4 million hectares to 6.3 million hectares between 1961 and 1995, with total planting exceeding 11 billion trees by 2008.

Another successful attempt at forestation, which bodes well for Saudi Arabia, is that of the Kwimba Reforestation Project, which was launched by the Tanzanian government in 1990 and led to the planting of about 6.4 million trees over a nine-year period.

Any forestation project requires long-term thinking of the kind embraced by Saudi Arabia under its social reform and economic diversification agenda, Vision 2030, and other extended roadmaps.

For all of us who recognize the urgency surrounding climate change, we must take it upon ourselves to learn more about forestation and to support such efforts boldly and aggressively.

Europe’s growing consensus on Palestinian statehood

Alistair Burt

prerequisite for achieving peace in the Middle East, and added that recognition was a “means of supporting the moderate forces which have been losing ground.” There is no encouragement for Hamas in these statements.

But not all European states followed the lead set this week. The UK, France, and Germany believe that recognition of the state of Palestine is a huge decision, and they want such an act to either prompt something, or be part of a

announcement of a UK election on July 4 complicates matters. First, no major foreign policy commitment is likely during the campaign, especially one that might bind an incoming government. But, second, should there be, as likely, a change of government to Labour, there will be greater pressure on it to recognize Palestine than on a conservative government.

Long-standing campaigns in Labour for Palestine, quiet for a couple of years, have been given new impetus by events in Gaza, and by recent elec-

Norway, not surprisingly remembering Oslo, emphasized the importance of process in its own statements, reinforcing the growing view that recognition is now vital in order to preserve and promote the two-state process. If states truly wish to encourage this, so the argument goes, then it is time to acknowledge fully both the two states involved.

Norway’s Prime Minister Jonas Store made clear that a Palestinian state was “a prerequisite for achieving peace in the Middle East,” and added that recognition was a “means of supporting the moderate forces which have been losing ground.” There is no encouragement for Hamas in these statements. But not all European states followed the lead set this week. The UK, France, and Germany believe that recognition of the state of Palestine is a huge decision, and they want such an act to either prompt something, or be part of a process that is moving forward, as UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron suggested just a few weeks ago in a speech in London. So, celebration in Palestine this week is understandable, but not sufficient. The Palestinian Authority is unable to end the conflict, but it is absolutely essential to demonstrate, and pursue in company with regional and other friends, that it is doing all that it can to be fit and prepared to govern.

process that is moving forward, as UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron suggested just a few weeks ago in a speech in London. So, celebration in Palestine this week is understandable, but not sufficient. The Palestinian Authority is unable to end the conflict, but it is absolutely essential to demonstrate, and pursue in company with regional and other friends, that it is doing all that it can to be fit and prepared to govern. If so, then that other European states will recognize Palestine becomes increasingly likely.

The UK is keen to cooperate on the issue, particularly with France and Germany, but the

tion results and polling suggesting unhappiness with Labour’s position on the conflict. The Labour leadership will be pressed to address such concerns by recognizing Palestine, not least now that serious and respectable international players have recently done so. This may well increase pressure on France and Germany later in the year.

This week’s decisions, and the deliberations of others for the future, suggest there is strong and passionate support for a political and negotiated way out of the current catastrophe — but it will take a greater response from both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to deliver it.

An appreciation of African-Arab cooperation

Dya-Eddine Said Bamakhrama

The 61st anniversary of the African Union’s founding, a significant African political event, reminds us of the historical and geographical ties that unite Africa and the Arab world, as both sides share numerous civilizational and cultural elements.

Throughout the ages, the Arabian Peninsula and the African continent have engaged in extensive cultural and commercial interactions, shaping a shared identity in many aspects of life. Notably, tens of Arab states are situated in Africa, with a combined population of approximately 283 million people out of the continent’s 1.25 billion inhabitants, contributing to strengthening relations between the two sides.

Some intellectuals, notably the Arab-African intellectual Dr. Ali Mazrui, have argued that Arabs and Africans once inhabited a single continent before the geological separation by the formation of the Red Sea, which division was completed in the 19th century with the construction of the Suez Canal.

In this context, Mazrui

developed a scientific model, “Afrabia,” to frame the ongoing historical and geographic connections between the Arabian Peninsula and Africa, based on several key factors. These include the fact that Africa is the first continent where Muslims form the overwhelming majority, the long history of migration and movement between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, and the linguistic ties between the two.

Furthermore, the formation of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden dates back to about three to five million years B.C., which implies that the Arabian Peninsula and Africa were one geographical area before the geological rift.

Based on these themes, Mazrui concludes that Africa and the Arabian Peninsula will merge under the new world order to form a single hub of cooperation and integration that is strengthened by history, geography, and culture, with all these elements common between them more than with any other bloc in the world. Moreover, the Arab-African integration and fraternity, or what can be

called the Arab-African cohesion, is both long-standing and current, due to many supporting factors. Therefore, it was necessary to bolster it with economic integration for sustainable development, thus benefiting the peoples of the African continent and the Arab world.

Supporting joint economic development between Africa and the Arab world is critical for both sides to prosper and thrive, and a number of Arab and Islamic financial institutions have played a pivotal role in this area.

The Islamic Development Bank is one of the leading institutions in supporting economic development in the African continent. Since its establishment 50 years ago, it has provided financing and technical cooperation to hundreds of development projects in various vital sectors, such as infrastructure, agriculture, industry, health and education. Thus, the bank has contributed significantly to stimulating economic growth and improving living standards in many African countries.

The Arab Bank for Economic Development in

Africa focuses on financing economic and social projects in Africa to achieve sustainable development. Over the past 50 years, the bank has contributed significantly to the development of productive sectors and infrastructure in many African countries.

The celebration of the golden jubilee of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa in Riyadh over the past few days came as a culmination of five decades of developing infrastructure and agriculture across Africa and contributing an active role in the development of economic, financial and technical cooperation between the Arab world and Africa, embodying Arab-African solidarity.

It is notable that the celebration took place a month after a similar celebration in Riyadh on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Development Bank under the slogan “Cherishing our Past, Charting our Future: Originality, Solidarity and Prosperity.”

These two celebrations

reflect the importance of economic and social development and the role of the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in supporting sustainable development in the world, especially in the Islamic world and Africa.

In addition, Arab development funds, such as the Saudi Fund for Development, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the Qatar Fund for Development, and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, play a crucial role in supporting development in Africa. These funds have provided financing and soft loans for hundreds of development projects, effectively contributing to enhancing infrastructure and sectoral development in many African countries.

Moreover, one should not overlook the humanitarian and relief efforts carried out by KShrelief, the Kingdom’s charitable arm, in many African countries.

These combined Arab institutional efforts emphasize the importance of economic and development cooperation between

the Arab and African sides. Such cooperation enhances productive capacities and infrastructure in Africa and helps achieve sustainable development and improve living standards on the continent. It also reflects the depth of historical and civilizational ties between the two regions.

Politically, the past five decades have witnessed weak communication between the two sides, as evidenced by the fact that leaders in the Arab world and Africa have only met three times in 47 years. The first Arab-African summit was held in Cairo in 1977, the second in Sirte, Libya in 2010, while the third Arab-African summit was held in Kuwait in 2013. The last Saudi-African summit, held in Riyadh last November, emphasized developing relations between the two sides in various fields, strengthening joint cooperation, and advancing the strategic partnership relations between the two sides, valuing the historical ties between them. It can be a basis to build Afro-Arab cooperation in various fields, especially since Crown Prince Mohammed

bin Salman, announced during the summit that the Kingdom has provided more than \$45 billion to support development and humanitarian projects in 54 African countries, and that the assistance of KShrelief amounted to more than \$450 million in 46 African countries.

Furthermore, the crown prince announced King Salman’s Development Initiative in Africa by launching development projects and programs in the African states worth more than \$1 billion over 10 years, and injecting new Saudi investment in various sectors in the continent exceeding \$25 billion. This is in addition to financing and securing \$10 billion of exports and providing \$5 billion in development funding to Africa until 2030. He also revealed that the Kingdom intends to increase the number of its embassies on the continent to more than 40.

The Republic of Djibouti plays an important role in the efforts to promote Arab and African cooperation as a bridge between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, given its unique geographical location overlooking the

Bab el-Mandeb Strait which, holds great economic and political strategic importance. Djibouti is also home to the largest free trade zone in Africa, which would contribute to the development of trade and investment exchange with Africa.

Arab-African integration is an urgent necessity supported by various common denominators between the Arab and African peoples, historical ties, and geographical proximity. Strengthening cooperation between the two sides will have positive repercussions on development and the well-being of the peoples, and on security and stability. This requires strong political will and joint strategic visions by decision-makers both in the Arab world and Africa.

We look forward to the forthcoming launch of the Council of Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. We hope that this council will be a model of high-level Arab-African cooperation on the basis of common regional interests that are compatible and harmonious with the international community.



Pakistan's regional exports increase 20.61 %

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's exports to the seven regional countries witnessed an increase of 20.61 per cent in the first ten months of the financial year (2023-24) as compared to the corresponding months of last year.

"The country's exports to the regional countries including Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, and the Maldives account for a small amount of \$3,655.483 million, which is 14.24 per cent of Pakistan's overall exports of \$25,669.182 million during July-April (2023-24)," State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported.

China tops the list of countries in terms of Pakistan's exports to its neighbouring, leaving

behind other countries such as Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Pakistan carried out its border trade with the farther neighbour Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, and Maldives.

Pakistan's exports to China witnessed an increase of 37.68 per cent to \$2,341.089 million in ten months of this year from \$1,700.303 million last year while exports to Afghanistan witnessed a nominal decline of 0.54 percent from \$435.954 million to \$433.567 million.

The country's exports to Bangladesh also decreased by 15.82 percent to \$542.165 million this year from \$644.104 whereas exports to Sri Lanka rose by 35.83 percent to \$326.995 million from \$240.732.

The exports to India increased to \$1.376 million from \$0.250 million in the previous year.

Exports to Nepal decreased by 1.38 per cent to \$2.420 million from 2.454 million while to Maldives increased by 13.90 cent to \$7.671 million from 6.783 million, it added.

On the other hand, the imports from seven regional countries were recorded at \$10,925.280 million during the period under review as compared to \$8,617.786 million during last year, showing an increase of 26.77 per cent.

The imports from China during July-April 2023-24 were recorded at \$10,648.334 million against the \$8,343.937 million during July-April

2022-23, showing an increase of 26.61 per cent during the period.

Among other countries, imports from India are worth \$172.076 million against the imports of \$151.987 million, an increase of 13.61 per cent while imports from Afghanistan decreased by 47.34 percent from \$13.959 million to \$7.350 million.

Meanwhile, imports from Sri Lanka increased to \$49.055 million from \$40.923 million whereas Pakistan imports from Bangladesh recorded \$48.040 million from \$66.218 million during last year.

The imports from Nepal into the country witnessed a decrease of 61.71 per cent from \$0.734 million to \$0.281 million, it added.



ISLAMABAD: Vendors displaying melon to attract customers at Fruit and Vegetable Market in Federal Capital.

