

Cop dead, two injured
F.P. Report
MANSEHRA: The Highway Police came under attack as a cop was shot dead and two others sustained injured when passengers of a car opened fire at the personnel at Bedra Interchange in Mansehra on Friday. The police said that the incident took place during a dispute over issuance of a challan by the Highway Police to a car driver travelling from Peshawar to Mansehra.

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ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

New governors for Punjab, KP & Balochistan finalised

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development, the appointments of new governors for Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan have been confirmed following a high-level meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari.

Under an agreement reached between the ruling PML-N and PPP, Sardar Salim Haider has been selected as the governor of Punjab, Faisal Karim Kundi for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Jaffar Khan Mandokhel for Balochistan.

These appointments were finalised subsequent to a meeting between Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz, where discussions primarily revolved around the gubernatorial positions in Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

During the meeting, PM Shehbaz hosted a luncheon for Bilawal, fostering an environment conducive to deliberations on the current political landscape of Pakistan and the crucial

task of appointing governors. Bilawal proposed various names for the governorships, which were ultimately endorsed by the prime minister.

Sardar Salim Haider, with prior experience as Special Assistant to the PM on Overseas Pakistanis and as Minister of State for Defence and Defence Production, was nominated for the role of Punjab's governor.

Sardar Salim hailed from Fateh Jhang tehsil of Attock district. In the 2002 general elections, Salim ran for the provincial assembly constituency PP-18 (Attock-IV) as a PPP candidate but did not win. He secured 37,140 votes but lost to Malik Muhammad Anwar of Pakistan Muslim League (Q).

In the 2008 general elections, Salim was elected to the National Assembly from NA-59 (Attock-III) as a PPP candidate. He received 71,400 votes, defeating PML-Q's Waseem Gulzar. Salim joined the then prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's federal cabinet in November 2008 as Minister of State for Defence Production, a role he held until February 2011. He then served as

Minister of State for Defence under Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf from June 2012 to March 2013.

In the 2013 elections, Salim again contested for the National Assembly from NA-59 (Attock-III) as a PPP candidate but was unsuccessful. During the previous government, Salim also served as a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis.

Faisal Karim Kundi, former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly under the federal government of PPP, currently assumes the position of Secretary of Information within the party and has been designated as the governor of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

Jaffar Khan Mandokhel, known for his longstanding affiliation with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and his multiple tenures as an elected MPA, has been appointed as the governor of Balochistan. Furthermore, it was agreed that the governorship of Sindh would remain with MQM-Pakistan, with the incumbent Kamran Khan Tessori retaining his position.

Sharjeel distributes cheques among journalists

F.P. Report

KARACHI: On Press Freedom Day, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon distributed cheques to journalist associations. The Senior Minister of Sindh and Provincial Minister for Information, Excise, Taxation, Narcotics Control, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, presented a cheque of fifty-five lakhs to the leaders of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, Karachi Union of Journalists, and Sukkur Union of Journalists.

The cheque of PFUJ was received by Lala Asad Pathan, while the cheque of KUJ was received by President Ijaz Ahmed and Aajiz Jamali. The cheque of the Sukkur Union of Journalists was received by Javed Jatoi. Additionally, a cheque of 2 crores was given to the Sindh Parliamentary Reporters Association by the Government of Sindh. The leaders of journalistic organizations expressed their gratitude to Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon.

A delegation of Malir journalists, led by President of Press Club Malir Hanif Soomro, met with Sharjeel Inam Memon. Deputy Mayor of Karachi Salman Murad was also present at the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon expressed his pride in the efforts made for journalists on Press Freedom Day. He highlighted that the Sindh government has provided a cheque of 2 crores to SPRA and 55 lakhs to PFUJ, KUJ, and SUJ for the betterment of journalists. He emphasized that the Sindh government is striving to uphold the rights of journalists in line with the vision of Shaheed Bibi, President Asif Ali Zardari, and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto.

Sharjeel Inam Memon highlighted that journalists serve as the mirror of society, underscoring the government's unwavering commitment to address their challenges.

20 killed, 21 injured as bus falls into ravine in Chilas

F.P. Report

CHILAS: At least 20 people lost their lives and 21 others were wounded when a bus fell into a deep ravine in Chilas, a city in Gilgit-Baltistan province in the wee hours of Friday.

According to details, the accident occurred at the Karakoram Highway in Preshu Khaldas area of Chilas. The bus was on its way to Hunza from Rawalpindi. As the bus driver tried to take a sharp turn, he could not control the vehicle and it fell into a gorge, killing 15 people and injuring 22 others. Five of the injured succumbed to injuries, taking the toll to 20.

Rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the dead and injured to Chilas Hospital. Rescue sources said the death toll might rise as a majority of the injured were in a critical condition.

An emergency was declared at the Chilas Hospital after the accident, said Gilgit-Baltistan government spokesperson Faizullah Faraq. He said the bus was carrying more than 35 passengers to Hunza. He said the bus met with an accident around 5am.

Rescue operations were swiftly initiated, with teams rushing to the accident site to assist the injured and retrieve the deceased. The Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister's spokesman said the injured were rushed to the Chilas Regional Headquarters Hospital for medical treatment. Emergency measures were implemented in hospitals in Chilas to ensure prompt care for the victims.

Diamer Deputy Commissioner Fayaz Ahmed confirmed the death toll, saying that among the deceased were 17 men and three women. He said three bodies and 21 injured were shifted to the Regional Headquarters Hospital. Three of the injured were referred to Gilgit by road, while those critically injured will be transferred to Gilgit by helicopter. GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan expressed deep sorrow and regret over the incident, emphasizing the need for timely medical

assistance and support for the affected families.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi have expressed their profound grief over the loss of precious lives in the Chilas accident. In their separate messages, both leaders condoled with the bereaved families and prayed for the departed souls. They also ordered the authorities concerned to provide the injured the best possible treatment. They also prayed for swift recovery of the wounded in Chilas accident.

Meanwhile, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the bus accident. President Asif Ali Zardari also expressed deep grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives in bus accident near Chilas. Commiserating with the bereaved families, the President prayed for eternal peace of the deceased and patience for their families. He also prayed for speedy recovery of the injured.

3 perish in Khuzdar blast

F.P. Report

KHUZDAR: Mohammad Siddiq Mengal, a journalist and president of the Khuzdar Press Club, was killed along with two others on Friday after a remote-controlled bomb targeted his vehicle in Khuzdar, police told media.

At least eight people were also injured as a result of the deadly explosion. Two injured individuals in the blast later succumbed to their injuries with the death toll rising to three, said the station house officer. The killed passers-by were seriously injured in the remote-controlled blast and were brought to the hospital, while the other eight injured in the blast are undergoing treatment in different hospitals, police said.

According to the police, the remote-controlled blast was carried out on the Sultan Ibrahim Khan Road on the National Highway. The sta-

tion house officer said that the journalist's vehicle was the target of the blast and was hit when he was going to university from his home. This is not the first time Mengal has been targeted by attackers.

Police said that the journalist — who was associated with a local newspaper — escaped an assassination attempt a few months ago. Balochistan Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Langau strongly condemned the Khuzdar blast and directed the relevant authorities to present a report. The attack on the journalists comes as the world honours the work of journalists around the world on Press Freedom Day today.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday expressed grief over the martyrdom of Khuzdar Press Club President Maulana Siddiq Mengal in a bomb blast.

The prime minister prayed to Allah Almighty for

forgiveness of the departed soul and strength for the bereaved family to bear the loss. He also prayed for the swift recovery of those injured in the incident.

Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has strongly condemned the terrorist bomb blast in Khuzdar. Chairman Bilawal expressed deep sorrow over the martyrdom of Press Club President, Muhammad Sadique Mengal in the blast. He extended heartfelt condolences to the affected families and the journalist fraternity.

Such cowardly acts will not dampen the spirits of the Pakistani nation, Chairman Bilawal stated. He further said that the despicable elements involved in this heinous crime will receive nothing but humiliation. Chairman Bilawal also prayed for a speedy recovery of all those injured.

Govt notifies new cybercrime probe agency

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Friday established the National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency (NCCIA), rendering the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) Cybercrime Wing as "defunct".

According to a notification in The Gazette of Pakistan from the information ministry, the NCCIA was formed under Section 51 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (Peca) and the FIA would now cease to perform functions as the designated investigation agency under the act. It added that all existing personnel, assets, liabilities, rights, obligations, privileges, inquiries and investigations related to the FIA's "defunct" Cybercrime Wing would now stand transferred to the NCCIA.

However, it said that existing personnel of the FIA Cybercrime Wing would continue to perform their duties for another year until the appointment of staff in the NCCIA. The NCCIA will be headed by a director-general, chosen by the federal government to serve a two-year term. It pointed out that the candidate would have to have "not less than 15 years of experience" in the fields of computer science, digital forensics, cyber technology, law, public administration, information technology, telecommunication or related fields to enable him to deal with offences under the Peca act.

The notification said the NCCIA chief would exercise the powers of an inspector general of police while the agency's affairs related to the federal government's business would be allocated to the Interior Division. It added that the NCCIA would also be the designated agency in respect of international cooperation.

Pakistan to commence Hajj flights from May 9

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Ministry of Religious Affairs has issued a schedule for month-long Hajj 2024 flight operations, commencing from May 9 to June 9, the spokesperson announced on Friday.

All flights scheduled for the first 15 days would land at the Medina airport, while most flights will land at the Jeddah airport from May 24 to June 9, the spokesperson said. The country would operate 11 special flights to transport 2,160 Hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia on the first day of the scheduled operation, including 330 passengers from Karachi via 2 flights, 680 from Islamabad via 3 flights, 670 from Lahore via 3 flights, 329 from Multan via 2 flights, 151 from Sialkot via a single flight.

Subsequently, the first Hajj flight from Balochistan will take off from Quetta on May 11, and from Sukkur on May 27. Pakistan will operate a total of 259 Hajj special flights for over 68,000 pilgrims registered with the government scheme, the ministry said, adding that the special operation will conclude on June 9.

Later, the country would resume its flight operation on June 20 to bring pilgrims home post-conclusion of the sacred pilgrimage, it concluded. After balloting for the government's Hajj scheme in December last year, 63,805 out of 69,438 nationals remained successful. Radio Pakistan reported. Over 81,000 pilgrims from Pakistan performed the sacred pilgrimage under the government scheme last year. Last year, Saudi Arabia restored Pakistan's Hajj quota of 179,210 pilgrims besides ending restrictions of the upper age limit of 65 years.

Regarding the upcoming hearing related to reserved seats on April 8, he expressed optimism for a

Pakistan embarks on first lunar mission

President, PM felicitate nation and scientists

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's historic lunar mission (ICUBE-Q) has been launched on Friday on board China's Chang'E6 from Hainan, China. According to the IST, the satellite ICUBE-Q has been designed and developed by IST in collaboration with China's Shanghai University SJTU and Pakistan's national space agency SUPARCO.

ICUBE-Q orbiter carries two optical cameras to image the lunar surface. Following successful qualification and testing, ICUBE-Q has now been integrated with the Chang'e6 mission. Chang'e6 is the sixth in a series of China's lunar exploration missions.

The launch activity was telecasted live on the IST website and social media platforms. Chang'6, China's Lunar Mission will touch down on the Moon's far side to collect samples from the surface and return to Earth for research.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday felicitated the nation and the scientists as Pakistan launched its first lunar mission ICUBE-Q.

The president and the prime minister, in the separately issued statements, paid tribute to the core committee of the Institute of Space Technology including its member Dr. Khurram Khurshid, SUPARCO, China's space body and the students who took part in the project. "The successful launch of the space mission will prove to be a milestone in Pakistan's space programme. The whole nation feels proud for this significant achievement in the space technology," he remarked.

The president also lauded cooperation between Pakistan and China in the field of space, and said Pakistan had yet to achieve more milestones in the sector. President Zardari expressed the hope that Pakistan's space research institutes and scientists would bring more laurels to the country through their enhanced hard work, dedication and planning.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the Pak-China friendship, which was dubbed as higher than Himalayas, deeper than the oceans and sweeter than the honey, had gone beyond the borders to reach the space. Terming the ICUBE-Q launch Pakistan's first step in the space, he said just like the nuclear field, the country's scientists, engineers and experts were proving their mettle in the space technology as well. The acceptance of Pakistan's mission



among eight countries was the recognition of the capabilities of Pakistan's scientists and experts, he added. "This is a historical milestone in the technological development. By this achievement, Pakistan has entered a new era of exploring the space for productive purposes," the prime minister said as he watched the launching ceremony live on Pakistan Television and expressed his pleasure for Pakistan joining the nations which have sent lunar satellites.

Prime Minister Shehbaz said that the achievement would help build Pakistan's capacity in the satellite communications, besides opening up new avenues for scientific research, economic development and national security. "Our sons of the soil have proved that they have the capability, passion and expertise to explore the space. God willing, Pakistan will achieve excellence in the fields of space and economy too as it had done in the field of nuclear technology on May 28, 1998. By realising the dream of self-dependence in the communications infrastructure, Pakistan will join the comity of nations playing a leading role in the sector," he remarked.

Calling Pakistan's development in science and technology, modern sciences and skill development the need of the hour, the prime minister reiterated the resolve to uplift the youth in the said fields to ensure that the country achieved excellence in the field of inventions. In a separate statement, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar also congratulated the young Pakistani students and scientists on the launch of lunar orbital mission ICUBE-Q. "Today's launch from Hainan in China, is a good example of countries and organizations coming together for space cooperation and shared benefits. It shows the promise of Pakistani youth," he added.



KARACHI: Journalists holding placards during a rally in connection with World Press Freedom Day.

Gohar denies talks with anyone

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan stated that the party did not receive any nod regarding negotiations and is not engaged in talks with anyone. He stressed the need for a transparent inquiry into the May 9 events.

Addressing the media in Rawalpindi, Barrister Gohar highlighted PTT's view, expressing hope for a fair decision from the Supreme Court regarding reserved seats, excluding those acquired through electoral 'robbery'. He blamed the political push behind the ongoing cases, lamenting the delay in their resolution and warning against the fabrication of additional charges. Barrister Gohar urged for timely decisions to ensure fairness.

Regarding the upcoming hearing related to reserved seats on April 8, he expressed optimism for a

clear outcome by the law, expecting the Supreme Court to reinstate PTI's reserved seats. Barrister Gohar highlighted PTI's issuance of a white paper on the general elections. He clarified that PTI's founder did not question the judiciary's integrity but instead advocated for its strengthening. He reiterated the party founder's call for the formation of a judicial commission to investigate election rigging.

Meanwhile, Amid back-to-back calls for reconciliation talks, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Ali Muhammad Khan has clarified that the expected dialogues will revolve around the release of incarcerated party founder Imran Khan and other detainees instead of striking a "deal".

Imran's aide made the key statement after meeting the former prime minister at Adiala Jail on Friday. Ali said that he waited too long to meet the party founder,

adding that the people firmly standing with "Imran are facing difficulties" in the country. He said that they are ready to hold dialogues with anyone whether they are "political or other powers". Elaborating on the genre of dialogues, he also said that they are not seeking any "deal" but are ready to hold dialogues.

Ali added that those who were willing to initiate talks would have to remove hatred against the PTI founder from their hearts. Additionally, he asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to "return the PTI's mandate" and let the Imran-founded party do politics as the largest political party. The National Assembly lawmaker, who is among those loyal PTI leaders who stick to the former ruling party despite several politicians parted ways after the May 9 riots in 2022, said that all cases, including the Al-Qadir Trust case, against Imran were false.

TEVTA's BoD decides capacity building, adoption of frugality

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Technical Education and Vocational Training and Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA), Abdul Karim Toru, chaired the 21st Board of Directors meeting of TEVTA on Friday in the committee room of the Industries Department.

Apart from Secretary Industries, Technical Education, and Vocational Training Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah, MD TEVTA Amir Afag, members from the private sector and government departments, TEVTA directors, and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

Several decisions were taken during the meeting to enhance the role and effectiveness of the authority in technical education and skill development, improve

the capacity building of educational institutions, adopt cost-effectiveness measures, and bring transparency in financial matters.

The Board approved the budgets for 2022 and 2023 while adopting austerity principles for the budgets of 2023 and 2024. Measures were also taken to control unnecessary expenditures and review business models.

Moreover, the Board approved the appointment of the Secretary Industries as the Chairperson of the Departmental Audit Committee instead of the MD, and also approved the elimination of unnecessary accounts besides essential operational accounts for financial transparency.

To ensure self-sustainability, the Board approved the initial draft of the model presented and directed the Chairman to compare it with various universities within 15 days and submit the draft accordingly.

In line with adopting austerity principles, the Board approved reducing the current staff at TEVTA headquarters to less than 160 employees, down from 85.

Appointments of heads of technical education institutions were conditionally approved, with guiding principles and guidelines for selection and presentation.

The Forum approved rationalization of staff and facilities in TEVTA institutions according to their needs.

Additionally, the renewal of the Second Shift Financial Policy and Procurement Committee was approved.

Performance-based allowances were granted for future operations in TEVTA.

Furthermore, an agreement was reached on participation in the Dasu Hydropower Project and provision of technical education by TEVTA, with the

Chairman stating that trades should be introduced there according to local needs.

For resolving issues related to temporary employees in TEVTA, a committee comprising representatives from the Industries, Law, Finance, and KP-TEVTA departments was formed, and the committee was directed to identify the perpetrators of irregularities in this regard.