PFC to participate in London Tech Week expo

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PEC) CEO Mian Kashif Ashfaq said on Sunday that PFC would participate in the five-day international London Tech Week expo, commencing on June 10, 2024.

Chairing the Pakistan Furniture Council Board of Directors meeting here, he said the event offers a significant platform to showcase the diverse and high-quality range of Pakistani furniture products to a global audience.

By presenting at London Tech Week, he added, the Pakistan Furniture Council aims to highlight the craftsmanship and innovation inherent in Pakistan's furniture industry, seeking to captivate potential buyers and partners from around the world.

The expo serves as an opportunity for Pakistan Furniture Council to explore new export markets, forge international business relationships, and enhance the visibility of Pakistani furniture on a global scale.

The Pakistan Furniture Council's involvement underscores its commitment to promoting Pakistan's furniture sector and contributing to the country's economic growth through increased exports.

He said Trade Development Authority Pakistan in collaboration with Pakistan Software Exports Board had made these elaborate arrangements to facilitate Pak exporters and importers.

Panwaar as new president Traders Union KPT

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Al Haaj Mian Tajammal Hussain Panwaar has been elected as President of the Traders Union, Khairpur Tamewali.

According to a press release issued here, Al Haaj Mian Tajammal Hussain Panwaar has been elected as President of the Central Traders Union of Khairpur Tamewali unanimously.

A ceremony was held in that regard where Panwaar took the oath as President of the Traders Union KPT. The ceremony was attended by local notables and a large number of traders.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that he would continue to raise his voice for the protection of the rights of traders.

Gas theft crackdown: UFG Task Force conducted raid

F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 143 connections; Rs2.9 million fine imposed.

The UFG Task Force for the Lahore West Region successfully conducted a raid at Shah Kamal Road in Kamboh Colony, where they dismantled a direct bypass installed on the main gas line. The stolen gas was being used by a tandoor and hotel. The owner had also installed two gas compressors to siphon gas. The bypass was removed, and a request for an FIR against the culprit has been filed at Wahdat Colony Police Station.

In Lahore, the team dis-

connected 12 connections on illegal use of gas while another 3 on use of compressor and imposed fine of Rs 1.31 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged 2FIRs against gas pilfers.

In Multan the team disconnected 04 connections on illegal use of gas while another 04 on use of compressor.

In Karak the company disconnected 67 connections on account of direct use and illegal use of gas.

In Peshawar the team disconnected 32 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 0.07 million against gas theft cases.

The regional team of Shiekhpura disconnected 04 connections on illegal use of gas and also booked an amount of Rs 0.2 million

against gas theft cases.

In Faisalabad the team disconnected 03 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed a fine of Rs 0.04 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal the team disconnected 01 connection on illegal use of gas.

The regional team of Bahawalpur disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas.

In Gujarat the team disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas.

The regional team of Gujranwala disconnected one connection on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 0.30 million against gas theft cases.

In Mardan the team disconnected 10 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 1 million against gas pilferers.

High cost of production biggest issue of industry

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has asked the government to work on a fast track plan to address expansive energy issue and priority should be given to the value-added industry in this regard.

The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association leader and Ferozepur Road Industrial Association Senior Vice Chairman Shahbaz Aslam said that industry's core issue is the high cost of doing business, which the government needed to bring down to bring the local as well as the export industry at par with global competitors.

The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association leader urged for increasing ease of doing business, lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch, relaxing import policy for industrial raw material, and equalizing the energy tariff across the country.

Shahbaz Aslam said Pakistan was at 147 out of 190 countries on the global ranking of doing business mainly due to bureaucratic hurdles.

He said various provincial departments, including EOBI, Social Security, Women Welfare, Environment Department were playing a negative role and

treating the manufacturers and exporters like criminals.

He called for giving a boost to the export sector by adopting diversified marketing techniques and extending practical support to the industry, and asked the exporters to prepare themselves for meeting the global challenges so that exports could be enhanced by fully exploiting new opportunities.

He also stressed the need for adopting new technology so that Pakistan's exports may be able to cope with the emerging challenges in international arena.

Shahbaz Aslam urged the government to undertake thorough research and also brief the SMEs of the details of such challenges.

He hoped that the government would help boost country's exports, while all the macro and micro issues of the trade and commerce should also be addressed.

He said that growth of economy was a must to steer the industry of worse situation and contribute to the exports of the country.

He observed that the domestic industry should be allowed to grow while enjoying the right to avail opportunities against the competitors.

The businessmen leader said the benefits of the

GSP Plus status can only be harvested by maximum value-addition in finished products rather than exporting only raw materials, which cannot be possible without relaxation in import policies.

He said that business community has been facing tough challenges because of limited business.

In this context, he sought attention of the government for formulation of regional, provincial and central level task force, and formulation of sector wise regional policies which would help the government address the problems confronted by exporters.

He called for promoting industrialisation and enhancing exports through lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch and relaxing import policy for industrial raw material.

He asked the government to appreciate the role of industry for its potential to harvest maximum benefits, providing mass employment to the jobless population of the country.

He also sought government's attention for formulating aggressive marketing plan and hurdle-free policies as well as urgent decisions in favor of exports while taking on board major stakeholders.

UBL announces winners of 11th UBL Literature & Arts Awards

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The 11th UBL Literature and Arts Awards were held in Karachi at a five-star hotel, attended in large numbers by writers, literary and media personalities, socialites, and celebrities. At every event, the celebrated awards recognize and celebrate the best of Pakistani writers and artists, honoring a longstanding commitment to arts and literature.

The various award categories received hundreds of nominations from all over Pakistan. The competition was open to all Pakistani authors who had published their original work in 2021 and 2022. Entries were shortlisted by an esteemed panel of judges. The jury members in the Urdu categories were Dr. Asghar Nadeem Syed, Dr. Arfa Syeda, Dr. Anwaar Ahmed, Ms. Kishwar Naheed and Dr. Nasir Abbas Nayyar, while jury members for the English categories included Dr. Naazir Mahmood, Dr. Aroosa Kanwal and Mr. Harris Khalique.

The winners in each category as declared at the Awards are:

Children's Urdu Literature presented to Mr. Ahmed Adnan Tariq for 'Dastaan-e-Ameer Hamza'
Children's English Literature presented to Ms. Marzieh Abbas for 'Nadia and Nadir Series'



Translation into Urdu (joint awards) presented to Mr. Inam Nadeem for 'Aaina Si Zindagi' and Ms. Yasmeen Hameed for 'Janubi Asia Ki Muntakhib Nazmein'

Urdu Poetry award presented to Mr. Mohsin Shakeel for 'Kuch Ishq Kiya'

Pakistani Languages award given to Dr. Syed Wiqar Ali Shah for his work 'Abdul Ghani Khan - Zhwade Au Zamana' in Pushto language

Online Literature award presented to Mr. Nayyar Mustafa for his work 'Rangon Main Sochnay Wali Larki'

Song Lyrics Award presented to Mr. Sabir Zafar

Drama Script presented to Mr. Hashim Nadeem for his play 'Parizaad'

Urdu Debut presented to Mr. Ahmad Jahangir for 'Shah Darya'

English Fiction presented to Mr. Haroon Khalid Akhtar for his work 'Liar's Truth'
English Non-Fiction

award given to Mr. Tariq Rehman for 'Pakistan's Wars: An Alternative History'

Urdu Fiction Award presented to Dr. Aurangzeb Khan Niazi for his work 'Urdu Abad - Maholiyati Tanazur'

Urdu Non-Fiction award given to Mr. Shaheen Abbas for his work 'Leema Yakka Ban'

The awards also included a special category to celebrate the wide reaching impact of a celebrated artist who has produced exemplary work across a long distinguished career. The prestigious 'Lifetime Achievement' award was awarded to the exemplary Ms. Zaheda Hina.

The awards were interspersed by light entertainment and ended with a lavish dinner for all the participants. It was hosted by well-known celebrities Mr. Sajjad Hasan and Ms. Faiza Gillani.

Mr. Zia Ijaz, Deputy CEO UBL, in his message during

the awards, said "As a responsible Corporate Citizen UBL has played its part in the betterment of society through many of its own efforts. The UBL Literature & Arts Awards have been a cornerstone of one of our initiatives of giving back to the society through the recognition of indigenous talent across the country."

With each iteration of the award, the UBL Literature & Arts Awards support, motivate and celebrate talented Pakistani writers. The Bank recognizes the importance of arts and literature in helping society feel fulfilled, inspired and proud of its roots. It encourages budding Pakistani artists to continue producing their works in a variety of different genres, knowing that there are celebrated local platforms where they can be recognized. It is through such ventures that the literary tradition lives on and benefits the current and future generations.

More trade bodies announce to back PIAF in LCCI polls 2024

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) continued to secure more support as traders of Hafeez Center, Hall Road Khidmat Group and several more associations have announced to back the PIAF-Founders Alliance in the LCCI upcoming elections of 2024. The PIAF leadership also nominated its second expected candidate for Lahore Chamber Election 2024 from the Hafeez Centre trade body during their visit to the PIAF Office.

Speaking on the occasion, PIAF patron-in-chief Mian Anjum Nisar and PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that PIAF-Founders Alliance

always raised its voice for early solution of various issues being faced by the business community.

He said Alliance would continue its efforts. Hafeez Centre trade body's newly-elected office-bearers paid rich tributes to the PIAF leadership in general and Mian Anjum Nisar in particular.

They said that Alliance has honored the traders of Hafeez Centre by giving representation to its chairman.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that Hafeez Center has always played an important role in the elections of the Lahore Chamber.

In the biggest election of the business community of Lahore, PIAF will be successful once again with

the confidence of businessmen and industrialists.

After two years, the chamber elections are taking place for which we all have to work very hard. The leadership of PIAF is always active in solving the problems of the business community on all forums and will not spare any effort in the future.

This time also PIAF Founder Alliance will win all the seats with the support of all the markets of Lahore.

Former Executive Committee Member of Lahore Chamber and EC Member PIAF Sheikh Muhammad Fayyaz, President Hafeez Center Fayyaz Butt and Hall Road Khitmat Group President Babar Mehmood were also present. Hundreds of

traders and industrialists from Hall Road and adjacent markets also participated in the meeting.

On this occasion, Mian Anjum Nisar announced that Sheikh Fayyaz is the candidate of PIAF in the Lahore Chamber elections.

All the members clapped and expressed their support. On this occasion, Senior Vice Chairman PIAF Nasrullah Mughal, Vice Chairman PIAF Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, Former Chairman PIAF Muhammad Ali Mian, Mian Abuzar Shad, and others were present.

Sheikh Muhammad Fayyaz, the nominated candidate of PIAF, thanked the PIAF cadres and said that he will follow the behavior of the traders.

Govt fails to attract new investment as ratio hits 50-year low: BMP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has lamented that country's investment ratio has fallen to its lowest level in 50 years, reaching mere 13% of the economy in the outgoing fiscal year, reflects the challenges faced by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in attracting investment without addressing fundamental economic issues and achieving political stability.