Expressing his views on the occasion, the Special Assistant stated that TEVTA needs to be taken towards sustainability and improvements in all operational matters within the timeline. He emphasized the importance of fulfilling the gaps in the path of TEVTA's progress and placing the institution on the right track.

He also mentioned the efforts of the institution to find dignified employment opportunities in the market for the unemployed students.



PESHAWAR: Vendor selling and displaying traditional carpets to attract the customers at Shahi Katha.

World Press Freedom Day Saif terms Press for Planet theme significant

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, Minister for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Saif, issued a statement emphasizing the importance of the Press for Planet theme.

He highlighted the urgent need for actions based on global foundations to protect our planet and its environment.

He stressed the deep connection between the environment and the Earth, terming environmental issues as the Third Generation of Human Rights.



He stated that the media plays a significant role in understanding the Earth and its environment.

Through news coverage, documentary films, and other forms of media, it raises awareness about environmental issues, sheds light on conservation efforts, and informs people about the importance of preserving the vital diversity of our planet.

He noted that the media can also highlight issues such as governments' environmental policies and practices, climate change, deforestation, pollution, and habitat destruction.

Delegation of KEF calls on Governor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A representative delegation of Khyber Eye Foundation (KEF) called on Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali and informed him about the performance of the foundation.

The delegation that was led by Patron-in-Chief of the foundation Professor Dr. Daud comprised Adnan Jalil, Khawaja Khalid Sultan, Yawar Nasir and Ubaid Amjad.

The delegation informed governor about the achievements of eye foundation

and discussed with him the establishment of a hospital in Lower Dir.

Speaking on the occasion, KP Governor appreciated efforts of the foundation to help out ailing community and assured his cooperation in establishing hospital in Lower Dir.

Pakistan Forest Institute to be given university status

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the chairmanship of the Minister for Forests and Environment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Fazal Hakim Khan Yusufzai, a meeting was held regarding conferring university status to the Pakistan Forest Institute Peshawar.

The Director-General of the Pakistan Forest Institute Peshawar, Khalid Ilyas, Secretary Forest Nazir Hussain Shah, and other relevant officers attended the meeting,

where the Director-General briefed the provincial minister on the overall performance of the institute and necessary decisions were made.

During the meeting, Fazal Hakim Khan Yusufzai instructed the relevant officials regarding conferring university status to the Pakistan Forest Institute Peshawar, urging them to complete the necessary paperwork expeditiously and submit the report.

The provincial minister stated that the Pakistan

Forest Institute Peshawar holds historical significance throughout Pakistan, providing students with the best and modern education. He expressed that granting university status to the institute is a significant gift for the future of students. He emphasized that providing the youth with quality education is among the top priorities of the PTI government. He further stated that their endeavor and desire are to implement this important step as soon as possible.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur chairing a meeting of Sports and Youth Affairs Department

KPCIP, AIT Bangkok sign scholarship agreement

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a groundbreaking development, the Local Government Election and Rural Development Department, under the Asian Development Bank-funded Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project (KPCIP), has entered into a significant scholarship agreement with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Bangkok.

As per the agreement, the institute will enroll 30 female students across various disciplines, with a particular emphasis on fields relevant to the development sector as outlined in KPCIP's Gender Action Plan.

The Asian Development Bank's Asian Development Fund (ADB-ADF) will cover the costs of these scholarships.

Project Director KPCIP Syed Zafar Ali Shah and Kazuo Yamamoto AIT President signed the agreement. Minister LGE&RDD Arshad Ayub Khan, Secretary Muhammad Daud Khan, ADB representative Inayatullah Waseem, KPCIP's Director Compliance Amir Alam Khan, Director Technical Mian Muhammad Shakeel, Director Gender Mehnaz Iftikhar, and Director Finance Qazi Raees were prominent among the participants.

Minister Arshad Ayub Khan expressed gratitude to AIT and ADB for providing such opportunities to empower women that would enable them to contribute significantly to societal development.

He emphasised that such opportunities would enable women to excel in traditionally male-dominated fields, showcasing compe-

tence, resilience, and leadership capabilities.

"Upon their return, these accomplished scholars will serve as role models for other women, instilling confidence and self-belief in their abilities," the minister said. The minister noted that they would represent Pakistan admirably, enhancing the country's image and honing their skills in a multicultural environment.

Secretary LGE&RDD highlighted the importance of diversity and innovation that these scholarship recipients would bring, enriching the work environment with their varied perspectives, skills, and approaches.

He stressed the fostering of an inclusive and collaborative workplace culture, where different viewpoints are valued and respected.

In addition to the scholarship program, KPCIP has

launched a one-year paid internship initiative, recruiting 25 female interns across five water and sanitation companies. These interns, placed in various departments relevant to their academic backgrounds, are provided with laptops and receive a monthly stipend of Rs35,000. The program aims to induct a total of 200 female interns, furthering the ADB-funded internship initiative.

Furthermore, a Women's Business Development Center is under construction in Kohat. Upon completion, it will offer training in various skills and entrepreneurial opportunities for women.

These initiatives aim to empower women to provide financial support to their families, achieve economic self-sustainability, and make meaningful contributions to society.

PHC orders IGP to recover minor till 7th May

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court ordered Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to recover a minor child and produce him on 7th May, on Friday.

The court has ordered the IGP to act as District Police Officer Kurram has failed to recover the child. The petitioner woman, had filed a petition in the Peshawar High Court for the recovery of her five-year-old son, who was

taken by her husband after their divorce.

The husband has been disappeared with the child since then. The court has adjourned the hearing till May 7 and directed the IGP to produce the child in court by then.



PESHAWAR: An old man is selling and displaying second hand imported toys to attract the customers at Kohati area.

City Improvement Project Mardan discussed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting chaired by Provincial Minister for Local Government, Elections, and Rural Development, Arshad Ayub, and Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru, was held in Peshawar to discuss ongoing progress on "City Improvement Project Mardan."

The meeting was attended by members of the Provincial Assembly, including Shafi Jan, Mian Umar Kakakhel, and Mian Iftikhar. Local government department secretary, special secretary, Director General, WSSP officials from Mardan district, and representatives from the Asian Development Bank, including Director Omer Ali.

During the meeting, the Secretary provided a detailed briefing on the progress of the "City Improvement Project Mardan" under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa City Improvement Project. The secretary explained ongoing

construction work in detail and future projects which would be included in the Mardan Master Plan.

Provincial Minister Arshad Ayub directed the relevant officials to ensure the timely completion of the Mardan City Improvement Project, emphasizing that no delays should be tolerated.

On this occasion, minister for food Shah Toru highlighted the benefits of the project, stating that it will not only address waterlogging issues in Mardan but also meet modern demands. He further emphasized that the project will significantly reduce the risks of flooding and contributes to the beautification and cleanliness of urban areas, ultimately leading to positive health impacts for citizens.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Minister for Food Zahir Shah conducted a thorough inspection of the wheat godown in Mardan, on Friday. During the visit, the minister was accompanied by deputy

director and district officials, meticulously reviewed all arrangements related to wheat procurement at the godown.

According to the briefing received by the provincial minister, the wheat godown in Mardan has a storage capacity of approximately 28,000 metric tons, with an existing stock of around 6,000 metric tons from previous seasons. Zahir Shah instructed to ensure all necessary measures a for wheat procurement during the ongoing season, including the installation of additional surveillance cameras for strict monitoring.

Shah emphasized the KP government's commitment to transparency and quality control in the wheat procurement process. He highlighted the institution of committees at the district level, comprising officials from the food department, district administration, NAB, and anti-corruption agencies, to oversee the procurement process and prevent malpractices.

District Health Information System inaugurated

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Health Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, inaugurated the District Health Information System on Friday, considering it a pivotal milestone for the health department. He shed light on the significance of the DHIS-2 system, stating that it is crucial for the overall health system of the province. He commended the efforts of the Director DHIS, his team, UNICEF, and WHO for their commendable work.

The Health Minister encouraged stakeholders, stating that initially, DHIS 2 has been initiated in six districts, with plans to digitalize the remaining 22 districts with the assistance of the health department. With the collaboration of UNICEF, the Health Department has launched DHIS 2 in Bajaur, Charsadda, Khyber, Kohat, Swat, and Torghar, with plans for further expansion.

Dr. Inamullah Khan, the head of UNICEF's health team, termed the implementation of DHIS 2 as a significant milestone for the digitalization of the health department. He praised the efforts of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and DHIS teams and extended congratulations to the Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for this achievement.

Senior officials of the Health Department were also present at the occasion.

Muqam grieves over GB accident

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR (APP): Expressing profound grief and sorrow over loss of precious lives during the bus accident in Diamir Gilgit Baltistan, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions and Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam contacted the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary of the Gilgit Baltistan and assured every possible support.



In brief

Police arrests 3000 outlaws F.P. Report

MARDAN: As many as 3000 people held including 332 proclaimed offenders allegedly involved in murder, attempted murder and other serious cases during the month of April 2024 by the police. During anti-narcotics operations, more than 112 kilograms hashish, more than 02 kilograms heroin, more than 27 kilograms Ice-drug, 270 grams opium and one liter alcohol as well as recovered 33 Kalashnikovs, 13 Kalakovs, 17 rifles, 37 short guns, 688 pistols and 8775 different types of weapons during the operations against criminal elements and illegal weapons. DPO Mardan while issuing instructions to the officers said that the law is same for all and no one will be allowed to disturb the peace. Anti-social elements, criminal advertising, drugs, aerial firing, illegal display of weapons, street crime, and other social and social crimes will continue to be dealt with indiscriminately.

Farewell party organized F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: A farewell ceremony was held at District Police Office Toba Tek Singh on the retirement eve of police officers and employees, on Friday. Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Legal Muhammad Tahir was also present. The retired employees are Inspector Abdul Ghaffar, Inspector Muhammad Irshad, Inspector AttaAllah, Sub-Inspector Muhammad Riaz, Assistant Sub-Inspector Shaukat Ali, Head Constable Ghulam Jaffar are included. DPO Toba Tek Singh Ibadat Nisar presented commemorative shields and flower bouquets to the retired police officers and employees and expressed good wishes and expressed good wishes for serving the public during their posting in District Toba Tek Singh and staying in District Police Toba Tek Singh with achievements and hard work. Appreciate the duty done.

One killed, four injured

RAIWIND (INP): One person was killed and four other sustained injuries when boiler of a factory exploded in Raiwind. The incident occurred in the Sundar Industrial Estate area near Raiwind. The explosion was so massive that the three-storey building of the factory collapsed while windowpanes of nearby buildings were also broken. Fire brigade and rescue teams reached the spot and after being informed and started operation the clear the debris. Rescue teams retrieved a dead body from the rubble while four persons were pulled out in injured condition. Later, the rescue teams have shifted the dead and injured to a nearby hospital.

Provision of field hospitals

BAHAWALPUR (INP): Member of the Punjab Assembly from Bahawalpur and senior leader of Pakistan Muslim League-N, Dr. Rana Muhammad Tariq has appreciated the Punjab government's project to provide field hospitals. In a press release issued here, he said that the Chief Minister, of Punjab, Ms. Maryam Nawaz had taken great steps to introduce mobile health field hospitals to several districts of the province in order to provide medical treatment facilities to people at their doorsteps. "Mobile health field hospitals established by the Punjab government had been equipped with the latest technology and modern medical machinery," he said.



GWADAR: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh visiting airport.

Peace: A simple path to harmony

Kalsoon Alam

IN a world where discord often seems to reign supreme, the concept of peace holds an unparalleled significance. Peace isn't merely the absence of conflict; it's a state of harmony, both within ourselves and among others. It's about finding common ground, respecting differences, and fostering understanding.

Peace begins with each one of us. It starts within our hearts and minds, with a willingness to relinquish anger, resentment, and prejudice. By cultivating empathy and compassion, we can bridge divides and build connections with those around us. Simple acts of kindness, such as lending a helping hand or offering a listening ear, have the power to sow the seeds of peace in our communities.

Communication plays a pivotal role in fostering peace. Instead of resorting to hostility or aggression, we can choose dialogue and diplomacy to resolve conflicts. Listening attentively

to others' perspectives and expressing our own views respectfully can lead to mutual understanding and reconciliation. By fostering open and honest communication, we can break down barriers and build trust, laying the foundation for lasting peace.

Education is another key ingredient in the recipe for peace. By promoting tolerance, diversity, and inclusivity in our schools and communities, we can instill the values of peace and cooperation in future generations. Teaching children, the importance of empathy, conflict resolution, and global citizenship empowers them to become agents of positive change in the world.

Beyond individual efforts, international cooperation is essential for achieving peace on a global scale. By working together to address common challenges such as poverty and climate change, nations can create a more just and sustainable world for all. Through diplomacy, dialogue, and multilateralism, we can build bridges across borders and forge a shared

vision of peace and prosperity.

However, achieving peace is not without its challenges. It requires perseverance, patience, and a steadfast commitment to justice and equality. It requires us to confront our biases and prejudices, to acknowledge the humanity in others, even in the face of disagreement or conflict. But the rewards of peace, belonging, and interconnectedness far outweigh the costs.

In conclusion, peace is not an abstract idea but a tangible reality that we can all strive to create in our daily lives. By embracing empathy, communication, education, and cooperation, we can construct a world where peace prevails a world where every individual can live with dignity, freedom, and respect. Let us join hands and hearts in the pursuit of this noble goal, for the sake of ourselves, our children, and generations to come.

The writer is student of BS English at 3rd Semester, University of Swat.

Newly appointed DPO welcomed

Saqib Mushtaq

LODHARAN: SSP Kamran Mumtaz has recently taken charge as the District Police Officer Lodhran. He expressed his happiness in taking charge of Lodhran's civil society, lawyers, and Anjuman locally Traders and immediately started working towards maintaining law and order in the district.

The former President of the District Bar Association Lodhran, Malik Allah Nawaz Channer advocate, had high praises for SSP Kamran Mumtaz. He stated that after a long time, instead of an SP, a senior and capable officer has been appointed as SSP in Lodhran, which is a welcome change.

On his arrival at the Javed Islam Shaheed police line, SSP Kamran Mumtaz was saluted by the police patrol. He offered flowers of Fatiha to the martyrs and even planted a sapling in the police line, showing his respect towards those who have dedicated their lives to serving and protecting the people.

The DPO also visited various departments of the police line, including the



uniform warehouse, miscellaneous store, MT section, Kot, and Muharr office. His visit showed his dedication towards understanding the workings of the police department and his willingness to work with the officers on the ground.

In an exclusive conversation with The Frontier Post, SSP Kamran Mumtaz stated that his priority is to ensure law and order throughout the district and prevent crime in every way possible. He believes in hard work, honesty, and merit and expects the same from his fellow police officers. He also assured the citizens and police personnel that his doors are always open to them and that he will not tolerate

injustice.

SSP Kamran Mumtaz's vision for the Lodhran police department is to work as a team while respecting the dignity of the District Police uniform. He believes that eradicating crime and serving the citizens are among the primary duties of the police.

He hopes that under his leadership, the police officers will perform their duties with hard work and dedication for the betterment of the country and the nation. Overall, SSP Kamran Mumtaz has started his tenure on a positive note, and we are hopeful that he will bring about positive changes in Lodhran under his leadership.

World Press Freedom Day celebrated with enthusiasm

F.P. Report

LARKANA: In connection with 3 May World Press Freedom Day, a program was organized by journalists to celebrate in an enthusiastic way in Larkana. Addressing the program of Press Club Muhammad Nawaz Umrani, Senator and journalists Sarfaraz Saleem Phalputto, Abdul Khaliq Jagirani, Al-Hadad Chandio and others said that journalists are being mistreated in all countries in the world due to which no journalist has been spared and this is absolutely true.

It is clear that when the

fax machine used to be in the distant past, every journalist wrote the news on white paper with his own hand and reached PTCL's number by fax number to the institution. The institution also got to know and at that time, journalists never did one-sided reporting, nor did they act hastily in the news, while journalists should always seriously try to examine the issues from multiple perspectives and always read every news.

The news should be confirmed and filed by the parties. It will be considered to fulfill the three basic requirements of journalism. Jo Rangdi has created a

unique place in the world and society along with journalism.

Meanwhile, on the last day, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Larkana Region, Nasir Aftab Sahib, to control the growing unrest in Larkana, Kashmir, Kandakot, Shikarpur, Jacobabad and Qamber Shahdadkot districts of the division.

The strictest orders have been issued, to tighten the security of all financial institutions/banks in Larkana range and to protect the citizens and to control the unrest in the cities, roads and streets, while all the districts.

American journalist finds love in Chitral F.P. Report

CHITRAL: An American freelance journalist has found love of her life in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral and returned to Pakistan to marry him. Clair Stephen and Anwar Ali, who is a polo player by profession, tied the knot in Islamabad and left for Chitral for the wedding festivities.

In a recent example of such cultural intermingling, Claire Stephen, an American freelance journalist, married Anwar Wali, a polo player and poet from Upper Chitral, Pakistan. Clair met Wali during her visit to Pakistan eight months ago. She stayed in the Buni area of Upper Chitral. Claire maintained communication with Anwar despite returning to her home and their friendship turned into a romantic relationship.

Anwar's friends and relatives attended the ceremony. The dowry was set at Rs30,000, according to reports. The American freelance journalist expressed admiration for Anwar's character, citing that such a quality prompted her to marry him.