The BMP Chairman and FPCCI former president Mian Anjum Nisar observed that the failure to meet the investment target of 15 of the GDP has limited

ed the government's ability to address infrastructure and social sector issues, increasing reliance on loans for development projects.

According to the data, the country's economy experienced a low growth rate of 2.38pc compared to population growth of over 2.6pc, while inflation on an average ranges between 25pc and 26pc, portraying persistent stagnation over the last few years.

However, the overall size of Pakistan's economy in dollar terms had gone up to \$373 billion in the current fiscal year 2023-24 against revised estimates of \$338 billion for the last financial year.

He said that the investment-to-GDP ratio stood at 12.8 per cent in the fiscal

year 1972-3, then it had remained on the higher side in all subsequent fiscal years since then and clinched highest-ever position of 26.2pc of GDP in 2001-2. In the fiscal year 2014-15, it stood at 17.2pc of GDP, and 17.1pc of GDP in 2017-18 during the tenure of PMLN. During the tenure of Imran Khan, the investment-to-GDP ratio stood at 15.6pc in 2021-22. It stood at 14.1pc of GDP in 2022-23 under the PDM-led government, but then it witnessed the lowest ebb and declined to 13.1pc of GDP in 2023-24.

Mian Anjum Nisar said that that restoring energy sector viability requires strong cost-side reforms, including continuation of efforts to improve transmis-

sion infrastructure, better integration and expansion of renewable energy capacity; improving DISCO performance via either privatization or long-term management concessions; moving captive power demand to the grid; revisiting, the terms of power purchase agreements; and continuing to convert publicly-guaranteed PHPL debt into cheaper public debt.

He outlined the reforms' agenda that has either been undertaken by Pakistan or where Islamabad needs to put more efforts.

In the case of the energy sector, terms of power purchase agreements have not come heavily under the scanner as the focus has first been on taking recovery and tariffs to a sustain-

able level.

Higher energy prices triggered mass protests across Pakistan last year and have also stifled energy demand with policymakers scratching their heads on how to move forward for the sector's viability.

With runaway inflation triggering record high interest rates, demand for energy has reduced further, leaving the government in a 'catch-22' situation.

He said that the only sustainable solution for the sector is decisive action to address cost-side and infrastructure issues.

He quoted the IMF report which is an important document as many see it as a guideline in the light of Pakistan's pursuit for a longer, larger program with

the IMF.

In its recommendations, he suggested to the government that basic tariff of IPPs should be changed in Pakistani currency instead of dollars and if this change is not made, an amount of Rs5,266 billion will have to be paid. Similarly, the profits to the IPPs owners should be given in Pakistani rupees instead of dollars.

The FPCCI former president observed that besides increasing exports and controlling imports the government will have to take administrative measures.

He argued that the devaluation of the currency was dictated by the IMF through prior actions and it has nothing to do with macroeconomic fundamen-

tals. He said that there was a complete breakdown of economic policymaking, as the country's fiscal policy had become subservient to monetary and exchange rate policies.

He said that the monetary tightening and exchange rate depreciation resulted in higher inflation, public debt and debt servicing.

The empirical evidence showed that the one percent monetary tightening hiked the inflationary pressure by 1.3 percent in the case of Pakistan, he added.

According to provisional figures, approved by the National Accounts Committee (NAC), the per capita income has been worked out at \$1,676 for the current fiscal year,

while the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) worked out per capita income in dollar terms at \$1,680. There is a slight variation of \$4, but the Ministry of Finance is expected to publish a figure of per capita income at \$1,676 in the Economic Survey for 2023-24, going to be unveiled ahead of the upcoming budget for 2024-25.

The savings-to-GDP ratio remained constant at 13.1pc for the current fiscal year against 13pc for the last financial year.

The import restriction helped the country to slash the current account deficit, which is estimated at 0.03pc of GDP, equivalent to remaining below \$1 billion for the ongoing financial year.



In brief

Pak-Eng 2nd ODI abandoned due to rain

TAUNTON (Monitoring Desk): The Second ODI match between Pakistan Women and England Women was abandoned due to persistent rain after only 6.5 overs were bowled in the day in Taunton. Both teams were awarded one point each on the ICC Women's Championship table. Earlier in the day, Nida Dar won the toss and elected to bat first fielding an unchanged XI. Pakistan's opening batters, Sadaf Shamas (18 not out, 28b, 2x4s) and Sidra Amin (7 not out, 13b) put on an unbeaten 29 for no loss in 6.5 overs. Playing her first ODI of the three-match series, Lauren Filer conceded 18 runs in her three overs while Kate Cross had bowled one maiden out of the 3.5 overs she sent down giving away 11 runs. England had clinched the opening ODI at Derby while the last game will be played at Chelmsford on 29 May.

Squash team announced for U-23 Games

PESHAWAR (APP): The selection committee headed by Director Blue Tone Squash Academy Wazir Gul along with squash coaches Munawar Zaman and Tahir Iqbal Sunday announced Peshawar Region Male and Female Squash team for the forthcoming U23 Inter-Regional Games to be starting from May 28, 2024. Regional Sports Officers Peshawar Kashif Farhan said that the selection committee headed by Wazir Gul along with Munawar Zaman and Tahir Iqbal announced both male and female teams. He said the performance of the players would be better and hopefully would win gold medals in the both male and female events. The men's team consists of Khushal Riaz Khan, Fawad Hussain, Fahad Sharif, Jawad Ali Khan and Mohammad Azhan Khalil while Tahir Iqbal will be the coach. Zaman will be the coach of the female team comprising Hira Aqeel, Umme Abdulsoom, Zohra Abdullah, Manahil Aqeel, Naheed Faiz.

Fakhar Jihan hails talented players in Hazara Region

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, visited Abbottabad and participated as a chief guest in the final match of the Inter-Departmental Cricket Tournament organised by the Sports Department in the region. During his visit, he distributed prizes among the winning and runner-up teams and praised their performance in the event. On this occasion, he also watched the final match between the Police and Anti-Corruption Department teams and distributed trophies among the final teams. In the tournament, including the administration department, a total of 32 teams from various line departments participated, wherein the teams of Police and Anti-Corruption Departments reached the final match. During the final match ceremony, Syed Fakhar Jihan expressed his commitment to promoting sports in the province and providing facilities and infrastructure to support the players of every sport. He said that more sports competitions and events will be held in the Hazara region and that shooting competitions will also be organised for various departments including police.



TAUNTON: The second women's ODI at Taunton was abandoned after heavy rain.

Nadal bidding to avoid early French Open exit

PARIS (AFP): Rafael Nadal admits he will be facing "one of the toughest opponents possible" when he plays Alexander Zverev in the French Open first round on Monday. This year's event was expected to be the 14-time champion's farewell to Roland Garros, but he has since insisted he could not confirm "100 percent" it would be his last appearance. Nadal has only played four tournaments since January 2023 after suffering a hip injury and then a muscle tear. That left him unseeded for the draw and vulnerable to a difficult opening round at a tournament where he has only lost three of his 115 matches. World number four Zverev arrives in Paris as one of the favourites for the title after winning the Rome Open earlier this month. "Of course on paper it is not the best draw," Nadal said ahead of the match on Court Philippe Chatrier. "I play against one of the toughest opponents possible, and at the same time, he came here winning the last event and it's a Masters 1000.

"It's not a small one. So what can I do? That's the draw. Just try to be ready for it," Nadal, who turns 38 in a week's time, has shown flashes of his best form in the clay-court swing, but was thrashed 6-1, 6-3 by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the second round of his last outing in Rome. He boasts a 7-3 winning record over Zverev ahead of their first meeting since the 2022 French Open semi-finals, when the German left the court in a wheelchair near the end of the second set after injuring his ankle. "I am not anxious. No, I am focused on trying to play well. That's it," said Nadal. "Maybe I go there and I repeat the disaster of Rome. It's a possibility, of course. I don't want to hide that. "But in my mind, is do something different and play much better and give myself a chance to play competitive." "Didn't want' to play Nadal Zverev did not play again in 2022 after that ankle injury but has climbed the rankings again in recent months. The 27-year-old has long been touted as a future

Grand Slam champion but remains without one of tennis' four biggest titles. Clay is his strongest surface, though, and he has reached the semi-finals in each of the last three years at Roland Garros. The men's draw looks far more open than usual, with doubts surrounding Nadal's fitness and Novak Djokovic having endured a turbulent start to the year. "I can guarantee you Novak didn't want to play Rafa in the first round and (Carlos) Alcaraz didn't want to play, Jannik (Sinner) didn't want to play him," admitted Zverev. "I don't want to play him in the first round, but it is how it is. He has been out injured. He hasn't played a lot of tennis. His ranking is where it is. Of course it's not ideal, but at the same time, you know, there is nothing you can do. "Everybody now is excited for a tough battle and tough first round. I think he's excited and I'm excited for it." French Open organisers were prepared to stage a tribute ceremony to Nadal to honour his career but the Spaniard was reluctant to endorse such a celebration.

Southampton beat Leeds to return to Premier League

LONDON (AFP): Southampton clinched promotion back to the Premier League after a one-year exile as Adam Armstrong sealed a 1-0 win against Leeds in the Championship play-off final on Sunday. Armstrong's first-half strike at Wembley ensured Southampton erased the bitter taste of last year's relegation from the top-flight with an immediate return. Victory in football's single richest match will give Southampton an estimated £140 million (\$178 million) windfall due to the increases in matchday, broadcast and commercial revenue for clubs who reach the Premier League. Financial experts Deloitte say Southampton could eventually bank £305 million if they avoid relegation next season. While the cash prize is a huge bonus, it is the prestige of competing with Manchester City and Arsenal, rather than second-tier minnows like Plymouth and Oxford, that fuelled Southampton's hunger to regain their Premier League status after a year in purgatory. Southampton, whose only major honour is the 1976 FA Cup, had spent 11 years in the Premier League prior to their relegation. They will hope this success, celebrated by over 35,000 of their fans at Wembley, is the prelude to another lengthy spell among the elite. In their first ever play-off final, Southampton made it three wins over Leeds this term despite finishing three points behind the Elland Road club in the regular season. Saints boss Russell Martin has become widely admired for his purist passing principles and this was the 38-year-old's crowning glory. Martin was managing in League One with Milton Keynes Dons just three years ago, but he has trans-

formed Southampton in his first season in charge, to such an extent that they boasted more possession than any team in Europe's top five leagues this season. "I'm so pleased for the board because I was not an exciting appointment for them. I finished 10th at Swansea, but we had a really clear way of doing things at MK (Dons) and here, so for them to take me on was really brave," Martin said. "We had to do this to justify their decision. I feel really emotional about it. "The team have been so brave. I'm really grateful and proud of them. They deserve it." Securing promotion at Leeds boss Daniel Farke's expense was a sweet moment for Martin after his Norwich contract was terminated by the German during their time together at Carrow Road in 2018. Defeat was a bitter blow for Farke and Leeds, who were relegated alongside Southampton last season.