Last month, a Philippines woman married a Pakistani man after arriving in the country. The 26-year-old woman said that the two met in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and her 31-year-old husband took care of him a lot in the city. Both worked at the same place where they fell in love. The woman, who is now called Zainab after embracing Islam, said that Muhammad Salman took care of him a lot in the city.

Six injured as fire breaks out in factory F.P. Report

BARA: A fire broke out in the Iqbal Steel Factory as a result of which six people received serious burn injured in Bara, an area of Khyber on Friday.

As soon as the rescue 1122 control room was informed, fire vehicles and medical teams reached the spot. Rescue medical teams provided first aid to all the injured and shifted them to the hospital. However, rescue firefighter teams controlled the fire in time. Among the injured Rashid, Dawood, Usman, Amin, Rauf and Ismail are included.

Police arrests two injured robbers F.P. Report

SHAHADKOT: As many as two injured robbers were arrested during police encounter. According to the details, two alleged police encounters took place in Naseerabad and Shahdadkot boundaries of Qamber Shahdadkot district, two robbers were arrested and injured.

The injured suspect was identified as Qasir Ali Jalbani, who is involved in many crimes in Qamber Shahdadkot and other districts, while the second police encounter took place at Mandir Wah near Naseerabad to Bada Road within Naseerabad Police Station and Abid.

Free press ensures freedom of speech, expression



F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Journalist community is the mirror image of the society and free press ensures freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees press freedom but at the same time restricts journalists on pretext of state and certain departments' interests. Beside certain limitations media persons in tribal merged areas are competent to execute their professional duties with responsibility.

These views were expressed by the senior media persons and President of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Union of Journalist (KUJ) Shams Mohammad while addressing to a seminar as chief guest, organized in connection of observing World Press Freedom Day in Landi Kotal press club district

Khyber on Friday.

Tehsil Chairman Shah Khalid Shinwari, Director General Operation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, (PEMRA) Amjad Afridi, Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) Syed Rameez Ali Shah, former Head of Teacher Association Haji Ghaffar, District Chief of Khudai Khedmatgar Fazal Rehman Afridi, scores of councillors; local journalists were among the participants.

He said that the purpose of observing "World Free Press Day" was to acknowledge journalists' hard work, risking lives for revealing the truth and said blaming the journalist community for overlooking the people's problems was injustice as a journalist was a reflection of the society.

For the last two decades, in spite of self restrictions, tribal journalists perform their professional duties

with dedication and honesty beside unfavorable prevailed environment in the merged tribal districts, he remarked. He went on that 17 tribal journalists who lost their precious lives in the line of duty in the last two decades showed affection for the local journalist to their profession.

Jointly they could compete challenges being faced by the journalist, he opined. Earlier, Ibrahim Shinwari, Khalil Jibrani, Ahmad Nabi and others highlighted the importance of the day and challenges faced by the media. Later on a walk was also conducted at Bacha Khan Chawk, main Landi Kotal that was attended by people from different walks of life. It is to be stated here that recognizing efforts and sacrifices of journalists in Africa in 1991, the United Nation has announced May 03 as World Press Freedom Day in 1993.

Supervisory staff of three exam centers suspended

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The board of intermediate and secondary education (BISE) Malakand's acting chairman and controller of examinations Muhammad Naseem Khan suspended the supervisory staff of three examination centers for girls where it was fully confirmed that the papers were being shared in various WhatsApp groups.

The chairman said the cases were traced out with a secret procedure adopted by the board. He said that it was the core responsibility of all superintendents, deputy superintendents including the invigilators to provide mobile-free atmosphere inside the examination centers. He warned the rest of the staff would also be dealt with strictly in case of any such negligence during the course of examinations.

The controller of examination also rejected the social media reports about papers' leak and termed it baseless and maligning. He

ing the papers on WhatsApp soon after 9 am from the centers which was a serious violation of examinations' rules. Talking to local reporters, he said that he along with his inspection team paid surprise visits to the three examination halls for girls where it was fully confirmed that the papers were being shared in various WhatsApp groups.

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The controller of examination also rejected the social media reports about papers' leak and termed it baseless and maligning. He

said that smooth examinations were in progress in a peaceful environment and there were no proofs about papers' leakage. He said that some vest interested elements were blackmailing the board by spreading false and baseless information regarding the ongoing secondary school certificate annual examinations.

Anti-polio drive: The additional deputy commissioner finance and planning Jan Muhammad while chairing an evening review meeting regarding the ongoing anti-polio drive, directed the police department to provide foolproof security to the teams. The meeting was attended by district health officer Dr Irshad Rughani, deputy DHO Dr Wali Khan, EPI coordinator Dr Noor Hameed, district administration Afghan refugees Humayun Khan, WHO area coordinator Khwaja Irfan, Noorul Wahab and representatives of education department.



QUETTA: MPAs Fazal Qadir, Mir Rehmat Saleh Baloch and Mir Khair Jan Baloch called on Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

Khalid Khattak elected President of Karak Press Club

F.P. Report

KARAK: Khalid Khan Khattak has been elected president of the Karak Press Club (KPC) for the third time, securing 26 out of 48 polled votes. His rival, Abdullah Gul, received 22 votes.

The election, which was pending since 2020, was held after a lapse of four years. Members of the KPC actively participated in the democratic process, with Muhammad Khaliq Jan Khattak, Hifzur Rahman, and Shad Nawaz Khan serving as polling agents for the presidential candidates.

A three-member election committee, comprising Chairman Rauf Khattak, Karim Khattak, and Sarfraz Khattak, oversaw the elec-



tion under the constitution of the Press Club Karak. Several notable figures, including Deputy Director of Regional Information Office Kohat Irshad Afridi extended his congratulations to Khalid Khattak and assured him of full support from his department. He praised the journalists for conducting the elections in a peaceful and friendly environment, and hoped that they would continue to promote positive journalistic values.

will appoint a 10-member cabinet and begin working towards the welfare of Karak journalists. Deputy Director Information Kohat Irshad Afridi extended his congratulations to Khalid Khattak and assured him of full support from his department. He praised the journalists for conducting the elections in a peaceful and friendly environment, and hoped that they would continue to promote positive journalistic values.



GAZA: A Palestinian man and child pass by the rubble of destroyed buildings.

Russian troops enter base housing US military in Niger: US official

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Russian military personnel have entered an air base in Niger that is hosting US troops, a senior US defense told Reuters, a move that follows a decision by Niger's junta to expel US forces. The military officers ruling the West African nation have told the US to withdraw its nearly 1,000 military personnel from the country, which until a coup last year had been a key partner for Washington's fight against insurgents who have killed thousands of people and displaced millions more.

A senior US defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Russian forces were not mingling with US troops but were using a separate hangar at Airbase 101, which is next to Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey, Niger's capital. The move by Russia's military, which Reuters was the first to report, puts US and Russian troops in close proximity at a time when the nations' military and diplomatic rivalry is increasingly acrimonious over the conflict in Ukraine.

It also raises questions about the fate of US installations in the country following a withdrawal. "(The situation) is not great but in the short-term manageable," the official said. Asked about the Reuters report, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin played down any risk to American troops or the chance that Russian troops might get close to US military hardware.

"The Russians are in a separate compound and don't have access to

US forces or access to our equipment," Austin told a press conference in Honolulu. "I'm always focused on the safety and protection of our troops ... But right now, I don't see a significant issue here in terms of our force protection." The Nigerien and Russian embassies in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The US and its allies have been forced to move troops out of a number of African countries following coups that brought to power groups eager to distance themselves from Western governments. In addition to the impending departure from Niger, US troops have also left Chad in recent days, while French forces have been kicked out of Mali and Burkina Faso.

At the same time, Russia is seeking to strengthen relations with African nations, pitching Moscow as a friendly country with no colonial baggage in the continent. Mali, for example, has in recent years become one of Russia's closest African allies, with the Wagner Group mercenary force deploying there to fight jihadist insurgents. Russia has described relations with the United States as "below zero" because of US military and financial aid for Ukraine in its effort to defend against invading Russian forces. The US official said Nigerien authorities had told President Joe Biden's administration that about 60 Russian military personnel would be in Niger, but the official could not verify that number.

After the coup, the US military moved some of its forces in Niger from Airbase 101 to Airbase 201 in the city of Agadez. It was not immediately clear what US military equipment remained at Airbase 101. The United States built Airbase 201 in central Niger at a cost of more than \$100 million. Since 2018 it has been used to target Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimen (JNIM) fighters with armed drones. Washington is concerned about Islamic militants in the Sahel region, who may be able to expand without the presence of US forces and intelligence capabilities. Niger's move to ask for the removal of US troops came after a meeting in Niamey in mid-March, when senior US officials raised concerns including the expected arrival of Russian forces and reports of Iran seeking raw materials in the country, including uranium.

While the US message to Nigerien officials was not an ultimatum, the official said, it was made clear US forces could not be on a base with Russian forces. "They did not take that well," the official said. A two-star US general has been sent to Niger to try and arrange a professional and responsible withdrawal. While no decisions have been taken on the future of US troops in Niger, the official said the plan was for them to return to US Africa Command's home bases, located in Germany.

Russia troops accused of executing surrendering Ukraine soldiers

MOSCOW: Russian forces appear to have executed Ukrainian soldiers as they attempted to surrender or had already surrendered since December 2023, an international rights group has said in a new report. The actions should be investigated as war crimes, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in the report published.

The group probed five incidents of what it called the "apparent summary executions" of at least 15 Ukrainian soldiers as they attempted to surrender, and possibly six more who were surrendering or who had surrendered between December 2023 and February 2024.

"Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, its forces have committed many heinous war crimes," said Belkis Wille, a senior researcher at HRW.

"The summary execution - or murder - of surren-

dering and injured Ukrainian soldiers, gunned down in cold blood, expressly forbidden under international humanitarian law, is also included in that shameful legacy." The rights watchdog said it relied on analysis of drone footage and videos on social media, interviews with Ukrainian soldiers, and media reports, but added that it could not confirm the locations of some of the incidents. It noted that the "apparent executions do not appear to be isolated instances". It cited one incident on February 25 when drone footage shared on X appeared to show at least seven Ukrainian soldiers coming out of a dugout removing their body armour - one soldier even removing his helmet, and all lying face down as five Russian soldiers aimed and fired at them. In other footage captured on the front lines in

the Donetsk region, a Russian commander seemed to have told his troops: "Take no prisoners, shoot everyone," according to the report.

The researchers differentiated between Russian and Ukrainian troops by observing the use of each side's identification tape - blue for Ukraine and white or red for Russia - as well as the different colours of their military fatigues. In December, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office accused Russia of committing war crimes after a grainy video on social media appeared to show several soldiers shooting two surrendering military personnel who emerged from a dugout at gunpoint.

Ukrainian authorities are conducting about 27 separate investigations into similar allegations, HRW said. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission

in Ukraine in March separately reported allegations that at least 32 Ukrainian prisoners were executed in 12 separate incidents between December 2023 and February 2024. Findings from 60 released Ukrainian soldiers, the mission added, showed they had been tortured using repeated beatings, electric shocks, threats of execution, prolonged stress positions, mock executions and sexual violence.

Civilians in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory were also subject to arbitrary killings, detention, and restricted freedoms of expression, the UN group said. Russia denies committing war crimes during its war in Ukraine. It is a party to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid killing prisoners of war. Ukraine has in the past also faced allegations that its soldiers summarily killed Russian troops. — Aljazeera

UN, EU, US urge Georgia to halt 'foreign agents' bill as protests grow

TBILISI: The European Union, United Nations, and the United States have condemned legislation making its way through Georgia's parliament on "foreign agents", as thousands of protesters snarled traffic in the country's capital Tbilisi with a large new protest against the bill.

Protesters poured into Heroes' Square, a key junction through which much of Tbilisi's traffic passes between the city's neighbourhoods. Long queues of vehicles remained blocked. "We are all together to show the Kremlin's puppets that we will not accept the government that goes against the Georgian people's wishes," said protester Giorgi Loladze, 27, from Kutaisi, Georgia's third-largest city.

Tens of thousands of protesters had shut down central Tbilisi a day earlier in the largest anti-government rally yet. Police fired tear gas and

stun grenades to clear some of them. The bill - attacked by opponents as authoritarian and Kremlin-inspired - has completed two of three readings in the parliament and the latest comments reflected alarm in both Washington and Brussels over the country's future direction. The ruling Georgian Dream party says the law, which would require organisations receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad to register as agents of foreign influence, is needed to ensure transparency. The party's billionaire founder said this week that Georgia must defend its sovereignty against Western attempts to dictate to it. Crowds have protested nightly for weeks outside the parliament in Tbilisi. Inside the building, lawmakers have come to blows. The standoff is seen as part of a wider struggle that could determine whether Georgia,

a country of 3.7 million people that has seen war and revolution since the fall of the Soviet Union, moves closer towards Europe or back under Moscow's influence. Gert Jan Koopman, director general of the European Commission's enlargement directorate, reiterated the EU's warning that the bill would put at risk Georgia's hopes of becoming a member of the bloc.

"There are concerning developments in terms of legislation. The law ... as it stands is unacceptable and will create serious obstacles for the EU accession path," he told a news conference in Tbilisi. Koopman said "the ball is very firmly in the court of the government", adding it still had time to change course. But the government - which put forward a similar law last year, only to withdraw it in the face of protests - has shown no sign it will climb down a second

time, which could be damaging ahead of a parliamentary election in October.

UN rights chief Volker Turk called on Georgia's government to withdraw the bill and expressed concern at police violence against protesters. The White House also expressed concerns about the chilling effect such legislation could have on Georgians' ability and willingness to express themselves.

"We are deeply concerned about this legislation - what it could do in terms of stifling dissent and free speech," White House national security spokesman John Kirby said at a US briefing. Earlier, US Ambassador Robin Dumbinn said the Georgian government's choices "have moved the country away from its Euro-Atlantic future" and urged it to recommit to integration with the West. — Aljazeera

Dozens held after London protest

LONDON (Reuters): British police arrested 45 people during a protest in London against the transfer of asylum seekers staying in a hotel to a barge off southern England. Dozens of protesters outside the hotel in Peckham, south-east London, attempted to stop a bus carrying the asylum seekers from leaving, reportedly deflating its tyres and obstructing the vehicle by surrounding it, London's Metropolitan Police said.

Tackling illegal migration is one of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's top priorities, and in order to bring down the high costs of accommodating migrants in hotels while their asylum claims are processed, the government has been trying to use barges and former military sites. Critics, however, have called the Bibby Stockholm barge -- which is docked at Portland Port in Dorset and can house up to 500 men -- inhumane and compared it to a prison ship.

A number of police officers had been assaulted during the protest in Peckham but none were seriously hurt, police said. "We will always respect the right to peaceful protest, but when officers are assaulted and obstructed from their duty then we can and will take decisive action," Met Deputy Assistant Commissioner Ade Adelekan said.

Arrests were made for offences including obstruction of the highway, obstructing police and assault on police. "Housing migrants in hotels costs the British taxpayer millions of pounds every day," Home Secretary James Cleverly said on social media platform X, alongside a video of the protest.

"We will not allow this small group of students, posing for social media, to deter us from doing what is right for the British public." Asylum seekers have been arriving in Britain via small boats across the Channel, and Sunak has made "stopping the boats" one of his signature policy pledges. Official data showed 711 migrants had arrived via small boats, the highest number for a single day in eight months.

US acknowledges Syria air strike

WASHINGTON: The United States Department of Defense has acknowledged that a drone strike in Syria, initially said to have successfully targeted an al-Qaeda leader, actually killed a farmer. The Pentagon stated that the drone strike on May 3, 2023, killed a 56-year-old shepherd named Lutfi Hasan Masto, whom they initially misidentified as a senior member of al-Qaeda.

US Central Command, which oversees military activities in the Middle East, wrote that it "acknowledges and regrets the civilian harm that resulted from the airstrike". The killing of Masto is the latest incident to raise questions about the impact of US drone warfare on civilians, who often pay the price for botched strikes.

The US has become increasingly reliant on armed drones to carry out strikes in numerous countries in the Middle East and Africa, which allows its military to target armed groups without the risks or potential public backlash that accompany deploying troops on the ground. But despite a series of high-profile incidents - including a drone strike during the US withdrawal from Afghanistan that killed 10 civilians, including seven children - accountability for US officials has been rare. Families of the civilians killed in strikes have also struggled to claim restitution.

The Pentagon said that few details of the Masto investigation would be released, citing the classification of sensitive information, but that the strike complied with the laws of armed conflict. The Washington Post, a US news outlet, published a report last year casting doubt on the Pentagon's initial version of events regarding the strike, including its claim that it was an al-Qaeda leader who was killed. — Aljazeera

Panama's presidential race Candidates confront graft and inequality

PANAMA: Over the last five years, Panama has weathered the COVID-19 pandemic, paralysing nationwide protests, and a drought that has brought transportation through its famed canal to a standstill. But, the slender Central American country is set for a shake-up, as its latest presidential election unfolds.

Eight candidates are vying for the position occupied by outgoing President Laurentino Cortizo, whose office is limited to a single five-year term at a time. Foremost among the presidential hopefuls is Jose Raul Mulino, a former security minister who stepped into the race to replace embattled ex-President Ricardo Martinelli.