Established in 2015, the academy started functioning at Allama Iqbal Town at a small grassy ground before it was properly launched in September 2021 at National Hockey Stadium. Currently, there are around 300 boys and 60 girls, aged 3 to 18 years, who are being imparted free training, kits and other accessories. "The players at the academy undergo comprehensive training, designed to hone their skills and elevate their game to next level," remarked Junaid Chattha. "We've also extended our operation to Islamabad where around 60 budding players are being trained at Naseer Bunda Hockey Stadium and soon we are going to launch our academy's branch at Government Viqar-un-Nisa Post Graduate College for Women, Rawalpindi." Chattha informed that cost of one kid's training, travelling and equipment is around Rs 12,000 a month and presently friends and relatives of Khawaja Junaid are

Stellar Starc fires Kolkata to third IPL title

CHENNAI (AFP): Mitchell Starc bowled a sensational opening spell to fire Kolkata Knight Riders to their third Indian Premier League title with a eight-wicket thrashing of Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Sunday final. Kolkata bowled out Hyderabad for IPL's lowest total of 113 in a final as Australia's left-arm quick Starc returned figures of 2-14 to live up to his top billing in the world's most lucrative T20 tournament. Starc went to Kolkata for a record \$2.98 million in the December auction and ended the IPL with two stellar performances, including a match-winning 3-34 in the first play-off to hammer the same opponent. Kolkata's batsmen had it easy and despite Sunil Narine's early departure, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who made 39, and Venkatesh Iyer, on 52 not out, helped the team home with 9.3 overs to spare after a partnership of 91. Iyer, a left-handed batsman, reached his 50 in 24 balls and hit the winning runs to trigger celebrations for Kolkata, who remained the most dominant team after they ended top of the table with 20 points in the league phase. Skipper Shreyas Iyer was unbeaten on six, and at the other end, when Kolkata players came rushing on to the pitch. It was Kolkata's second title triumph at the venue, after they won their first trophy in 2012, and a near-capacity crowd at the 36,000-seater stadium cheered on. Apart from the big signing of Starc, they got Gautam Gambhir as mentor after the former India batsman led the team to two titles, including the 2014 triumph. Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins won the toss and elected to bat first and go with his team's strength of scoring big, after they racked up IPL record totals of 277 and 287 in this year's edition. Hyderabad took Cummins for \$2.5 million in the same auction and made him captain after he led Australia to two titles, including the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup last year. But Starc took the lime-light as he struck in his first over when he bowled in-form Indian batsman Abhishek Sharma, for two, on a delivery that pitched in the middle and caught the top of off stump.

Australian team lands Islamabad ahead of volleyball series against Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Australian volleyball squad arrived in Islamabad on Sunday ahead of a three-match volleyball series against Pakistan. The Aussies would be in action for the first time in the history of Pakistan organised by Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) on the request of Australian Volleyball Federation. The visiting team received a warm welcome on the arrival at Islamabad International Airport by the officials of Pakistan Volleyball Federation, Australia will take part in the practice session on May 27 (Monday) followed by the

pre-event press conference at 5pm here at a local hotel. Nehemiah Mote was leading Australian squad while other players include Luke Perry, Arshdeep Dosanjh, Jackson Holland, Trent O'dea, Matthew Aubrey, Max Senica, Beau Graham, Thomas Heptinstall, Sam Flowerday, Nicholas Butler, Ethan Garrett, William D'arcy Miles, Jacob Baird members of the playing squad while Daniel Iloit will act as head coach, James Begley, Alec Walker, Brendan Garlick will be coaches with team. The first match of the three-match series would

be held on May 28 here at Liaquat Gymnasium, Pakistan Sports Complex, Islamabad, while the second match on May 29 and third on May 30. "All matches will be started from 6:30 PM and entry of the fans and supporters are free", said Chaudhry Muhammad Yaqoob, Chairman Pakistan Volleyball Federation, adding that Australia have some very good players in squad and fans must come to cheer the green shirts as they shown the excellent performance to won the Central Asian Volleyball League which was held recently.

Ramiz labels Saim Ayub 'undercooked' as opener

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan captain Ramiz Raja has slammed opening batter Saim Ayub for his inconsistent performance and labelled him 'undercooked' after the Green Shirts' loss against England in the second T20I. Saim Ayub continued his poor run, falling for only two runs while chasing 184. He has scored 286 runs in 19 T20I innings so far at a strike-rate of 127.67. Speaking on his YouTube channel, Ramiz Raja questioned Ayub's place as an opener and urged Pakistan to revert to the opening pair of Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan. "First, Saim Ayub coming as an opener. I don't think

Pakistan should continue with Saim. He has been given too many chances and you have to do better in [international] cricket. He is undercooked," said Raja. "You need to revert to the opening pair of Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam because that is Pakistan's strength and they understand each other's game. The entire combination has been disturbed due to Saim." The former chairman also advised pace bowler Shaheen Afridi to develop more variations to put more pressure on the batters irrespective of the conditions. "Second, Shaheen Shah Afridi's bowling. Look, if the ball isn't swinging and he bowls at full length, then he gets bashed," he added.

"He needs to develop length ball and change of pace especially when he is not getting much from the pitch. Even today, he didn't bowl perfectly with the new ball and [England] escaped pressure." Ramiz Raja also raised concerns over Azam Khan's batting against pace bowlers, stating that he needs to improve otherwise teams will exploit this weakness and will further trouble him. "And then, Azam Khan's batting against pace is problematic. With the team, as big teams will analyse him, they will use short balls against him, and they will make him come out of his comfort zone. His strike rate against spin is very good but not against pace," he stated.

Leclerc wins home Monaco GP after heavy Perez crash

MONTE CARLO (Agencies): Ferrari's Charles Leclerc held his nerve to convert pole position at his home Monaco Grand Prix into a controlled victory after a huge first-lap pile-up. A collision between the two Haas cars and Red Bull's Sergio Perez caused a red flag and led to a race of extreme tyre management by the leaders. Leclerc controlled McLaren's Oscar Piastri, team-mate Carlos Sainz and McLaren's Lando Norris all race - without any of them making a pit stop - to take Ferrari's second win of 2024. The final laps were enlivened by a battle for fifth between Mercedes' George Russell and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, in which the Briton managed to hold out despite having tyres that were more than 50 laps older than Verstappen's. Verstappen had stopped for fresh tyres with 26 laps to go and quickly caught Russell, but despite the huge grip advantage was unable to pass. Lewis Hamilton, who had stopped for fresh tyres a lap before Verstappen, took seventh place - just behind his 2021 title rival. Leclerc's win was a story of redemption for the



26-year-old, who twice before had taken pole position at Monaco only for the win to slip through his fingers. This time, neither team nor driver made a mistake after Leclerc's blistering pace had secured pole, before Ferrari planned a race centred on managing from the front. The top four had started on medium tyres, while Russell, Verstappen and Hamilton behind them were on the hards. But the red flag - which was caused when Kevin Magnussen's front left tyre tagged Perez's right rear, spinning the Red Bull around, the pair also collecting Nico Hulkenberg - turned the race around. Firstly, it allowed Sainz to rejoin the race in his original third-place grid position after a collision with Piastri at the first corner had caused a puncture which led to him going straight on at Casino Square. And it allowed Ferrari

and McLaren to switch their cars to hard tyres while the barriers were repaired, with the expectation that they would run and run and perhaps have to get to the end if there were no more safety cars. That meant taking the tyres about 15 laps further than Pirelli had predicted they would last, but Leclerc and his pursuers were more than capable of making them last by virtue of careful driving and controlling their pace. The teams spent the race looking at gaps to rivals and wondering about pit-stop windows but the remainder of the grand prix passed without major incident and going to the end was what they were forced to do. In the closing laps, Leclerc underlined his domination of the weekend by stretching out his lead and he crossed the line seven seconds ahead of Piastri. Leclerc screamed with delight on the radio after crossing the line, before saying: "I need to cool down, myself as well. Tonight will be a big night." His engineer Bryan Bozzi said the team would stay in Monaco with him to celebrate. "You'd better," Leclerc said. He added after getting out of the car: "No words can explain that. It's such a difficult race.

Igniting flame of hope for hockey's revival in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overly pleased with a hockey stick in one hand and a text book in other, 12-year-old prodigy, Zunair Khan is redefining the spirit of being a student-athlete. Belonging to a humble family background, he had never thought to get a chance to pursue his dual dreams of a professional hockey player and studying at a top-notch institution. But thanks to Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy, he got enrolled in Aitchison College Lahore, also securing a slot in its hockey outfit. Zunair's exceptional talent in hockey was spotted by the coaches of Khawaja Junaid Academy during a talent hunt camp at National Hockey Stadium, where he had come to try his luck for becoming a future sport star. "I had never thought of studying at this institution. But my nurturing at the academy proved that anything is possible with hard work and dedication," remarked Zunair, a class 7th student. Shahid Khan, another promis-

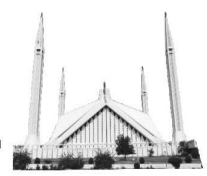
ing player from the same academy, echoed similar sentiments. "Being at this academy has been a life-changing experience for me. It's not just about learning hockey skills; but acquiring overall commitment and dedication for a successful life," he said. Both Zunair and Shahid were picked up by Aitchison College last year from Khawaja Junaid Academy and awarded full tuition fee waiver and a comfortable lodging at college's hostel due to their remarkable talent and commitment to the sport. "The college has a rich legacy of providing highly talented players to Pakistan hockey including legends like Hassan Sardar and Akhtar Rasool. But unfortunately, then there was a gap and it is now after a hiatus of around three decades that it offered scholarships to two rising stars," said Junaid Chattha, a German qualified, FIH level-2 coach, who along with former hockey great Mohibullah trains players at the academy.

Established in 2015, the academy started functioning at Allama Iqbal Town at a small grassy ground before it was properly launched in September 2021 at National Hockey Stadium. Currently, there are around 300 boys and 60 girls, aged 3 to 18 years, who are being imparted free training, kits and other accessories. "The players at the academy undergo comprehensive training, designed to hone their skills and elevate their game to next level," remarked Junaid Chattha. "We've also extended our operation to Islamabad where around 60 budding players are being trained at Naseer Bunda Hockey Stadium and soon we are going to launch our academy's branch at Government Viqar-un-Nisa Post Graduate College for Women, Rawalpindi." Chattha informed that cost of one kid's training, travelling and equipment is around Rs 12,000 a month and presently friends and relatives of Khawaja Junaid are

sponsoring the academy while coaches and other staff work as volunteers. Pakistan hockey was once a formidable side, claiming three Olympic gold medals in 1960, 1968 and 1984, three silver medals in 1956, 1964 and 1972 and two bronze medals in 1976 and 1992. It also won four World Cup titles in 1971, 1978, 1982 and 1994 and finished runners-up twice in 1975 and 1990. Pakistan's hockey players of that era were adored as national heroes, with legends like Abdul Hafeez Kardar, Hassan Sardar, Kaleemullah, Samiullah, Shahnaz Sheikh and Shahbaz Ahmed inspiring the young generations. The team was also a dominating force at Asian Games winning six gold medals as its good old days were marked by thrilling matches, memorable victories and a sense of national pride. But later it suffered three decades long decline and a team once known to be an unbeaten

side, even failed to qualify for Summer Olympics thrice consecutively in 2016, 2020 and 2024. It also failed to make a cut to coveted World Cup in 2014 and 2023 while in 2010 and 2018 it ended 12th. Number of factors contributed to its downfall from a dominant side to a back bench, prominently the lack of investment and funding with Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) time and again complaining about financial constraints. Neglecting schools and clubs as nurseries for young talent led to a dwindling player base as hockey also struggled to keep pace with evolving tactics, strategies and technologies in the sport. Limited participation in top-level international tournaments and lack of exposure to world-class competitions was another reason of downfall. But, once again things start changing with keen interest of the present government to revive national game. Recent perform-

ance of national team at Azlan Shah Cup where it ended as runners-up was highly appreciated and the government announced handsome prize money for players for exhibiting valiant show in the tournament. As promising athletes like Zunair and Shahid embark on a new journey, their stories are a testament to transformative impact of Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy in nurturing talent and shaping the future of hockey in Pakistan. "Every drop of sweat is a step closer to glory," believes Khawaja. "Our efforts are for unfolding new chapters in Pakistan's hockey - fuelled by passion and dedication of young players." Therefore, people like Khawaja Junaid must be encouraged for shaping tomorrow's champions as with each flick of stick and every thundering goal, these aspiring players are poised to honing their skills and forging a path towards a brighter future for national sport.