The former president was previously the frontrunner, until a 10-year prison sentence for money laundering rendered his campaign illegal under Panamanian law. Mulino, Martinelli's former running mate, now leads the race in his stead. An April poll from the research agency Gallup places him at the front of the pack, with 29 percent of the voters' support.

Other contenders include an array of high-ranking government officials. Second in the running, for instance, is Martin Torrijos, another former president, with 14 percent of voters backing him. Even the current vice president, José Gabriel Carrizo, is in the race, though opinion polls show him lagging with only 5 percent support. All but one of the candidates are considered conservative: Only economist Maribel Gordón, a long shot, represents the left. Still, the race could be anyone's to win. Gallup found that 22 percent of voters were undecided, and the presidency will be determined in a single vote, with no run-offs. What are the issues shaping this year's race? Al Jazeera breaks down the voters' top concerns. Gallup found that corruption was the main concern driving Panamanians to the polls this election cycle, with 57 percent of respondents identifying it as the primary issue affecting the country. The nonprofit Transparency International ranks Panama among the bottom half of all countries in its corruption index.

And in 2015, a United Nations official estimated that the country loses 1 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) - approximately \$520m - each year due to corrupt practices. Panama's Social Security Fund (CSS) is often singled out as an example. Last week, for instance, the

Attorney General's Office announced the arrest of three officials from the agency after an investigation surfaced evidence of bribery. "The CSS is a financing well for corruption," economist Felipe Argote told Al Jazeera. "The institution is full of botel-las, inefficiency and overpricing," he added, using Panamanian slang for someone who collects paycheque without working. But while all eight presidential candidates have pledged to stamp out corruption, some have faced suspicions of malfeasance themselves.

One candidate, lawyer and former judge Zulay Rodriguez, is currently under investigation for money laundering and misappropriating 66kg (146 pounds) of gold from a client. Torrijos, meanwhile, has previously faced scrutiny for his ties to the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht, which was accused of bribing officials across Latin America in exchange for beneficial contracts. Experts say the institutional corruption in Panama has a direct bearing on the results of the election. In a 2019 report, Transparency International estimated that 23 percent of Panamanians had been offered some form of bribe in exchange for their vote. "It's unusual to see a person with a campaign hat or T-shirt handing out brochures in the street who hasn't been paid," political scientist Claire Nevache told Al Jazeera. Part of the problem, she explained, stems from the wealth gap between Panamanians: Poverty drives some citizens to seek favours from politicians.

"Panama's great inequality fuels great patronage," Nevache said. "For many people with scarce personal networks and low education levels, the only way to get a job is in the public sector. So you go and work in the campaign for a local representative or congressman with the hope that they will give you or a relative a job once they're in charge." Despite Panama's low inflation rate and sustained economic growth, the World Bank considers it to be the third most unequal country in Latin America, behind Brazil and Colombia. While the economy grew at a rate of 7.3 percent last year, that growth was uneven, with 12.9 percent of Panamanians continuing to live in poverty on an income of \$6.85 a day or less. Unemployment likewise is improving, with the World Bank indicating the joblessness rate sits at 7.4 percent, down from more than 18 percent in 2020. — Aljazeera

Berkeley takes light touch on Gaza protests

BERKELEY (Reuters): At Columbia University, tensions between the administration and students protesting over Israel's war in Gaza have reached the point that scores of New York City police marched onto campus to clear an encampment and arrest demonstrators who had commandeered a classroom building.

It was the second time in as many weeks that the administration has called on police to control the protests. Students have been suspended, and threatened with expulsion. Police are now stationed around-the-clock on campus. Nearly three thousand miles away at the University of California, Berkeley, the scene has been far different. Student demonstrations have so far taken place without arrests or disruption of campus operations.

The contrast in how protests have played out at the two prestigious institutions - both with long histories of student activism - illustrates the range of factors at play in how school administrations, students

and the police navigate what can quickly turn into a full-blown crisis.

South of Berkeley at UCLA, part of the same university system, police flattened a pro-Palestinian camp, a day after it was attacked by pro-Israel counter protesters. Authorities at the Los Angeles school had declared the encampment an unlawful assembly. Similar crackdowns have occurred at colleges across the country, from Arizona State to Virginia Tech and Ohio State to Yale. Police have arrested around 2,000 campus protesters to date.

Still, some universities - including Berkeley, Northwestern and Brown - have managed to avoid confrontations between the police and students. Education experts say these cases offer lessons in keeping tensions from boiling over, a key one being a university's experience with balancing student activism against pressure from donors, interest groups and politicians. Berkeley Chancellor Carol Christ has allowed students to maintain a protest space on cam-

pus since they began erecting tents April 22 on the steps of Sproul Hall, where Martin Luther King gave a 1967 civil rights speech. Dan Mogulof, a spokesman for the university, said that remained the case, despite a scuffle between the co-founder of a Zionist activist group and a pro-Palestinian protester. It was the first violence after days of peaceful assembly. "We are urging everyone to avoid engaging in pointless provocation and physical conflict," Mogulof said, adding that Christ was in talks with encampment leaders after the incident led to three minor injuries. He said the school would respond to violence in line with University of California policy.

That guidance tells administrators to avoid police involvement unless it's absolutely necessary and the physical safety of students, faculty and staff is threatened. That policy is rare, with most universities having some kind of regulation that prohibits permanent encampments or out-laws overnight student activities on campus.

UK's Labour claim big win over Conservatives

LONDON (Reuters): Britain's opposition Labour Party won a parliamentary seat in northern England on Friday, inflicting a heavy loss on the governing Conservatives at the start of what could be a bruising set of results for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

The thumping victory set the tone for what will be a closely watched two days of results ahead of a full national election this year, which polling shows could put Labour Leader Keir Starmer in power and end 14 years of Conservative government. Voters cast their ballots for more than 2,000 seats on local authorities across England and a handful of high-profile mayoral elections, including in the capital, London.

Blackpool South was the only parliamentary seat up for grabs after the incumbent, elected in 2019 as a

Conservative candidate, quit over a lobbying scandal. Labour candidate Chris Webb won the Blackpool election with 10,825 votes. The Conservative candidate came in second with 3,218.

The defeat in Blackpool and early signs of losses at the council level will boost Labour's hopes for a sweeping victory over Sunak's Conservatives in the national election. "This seismic win in Blackpool South is the most important result today," Starmer said. "This is the one contest where voters had the chance to send a message to Rishi Sunak's Conservatives directly, and that message is an overwhelming vote for change."

Sunak's Conservatives are about 20 percentage points behind Labour in most opinion polls for a national election, which

Sunak intends to call in the second half of the year. The first 500 of the more than 2,600 local council results showed Labour making gains at the expense of the Conservatives - in line with finance minister Jeremy Hunt's pre-vote prediction of significant losses for the governing party. Although local elections do not always reflect how people will vote in a national contest, a heavy defeat could trigger fresh anger in the Conservative Party over Sunak's leadership and the prospect of losing power.

The extent of that unrest could hinge on the results of two mayoral elections in which the Conservatives hope to show they can still hold ground in central and northeast England. The Tees Valley mayoral result is due on Friday, while the West Midlands mayor is to be announced.

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Is Columbia in crisis?

ON April 17, University President Minouche Shafik became the latest in a line of leaders in higher education to testify before Congress. As part of the House probe into antisemitism on college campuses, the hearing, titled "Columbia in Crisis," was theoretically the fruit of a bipartisan effort to combat bigotry by holding administrations across the country accountable for their handling of it.

The administration has failed to genuinely engage with its students, faculty, and staff as we—the Columbia community—are forced to watch our beloved University slowly unravel into a space of distrust, suppression, and fear. Only one day after her hearing, Shafik has proven to her students yet again the administration's commitment to silencing and marginalizing its own student body.

Shafik's authorization of the New York Police Department to enter campus and forcibly remove peaceful protesters spotlights the emptiness and duplicity of the promises she made to Congress and the Columbia community. In her opening statement to the Committee, Shafik claimed that she has always "held on to four principles": prioritizing safety as being paramount, demonstrating "care and compassion equally to everyone," upholding freedom of nondiscriminatory and non-abusive speech, and affirming education as the ultimate answer to antisemitism and hate. Much like the "community values" that have been hypocritically implemented by administrators, not only have Shafik's principles been void from the very beginning of her administration's response to events after October 7, 2023, but her response to the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" only further cements her selectivity in enforcing her "principles." When the NYPD Strategic Response Group—which the New York Civil Liberties Union has repeatedly characterized as "notoriously violent"—is welcomed onto campus with open arms, it is Shafik who "disrupts campus life" and infringes on her supposedly paramount principle of safety. How can students, especially those of color, feel safe when their campus is flooded by a police force infested with systemic racism and armed with riot gear? Clearly, "care and compassion" are not being extended equally to everyone.

Even Shafik's commitment to a qualified form of freedom of speech is insincere. A nonviolent protest employing rhetoric that has "historically meant different things to different people" is not making anyone unsafe—feeling uncomfortable is not the same as being unsafe. Lastly, Shafik's proclaimed belief in the enlightening power of education similarly holds no weight. With teach-ins organized by protesters being repeatedly targeted by the administration, it is apparent that Shafik holds a narrow vision for education, only approving of it when it furthers the ideologies the administration agrees with and supports. This characterization of education is fundamentally at odds with both Shafik's principles and Columbia's core mission at large. Unlike her predecessor's steadfast commitment to free speech, Shafik has demonstrated a complete lack of consistency in enforcing her principles, failing to differentiate between speech she personally opposes and speech warranting suppression. With all four of her leadership principles serving as nothing more than mere platitudes, it becomes clear what Columbia's true crisis is.

Columbia's crisis is not as the committee has attempted to define it—a characterization stemming from the belief that the University has become a hotbed of antisemitic thought and behavior. Rather, the crisis is rooted in a lack of genuine community engagement on the part of the administration, as well as a failure to fulfill its duty of care to all affiliates. We have witnessed the creation of countless ineffectual task forces, listening forums with lottery participation, student suspensions, inconvenient and poorly communicated gate closures, disciplinary warnings and hearings, dorm door monitoring, interim policy introductions, proud NYPD and FBI collaborations, campus militarization, and most recently, the arrest of over 108 peaceful protestors at the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

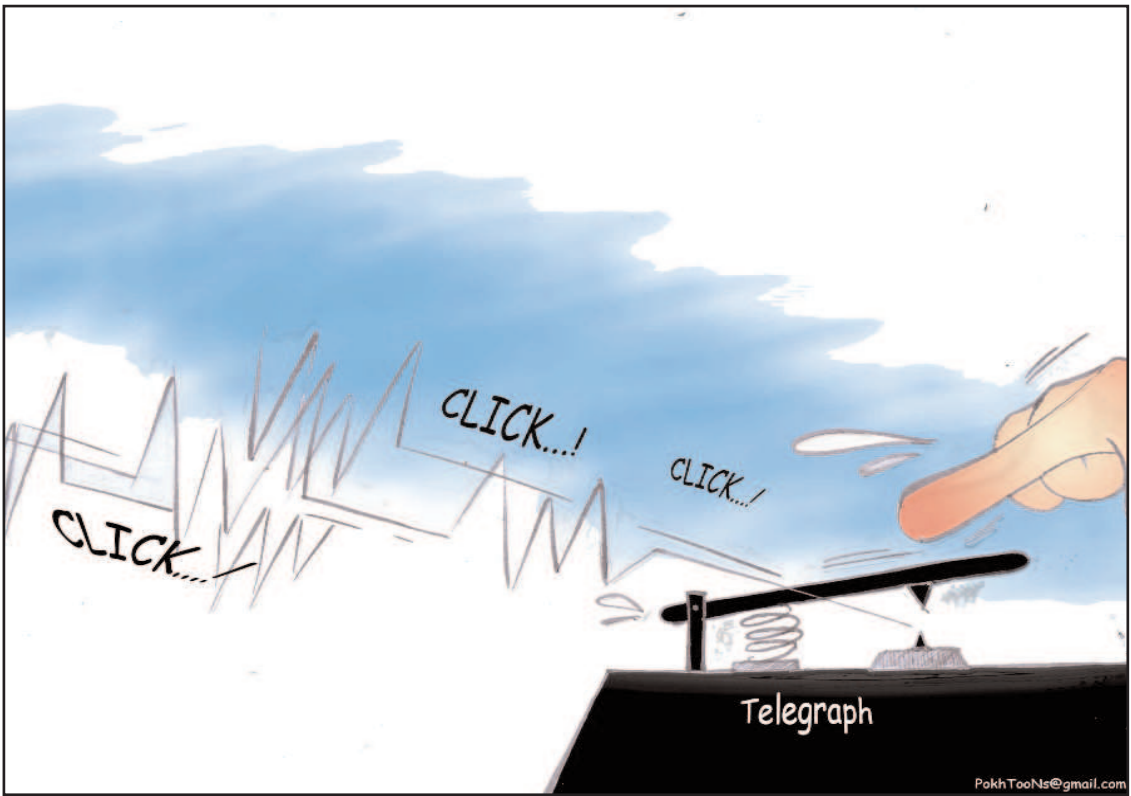
The administration has ignored our countless pleas to engage meaningfully with students, opting instead to continue down a path of surveillance, oppression, and authoritarian policies. Columbia should encourage free discourse on campus, not censor marginalized voices under the guise of "safety" and protection. Shafik could attend student meetings and make concrete commitments to protect their safety. Why does a university that flaunts its "storied history" of successful student activism seek to contain and suppress student mobilization? Why is the same university that capitalizes on the legacy of Edward Said and enshrines The Wretched of the Earth into its Core Curriculum so scared to speak about decolonization in practice? It's not just the House committee watching the administration's every move—it's the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who contribute to the rich legacy the University continuously lauds. It is these very student demonstrations and demonstrators that will one day be touted as examples of Columbia's history of activism. Instead of "saying the right things" to Congress, do the right things for students.

Your students are willingly risking suspension, arrests, harassment, and internal and external threats—why do you continue to isolate yourself from those whom you allegedly seek to serve? What is the role of the University if not to advocate for—and protect—its students? It is too late to pretend to walk the tightrope of bipartisanship. President Shafik, in your own words from your email announcing student arrests, when will you "show compassion and remember the values of empathy and respect," for the students, staff, and faculty who call on you and your administration to represent their interests? It is you and your administration who pull us apart as a community instead of drawing us together. Your explicit declaration that you "complied with the requirements of Section 444 of the University Statutes" is similarly duplicitous. While only consultation with the University Senate is officially required, the University Senate's executive committee did "not approve the presence of NYPD on campus at this time," again demonstrating your willingness to use the student body as collateral to justify your actions and imbue them with a false sense of democratic support.

Hundreds of campus affiliates stood witness as the NYPD disgracefully arrested over 100 of our classmates, friends, and colleagues for peacefully protesting. Similar scenes unfolded when the NYPD was previously invited onto campus over 50 years ago during the anti-war protests of 1968. History has made clear who stood on the wrong side then, and it's clear that this is the side you are aligning yourself with now. This will be your legacy. You must confront your failure to fulfill your duty of protecting and representing your students and their concerns. Otherwise, you will further marginalize, endanger, and distance your students, indefinitely trapping Columbia in its self-inflicted crisis.

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Active Clubs: A new far-right threat to democratic elections

Broderick McDonald

ACROSS North America and Europe, the far-right Active Clubs movement is expanding at an unprecedented pace, presenting new threats to democratic elections and minorities.

With a network of decentralised cells in most states in the United States and European Union member countries, the Active Clubs movement has blended far-right extremism with mixed martial arts (MMA). By presenting a more palatable image to the public and combining its extremist ideology with exercise, fitness and MMA training, Active Clubs have widened their appeal to reach a much broader audience than traditional white supremacist groups whose members are often derided for being "keyboard warriors".

Unlike these traditional hate groups which are mocked for existing mostly in online echo chambers, Active Clubs put real-world engagement at the very core of their group. Whether through kickboxing, weightlifting, hiking, or organising demonstrations, Active Clubs focus on taking action in the here and now. While the ideology of Active Clubs remains similar to the tired and hateful ideologies of traditional white nationalist organisations, two unique factors – decentralised organisational structures and personal growth – have set the Active Clubs movement apart from others and fuelled its rapid growth.

Launched in 2021, the movement now includes more than 104 known cells across the US, Canada, and Europe, according to a recent Counter Extremism Project report. The unprecedented growth of the movement poses serious public safety risks as the US and many democratic countries approach elections in 2024. With a history of engaging in political violence and intimidation, there is a significant risk that the network's cells could serve as a violent militia and "brown-shirt" organisation interfering in elections and political events across the US over the coming year.

To understand the growth and dangers of Active Clubs, we need to examine how the movement started. First launched in January 2021, the network was the second project started by Robert Rundo, a white American nationalist who spent time in Europe learning from other far-right groups and founded the

Rise Above Movement (RAM).

After the arrest of Rundo and three other group leaders during the 2019 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the hierarchically organised RAM began to disintegrate. Recognising the danger that well-placed arrests could pose to vertically structured organisations, Rundo adopted the model of leaderless resistance, first developed by the white nationalist writer Louis Beam in 1983.

With this lesson learned, Rundo structured the Active Clubs movement as a decentralised network where each cell functions independently, yet stays connected to others on encrypted messaging platforms such as Telegram and Rocket.Chat. This more durable decentralised network approach ensures that even if one branch or cell leader is arrested, the overall network remains intact.