In brief

Nai Gaj dam completion

ISLAMABAD (APP): A multi-purpose Nai Gaj dam being constructed by the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) in the Dadu district of Sindh is likely to be completed by the end of this year. Sources told the agency that the project mainly aimed at storing water for irrigation and mitigating floods in the surrounding areas. However, it would also generate low-cost 4.2 megawatts of clean and green energy for the locals, they said. The dam's gross water storage of 300,000 acre feet would help irrigate 28,800 acres of land.

329,200 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 329,200 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 366,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1467.99 feet and was 69.99 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 137,000 cusecs and 140,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1181.90 feet, which was 131.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 74,100 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 210,600, 122,600, 105,100 and 26,700 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 99,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 32,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Complete ban on plastic bags

RAWALPINDI (APP): The administration on the directives of the Punjab government, would enforce a complete ban on plastic bags from June 5. According to a Commissioner Office spokesman, C o m m i s s i o n e r Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak, all-out efforts should be made to provide relief to the citizens through price control, anti-encroachment operations, and other measures. "The first priority of the administration is to promote economic activities by providing a favorable environment to the business community," he said. The Commissioner had also directed the Assistant Commissioners to visit all the markets and inform the people about the ban on the use of plastic bags. All possible efforts would be made to spread awareness about the ban. He said, "The price magistrates are active in the field to check the availability of the essential commodities at fixed rates." To pass on the benefit of the reduction in the price of wheat to the people, the price of 'Roti' had been fixed at Rs 15 across the division, he said. "About 168 price magistrates are working across the division to check profiteering and enforce the price of 'Roti'," he informed.

Police arrest nine drug dealers

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a major crackdown on Sunday, police arrested nine involved in drug dealing and liquor supplying, recovering significant quantities of drugs and liquor from their possession. According to a police spokesman, the Taxila police arrested Arslan, seizing 1.8 kg of drugs and Saeed, from whom they recovered 4 liters of liquor. Similarly, the Gujjar Khan police apprehended Mati Ullah and found 1.6 kg of drugs in his possession. The Waris Khan police recovered 140 grams of ice (crystal meth) from Rahim and 15 liters of liquor from Yasir.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation led by Ms. Mio Sato, Chief of Mission, UN - IOM, called on Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Engr. Amir Muqam at the Ministry of SAFRON. —APP Photo

Salik condemns blasphemy allegation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Sunday expressed regret over the recent unrest in Sargodha following an alleged blasphemy incident.

In a statement, he condemned the allegations and the subsequent disorder, underscoring the importance of adhering to the rule of law and maintaining peace.

"The reaction of Punjab Police and other law enforcement agencies in promptly addressing the situation is commendable,"

Salik said emphasizing that reacting impulsively to rumours is contrary to the teachings of religion, which advocate for patience and due process.

He reminded the citizens that Pakistan has established legal procedures to handle accusations of blasphemy and acts of hatred. He issued a stern warning against taking the law into one's own hands, noting that such actions will be met with legal consequences.

Reiterating the state's commitment to safeguarding all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, he

highlighted that the Constitution of Pakistan and the principles set by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah serve as guiding lights for the nation.

The minister also acknowledged the significant contributions of religious leaders in fostering societal harmony and called for unity to counteract any attempts to incite hatred or religious intolerance. He urged citizens to be vigilant against efforts to defame Pakistan through social media, advocating for a collective effort to maintain national peace and cohesion.

ANF recovers 324 kg drugs in nine operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting nine operations across the country managed to recover 324 kg drugs and arrested 15 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman.

He informed that 27 kg ice was recovered from a parcel sent to Japan at a courier office in Karachi while an accused was arrested. 900 grams ice was recovered from a passenger going to Bahrain at Islamabad Airport.

In two separate operations in Balochistan, 138.8 kg hashish, 14 kg opium and 10 kg ice were recovered from the possession of two suspects. 4.8 kg opium and 91.2 kg hashish were recovered from six suspects including five women netted in two operations near No. 26 Chungi Islamabad.

18 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects arrested in Orangi Karachi area while 16.8 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects held near Ghorri Town Road Islamabad. 2.4 kg hashish was recovered from an accused rounded up in Sohrab Goth Karachi.

Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and investigations are under process.

Admin sets up heat stroke camps

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district administration on the orders of the Punjab government has set up heat stroke camps and educating citizens on preventive measures.

According to a district administration spokesman, the administration had launched heat wave combat initiative and spreading awareness on heatstroke. Rawalpindi district administration was taking all possible steps to protect the citizens from heat stroke, he added. On the direction of Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, Hasan Waqar Cheema, the administration had arranged covered places and water coolers for the public on Murree Road, other main roads and bus stands.

Awareness was also being provided to the public regarding preventive measures to prevent heat wave, the spokesman said. In response to the recent surge in temperatures, the DC had issued directives to authorities concerned to take immediate actions. The heat wave was increasing due to the intensity of hot weather from last few days, he added. The spokesman urged the citizens not to go out of their homes unnecessarily and keep themselves covered.

Water should be used more to avoid the effects of heat wave. The citizens could protect themselves from the effects of heat wave by taking precautionary measures, he added. The authorities concerned had been directed to ensure preparedness for anticipated heat wave, Hassan Waqar Cheema had directed the authorities concerned to take all possible steps to ensure preparedness and safety in light of the anticipated heat wave in Rawalpindi district.

Muqam lauds IOM services for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan, Engr. Amir Muqam Sunday said that Pakistan continued to bear the world's largest refugee burden for the past 40 years and also urged the international community to acknowledge our efforts in that regard.

Talking to a delegation led by Chief of Mission for the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Pakistan, Ms. Mio Sato, the federal minister commended the International Organization for

Migration (IOM) for its services to Afghan citizen card holders and the host community.

Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees Mohammad Abbas Khan, Joint Secretary of SAFRON and other senior officials were also present on the occasion.

The federal minister expressed the desire for Afghan refugees to return their country with dignity, noting that there had been no incidents of forced expulsion or harassment. He emphasized the need for screening to determine their locations and activities.

He said that Pakistan

was aware of the business activities, education, and relationships of Afghan refugees within the country. He highlighted that many Afghans were involved in businesses that are beneficial to both Pakistan and its citizens.

"I will travel to Geneva in June at the invitation of the High Commissioner of UNHCR, and also planned to meet with the DG of IOM," he added.

Chief of Mission MIO Sato expressed gratitude to the minister for meeting despite the holiday and stated her intention to maintain close contact with the Ministry.

Another Congo virus patient dies in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (PPI) An 18-year-old boy who was diagnosed with Congo virus died in Peshawar, according National Health Institute sources.

According to sources, the patient, was admitted to Khyber Teaching Hospital on May 17 and tested positive for Congo virus on May 18. Sources said that the patient had been experiencing symptoms such as high fever, body aches, and vomiting, and had recently traveled to Punjab to purchase animals.

Contact tracing has been initiated, and the patient's family, hospital staff, and close contacts are being monitored, sources said.

No other cases of Congo virus have been confirmed among the patient's con-

tacts, including hospital staff and family members.

Yesterday, the Congo virus claimed the lives of two individuals in Attock district. In response to the medical emergency, the authorities have imposed Section 144 to curb the spread of the virus.

Deputy Commissioner Rao Atif Raza announced a ban on setting up cattle markets across the district.

Additionally, there is a complete ban on the inter-provincial and inter-district transfer of animals to prevent further transmission of the virus.

The Section 144 ban will remain in effect until May 30, as confirmed by Deputy Commissioner Raza.

It is pertinent to men-

tion here that the National Institute of Health (NIH) issued advisories for the prevention and control of CCHF.

In the wake of high disease transmission and risk due to anticipated increased human-animals' interaction during upcoming Eid-ul-Azha, it is imperative to be vigilant about the situation and take steps to interrupt the transmission of CCHF.

It explained that CCHF is caused by tick-borne Nairovirus. Animals such as cattle, goats, sheep and hares are carriers of this virus, which is transmitted to people by tick bites or through contact with infected blood or tissues during and immediately after slaughter.

Teachers protest against attending school

RAWALPINDI (APP): Teachers from Federal Government Educational Institutions (FGEI) on Sunday staged a protest against the directives to attend school daily during the summer vacations.

Among the protesting teachers were Arifa Batool, Shahbana Raza, Momina, Mubashira Nawaz, Shazia Begum, Rafia Shahid, Ghazala Majeed, and Hina Shah Nawaz. They expressed their concerns

to the Director General of FGEIs and urged him to review the order.

The teachers emphasized the difficulties of commuting long distances to school every day in the intense summer heat. They queried the logic of their presence at school when students were on holidays.

The teachers pointed out that the initial announcement of the holidays was made on May 24th. However, the subsequent directive to attend

school daily has caused confusion and problems for the teachers. Despite the official summer holiday that will commence from June 1st to July 31st, teachers are still being required to report to school, leading to significant inconvenience.

The teachers expressed hope that the authorities would review the decision as it was not possible for teachers to manage their duties amid scorching heatwave.

1634 cases registered against electricity thieves

RAWALPINDI (APP): 1634 cases were registered against electricity thieves in Rawalpindi division during special campaign launched on Sept 7, 2023.

According to a Commissioner Office spokesman, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak had directed the authorities concerned to take indiscriminate action against electricity thieves.

She informed that the Commissioner had also instructed the officers to accelerate the ongoing operation against power theft. The officers during a briefing informed the Commissioner about the measures taken across the

division regarding anti-electricity theft. 1344 accused were arrested and recoveries amounting to Rs 106.68 million were made during the campaign.

The Commissioner said that the people face load-shedding and overcharging due to those involved in power theft. Electricity thieves do not deserve any concession.

All the officers in collaboration with IESCO staff should speed up action against electricity thieves and defaulters, Engineer Aamir Khattak directed the authorities concerned.

During the briefing he also ordered that all-out efforts should be made to ensure 100 percent recoveries in all districts and action

should be taken on priority basis against big power thieves and defaulters.

The electricity connections of those involved in electricity theft should be disconnected immediately, the Commissioner issued directives and ordered that all available resources should be utilized to prevent power theft besides compiling a record of FIRs against electricity thieves.

All big and small industries and ice factories across the division should be specially checked.

Special attention should be given to commercial settlements as there is a high risk of power theft, Engineer Aamir Khattak said.

Citizens urged not to invest in illegal societies

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has urged the citizens not to invest in illegal housing societies and visit RDA website www.rda.gop.pk to check status of the housing societies.

According to a RDA spokesman, the authority had geared up its ongoing operation against illegal housing schemes. RDA on the directives of the Divisional Intelligence Committee had also launched operation against rules violators, he said.

The spokesman informed that the Task Force constituted to take

strict action against illegal housing schemes conducted operations against four illegal housing schemes, Capital Valley, New Airport Town, Banni Mehboba, and Gulshan-e-Bahar, located in Mouzas Katrian, Thalian, and Pilo, Rawalpindi. The enforcement squad sealed the site offices and demolished the main gates, boundary walls, billboards and other infrastructure of the illegal schemes.

The spokesman informed that the enforcement teams also demolished illegal construction on Plot No. 522, Phase-II, Gulraiz Housing Scheme. Earlier, notices were issued

to the plot owners, Ilyas and Muhammad Jamal, he informed.

The operation on the directives of the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Muhammad Abdul Aamer Khattak was launched under the supervision of the Director General (DG) RDA, the Additional DG RDA, the Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, and City Police Officer Rawalpindi.

He informed that the crackdown against illegal housing societies on the instructions of the DG RDA Kinza Murtaza would continue without any discrimination.

Railway Police reunites 37 children with parents

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Railway Police have reported reuniting 37 children, both boys and girls, with their parents after finding them wandering at various railway stations or travelling on trains across the country over the past two weeks.

The Rawalpindi division reunited nine children, while the Lahore and Peshawar divisions each reunited six children, official sources in the Railway Police told APP.

They said the Multan and Sukkur divisions found three children, while the Karachi and Quetta divisions reunited seven and three children, respectively. Additionally, the police returned lost luggage and

goods to 60 passengers.

To a question, they said the department collected Rs 74.8 million from ticketless passengers during a four-month crackdown, assisted by railway police and train staff.

Approximately 58,446 passengers were caught travelling without tickets, and the collected fines were deposited in the department's official bank account, they added.

They emphasised that crackdowns on ticketless travel are a daily occurrence, and violators are charged for the full journey plus a penalty. Those unable to pay are handed over to the railway police.

Over the past year, they said the Pakistan Railway

Police arrested 3,923 individuals for various rule and law violations, registering 3,625 cases across the eight railway divisions.

They said the case distribution includes 658 in Peshawar, 577 in Rawalpindi, 1,044 in Lahore, 326 in Mughalpur workshops, 393 in Multan, 208 in Sukkur, 346 in Karachi, and 73 in Quetta.

The sources said that help desks have been established at all major railway stations to support passengers. Despite limited resources, the performance of the railway police has been satisfactory, with expectations for further improvement in the coming year.

CDA chief orders swift completion of IT work

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, directed that all the IT work, including the video conference room for 93 Civil Courts, should be completed at earliest.

An official source told APP, Muhammad Ali also instructed that the IT work and other repairs be commenced promptly.

The CDA chief said that third-party validation of the

93 civil courts should be carried out by NESPAK while the payments should be made after the satisfaction of the judges.

The official briefed that the construction expenses of the 93 Civil Courts were borne by the CDA and courts have been operational for the past one and a half years.

The 93 Civil Courts were made operational only after the completion of the civil work, he said adding that

the courts were constructed at a cost of Rs 2 billion.

Chairman CDA also visited the Litigant Facilitation Center in G-10/I and directed the concerned officials that the construction work of the centre should be resumed without delay.

"There will be zero tolerance for any shortcomings in the quality and speed of the work, while all the projects should be completed as soon as it possible," he added.

No collection of hides without permission

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district administration has imposed a ban on collection of hides of sacrificial animals without permission.

According to a district administration spokesman, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Hasan Waqar Cheema had issued an official notification in this regard.

Permission would be required for the collection of hides of sacrificial animals and applications for the collection of sacrificial animal hides could be submitted until June 8. No applications would be

accepted after June 8 and legal action would be taken against those collecting skins without permission.

The spokesman said that the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak had also directed the authorities concerned to impose Section 144 on illegal sale points and the collection of sacrificial animals hides without an NOC. On the directives of the Commissioner, all cattle markets would be set up at approved sale points on the occasion of Eidul Azha, he said adding, the Commissioner had also

emphasised the need to set up a control room in the commissioner's office to monitor sanitation arrangements.

Special measures would be taken to prevent Congo virus and other diseases by considering the movement of animals before Eid. The Department of Livestock would ensure vaccination at entry and exit points, he informed. Biodegradable bags for the entrails of the sacrificial animals would also be distributed to the public. Special cleanliness arrangements would also be finalized for Eid ul Azha, he added.

2 killed, 37 hurt in bus crash

KABUL (Ariana News): Two people, including a woman, were killed and 37 others were injured when a bus rolled over on Kabul-Kandahar highway in Zabul province on late Saturday night, officials said. Mirwais Afghan, director of public health in Zabul, said that the incident happened in Karizgi area in Shahf-e-Safa district. The injured include 26 men and 11 women who were taken to the hospital in the district for treatment.

Work on last section kicks off

HERAT (Ariana News): The construction work of the second phase of the fourth section of the Khaf-Herat railway project, connecting Afghanistan with Iran, has been inaugurated. The segment is 47-kilometer long, stretching from Rabat Parian to Herat International Airport and the Industrial Town. It will be constructed at the cost of \$53 million and within approximately two years. Its contract had been signed between Afghanistan Railway Authority and Gamma Group in late March.

Iranian Envoy advocates for political inclusivity

KABUL (TOLONews): The ambassador and special representative of Iran to Afghanistan, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, stated that the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan is the key to political stability and would be the beginning of reconstruction in the country. The Special Representative for Afghanistan emphasized that Afghanistan belongs to all its people, and a government consisting of individuals from various ethnicities should be established. Speaking at a gathering of Afghan citizens residing in Qom, Iran, he said: "We

have clearly stated that Afghanistan is for all Afghans. If we want to avoid returning to the conditions of Bonn, we must focus on this issue." The Iranian Ambassador in Kabul also mentioned that while Iran interacts with the Islamic Emirate, it also offers its advice to the interim government officials of Afghanistan. In his speech, Hassan Kazemi Qomi accused the United States of continuing its interventionist and destabilizing policies in Afghanistan, describing Daesh as an American project. He stated, "Today, Americans

are causing more trouble in Afghanistan than before." According to Kazemi Qomi, the people of America's interventionist policies in the region. Several political experts believe that while neighboring countries and the international community consistently call for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, they do not provide any concrete examples for its establishment. Janat Faheem Chakari said, "All neighboring countries and the world agree on the need for an

inclusive government in Afghanistan, but they do not offer any examples. The Islamic Emirate continues to emphasize its previous statements; however, it would be better if the government formed in Afghanistan were inclusive." So far, the Islamic Emirate has not responded to these statements. Previously, several countries have consistently emphasized the need for an inclusive government in Afghanistan; however, the Islamic Emirate has asked these countries not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

Floods victims complain of hardships

GHOR (Khaama Press): A number of residents in Ghor province say that the recent floods have severely affected them, and they now need assistance seriously. Mohibullah, a 50-year-old man whose home and belongings were washed away by the devastating floods of recent days, now lives with his wife and five young children in a blue tent provided by a charity organization. This man, from the village of "Dara-e-Sheikhs" in the Ferozkoh city center of Ghor province, says, "The flood destroyed our house and took all our belongings. Now we live in this tent without facilities, facing many difficulties."

He also mentions that the floods destroyed all water sources in the area, forcing people to use unhealthy and muddy water, which has led to an increase in diseases, especially among children and women. Gulpari, another resident of "Dara-e-Sheikhs" village, shares her experience of the devastating floods and her living conditions, saying, "The flood took everything we had; our living conditions are very bad. We urgently need food, water, and household items." She adds that the cold nights and the use of unhealthy water have made her children sick, and she cannot afford their treatment. These residents of Ghor province describe the recent devastating floods as unprecedented and call on officials and national and international aid organizations to take serious action to help the flood victims in Ghor. Meanwhile, Amanullah, a resident of "Dahan-e-Dara-e-Sheikhs" in Ferozkoh city, says, "I am 57 years old, and neither I nor my ancestors remember such a flood in this area. The situation of the people is very difficult, and we hope the de facto administration and organizations will help."

Not only the flood victims of the "Dara-e-Sheikhs" area are complaining about their living conditions. Reports from Murghab, Chaharsada, Shahrak districts, and some villages of Ferozkoh city center in Ghor province also speak of the dire situation of the flood victims. On the other hand, local officials in Ghor report the ongoing relief efforts for the flood victims. Recently, the Red Crescent Society in this province distributed food and non-food items to 150 families affected by the recent floods. As a result of the devastating floods in recent days in the center and some districts of Ghor province, several people, including women and children, have lost their lives, and irreparable damage has been inflicted on the people.

10 members of a family die due to flood

BADAKHSHAN (Ariana News): Ten members of a family have died due to the flood in Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan province, officials said on Sunday. Mohammad Kamgar, head of disasters of provincial disaster management authority, said that the incident happened last night in Murchak area of provincial capital Faizabad, and women and children are among the dead. He added that rescue teams are busy finding bodies and casualties are likely to rise. It comes a day after floods damaged agricultural lands, water canals and roads in Shuhada and Warduj districts of Badakhshan province.

1,500 Afghan refugees deported

KABUL (Ariana News): The Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) announced the deportation of over one thousand Afghan migrants from Pakistan. The ministry stated in a statement that a total of 1,479 Afghan migrants have returned to the country after being expelled by Pakistan. These refugees re-entered the country through the Spin Boldak border and the Torkham border in Nangarhar province. Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently stated that support for women and girls remains a primary concern among returnees, as they face multiple dangers.

Central Bank team visits Malaysia



KABUL (TOLONews): A delegation from Afghanistan's Central Bank departed for Malaysia to participate in the Global Forum of Islamic Economics and Finance. Haseebullah Noori, the spokesperson for the Central Bank, said that representatives from central banks and financial institutions from various countries will attend the forum to discuss the development of Islamic banking, the strengthening of small and medium-sized enterprises, and the expansion of financial markets. The Central Bank spokesperson said: "A delegation from the Central Bank traveled to Malaysia to attend the Global Forum of Islamic Economics and Finance. Representatives from various countries' central banks, Islamic banks, and financial institutions will also participate in this forum."