Beyond this more resilient organisational structure, the second factor behind the dramatic growth of the Active Clubs movement is its blending of far-right ideologies with personal growth and physical fitness.

By promoting healthy pastimes like weightlifting, kickboxing, and even hiking, the group centres itself around positive, shared activities. Active Clubs enthusiastically encourage their members to live healthier lifestyles, by avoiding tobacco and drug use, training daily, and even going for hikes. For many new members, Active Clubs initially serve as a vehicle for self-improvement where they can train and exercise amongst like-minded individuals. Alongside this personal growth, the group gradually introduces its members to the movement's ideology as their involvement deepens. Putting physical training at the centre of the organisation serves as a powerful tool to help build the self-confidence of its members, many of whom are disenfranchised or isolated with few other options. Beyond developing their self-confidence by orientating the movement around shared training, the network also helps its members build a strong sense of camaraderie.

These powerful social and psychological factors have helped the group to not only reach a wider audience of disaffected young

people than similar organisations but also grow faster than any other far-right movement I have monitored. Unlike most far-right extremist groups – which simply take time and funds from their members – Active Clubs are unique in claiming to provide some concrete social and psychological benefits to recruits. When these social and psychological benefits are combined with a sense of purpose and sacred values, they can become powerful catalysts for collective action that are likely to lead to further political violence and election interference.

Members of the Active Clubs movement have been involved in a wide range of political activity, including violent far-right rallies, political intimidation during campaign debates, and clashes with counter-protesters. The Active Clubs will feel emboldened to take violent action in the run-up to the US elections.

As we approach major elections around the world in 2024, the risks posed by far-right extremist groups grow rapidly. To counter these threats in the short term, we must invest in trust and safety teams to ensure that extremists cannot exploit private platforms to organise, recruit, and spread hateful propaganda. We must also encourage law enforcement and the military to expand their plans to ensure their ranks remain free of extremist-aligned individuals.

However, in the longer term, we must do much more to address the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that drive individuals to join extremist groups like Active Clubs. As generative artificial intelligence and greater specialisation leads to higher unemployment, additional funding for upskilling and retraining will be necessary to begin addressing these economic factors. However, any approach must also provide alternate sources of community and personal agency. Community sports, coding workshops, and entrepreneurship programmes would be a step in the right direction. This is a slow and costly process, to be sure, but without taking steps to change these underlying social conditions, movements like Active Clubs will continue to grow and do significant damage to both the minorities they target and our democratic system as a whole.

Aljazeera

Maritime community of shared future sets sail

He Zhipeng

IN terms of potential future risks, several critical points require China's attention. First, the Ren'ai Jiao issue in the South China Sea has been simmering since the Philippines started delivering construction materials to the Ren'ai Jiao and attempted to make it a permanently occupied military base. Also, the Philippines is consistently trying to stir up public opinion against China.

Given the pattern of the Philippines' provocations, a peaceful resolution to the issue appears difficult. Hence, maintaining the status quo while allowing Manila, on humanitarian grounds, to send limited supplies to the World War II-era military vessel it deliberately rammed into Ren'ai Jiao in 1999 citing the excuse of mechanical fault and now wants to build facilities around it appears to be the most pragmatic way to address the issue.

Second, Manila has indicated it may seek fresh arbitration on Chinese activities near Houteng Jiao. That it has been gathering evidence, especially on marine environmental damage and alleged interference in fishing activities near Houteng Jiao, makes the issue a big legal challenge.

The new arbitration, if the Philippines seeks it, will have far-reaching consequences, affecting relations and setting a precedent for other countries in the region to take similar actions. So China must closely monitor the developments and take measures to protect its interests. The situation in Liyue Tan, where the Philippines desperately wants to unilaterally exploit the resources, poses a threat to China's maritime interests. If Manila proceeds with its plan to extract resources from Liyue Tan, it will undermine regional stability and jeopardize China's strategic and economic interests. While diplomacy should be used to settle the issue, China also needs to respond assertively to protect its national interests in the South China Sea.

A consistent and principled approach is essential to help resolve the issues through dialogue and diplomacy, and safeguard China's interests in the South China Sea. Wu Shicun, chairman of Huayang Research Center for Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance and founding president of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies

A good knowledge of international law, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, is necessary to understand the South China Sea dynamics, and why the United States has been intervening in other countries' disputes, deploying its military and conducting "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea. China's approach to the South China Sea issues is multifaceted. It has been balancing sovereignty claims with efforts to maintain stability and safeguard its economic interests. Late leader Deng Xiaoping's principle of shelving disputes to pursue joint development in such cases encapsulates this strategy, emphasizing cooperation alongside territorial assertions.

However, translating this

policy into action is challenging. The maritime disputes necessitate a nuanced approach that balances assertiveness with cooperation. While stability is essential, it must not come at the expense of fundamental rights. Achieving this delicate balance requires a deep understanding of the region's complexities and a commitment to constructive engagement.

In fact, to resolve the South China Sea conundrum, we need to shift from conventional wisdom toward pragmatic diplomacy. Adopting a holistic approach that prioritizes dialogue, cooperation and respect for international law offers the best path toward stability and prosperity in this vital maritime domain.

The need to urgently resolve the South China Sea issue cannot be overstated. Failure to defuse the underlying tensions risks affecting not only regional stability but also global security. By acknowledging the complexity of the situation and adopting a collaborative approach, stakeholders can work together to develop the South China Sea into a zone of cooperation rather than conflict. Gao Zhiguo, president of the Chinese Society of Law of the Sea, and former judge of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

The vision of a maritime community with a shared future encompasses various layers rooted in diverse interests. Through the lens of Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs theory", we can discern distinct levels of demands and environmental concerns. For instance, maritime disputes often revolve around questions of territorial ownership and belonging, and climate change-induced marine disasters highlight the urgency of addressing these issues.

Contemplating a world marked by diverging interests may prompt skepticism about the feasibility of forging a maritime community amid such unfavorable circumstances. But there is no denying that hope persists amid these challenges — for example, regional initiatives promote partnerships, as can be seen in the case of ASEAN and China. The pursuit of a comprehensive maritime community remains an ideal worth striving for, even if it is achieved gradually. A realistic appraisal of the power dynamics underscores the importance of legal frameworks in shaping perceptions and managing conflicts.

The conflicting assertions of sovereignty, especially in the South China and East China seas, underscore the real threat hegemony poses to China's national interests. Given the threat of the environmental crisis and terrorism, there is a need to take a cautious approach to international relations. After all, safeguarding national interests is a prerequisite for nurturing a global community. Without this, a shared future would remain elusive. Sovereignty, security and development are the basis for a shared future. The concept of a maritime community with a shared future can be viewed through various lenses, from the "Thucydides trap" to a perpetual peace arrangement. By reflecting on our place now, we can navigate our path forward.

World is poised on the edge of a new copper supercycle

Tom Stevenson

IN the 1967 coming-of-age classic, The Graduate, the young protagonist played by Dustin Hoffman is given some advice by a friend of his parents: "I want to say one word to you....plastics....there's a great future in plastics."

If the film were remade today, I suspect the word would be different. The key commodity in the next few decades is likely to be a soft, malleable and ductile red metal with high thermal and electrical conductivity. Today's graduates might be advised to think about a future in copper. Think about today's growth sectors – renewable energy generation, electric vehicles, AI – and the one thing they all have in common is an insatiable appetite for copper. To take one example, it requires three times as much copper to generate the same amount of electricity on a solar farm as in a gas-fired power station. Nearly eight times as much

using offshore wind.

The new energy infrastructure that will be required to make the transition to a low carbon future requires less fuel but more materials. Same story with electric cars, which require six times as many minerals as conventional vehicles. It is one of the ironies of the green revolution that the solution requires investment in the problem. Basic materials account for 15pc of total greenhouse gas emissions and miners cause harm to the environment. But without them there is no net zero.

This is why BHP has alighted on Anglo-American. And why the target has rejected a £30bn bid as "highly unattractive". We should expect BHP to raise its offer and it may also end up in a battle with other potential bidders. While the demand for copper is likely to remain high for years to come, matching it with supply is going to be difficult. The time between explo-

ration and production is measured in years and it is very costly. Buying existing supply is a cheaper, quicker and easier option – but there aren't many pure play copper miners available.

Anglo is a sprawling empire that also includes iron ore, platinum and diamonds, but it's a digestible bite for BHP which is valued on the Sydney stock market at three times as much as its London-listed rival. Lack of supply is one of the principal reasons to think that the price of copper, even at a two-year high of nearly \$10,000 (£7,980) a tonne, might be poised for further gains. Copper production, like that of all commodities, is highly cyclical. To make it worth the cost, the environmental challenges and the long and risky timescales, the price needs to rise from here. In recent years, dwindling demand from China's struggling property sector has kept a lid

on the price and made it more attractive for companies to hand cash out to shareholders rather than invest in new capacity. Between 2012 and 2020 capital expenditure in the copper industry fell by more than 40pc.

This is the perfect set up for one of the price supercycles that have come along every 30 years or so in the commodities world. Years of underinvestment and then a credible demand growth story. It's what happened after the Second World War, when lack of investment during the depression gave way to soaring demand during the conflict and afterwards as Germany and Japan were rebuilt.

In the 1960s, the catalyst was US president Lyndon Johnson's Great Society spending splurge, and in the early years of this century it was China's mass migration from the countryside to its cities. The demand narrative

has several strands. In addition to the copper-hungry renewable energy and electric vehicle sectors, there's a potential new source of demand from data centres for artificial intelligence. In the US alone, it is estimated that energy requirements for these data centres will double in the next few years.

In the case of copper, the price was higher in the mid-1970s than it was in 2003. But within three years it had quadrupled. Since then, it has moved sideways for nearly another 20 years, albeit with big swings along the way, and growing numbers of investors think its time may have come again. As with any commodity, there are different ways to gain an exposure. Only two make sense because you are unlikely to have a big enough warehouse to store the metal itself or to risk the inevitable attempts to relieve you of this valuable commodity.

More likely you will attempt to track the metal

price via an exchange traded fund, such as the WisdomTree Copper ETC, which aims to replicate the Bloomberg Copper Index via a basket of futures. Alternatively, you could invest indirectly via an individual miner or a portfolio of these. The purest play would be Antofagasta, but Glencore, Rio Tinto, BHP, Vale, Freeport McMoRan, Teck Resources and, of course, Anglo American all have copper interests. The Blackrock World Mining Trust holds most of these stocks. Commodities are not a great strategic portfolio holding because in the long run they tend to only match inflation, with lots of volatility. That's not a great combination. But when the price does move, it tends to go far and fast. Having a small exposure in anticipation of the next big upswing makes sense. There's a great future in copper.

Lunar missions exciting time for space

THE success after success of China's space program, with all its diverse elements for scientific exploration and technological development in what remains a risky business, is as impressive as it is exciting.

China launched three astronauts into low-Earth orbit on Thursday night for a six-month mission at the Tiangong space station, as part of its preparations to send astronauts to the moon by the end of the decade. During a press conference on April 24, China Manned Space Agency stated that the development and construction of systems for a Chinese manned lunar landing are progressing as planned, with the aim of achieving a moon landing by Chinese astronauts before 2030. China's accomplishments in space exploration and technology over the past five years, in particular, are without precedent. This includes the completion of China's space station Tiangong (Heavenly Palace), whose first major component, the core module Tianhe, was launched in April 2021 and the two major science modules, Wentian and Mengtian, were launched in 2022.

China's space station continues its program of development and progress from its current T-configuration but with plans for further expansion. Indeed, the docking time for "taikonauts" from launch to entry into the space station has recently been reduced from an already impressive six-seven hours to just two and a half hours due to the development of space rendezvous and docking technologies.

Tianzhou 7, the latest automatic cargo resupply vessel, took off from the Wenchang Satellite launch center in the Hainan island in January and docked in three hours compared with the 16-19

hours taken by the Elon Musk Space-X "Dragon" capsule to dock with the International Space Station (and the about six hours taken by the old Soyuz capsules).

Also, there was the Tianwen 1 Mars mission with Zhurong Rover in May 2021 — perhaps the most complex and hazardous of China's space missions. This should be seen in the context of about 60 percent of Mars missions failing to land on the surface of the Red Planet. Also, the Chinese Space Station Telescope, Xuntian, is scheduled for launch and operation in 2025. Xuntian is an optical and ultraviolet space observatory that will boast a 2-meter-diameter lens, making it comparable to the venerable Hubble Space Telescope. Although the resolution of China's telescope will be similar to Hubble's, its field of view will be 350 times larger.

More important, China's Chang'e (Beautiful Moon Goddess) series of lunar missions have proved amazingly successful, with the Chang'e 3 lander making the first landing on the moon way back in December 2013. The mission included a lunar lander and a small yutu (jade rabbit) rover that was set down in the Mare Imbrium region of the moon, a prominent lava filled basin from one of the largest impact craters known in the entire solar system and easily visible to the naked eye. It made China only the third country to achieve a lunar soft landing.

Chang'e 4, a similar mission of lander and rover, followed in 2019. It was designed as a backup in case Chang'e 3 failed. What set the mission apart was that its landing zone was on the far side of the moon, which is not visible from Earth, the first such landing

Quentin Parker

in space exploration history. This feat was made possible by the success of Chang'e 3 that gave the mission planners and scientists the opportunity and confidence to reconfigure Chang'e 4 for the more challenging but interesting far side alternative. Since this made the mission far more complicated, to maintain essential communication with the Earth a separate queqiao (magpie bridge) relay satellite was deployed into a halo orbit around the so-called L2 Earth-moon Lagrangian point of gravitational equipotential for stability. This mission, too, was a big success.

The Chang'e 5, which followed, was China's first lunar mission that involved bringing back rock sample from the moon. It was launched in November 2020 and landed on the moon on Dec 1, 2020. The return module came back with its precious cargo of 1.7 kilogram of moon rock two weeks later. The scooping device attached to the lander was developed by the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong while my own university, the University of Hong Kong, was fortunate enough to get a small sample of the moon rock for scientific study.

As a result, China became only the third country, after the United States and the former Soviet Union (now Russia), to bring back rock samples from the moon. Just like Chang'e 4 was a backup for Chang'e 3 so was Chang'e 6 for Chang'e 5. Given the success of Chang'e 5, the Chang'e 6 mission has been redesigned to collect rock samples from the far side of the moon for the first time. This mission is due to be launched in the near future. If successful, this will be another science bonanza, as game-changing amounts of water

ice are suspected to exist in the shadowed lunar craters which can be used as fuel for future space missions or to breathe by future space explorers.

However, international cooperation is vital in space exploration. And I believe China is keen on deepening cooperation as it has made clear in its white paper on space program published in January 2022. Indeed, many of the scientific payloads on the Chang'e landers have had international scientific packages. For example, Chang'e 4 had scientific packages by Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia.

And while the European Space Agency supported the Chang'e 5 mission by providing essential tracking from both its Kourou station in French Guiana and Maspolomas station in the Canary Islands at various crucial parts of the mission, different scientific payloads have been provided by France, Italy and Sweden again, and a Pakistani ICUBE-Q CubeSat for Chang'e 6 for detecting ice traces on the lunar surface from orbit.

The Chang'e series of missions is not over, for Chang'e 7 is planned for around 2026 and Chang'e 8 for around 2028, with both focused on the south pole of the moon in order to build a China-led lunar base in the 2030s. Anticipating further international cooperation, this follows the recent unveiling of the most comprehensive lunar atlas ever created, crucial for guiding future lunar endeavors. This remarkable achievement is the result of over a decade of meticulous work by Chinese lunar scientists and geologists. With this in mind, "watch this space" as humanity sets its sights on new aspirations of lunar exploration and envisions moon bases as a gateway to further frontiers.

With eye on China, defense chiefs agree to bolster interoperability

Jesse Johnson

DEFENSE chiefs from Japan, Australia, the Philippines and the US have agreed to further expand military cooperation, and — although "China" was not uttered by the four officials during their first-ever joint news conference Thursday in Hawaii — Beijing's growing regional assertiveness was clearly at the top of their agenda.

At the meetings, which saw US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin host Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara, Australian defense chief Richard Marles and Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro in Honolulu for a series of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral engagements, the four reiterated the need for deepening ties and building up interoperability.

Austin said that the four-country grouping would undertake more joint maritime military exercises, while the US, Japan and Australia would also provide even greater security assistance to the Philippines amid a territorial row with China. "We're clear eyed about the challenges that exist throughout the region," Austin told a news conference following the talks, just the second-ever meeting between the four countries' defense chiefs.

"We'll need to continue to work together to increase interoperability to make sure that we share information, share intelligence," Austin added. "I think that's the way that you promote security and stability. But that's why we're here, because we share a common vision." The gathering was part of a strategy by the United States to bring regional allies and partners closer together in small groupings, or "minilateral," in an effort to build up what it calls "collective capacity" to push back against Chinese assertiveness.

Beijing has been critical of these groupings, frequently referring to them as the beginnings of an "Asian NATO" and raising the specter of regional destabilization. While the four defense chiefs avoided directly calling out China during the news conference, all alluded to concerns over the its moves in the region — especially in the disputed South China Sea.

Beijing, which claims virtually the entirety of the strategic waterway, has repeatedly clashed with the Philippines in the contested waters. In the most recent example, the Philippines summoned China's ambassador to Manila on Thursday to protest China's use of water cannons against government ships Tuesday in the South China Sea, accusing Beijing of "harassment, ramming, swarming, shadowing and blocking, dangerous maneuvers, use of water cannons, and other aggressive actions."

The talks come at a critical time for security cooperation throughout the region, one senior US defense official said ahead of the four-way meeting, pointing specifically to Tuesday's clash near the flashpoint Scarborough Shoal. "Japan and Australia have been

some of our most vocal and staunchest allies in speaking up about the completely unacceptable nature of this behavior," the official said, noting Manila's efforts to highlight China's "worrisome operational behavior and coercion that we see taking place in a number of places across the region."

The Philippines has routinely brought journalists aboard its government vessels for sailings near disputed features to spotlight alleged Chinese harassment, including inside its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which extends 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from its coast. Asked what would prompt the US or the Philippines to invoke the allies' mutual defense treaty, both countries' defense chiefs refused to discuss hypothetical situations.

"We've been very clear to everyone, to include Beijing, that the kind of behavior that we've seen, where Filipino crews are put in danger ... sailors have been injured and property damaged, that is irresponsible behavior," Austin said, reiterating that Washington's commitment to the treaty remains "ironclad." Teodoro also did not speculate about conditions under which Manila might invoke the pact, saying that would be a "political decision at the end of the day."

"We are very conscious of the fact that we need to assert our rights, but in a manner that safeguards the safety of each and every member of the Philippine Armed Forces," he added. As a part of the effort to deter Chinese assertiveness, the four nations have conducted joint maritime patrols within the Philippines' EEZ, something the defense chiefs said would continue. Officials previously said one of the upcoming joint maritime exercises would take place around Japan sometime next year.

"We're looking to conduct more maritime exercises and activities among our four countries," Austin said. "We also want to pursue coordinated security assistance to the Philippines that will boost interoperability and help the Philippines achieve its defense modernization goals." Asked exactly how Japan would figure into these exercises, Kihara said that participation "will be considered and determined individually." Tokyo is planning to sign a visiting-forces agreement with the Philippines later this year, a move that would facilitate a greater scope and frequency for joint training, maritime patrols and the rotational deployment of troops.

Washington and Canberra signed similar deals with Manila in 1998 and 2007, respectively. From a logistics point of view, a similar deal by Japan would also help boost the US-led military footprint around self-ruled Taiwan, which China views as a renegade province that must be unified with the mainland, by force if necessary.

Japanese policymakers have said that a crisis over democratic Taiwan would represent an existential threat to Tokyo, while some senior US military officials

have hinted that an invasion of the island within the next decade is within the realm of possibility. Ahead of the four-way meeting, Kihara, Austin and Marles held separate trilateral talks, with the three signing a new trilateral agreement outlining cooperation on research, development and testing that they said is vital to maintaining their "collective edge."

"This landmark arrangement allows the respective defense organizations to pursue areas of interest for operationally-relevant advanced collaboration," they said in a joint statement. "Through this arrangement the ministries will further discuss cooperative opportunities in the areas of collaborative combat aircraft and autonomous systems and composite aerospace materials." Another US defense official told reporters ahead of the meeting that the deal would help get the three partners on the same page in terms of defense tech.

"The agreement encourages standardization and interoperability on defense technology and aims to make the countries' already strong ties on science and technology more efficient and cost effective," the official said. The defense chiefs also reached a deal to hold more joint military training while enhancing the complexity of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance cooperation and deepening trilateral intelligence-sharing.

Exercises involving the advanced F-35 stealth fighter jet were also announced, with multiple rounds to be held in all three countries over the next two years, including during the Bushido Guardian drills next year in Japan. Meanwhile, during bilateral talks between Kihara and Austin, the two agreed to hold a Cabinet-level dialogue for the first time on "extended deterrence," or the US commitment to use its nuclear and conventional forces to deter attacks on allies, the Defense Ministry said in a readout of the roughly 45-minute meeting.

The dialogue would take place at the next "two-plus-two" meeting of the two countries' defense chiefs and top diplomats expected sometime this summer. Kihara and Austin also said they would continue discussions on improving their respective command-and-control frameworks "to enhance their interoperability." During a summit last month, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and US President Joe Biden unveiled plans to revamp the US military's command-and-control framework in Japan following a similar move by the Self-Defense Forces "to enable seamless integration of operations ... and allow for greater interoperability and planning between US and Japanese forces." The defense chiefs also said preparations are underway for the early kickoff of regular consultations on US-Japan defense industry cooperation, including discussions on the joint development, production and maintenance of defense equipment.

The Japan Times

Kate Forbes has still won a significant victory – for religion in public life

WHEN Kate Forbes ran for SNP leader last year, the reaction was instant: how could a Christian of her unapologetic, traditional persuasion run a modern, progressive government?

It's not just that she was born into the Free Church of Scotland; she converted into it, leaving the more liberal Presbyterian church. She disagrees with gay marriage, sex outside of marriage and even women ministers. She'd uphold everyone's rights, she says – but her faith is real. And far more important to her than politics. At the time, her stance struck me as brave but politically suicidal. She'd be torn apart, I thought, as surely as Tim Farron was when he led the Liberal Democrats into a general election. He ended up spending every interview dodging questions as to whether he believed gay sex was sinful then resigned, concluding that faith and politics had become incompatible.

But Forbes went on to almost beat Humza Yousaf, winning 48 per cent of the vote. She decided not to run this time and instead cut a deal with John Swinney, who will be seen as a caretaker first minister with her as the heir apparent. The next few months will be odd in Holyrood: an SNP government led by the 60-year-old Swinney with the attention on his 34-year-old kingmaker.

It will be his duty to lead his party into a Westminster election where it will lose perhaps half of its seats. She can then present herself as a new broom, cleaning out the Augean stables of an SNP still under police investigation of embezzlement. It is, for her, a

smarter choice than running again now.

This time, the controversy over her faith was over almost as soon as it began. Attempts to cast her as "the MSP for the 19th century" drew instant condemnation with academics and opposition MSPs leaping to her defence. Douglas Alexander, tipped to be a big player in Keir Starmer's team if elected in East Lothian, called for "tolerance towards sincerely-held religious beliefs". The Twitterstorms, which hold a depressing amount of sway in modern politics, were directed at her critics. The debate seems to have changed – and she may well have changed it.

A Cambridge graduate, appointed Nicola Sturgeon's finance minister at the age of 29, Forbes has long stood out. Brought up in India to missionary parents, she first followed the normal pattern of dodging questions about her faith. Three years ago, she changed tack. "To be straight, I believe in the person of Jesus Christ," she told an astonished Nick Robinson. "I believe that he died for me, he saved me. And that my calling is to serve and to love him and to serve and love my neighbours with all my heart and soul and mind and strength."

Many politicians think this, but none would dream of saying so in public – not in such language. Talking about religion can only alienate and damage your prospects, it's argued: faith needs to be kept as a dirty secret. Not just in politics but the workplace or any public space. You'll be accused of bigotry and it's best just to keep quiet. This is the quiet-Christian

Fraser Nelson

consensus that Forbes wanted to challenge with her campaign, even if it cost her the race. But in the end, she ended up drawing more admiration than condemnation.

It's not true to say, as many do, that Yousaf was spared the secular inquisition because he's Muslim. He was asked, and answered. He agrees with gay marriage, so breaks from mainstream Islamic teaching. This is what's different: Forbes (and Farron) refused to break with their church's position and were pilloried. But Forbes is the first person to come through it with her reputation enhanced.

After a faltering start, she learnt how to handle such questions. When LBC's Iain Dale asked her whether he's a sinner in the eyes of her church because he has a husband, she didn't hold back. "I consider you as much of a sinner as I consider myself to be a sinner," she said. "I am taught to believe that you are of greater value than I am and I am to serve you – and every citizen of Scotland – in that fashion. When it comes to legal rights, I will defend absolutely your right to live and love without harassment and fear."

She made another interesting point: that they're both minorities and should back each other. "I would defend to the hilt your rights in the hope that you'd also defend other minorities' rights, including people of faith." This is Kemi Badenoch's point: that the equalities agenda is intended as a shield to protect people, not a sword to attack others or smear them as bigots.

Yousaf did his bit for faith in

public life, releasing pictures of himself at prayer in Bute House. Rishi Sunak did the same when knelt prostrate at a temple in New Delhi. He sees Britain not as a secular country but a multi-faith democracy. One with a Muslim in London City Hall, a Hindu in No?10, a Buddhist in the Home Office (the now-departed Suella Braverman) and most importantly, voters who couldn't care less about how any of them pray.

The prayers and Diwali candles are rare and low-key but the lack of backlash (or interest) matters. The old Alastair Campbell line – "we don't do God" – now looks dated. What we see now is a coming together of those seeking to promote diversity of opinion. The alliances are unusual. The Scottish Association of Mosques refused to back Yousaf and ended up praising Forbes. Joanna Cherry – a lesbian, feminist and gender-critical SNP MP – is a vocal fan of Forbes, who she admires for standing up to trans activists. Something is going on here that transcends party politics. And seems to be a rising political force.

Forbes may well never end up as first minister and, if she does, the SNP may still be doomed. But she has proven an important point: it's OK, now, to do God. There's a hymn sung in her church about the need to "dare to be a Daniel / dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose / dare to make it known." Adding the word "don't" in front of each of these lines would have seemed useful advice to any politician in recent years but it seems Forbes has written a new rule book. She won't be the last to use it.

China, France working together can smoothen the global bumps

François de la Chevalerie

CHINESE President is going to visit France. This special moment strengthens bilateral relations, especially when the world is undergoing a bumpy ride. The ongoing armed conflicts, the global warming issue, the commercial disputes, and, more broadly, the breakdown of multilateralism are of growing concern. What can be done to challenge a global noxious atmosphere and the suspicions it arouses?

The number one question is how to ease the international tensions by improving collective security. Both countries share the same view: peace is the prerequisite of enlightened progress broadly beneficial to our economies and societies. Concretely, that means the world has much to gain through diplomatic efforts than through drawing battle lines. History teaches us that the persistence of conflicts is harmful for everyone. So, it is time to put forward the idea of holding an international conference.

As Jean Monnet once said, we had to get around the table and put the problem in the middle. An initiative borne by two countries with different political systems from distinct geographical areas is more likely to be heard by the international community. While respecting national sovereignty, the pur-

pose of the conference is to build the foundation for cooperation by strengthening the procedures that civilize the world without creating conflict, without there being any cause for conflict, and without starting military conflict.

The second question is to address the issue of commercial disputes. The multilateral system embodied by the World Trade Organization and the current Doha Development Agenda is not functioning well. If the "every man from himself" is not yet the rule, we are not that far. The temptation of reverting to protectionism, the proliferation of customs barriers, the subsidies, and the binding norms threaten the smooth flow of trade.

Despite criticism, globalization has brought benefits. On the one hand, the affordability of low-priced consumer goods to everyone. On the other hand, economic development. Of course, this model should be corrected. The BRICS strive for a more equitable share of the collective wealth and a less dependence on the dollar. For their part, Western countries support policies aimed at inducing reindustrialization. It is clear that an appropriate balance has to be struck between these two positions. It requires leadership and ambition.

France could play a major role in the search for a fair and lasting agreement as regards to trade relations between China and the European Union. As part of their bilateral relations, France and China should boost business opportunities. For example, China is way ahead in the area of electric car.

Given its geographic location and its long-time experience in car manufacturing, France is a perfect venue to welcome and to set up Chinese factories. On the other hand, France has renowned experience in the agricultural field and in securing the food chain. China could house farm pilots for the development of true Chinese livestock sector with a genetic library. Lastly, the business community is first and foremost a mix of entrepreneurs, ideas, and research. Both countries have to foster individual initiatives to encourage the desire to cooperate, to settle partnerships in a very operational manner.

The third question refers to climate change. As the situation is worsening, there is no time to waste. Both countries have advocated for the Paris Agreement. As a result, they have initiated a profound energy transition by developing integrated technologies that radically transform production

processes.

They are promoting renewable energies by diversifying electricity production and energy efficiency. They are stimulating the implementation of recycling facilities and plants. Moreover, they are supporting the reduction of fuel consumption and CO2 emissions through binding mechanisms. In view of the urgency of the situation, more can be done. There too, they need to set an example to the world. Innovation and imagination must be at the heart of a shared approach. By combining their strengths, by pooling scientific expertise, several joint projects ought to be launched.

Thematic working groups involving universities, companies and domestic private investors need to be set up to respond to emergencies, for instance, flood risks, landslides control (through reforestation) and droughts control (through ecosystem conservation). In addition, they must take up the challenge of robots, artificial intelligence, and high-tech products to provide solutions to stop global warming. Aligning their strengths, China and France could push the process at all levels focused on the well-understood survival of Earth. In the end, these efforts could yield positive results in calming obsolete and pointless tensions.

Tokyo should mend its provocative ways

Li Yang

CHINA has enough reasons to lodge solemn representations to Japan, as it did on Sunday, after five Japanese lawmakers trespassed on Friday into waters near China's Diaoyu Islands allegedly for a maritime "inspection".

The lawmakers, including former defense minister Tomomi Inada, were reportedly conducting an inspection tour organized by the city of Ishigaki in Okinawa Prefecture. Their irresponsible action is undoubtedly a deliberate provocation to Beijing. According to the Chinese embassy in Japan, the China Coast Guard has taken necessary measures to deal with the issue in accordance with the law.

The Diaoyu Islands are an inherent part of China's territory since ancient times. The archipelago that Japan invaded decades before World War II should have been returned to China immediately after Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945 according to relevant historical files. But Tokyo handed over the

Diaoyu Islands to the US military that year on the pretext that the islands were under the jurisdiction of Okinawa. The Diaoyu Islands were subsequently used as a shooting range for the US military. In 1970, the US handed over jurisdiction over Okinawa to Japan, "giving" it the Diaoyu Islands.

Yet China's determination and will to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty and maritime rights are unwavering. China strongly urges Japan to stop all political provocations, on-site disturbances and media hype, and return to the correct track of managing differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation to avoid further escalation of the situation. That the CCG's patrols in the waters around the islands have become a regular practice means China is able to deal with the Japanese side's provocations. The Fumio Kishida government's one-sided pro-US diplomacy downgrades Japan into a proxy in Washington's

geopolitical game in the Asia-Pacific. That blind gambling threatens to derail the otherwise healthy development of Sino-Japanese relations, which harms the common interests of both sides and the region.

That the Diaoyu Islands did not become an obstacle to the two countries normalizing their diplomatic ties and promoting economic and trade cooperation is thanks to the political wisdom demonstrated by both sides in shelving their differences for the common development of the two countries. But if Japan is determined to unilaterally discard that consensus and throw its weight behind the US' China-containment strategy, it should realize that no one is allowed to violate China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and China remains steadfast in safeguarding its lawful rights. If Tokyo turns a deaf ear to the Chinese side and continues to sabotage China-Japan ties, it will be held accountable for the dire situation its irresponsible behavior will cause.



ISLAMABAD: CEO Huawei Pakistan Ethan Sun called on Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal.

PSX turns bullish, gains 1,244 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Friday, gaining 1,244.45 points, a positive change of 1.76 percent, closing at 71,902.09 points against 70,657.64 points the previous trading day. A total of 452,155,229 shares valuing Rs 24,542 billion were traded during the day as compared to 436,993,041 shares valuing Rs19,024 billion the last day.

Some 378 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 248 of them recorded gains and 104 sustained losses, whereas the prices of 26 remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Pak Petroleum with 26,658,354 shares at Rs 124.33 per share, Hascol Petrol with 26,575,393 shares at Rs8.06 per share and Fauji Cement with 19,309,110 shares at Rs21.36 per share. Unilever Pakistan Foods

Limited witnessed a increase of Rs 240.83 per share closing at Rs 19,379.98, whereas runner up was Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs 100.11 decline to close at Rs 7,585.11. Hallmark Company Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 68.03 per share closing at Rs 994.94, followed by Shahmurad Sugar Mills Limited with Rs 24.61 decline to close at Rs 550.38.

US ends Tesla rear-view camera investigation

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said on Friday it has closed a long-running investigation into the loss of rear-view camera images in nearly 160,000 of Tesla (NASDAQ:TSLA)'s Model X and Model S vehicles.

The auto safety regulator said Tesla's 2021 recall of almost 135,000 vehicles appears to address the risk presented by the failure of a media control unit and will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the callback.

Tesla agreed to the recall to address touchscreen failures under pressure from NHTSA, after the agency sought the callback in a formal letter. Automakers usually agree to voluntary fixes before the auto safety agency formally seeks a recall.

The agency said touchscreen failures posed significant safety issues, including the loss of rearview or backup camera images, exterior turn-signal lighting, and windshield defogging and defrosting systems that "may decrease the driver's visibility in inclement weather."

NHTSA said Friday the failure also impacts the Autopilot advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) and turn signal functionality due to potential loss of audible chimes, driver sensing, and alerts.

The agency last week opened a separate probe into Tesla's recall of 2 million vehicles in December to boost Autopilot safeguards.

NHTSA first opened a probe in June 2020 into complaints that media control unit (MCU) failures led to touchscreen displays not working.

NHTSA initially sought a recall of 158,000 vehicles but the recall did not include some vehicles with upgraded processors built after March 2018.

NHTSA said Friday the MCU has a finite lifespan and "believes that a 5- or 6-year life expectancy for a component integral to providing the driver with safety functions is insufficient."