According to Haseebullah Noori, the delegation is also scheduled to meet with some Malaysian officials to establish bilateral relations. Several economic experts believe that standardizing the banking system and developing Islamic banking is beneficial for the country in the current situation. Shaker Yaqoubi, an economist, said: "The more our banking system in Afghanistan meets global standards, the better we can align with the global economy. Regulated trade and investment will take shape, and given that Afghanistan is an Islamic country, Islamic banking is a crucial need." The Chamber of Commerce and Investment stated that the challenges related to money transfers through banks should also be addressed during these meetings. Mohammad Younis

Momand, First Deputy of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said: "We hope the global community and the Central Bank's proposals will address Afghanistan's banking issues so that the problems we face with money transfers can be resolved." Abdul Nasir Rashtia, an economist, added: "The more we normalize our relations with the world and lift sanctions and restrictions, the better we can expand our international trade and provide more facilities for traders." Previously, the acting governor of the Central Bank, in a meeting with the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, emphasized that the sanctions imposed on Afghanistan's banking sector by international countries have negatively impacted the country's financial stability and should be lifted.

IEA seeks broad-based engagement with world



KABUL (Ariana News): Minister of Industry and Commerce Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the political deputy prime minister, said that the visit of high-ranking officials of the Islamic Emirate to countries shows that the Islamic Emirate wants to engage with the world, including neighboring and regional countries, based on political, economic and cultural relations. He made the remarks in a meeting with Acting

Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi, who recently traveled to Russia's Tatarstan to participate in an international economic meeting. Azizi said his trip to Russia was full of achievements in the areas of exports and trade, adding that Russian companies and institutions expressed interest in investing in Afghanistan. He added that he repre-

sented the Islamic Emirate well during the visit and assured the participants of the "Russia-Islamic World: KazanForum 2024" that there is a good opportunity for investment in Afghanistan. The 15th edition of Kazan Forum was held in Tatarstan with the participation of representatives of 80 nations to discuss economic and social relations.

Govt retirees: Budget approved but pensions not paid



KABUL (TOLONews): Following the ratification of the 1403 fiscal year budget, several retirees once again called on the interim government to pay their retirement pensions. They claim that they have not received their retirement pensions for

nearly three years, and their economic challenges are increasing daily. Sayedullah, who dedicated 36 years of his life to serving the country, states that despite promises and commitments, he has not seen any practical steps taken to pay his pension.

Sayedullah told TOLONews: "Look at my documents; it is written that their collected money should be returned according to the law. This is the decree of the leader of the Islamic Emirate. Just look." Retiree Mohammad Issa said: "There are more than

170,000 retirees. If you consider their families, it amounts to millions of people currently living in misery." Another retiree, Sayed Muzaffar, said: "Are we not citizens of Afghanistan? Do they not consider us citizens to give us our rights?" Although the IEA has not clearly stated anything about paying retirees' salaries, they add that the 1403 fiscal year budget aims to address the needs of all sectors that have a rightful claim to the budget. Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said: "The budget should be handled transparently and allocated to the necessary extent, taking into account the needs of all sectors that require it." On the second day of the current solar month, the 1403 fiscal year budget was ratified by the leader of the Islamic Emirate; however, there is no mention of paying retirees' salaries in this budget.

Iran secures water rights from Afghanistan following talks

KABUL (TOLONews): The ambassador and special representative of Iran to Afghanistan, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, said that over 300 million cubic meters of Tehran's water rights have been secured from Afghanistan this solar year through negotiations and agreements with Afghanistan's interim government. In an interview with an Iranian media outlet, Hassan Kazemi Qomi said that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan ensured Iran's water rights by repairing the Kamal Khan Dam gates and dredging the water transfer route towards Sistan. Kazemi Qomi also mentioned that, given Iran's cooperative and constructive approach and the commitments of Afghanistan's interim government, it is expected that by the end of the current water year, Iran's water rights from the Helmand River will be



fully met. Nematullah Sardarzada, a water management analyst, said: "It is natural that when we have water, it will flow to the neighboring country. The 300 million cubic meters of water that they have received, and hope to continue receiving in the future, depends on climate changes." The Islamic Emirate, emphasizing the fulfillment of Iran's water rights, stated that if rainfall increases, it

will fully provide Iran's water rights. Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesperson for Islamic Emirate, told TOLONews: "Our water reserves have some water, but not enough to compensate for several years of drought. We need time, and once water is managed, Iran's water will also be provided." Matiullah Abid, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy and Water, said: "For years, there has been

drought in Afghanistan, especially last year in the Helmand River basin. Our compatriots did not even have access to drinking water." Some experts believe that the Islamic Emirate should ensure Iran's water rights while considering national interests. Abdulmuheeth Ebrar Rahmani, an economist, said: "If we cannot meet our own water needs, the national economy will suffer. We must provide water according to the accepted standards." The water treaty between Afghanistan and Iran was signed in 1973 between Mohammad Musa Shafiq, the former Prime Minister of Afghanistan, and Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, the former Prime Minister of Iran. According to this agreement, if water is available, Afghanistan must provide 26 cubic meters of water per second to Iran.

Official calls attention to persistent danger of unexploded ordnance

KABUL (TOLONews): Nooruddin Rustamkhil, head of Coordination, Cooperation, and Mine Clearance, stated that since the beginning of 2024, "nearly 50 people have been killed and more than 150 injured" due to landmines and other explosive materials. Rustamkhil told TOLONews that "over 100 incidents" have occurred during this period, with many of the victims being children. The Head of Coordination, Cooperation, and Mine Clearance added, "Since the beginning of 2024, 109 incidents have occurred in Afghanistan, resulting in a total of 209 casualties. Among these, 162 were injured and 48 lost their lives." Eight-year-old Arman,



whose legs and one eye were injured nearly two months ago due to an explosion in the Shekhu village of Deh Sabz district in Kabul. Describing the incident, he said, "I was playing and found a shell which exploded, injuring both my legs, one eye, and my face." Mohammad Arif,

Arman's father, spoke about his son's injury: "We ask the government and demining organizations to clear mine-infested and explosive-laden areas in the country so that mines and explosive materials do not claim more victims." At the same time, some deminers told TOLONews that they are working hard-

er than ever to eliminate landmines and unexploded ordnance in the country. Fazl Manan, a deminer, told TOLONews, "Landmines and explosives left over from wars have harmed many of our compatriots. We are diligently working to destroy mines and unexploded ordnance." The Head of Coordination, Cooperation, and Mine Clearance also reported that since the beginning of this year, over 15 square kilometers of land have been cleared of mines and explosive materials. According to Nooruddin Rustamkhil, the Islamic Emirate is committed to all international conventions regarding mine clearance, and the international community should not politicize this humanitarian issue.

Taliban announce discovery of 40 ancient artifacts

GHOR (Khaama Press): The Taliban's Department of Information and Culture in Ghor announced in a press release that following floods in the province, 40 ancient and historical artifacts were discovered near the Minaret of Jam. According to this press release, the discovered artifacts have been handed over to the local museum in Ghor, which is under Taliban control. The images published of these artifacts show damage, with some pieces broken into fragments. The Taliban's Department of Information and Culture in Ghor shared these images in a press release on their social media account, stating that the historical artifacts were found at the foot of the Minaret of Jam following the floods on Saturday, May 25. Abdul Hai Zaheem, the head of the

Taliban's Department of Information and Culture in Ghor, said that the discovered artifacts are from the "Ghurid period." The Ghurid dynasty, centred in the city of Firuzkuh, existed from 786 to 1215. It started in Ghor and expanded to become a major power in the mid-12th to early 13th centuries. According to Mr. Zaheem, the historical artifacts were transported to the city of Firuzkuh by a team consisting of the head of intelligence and the governor of the Taliban in Ghor. In recent days, images of the flooding around the Minaret of Jam have been published, showing that the water has even reached the minaret's protected area. Some sources reported that the water level had risen up to ten meters around this 64-meter-high minaret. Local people in Ghor say that the recent flood in the province has put the 800-year-old Minaret of Jam at risk of collapse. So far, the local governor under the control of the Taliban has not taken any step to protect the historical monument of the province. This minaret, considered a masterpiece of the Ghurid civilization, was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2002. However, the lack of sufficient attention to its restoration over the past two decades has led to repeated warnings about its potential collapse.



GAZA STRIP: An Israeli police officer stands next to the remains of a rocket after rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas.

Afghan soil was used for attack on Chinese nationals in Besham: Naqvi

LAHORE (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has said that Pakistan attaches high importance to its ties with China whether they are economic, political, diplomatic or security related.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, he said that both countries support each other at different forums and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative was a big example in this regard. He said, "We are confirming it with evidence that during an attack on Chinese engineers in Besham, Afghanistan's territory had been used and it was a matter of great concern for Pakistan."

He said that such threats coming from across the borders make regional security more complex. The interior minister said that it was a planned attack and was operated from Afghanistan. He said Pakistan had raised this issue with Afghanistan's Interim government and stressed them to control terrorists operating from there.

Mohsin Naqvi said that Pakistan had beefed up its security at borders, adding that the government was well aware of the elements behind such incidents, which wanted to harm relations between Pakistan and

China.

Support was being provided to TTP-like terrorists in border areas, he said and added that "we have a number of evidence in this regard".

He said that after occurrence of terrorist attack on Chinese in Besham, the law-enforcement agencies in the country jointly carried out comprehensive investigation of the incident. Some accused of the incident had been arrested, he said. He said that Chinese security was very important and new standard operating procedures (SOPs) had been made in this regard and were being strictly implemented.

Mohsin said all possible measures were being taken to provide the best security to Chinese and Prime Minister's visit to China during next month was also very important. He said that China's cooperation for strengthening Pakistan's economy was crucial. He said that in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the Counter-Terrorism Department was doing great work and they had developed themselves in very short span of time.

Mohsin Naqvi said that the Pakistan government had requested the interim Afghan government to arrest Bakhtiar Shah, Qari Asadullah and Khan Lala and especially TTP

Ameer Noor Wali Mehsud, TTP Malakand Commander Azmatullah Mehsud and other senior leaders of the TTP.

He said that Pakistan wanted good ties with Afghanistan and it was possible when Afghanistan would support Pakistan and not allow its soil to be used against Pakistan.

National Counter-Terrorism Authority Coordinator Muhammad Tahir Rai gave detailed briefing about the investigation done related to Besham (Shangla) terrorist attack on March 26. He said entire incident was planned in Afghanistan and objective was to harm Pakistan and China relations. He said that 11 accused namely Adil Shehbaz, Shafiq Qureshi, Zahid Qureshi, Nazeer Hussain, Faizullah, Fasihullah, Imran Swati, Sakha Ullah, Abdullah, Abdul Rehman and Kamal Khan had been arrested. The arrested accused were in police custody on physical remand. He said that the arrested accused would face trial in local anti terrorism court where challans would be submitted after completing legal formalities. Tahir Rai said that remaining accused belonging to the network including Hazrat Bilal would be arrested soon.

South Korean, Chinese and Japanese leaders discuss thorny topics

SEOUL, South Korea (AP): The Japanese and South Korean leaders raised sensitive topics like Taiwan, North Korea and the South China Sea as well as ways to boost cooperation when they individually met China's premier Sunday on the eve of a fuller trilateral meeting.