Tesla said all units will inevitably fail given the memory device's finite storage capacity, the agency said. Tesla said in February that about 104,000 of the 135,000 vehicles recalled have been repaired.

The company had last month recalled 3,878 Cybertrucks to fix an accelerator pedal pad that could come loose and get lodged in the interior trim.



Google defends app store, fighting Epic Games' bid for major reforms

NEW YORK (Reuters): Google has asked a U.S. judge not to impose sweeping changes to the Alphabet unit's app store Play that were proposed by "Fortnite" maker Epic Games in the companies' closely-watched antitrust fight.

Google made its filing late on Thursday in San Francisco federal court, where Epic last year persuaded a jury that the tech giant unlawfully stifled competition with its controls over apps downloads on Android devices and payments to developers for in-app transactions.

Epic's proposal "would make it nearly impossible for Google to compete," Google's filing said.

The gaming company in March asked U.S. District Judge James Donato in San Francisco to force Google to make it easier for users to download apps from other sources and to allow developers more flexibility in offering and charging for purchases.

The Cary, North Carolina-based company also said it should be allowed to bring its Epic Games Store to Android "without delays and barriers." A hearing on the proposed injunction is scheduled for May 23.

Epic did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Wilson White, Google's head of government affairs and public policy, said in a statement that "Epic's demands would harm the privacy, security, and overall experience of consumers, developers, and device manufacturers."

SCCI stresses proactive steps for promotion of poultry farming sector

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry urged the government to take proactive steps for promotion of poultry farming and resolution of issues attached with this important sector.

The demand was made by SCCI Senior vice president Sanaullah Khan while addressing as chief guest at Pak International Poultry Expo 2024, said a statement here on Friday.

Sanaullah Khan on the occasion assured that

chamber will take up issues facing the poultry farming community and would play its effective role for their amicable resolution.

He invited the poultry farmers and business community attached with this sector to the upcoming SCCI Investment Conference, which is likely to be held in mid of May.

The Expo was attended by KP Minister for Agriculture Maj (ret) Sajjad Barkwal, Secretary Livestock Dr Ambar Ali Khan, Principal Veterinary

Pakhtunkhwa Dr Syed Masoom Ali, Poultry Association president Raj Wali, along with poultry farming community in a large number

The SCCI senior vice president and minister of agriculture and other high officials on the occasion agreed to joint take steps for promotion of the poultry sector.

By taking up federal and provincial governments, all hurdles and problems facing the poultry farming community will be removed with concrete and collective efforts, they vowed.

Sanaullah asked the business community attached with the poultry sector to send problems in writing to the chamber and assured all these issues identified and raised during the expo would be taken up with the central and provincial level with authorities concerned.

The SCCI SVP stressed the need for using modern technology and machinery for increasing poultry production so that KP will be less dependent on Punjab and become sufficient in poultry production.

EFU General Insurance awarded 16th Corporate Social Responsibility Award 2024



F.P. Report

KARACHI: EFU General Insurance Ltd., the leading non-life insurer in Pakistan, was recently awarded with the 16th Corporate Social Responsibility Award 2024 at an event organised by the National Forum of Environment &

Health at a local hotel.

The award was presented by Mr. Mirza Ikhtiar Baig, Ex-Senior Vice President FPCCI and MNA, to Ms. Ansa Azhar, Senior Executive Vice President, EFU General Insurance.

This laurel serves as yet another strong endorsement of EFU

General's enduring commitment to the relentless advancement of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. It stands as a testament to EFU General's steadfast dedication to fostering positive social impact, promoting sustainable practices, and uplifting communities.

Apple iPhone sales fall in nearly all countries

NEW YORK (BBC): Sales of iPhones have fallen in almost every market across the globe, according to the latest results from Apple.

The technology giant said overall demand for its smartphones dropped by more than 10% in the first three months of this year, with sales falling in every geographic region except for Europe.

Apple said that overall, revenues across the company declined by 4% to \$90.8bn (£72.5bn), which was the biggest drop for more than a year.

Nevertheless, the results were not as bad as expected and Apple's share price rose in after-hours trading in New York.

The company said the figures were distorted by Covid-related supply disruptions, which led to unusually strong sales during the same period last year.

It pledged that sales would return to growth in the months ahead, noting upcoming product launches and investments in artificial intelligence (AI).

For the iPhone, sales in the critical greater China market dropped by 8%.

Mr Cook attempted to reassure investors about the state of the business in the world's second largest economy, noting that iPhone sales were actually up in "mainland" China.

"I maintain a great view of China in the long term," he said. Competition in that market has been intensifying from local rivals such as Huawei.

Gil Luria, senior software analyst at DA Davidson, said companies such as Huawei do well in China because "it is the homegrown brand".

"But in terms of features, functionality and prestige, iPhone still has an advantage over any other handset," he told the BBC's Today programme.

"So any time consumers get the choice and have the resources they're going to buy an iPhone - that's not any different in China."

Struggles at the company - which has endured a streak of sales declines for five of the last six quarters

- marked a contrast with the wider market.

Globally, smartphone shipments rose 10% in the first three months of the year, expanding after a long lacklustre period, according to research firm Canals.

Mr Luria said that for Apple, there hasn't been "significant improvements to the handset" since the iPhone 12 was launched almost four years ago "when Apple introduced 5G connectivity which compelled a lot of consumers to upgrade the phone".

He added: "What they're hoping for now is that they can introduce enough new AI features into the iPhone 16 which will come out later this year in order to finally drive a big iPhone upgrade cycle."

Apple is also facing legal battles with regulators in the US and Europe over its app store fees.

A separate anti-monopoly lawsuit in the US against Google threatens the lucrative payments

Apple receives from the search giant in exchange for making Google the default search engine on Safari, Apple's internet browser.

According to court filings, those payments amounted to about \$20bn in 2022, a sum that helped lift Apple profits.

Pre-tax profit for the three months was flat at \$28bn and the company announced that it was setting aside \$110bn to buy back shares.

Finance chief Luca Maestri said Apple sales were expected to rise in the "low single digits" in the three months to June.

He added that the firm expected double digit growth in its services business, offering more guidance than the company typically provides.

COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Fazal Gul. A.D.J-IV,Kohat
Appeal no.CA-50/13
Date of hearing,07-05-2024, Titled:- Dur E Nayab Vs Asfandiyar (etc), Notice against:- (4)Mst. Muneera Begum Dughter of Ikhlaiq Hussain R/o Hafiz Abad Kohat (6)Sajid (7)Zaheen Sons of Gul Khan R/o Hassan Abad Shah Pure Kohat presently r/o (now in Dubai UAE) (12)Ali Dost Son of Mohabet Khan R/o Hassan Abad Shah Pure Kohat (Respondent)
Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a Appeal against you Respondent in which date of hearing 07-05-2024 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Respondent is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 07-05-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law,order Issued on,26-03-2024(Court of ADJ-IV Kohat)



ISLAMABAD: President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari addressing a ceremony at chamber house.

Wall St gains after soft jobs data allays rate jitters



NEW YORK (Reuters): Wall Street's main indexes advanced on Friday after a softer-than-expected jobs report revived hopes of the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates this year, while gains in Apple and Amgen on upbeat corporate updates added sup-

port.

U.S. job growth slowed more than expected in April and the increase in annual wages fell below 4% for the first time in nearly three years, while the unemployment rate stood at 3.9% compared with expectations that it

would remain steady at 3.8%.

"The data is soft across the board from the Fed's perspective, which is what really matters and an unemployment rate of 3.9% is not something disastrous," said Jason Pride, chief of investment strategy and research at Glenmede. "This indicates an economy that is not declining dramatically, but it definitely indicates a looser labor market."

Traders added to bets that the Fed will deliver its first interest rate cut this year in September.

Yields across government bonds fell after the data, with the yield on the 10-year note last at

4.5036%.

The CBOE Volatility index (.VIX), opens new tab, also known as Wall Street's "fear gauge", touched its lowest level in a month.

The latest economic data follows the Fed's more dovish-than-expected interest rate guidance in its latest policy meeting, which caused U.S. stocks to rally on Thursday.

Separately on Friday, the U.S. services sector contracted in March, while a measure of prices paid by businesses for inputs jumped, a worrisome sign for the outlook on inflation.

Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab jumped 6%,

outpacing other megacap stocks after the iPhone maker unveiled a record \$110 billion share buyback program and beat modest expectations for quarterly results and forecast.

Amgen (AMGN.O), opens new tab climbed 12.1% as the biotechnology firm said it was very encouraged after completing an interim analysis of its mid-stage study of experimental weight-loss drug MariTide and as it reported first-quarter earnings.At 10:02 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (.DJI), opens new tab rose 481.28 points, or 1.26%, to 38,706.94, the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab gained 58.48

points, or 1.15%, to 5,122.30, and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab gained 303.94 points, or 1.92%, to 16,144.89.

Nine of the 11 major S&P 500 sectors were trading higher, with information technology (.SPLRCT), opens new tab and real estate (.SPLRCR), opens new tab stocks among the top gainers.

Block (SQ.N), opens new tab rose 5.4% after the Jack Dorsey-led payments fintech firm lifted its full-year adjusted core earnings forecast and revealed plans to add more bitcoins to its balance sheet. Expedia (EXPE.O), opens new tab fell 13%

after the online travel agency cut its full-year revenue growth forecast as gross bookings were hit by a drag in its vacation rental platform.

Of the 397 companies in the S&P 500 that have reported earnings to date in the first quarter, 76.8% beat analysts' expectations, compared with the historical average of 67%, according to LSEG data.

Advancing issues outnumbered decliners for a 5.7-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and a 3.52-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq.

The S&P 500 posted 17 new 52-week highs and one new low, while the Nasdaq recorded 86 new highs and 24 new lows.



In brief

PSL commissioner Naila resigns

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan Super League (PSL) Commissioner Naila Bhatti resigned from the post on Friday over differences with authorities of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Sources said the board has accepted the resignation Ms Bhatti, who was part of the team led by former PCB Chairman Najam Sethi. Naila Bhatti is the latest to step down as directors of PCB's several other departments have also resigned since Mohsin Naqvi took charge as Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman. A day earlier, Dr Sohail Saleem, Director of Medical and Sports Sciences, also resigned from the post followed the medical committee's findings of negligence in pacer Ihsanullah's treatment. On April 5, PCB Media Director Aalia Rasheed also resigned from her post. She had been appointed during the tenure of PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf. Last month, PCB Director Legal Bilal Raza and Director Commercial Babar Hamid also stepped down for unknown reasons.

Jr Tennis Initiative Program Activity held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Around 250 students Friday visited PTF Complex under JTI programme to witness the opening ceremony of the 1st PTF Inter Department Tennis Trophy. The students aged between 8 and 14 from OPF Junior and OPF Higher Secondary School F-11, OPF School F-8, Allied High School, OPF Girls Wing F-11 and Dar-e-Arkam School Islamabad got a chance to meet, mingle and play with members of the Pakistan team. International tennis star and President-PTF Aisam ul Haq Qureshi led the on-court activities and was joined by Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib, Barkat ullah and Yusuf Khalil. It was heartening to see the enthusiasm and excitement amongst the young students for the game of tennis. Such initiatives are very important for the development of tennis and making the game popular in Pakistan.

More matches decided in Handball League

PESHAWAR (APP): Peshawar, Mardan and Bannu Region secured victories in the Provincial Handball League in the Prime Minister Youth Talent Hunt Handball League being played in a joint collaboration of Higher Education Commission and Directorate of Sports University of Peshawar here on Friday. Peshawar defeated Swat Region by 22 goals to 14 in a thrilling match. Both Peshawar and Swat gave each other a tough fight but Peshawar overall dominated the proceedings and did not allow Swat to strike back. Swat took the lead in the very start of the match with 0-5 and 2-9 but later on when Peshawar players settled down they put pressure on Swat defence to score quite easily. In the second match, Bannu defeated Hazara Region by 16-11 in another hotly contested encounter. Similarly, Mardan defeated Hazara by 26 goals to 8 in a one-sided affair. In the match, Peshawar strengthened its position by scoring 34 goals against 14. On this occasion, Director Sports Bahre Karam, Director Distance Education Dr. Noorzada, Ehsanullah and Gul Gee from England and Deputy Director Youth Arshad Hussain were also present.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan in a group photograph with the players and management during Closing Ceremony of Prime Minister's National Table Tennis Youth Sports League at Sports Complex. —APP Photo

Wapda, Army victorious in PTF Tennis Trophy matches

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wapda and Pakistan Army Friday won matches on the opening day of the 1st PTF Inter-Department Tennis Trophy 2024 here at PTF Tennis Complex.

On the opening day, Wapda and Pakistan Army won matches against Pakistan Navy and SNGPL respectively, and gained valuable winning points in their bucket.

Muhammad Abid (Wapda) easily breezed out his opponent Faizan Fayyaz Khan (Navy) in one-sided affairs without conceding a single game 6-0 6-0. In the second single Aqeel Khan (Wapda) started his winning streak and overpowered his opponent Asad Zaman (Navy) in a straight set match 6-2 6-1.

In the first singles, Abdullah Adnan (Army) won his opening match against Ahmad Babar (SNGPL) in a straight set 6-2 6-1.

In the second single Muzammil Murtaza (Army) outclassed Saqib Hayat and won the match

6-0 6-1 just in 37 minutes.

Muzammil played an excellent game and hit 5 aces in the first set and 9 aces in the second set and did not allow his opponent to settle down against his powerful serve. This match was officiated by ITF White Badge Umpire Hussnain Mehmood. President PTF also congratulated the winning team members and wished them well for future matches.

Earlier in the afternoon Zahoor Ahmed Addl. Secretary IPC & Director General Pakistan Sports Board inaugurated the 1st PTF Inter-Department Tennis Trophy and met the players. Lt. Gen. Muhammad Afzal (R) also attended the opening ceremony as a Guest of Honor. The Chief Guest Zahoor Ahmad assured PTF Management of full support for the development of tennis infrastructure and players.

In the opening remarks, Zia-ud-Din Tufail Secretary PTF welcomed all the guests on behalf of

President PTF and highlighted that trophy featuring five men's teams from the Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force, Navy, SNGPL, and Wapda.

Results- Pakistan Army beat SNGPL (2-0) Singles-1: Abdullah Adnan (Army) beat Ahmad Babar (SNGPL) 6-2 6-1

Singles-2: Muzammil Murtaza (Army) beat Saqib Hayat (SNGPL) 6-0 6-1

Doubles: Abdullah Adnan, Arham Attique (Army) beat Ahmed Babar, Ahtesham Humayun (SNGPL) 6-2 6-3.

Wapda beat Pakistan Navy (2-0), Singles-1: Muhammad Abid (Wapda) beat Faizan Fayyaz Khan (NAVY) 6-0 6-0.

Singles-2: Aqeel Khan (Wapda) beat Asad Zaman (Navy) 6-2 6-1.

Doubles: Heera Ashiq, Shahzad Khan (Wapda) beat Asad Zaman, Faizan Fayyaz Khan (Navy) 6-1 6-2.

Saturday matches schedule: Wapda Vs SNGPL; Pakistan Army Vs PAF.

Bannu wins overall trophy of Inter-Madrassa Games

PESHAWAR (APP): Bannu Region clinched the overall trophy after winning gold medals of the Cricket and Volleyball by defeating Swat in the finals of the Inter-Madaras Games which concluded here at Tehmas Khan Football Stadium.

Director Operation Aziz Ullah Jan, Director Merged Area Razi Ullah Batani, District Sports Officer Miss Gul Rukh, Regional Sports Officer Peshawar Kashif Farhan, Deputy Director Operation Jamshed Khan Baloch, officials, players and large numbers of spectators were also present.

The ongoing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inter-Madrassa Games organized by the Directorate General Sports, Bannu region claimed first position in cricket and volleyball, Swat was second after taking

runners-up position in the football, cricket and volleyball while Dera Ismail Khan was third by winning football final on the penalty kicks at Tahamas Khan Football Stadium, Peshawar.

In the Inter-Madrassa games, the football final was played between Dera Ismail Khan and Swat region, in which both teams showed their best game. In the end, Dera Ismail Khan won the trophy by penalty shootout. In the volleyball final at PSB Gymnasium, Bannu defeated Swat 3-0. The score was 25-22, 25-19 and 25-23.

Similarly, the cricket final was played between Swat and Bannu Region at Islamia College Ground, in which Bannu Region won the toss and batted first by setting up 129 runs in the allotted overs in which

Saqib 25 with three boundaries, Altaf 19 with one six two boundaries and Ikram 17 with three boundaries were the outstanding scores. Fawad was the top scorer with 21 runs. The special guests of the closing ceremony of the Inter-Madrassa Games were Director Operations Azizullah Jan and Director of Sports Merged Area Raziullah Khan Batani, who distributed the prizes among the players.

Regional Sports Officer Kashif Farhan, Regional Sports Officer Kohat Dr. Hazratullah Khan, District Sports Officer Peshawar Gul Rukh and other personalities were present. Four hundred athletes from seven regions of the province participated in the volleyball, cricket and football games in the Inter-Madrassa Games.

Man City's Foden wins football writers' award

LONDON (Agencies): Manchester City's Phil Foden was Friday named Footballer of the Year by the English Football Writers' Association, with the club's Khadija Shaw scooping the women's award.