It was unclear how serious discussions the three leaders had on those thorny issues, which are not among the official agenda items for Monday's three-way gathering in Seoul, the first of its kind in more than four years.

No major announcement is expected from the meeting, but observers say that just resuming the highest-level talks among the three Northeast Asian neighbors is a good sign and suggests they are intent on improving relations. Their trilateral meeting was supposed to happen annually but it had stalled since the last one in December 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and complex ties among the three countries.

After meeting Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters that he expressed serious concerns about the situations in the South China Sea, Hong Kong and China's north-western Xinjiang region. He said Japan is closely monitoring developments on self-governed Taiwan.

He referred to China's military assertiveness in the South China Sea, clamp-downs of pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong and human rights abuses against minorities in Xinjiang. Last week, China also launched a large mili-

tary exercise around Taiwan to show its anger over the inauguration of the island's new president who refuses to accept its insistence that Taiwan is part of China.

During a separate meeting with Li, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, on his part, asked China, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, to contribute to promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula, while speaking about North Korea's nuclear program and its deepening military ties with Russia, according to Yoon's office.

Yoon's office said Yoon and Kishida in their separate meeting expressed worries about North Korea's nuclear program and agreed to strengthen their cooperation with the United States.

South Korea, Japan and the U.S. have long urged China — North Korea's major ally and economic pipeline — to use its leverage to persuade the North to abandon its nuclear ambitions. But China is suspected of avoiding fully enforcing U.N. sanctions on North Korea and sending clandestine aid shipments to help its impoverished neighbor stay afloat.

The three leaders also discussed how to bolster economic and other cooperation.

Yoon and Li agreed to launch a new South Korean-Chinese dialogue channel involving senior diplomats and defense officials in mid-June.

They also agreed to restart negotiations to expand the free trade agreement and reactivate dor-

mant bodies on personnel exchanges, investments and other issues, according to Yoon's office.

Chinese state media reported Li told Yoon that the two countries should safeguard the stability of their deeply intertwined industrial and supply chains and resist turning economic and trade issues into political and security-related issues.

Kishida said he and Li reaffirmed Japan and China will seek progress on various areas to promote mutually beneficial relations. Kishida and Yoon also said they agreed to further strengthen ties, which have warmed significantly since last year following an earlier setback over issues related to Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

South Korean officials said that a joint statement after Monday's trilateral meeting will cover the leaders' discussion on cooperation in areas like people-to-people exchanges, climate change, trade, health issues, technology and disaster responses.

The three Asian nations are important trading partners and their cooperation is key to promoting regional peace and prosperity.

They together make up about 25% of global gross domestic product. But the three countries have been repeatedly embroiled in bitter disputes over a range of historical and diplomatic issues originating from Japan's wartime atrocities. China's rise and a U.S. push reinforce its Asian alliances have also significantly impacted their three-way ties in recent years.

FO rejects Indian SC order on occupied Kashmir

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Pakistan has rejected a fresh order by the Indian Supreme Court, which upheld its earlier ruling that endorsed the Modi government's unilateral decision to revoke the special status of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir by abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution.

According to Kashmir Media Service, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch at her weekly press briefing in Islamabad said: "We reject the fresh order of the Indian Supreme Court just as we had rejected the earlier order of December 11, 2023. Two verdicts fail to recognise the internationally recognised disputed nature of Jammu and Kashmir... Indian Supreme Court judgments cannot distract the international community's attention from the gross and systemic human rights violation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir."

She said that Kashmiris had an inalienable right to self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

India has no right to make unilateral decisions on the status of disputed territory against the will of parties in the dispute — Kashmiris and Pakistan, she added.

Yemen's Houthis free more than 100 prisoners

SANAA (Reuters): Yemen's Houthi group freed more than 100 detainees in Sanaa on Sunday, calling the move a "unilateral humanitarian initiative" to pardon prisoners and return them to their families.

"Most of them are humanitarian cases, including the sick, the wounded, and the elderly," said Abdul Qader Al-Murtada, head of the Houthi-run prisoner affairs committee, who announced the release and said the detainees had been government soldiers captured at the battlefield.

But Yemen's internationally recognised government said the detainees were not soldiers, but civilians the Houthis had kidnapped from homes, mosques and workplaces.

"Releasing these victims under any name does not absolve (the Houthis) of this crime," Majed Fadail, deputy minister for human rights in Yemen's internationally recognised government wrote in a post on social media platform X.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed on Sunday the unilateral release of 113 "conflict-related" detainees and said in a statement that it assisted the detainees to ensure their release was humane and dignified.

"I feel completely at ease, as if I was born again today. Because we were desperate and thought we would never get out," said Murshed Al Jamaai, a detainee released on Sunday.

Yemen has been mired in conflict since the Houthis ousted the government from the capital Sanaa in late 2014. The Saudi Arabia-led military coalition intervened in 2015, aiming to restore the government.

PORT MORESBY (AFP): More than 670 people are believed to have died after a massive landslide in Papua New Guinea, a UN official told AFP on Sunday as aid workers and villagers braved perilous conditions in their search for survivors.

The once-bustling hillside village in Enga province was almost completely obliterated when the landslide struck in the early hours of Friday morning, burying scores of homes and the people sleeping inside them.

"There are an estimated 150-plus houses now buried," said UN migration agency representative Serhan Aktoprak, adding that "670-plus people are assumed dead."

"The situation is terrible with the land still sliding. The water is running and this is creating a massive risk for everyone involved," added Aktoprak, who oversees teams of emergency workers from Port Moresby.

The unforgiving terrain, damaged roads and an outbreak of tribal violence nearby have seriously hamstrung efforts to get help into the disaster zone.

More than two days after the landslide rumbled

down the face of Mount Mungalo, mud-caked villagers in bare feet are still searching for their loved ones using shovels, axes and other makeshift tools.

Disaster worker Omer Mohamud arrived at the site on Sunday, finding deeply "traumatised" villagers using "sticks and spades to discover the trapped bodies".

"The situation is really horrible, people are in shock and traumatised," he told AFP.

"The land is still sliding. You can see rocks falling down from the mountain."

More than 1,000 people have been displaced by the catastrophe, aid agencies estimated, with food gardens and water supplies almost completely wiped out.

Aid agencies and local leaders initially feared between 100 to 300 people had perished underneath the mud and rubble spanning almost four football fields in length.

But the death toll grew after local leaders and disaster workers realised official figures underestimated the population, Aktoprak said.

Five bodies and the leg of a sixth had been pulled

from the debris by Saturday night.

This number is expected to start climbing in the coming days as diggers and other heavy machinery speed up the painstaking excavations.

"The destruction is massive," Nickson Pakea, president of the nearby Porgera Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told AFP on Saturday.

"They need machinery and other equipment to uncover these bodies. We are facing a big problem."

- Tribal violence -

Located on the side of densely forested Mount Mungalo, the village was home to a transient population that could swell to more than 4,000 people.

It served as a trading post for miners who panned for gold in the highlands.

"It's a centre of the community. People come from near and far to do their alluvial mining, and then they come to this place to trade," Pakea said.

A difficult journey to make at the best of times, vehicle access has been further complicated by a burst of tribal violence along the only route not blocked by the slip.

Aktoprak said the vio-

lence was "not related to the landslide".

Papua New Guinea's military had stepped in to provide a "security escort" to aid convoys, he added.

French President Emmanuel Macron said his country was "ready to contribute to relief and reconstruction efforts", posting on social media platform X two days after US President Joe Biden expressed a similar willingness to help.

In a statement, Biden said he and First Lady Jill Biden were "heartbroken by the loss of life and devastation".

At some points, the landslide -- a mix of car-sized boulders, uprooted trees and churned-up earth -- was thought to be eight metres (26 feet) deep.

Locals said it may have been triggered by heavy rains that have saturated the region in recent weeks.

Papua New Guinea has one of the wettest climates in the world, according to the World Bank, with the heaviest downpours concentrated in the country's humid highland interior.

Research has found shifting rainfall patterns linked to climate change could exacerbate the risk of landslides.

Trump booed and heckled by crowd at Libertarian convention



Opinion polls suggest Kennedy might siphon votes away from both Trump and Biden, but it is not yet clear which of the major-party candidates will be hurt more by Kennedy's long-shot White House bid.

Libertarian Party organizers said Biden was also invited to speak to the convention but he declined to attend.

"The Libertarian Party can make a big difference. If we unite we will be unstoppable," Trump said to a mix of applause and jeers.

Trump said he was a "libertarian without even trying to be one," and that the Libertarian Party should endorse him, another line greeted by boos and jeers.

Undeterred, Trump poked fun at the crowd, saying if they did not back him, they would continue to garner just a tiny portion of voter support in national elections.

He pledged to put a libertarian in his cabinet if he wins the election, which was met by cries of "bullshit!"

Trump did get huge applause for one promise. A rallying cry for libertarians is the case of Ross Ulbricht, who is serving a life sentence for creating and operating the website Silk Road, which allowed users to secretly buy and sell drugs and other illegal products.

Libertarians believe Ulbricht's 2015 sentence represents government and judicial overreach. In front of a crowd holding "Free Ross" signs, Trump promised to commute Ulbricht's sentence if he wins back the White House.

W A S H I N G T O N (Reuters): Presidential candidate Donald Trump was booed and heckled by many in a raucous audience at the Libertarian National Convention on Saturday night, a marked change from the adulation he receives at rallies from his fervently loyal supporters.

Libertarians, who believe in limited government and individual freedom, blame Trump, a Republican, for rushing through the creation of a COVID-19 vaccine when he was president and for not doing more to stop public health restrictions on the unvaccinated during the pandemic.

When Trump took to the stage in Washington, there were loud boos and jeers. A smaller section of the crowd, Trump supporters, cheered him.

Shortly before he appeared, one Libertarian Party member shouted: "Donald Trump should have taken a bullet!"

Trump's campaign did

not immediately respond to a request for comment about the hostile reception.

Trump, who was president between 2017 and 2021, immediately mentioned the total 88 felony charges he faces in four federal and state prosecutions.

"If I wasn't a libertarian I am now," he said. He denounced the administration of President Joe Biden, his challenger in the Nov. 5 election rematch, and Biden's fellow Democrats as being part of a "rise in left-wing fascism".

Trump was trying to appeal to libertarians, who have more in common with Republican policy positions than Democrats on issues including taxes and the size of government, in what is expected to be a closely fought election.

He added: "We should not be fighting each other." He asked libertarians to work with him to defeat Biden, an appeal

which was greeted by many boos, although the vast majority in the crowd were fiercely opposed to Biden and his administration.

Libertarians garnered only 1.2% of the national vote in 2020, or about 1.8 million votes, but November's election could be decided by just tens of thousands of votes in a handful of battleground states, so Trump is seeking to peel away some libertarian support.

Trump's appearance at the libertarian gathering, unusual for a Republican White House candidate, also signaled how seriously he and his campaign take the threat of third-party candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has long opposed vaccines and mandates, and who spoke to the convention on Friday.

Trump has been ramping up attacks on Kennedy, who is running as an independent, recently calling him a "fake" anti-vaccination proponent.