England attacking midfielder Foden joins a roll call of famous names including Stanley Matthews, Bobby Charlton, George Best and Kenny Dalglish.

Foden is the third City player in the past four years to win football's oldest individual award, following Ruben Dias in 2021 and Erling Haaland last year.

The 23-year-old Foden received 42 percent of the votes, heading off competition from Arsenal's Declan Rice and his teammate Rodri, who came third in a ballot of the FWA's near 900-strong membership.

Foden has scored 24

goals this season as Pep Guardiola's City chase a Premier League and FA Cup double.

"Being named the Football Writers' Association footballer of the year is a huge honor," said Foden. "I'm very, very happy to receive this award but I could not have done it without the help of my teammates."

Guardiola praised his player but said he could get even better.

"The impact in the final third is really good, the work ethic," he said. "Every year, due to the amount of games he's playing, the minutes he's playing, he's more mature and he understands the game but he has to continue. He's still young."

"Depends on him, simple as that," Guardiola added. "I promise you, it depends on him. Mentality, want more, do it again, do it again, be better in this

department, I will live 24 hours for my game and for my profession. It depends on him, like all the players."

Khadija "Bunny" Shaw, who has scored 21 goals in the Women's Super League, piped Chelsea's Lauren James, with the two taking a combined 80 percent of the vote.

Jamaica international Shaw will miss City's final two games of the Women's Super League season with a foot injury but is almost certain to finish as the top scorer in the WSL as Gareth Taylor's side close in on the title.

"I am very proud and privileged to have received this award and to be recognized in this way is a special honor," said Shaw, 27.

"I want to also thank all of my teammates. They provide me with the chances to score goals and I could not have won this award without them."

Pakistan slips in ICC T20I rankings

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan men's cricket team slipped two spots to the seventh in the annual update of the International Cricket Council (ICC) T20I rankings, released Friday.

Inaugural T20 World Cup champions India continued their stronghold at the summit with 264 rating points but their lead has been significantly reduced from 11 points to just seven with second-placed Australia (257).

South Africa (250) jumped two places from sixth to fourth to move just two points within the third-placed England (252).

The most notable change was recorded in the longest format of the game which saw the reigning ICC World Test Championship (WTC) winners Australia overtaking two-time finalists India to claim the top spot.

The Pat Cummins-led side rose to the top at the back of their resounding 209-run victory over India in the WTC final at The Oval last year. The monumental victory helped Australia improve their rating to 124 points, four clear of India (120) and 19 clear of third-placed England (105).

Australia's rise to the top is the only change in the annual Test rankings, while South Africa (103), New Zealand (96), Pakistan (89), Sri Lanka (83), West Indies (82) and Bangladesh (53) remained unchanged in spots between fourth and ninth.

Notably, the ICC annual rankings were updated, considering the teams' performances after May 2021.

All results between May 2021 and May 2023 are then weighted at 50 percent and the ones in the following 12 months – that includes Australia's World Test Championship final victory – then weighted at 100 percent.

There is no notable change in the annual ODI rankings however India extended their lead at the top to six rating points over Australia (116).

Third-placed South Africa (112) shrank the gap on Australia to just four rating points, while Pakistan (106) and New Zealand (101) round out the top five.

The PM's Youth Talent Hunt Programme encom-

Faisalabad (Monitoring Desk): Quetta edged out Multan in a close encounter by just seven runs at Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad in the eighth round of the National Women's One Day Tournament on Friday.

After opting to bat first, Quetta were all out for 121 in 36.4 overs. Saima Malik's 74-ball vigil yielded 35 runs.

In reply, Multan were bundled out for 114 in 39.2 overs.

Only Gull Rukh (21, 57b, 1x4), Tasnia Rubab (19, 39b, 2x4s) and Samina Aftab (19, 41b, 4x4s) offered some resistance. Laiba Nasir was Quetta's most prolific bowler, bagging three wickets for 20 runs.

At Jawad Sports Complex Ground, Karachi got the better of Peshawar by 35 runs. Omaira Sohail's 61 punctuated with three fours helped

Schedule revealed for Pakistan's tour of South Africa

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday announced details of the national team's tour to South Africa for three T20Is, three ODIs, and two Tests in the second half of 2024.

Durban, Centurion, and Johannesburg will host the T20Is from 10-14 December. The ODIs will be played from 17-22 December in Paarl, Cape Town, and Johannesburg, while the two ICC World Test Championship 2023-25 matches will be held at Centurion (26-30 December) and Cape Town (3-7 January).

The side will depart for Durban on 2 December after returning from Australia on 19 November, having featured in a series of three ODIs and three T20Is from 4-18 November.

After completing their African safari on 8 January, the national side will take on New Zealand and South

Africa in a three-nation ODI tournament on home turf, which will be followed by the eight-team ICC Champions Trophy 2025 in Pakistan.

Prior to the tours of Australia and South Africa, Pakistan will host Bangladesh and England for two and three Tests, respectively.

This means they will play seven Tests, a minimum of 10 ODIs, and six T20Is in the six-month period from August 2024 to January 2025. This will be Pakistan's seventh Test tour of South Africa since 1994-95. Their two Test wins were in the 1997-98 and 2006-2007 series.

In the Durban Test in 1997-98, Pakistan won by 29 runs at the back of centuries from Azhar Mahmood (132) and Saeed Anwar (118), match figures of nine for 149 by Mushtaq Ahmed and a first innings five-fer by Shoaib Akhtar.

In the 2006-2007 Port

Elizabeth Test, Pakistan won by five wickets with Inzamam-ul-Haq being named as Player of the Match for his 92 in the first innings.

In ODIs, Pakistan has won two of the last three series in 2013-2014 and 2020-21, while South Africa triumphed in 2002-2003 (4-1), 2006-2007 (3-1), 2012-2013 (3-2), and 2018-2019 (3-2). In 12 T20Is to date, Pakistan leads 6-5 in head-to-head encounters, with one match ending in no result.

Tour Schedule
10 Dec – 1st T20I, Durban
13 Dec – 2nd T20I, Centurion

14 Dec – 3rd T20I, Johannesburg
17 Dec – 1st ODI, Paarl
19 Dec – 2nd ODI, Cape Town

22 Dec – 3rd ODI, Johannesburg
26-30 Dec – 1st Test, Centurion

3-7 Jan – 2nd Test, Cape Town.

Hamza Tufail to officiate hockey matches in Malaysia

PESHAWAR (APP): Promising Hamza Tufail, hailing from a remote village Arbab Landy, nominated as Technical Official for the 30th Sultan Azlan Shah Hockey Cup-2024 in Malaysia.

This was stated by the Asian Umpire Manager and Federation of International Hockey (FIH) while talking to APP on phone. Faiz Muhammad Fazi, a former international world penal hockey referee and now working with FIH as Manager Umpire, said that Hamza Tufail is very energetic and deserved to be officiating the matches of the 30th Sultan Azlan Shah Hockey Cup-2024 as Technical Official.

He said it is good that a

young boy Hamza Tufail got the call through his excellent performance during the Hockey League and National Senior and National Junior Hockey Championship.

The supervising umpire managers of the Pakistan Hockey Federation had given his excellent report that Hamza Tufail, left for Malaysia on May 2 (Thursday) from Lahore to participate in the 30th edition of the Azlan Shah Cup 2024. He belongs to Peshawar and will represent Pakistan in the tournament. It's an honour for Peshawar that one of the technical officials from Peshawar will represent Pakistan in the tournament, Faiz Muhammad Faizi said.

When contacted Hamza Tufail father, Tufail Ahmad, who himself, a former hockey player of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, he said Hamza is a very good natured boy and has good command over his hockey rules.

He also thanked the Pakistan Hockey Federation Secretary Haider Hussain and Faiz Muhammad Faizi for nominating his name for the tournament. Tufail Khan said actually Faiz Muhammad Faizi provided training regarding umpiring and technical officials as scores of international tournaments he organized even in Peshawar where he acted as umpire and as umpire manager as well.

Govt committed to nurturing young talent

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan, has reiterated the government's commitment to provide a platform for young talent to shine in various fields, including sports, health, culture, and art.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the PM's National Talent Hunt Programme, Rana said that PM's vision was to identify and groom talented young players to represent Pakistan at international level.

He expressed his excitement about the abundance of talent in every province of Pakistan, which he witnessed during his travels across the country.

He emphasized the importance of merit-based selection and development of young talent to propel the country forward.

The PM's Youth Talent Hunt Programme encom-

passes 12 games, providing opportunities for young players to showcase their skills in various fields. Rana announced plans to organize leagues like the Pakistan Super League (PSL) in other sports, ensuring a comprehensive approach to talent development.

He assured that players identified through the Talent Hunt Programme would receive world-class training and grooming, enabling them to make Pakistan proud at international platforms.

He predicted that within a year, Pakistani players would make a mark globally, thanks to the government's initiatives. Rana also commended the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan Sports Board, and Table Tennis Federation for their support to the PM's Youth Programme.

The ceremony was

attended by Pakistan Sports Board Director General Zahoor Ahmed, Deputy Director Shahid Islam, and other officials.

This initiative was a significant step towards nurturing young talent and promoting a culture of excellence in Pakistan.

Meanwhile Punjab won both men and women event of the National Talent Hunt Table Tennis League. In men's final, Punjab A team defeated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa A team.

In women's category final, Punjab B won against Punjab A team. Chairman Prime Minister Youth Program distributed prizes to winning teams at the closing ceremony of the league.

In mens category KP A got second position while KP B secured third spot. In women's category, Punjab A got second position while KP A stood third.

All-round Omaira propels Karachi to victory

Faisalabad (Monitoring Desk): Quetta edged out Multan in a close encounter by just seven runs at Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad in the eighth round of the National Women's One Day Tournament on Friday.

After opting to bat first, Quetta were all out for 121 in 36.4 overs. Saima Malik's 74-ball vigil yielded 35 runs.

In reply, Multan were bundled out for 114 in 39.2 overs.

Only Gull Rukh (21, 57b, 1x4), Tasnia Rubab (19, 39b, 2x4s) and Samina Aftab (19, 41b, 4x4s) offered some resistance. Laiba Nasir was Quetta's most prolific bowler, bagging three wickets for 20 runs.

Karachi manage 135 in 47.3 overs.

Momina Riasat, Tehzeeb Shah and Aleena Shah returned with two wickets each.

Peshawar's pursuit of the target was derailed by Omaira, who picked up five wickets for 20 runs in nine overs. Sidra Nawaz's half-century (55, 90b, 4x4s) went in vain as Peshawar only managed 100 runs in 35.2 overs.

At Bohranwali Ground, Lahore posted 209-7 in 50 overs on the back of a brisk half-century by Dua Majid (52, 35b, 11x4s). Noreen Yaqoob remained undefeated with 41 off 56 balls, hitting six fours.

Rawalpindi skipper Humna Bilal challenged Lahore's bowling with an enterprising half-century (58, 63b, 7x4s, 1x6) but failed to get her team over the line as they lost by six runs.

Amber Kainat and

Anam Amin were instrumental in bowling out Rawalpindi for 203 as the duo shared five wickets among them.

Scores in brief:
Quetta Women beat Multan Women by seven runs at Iqbal Stadium.

Quetta Women 121 all out, 36.4 overs (Saima Malik 35, Arijah Haseeb 28; Gull Rukh 2-4, Tasnia Rubab 2-16, Gull-e-Uswa 2-23)

Multan Women 114 all out, 39.2 overs (Gull Rukh 21; Laiba Nasir 3-20).
Player of the match – Laiba Nasir (Quetta Women)

Karachi Women beat Peshawar Women by 35 runs at Jawad Sports Complex Ground.

Karachi Women 135 all out, 47.3 overs (Omaira Sohail 61; Aleena Shah 2-22, Tehzeeb Shah 2-24, Momina Riasat 2-30).

Peshawar Women 100 all out, 35.2 overs (Sidra

Nawaz 55; Omaira Sohail 5-20, Maham Manzoor 3-14)

Player of the match – Omaira Sohail (Karachi Women)

Lahore Women beat Rawalpindi Women by six runs at Bohranwali Ground.
Lahore Women 209-7, 50 overs (Dua Majid 52, Noreen Yaqoob 41 not out; Rida Aslam 3-41)

Rawalpindi Women 203 all out, 47.3 overs (Humna Bilal 58, Farzana Farooq 26; Amber Kainat 3-46, Anam Amin 2-30)

Player of the match – Humna Bilal (Rawalpindi Women) and Dua Majid (Lahore Women)

Monday's fixtures – Rawalpindi Women vs Multan Women, Jawad Sports Complex Ground; Lahore Women vs Karachi Women, Iqbal Stadium; Quetta Women vs Peshawar Women, Bohranwali Ground.



In brief

IRSA releases 126,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 126,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 212,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1462.98 feet and was 48.98 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 36,300 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1162.50 feet, which was 111.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 79,100 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 56,400, 65,600, 47,900 and 13,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 70,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 17,600 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Shaukat Ali remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The birth anniversary of famous folk singer Shaukat Ali was observed on Friday. Shaukat Ali was born on May 3, 1944, in a family of artists at Malakwal town in District Gujrat. He was known for singing Sufi poetry with great vigor and a wide vocal range. Shaukat Ali was awarded the Pride of Performance in 1990. He also received many awards including 'The Voice of Punjab' and 'The Pride of Punjab'. He passed away on April 2, 2021 in Lahore after a long battle with liver disease.

Police arrest two bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested two bike lifters and street criminals and recovered seven stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, Dhamial Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Sajjad and Farhan, and recovered seven stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Saddar, Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

Police carry out search operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): The district Police here on Friday carried out search operations in the jurisdiction of Race Course, Cantt, Saddar Wah, Kalar Syedan, Jatli, Mandara and Dhamial police stations. According to a police spokesman, the search operations were conducted in order to maintain law and order and flush out suspects following the directions of City Police Officer (CPO), Syed Khalid Hamdani. He informed, senior police officers and police personnel including women police took part in the search operations. The police checked a large 148 houses, 85 shops, six tenants and 327 individuals during the search operations. The spokesman said that police were fully prepared to shield the lives and property of the public and combating and search operations were being done to flush out the suspects and hardcore criminals. He said that police were more vigilant to keep an eye on suspects and maintain law and order in Rawalpindi.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan discussing Pak-Australia historical relations with the Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mr. Neil Hawkins on the occasion of Australia Day in spring 2024.

Commissioner directs authorities to complete development schemes

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak has directed the authorities concerned to complete the ongoing development schemes swiftly. According to a Commissioner's Office spokesperson, the Commissioner chairing the divisional Development Schemes for Ward No. 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6 in Wah Cantt meeting held here reviewed the progress on the projects and instructed the authorities that no compromise should be made on quality and transparency.

13 uplift schemes including two from Rawalpindi, three from Jhelum, and eight from Chakwal were presented by the Public Health department in DDWP for the extension of the gestation period. The Commissioner said that unnecessary delays in development projects compromise their usefulness, therefore, the completion of all the schemes

should be ensured within the stipulated time frame.

Rainwater harvesting and water treatment projects for Murree should be launched as soon as possible, Engineer Aamir said adding, that the local needs could be met by saving the rainwater from being wasted. Drainage and Sewerage Schemes for Ward No. 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6 in Wah Cantt should be completed before the deadline of June. A deadline of next month was also set for the completion of the work on streets and drainage system in Chaklala Cantonment Board, Ward No. 1 to 6.

Revised approval was taken for the repair and maintenance of four road projects of the Chakwal district. Revised approval was also taken for a five km long main road of Hastal village, construction of PCC road Dhok Gah, repair of a five km long road from Dodha to Khasala, and a six km

long road from Saddam Chowk to Tarati.

The meeting also gave revised approval for the repair and maintenance of Pindaddan Khan to Chawah Chakwal road in Jhelum district. Before bringing the schemes to the concerned forum, it should be ensured that there is no duplication of the concerned scheme with any other department, Engineer Aamir Khattak directed the authorities.

GIS mapping of the development schemes of all the departments should be done, he ordered and said that a dashboard of the development schemes should be created in all areas. Daily progress could be reviewed on the dashboard, Aamir Khattak said.

The Commissioner said that whether the development scheme is small or big, its quality should be ensured in such a way that there is no need to repeat it for many years.

Syedaal Khan, Irfan Siddiqui discuss legislative issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate Sardar Syedaal Khan and parliamentary leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) in the Senate, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, held discussions on Friday regarding legislative issues currently under consideration in the Senate.

During a meeting Irfan Siddiqui congratulated Syedaal Khan on his recent election as Deputy Chairman of the Senate, expressing his best wishes for a successful tenure.

He also shared his optimism that Syedaal Khan will guide the Senate proceedings with efficiency and fairness, ensuring that all political parties are given a voice in the decision-making process, said a news release issued here.

During the meeting, both leaders engaged in a detailed conversation about the political situation in the country. Deputy Chairman Senate Syedaal Khan expressed his gratitude to Senator Siddiqui for his kind words and his role as a leader within the Senate. He hoped that presence of Senator Siddiqui, as a parliamentary leader of the Muslim League (N), would serve as a source of strength for everyone.

Syedaal Khan said that PML-N is the largest political party in the country and that its leadership plays a critical role in promoting harmony and cooperation within the House. He further stated that he intends to work as a symbol of the federation, highlighting his commitment to serving all regions of Pakistan, including his home province of Balochistan. Irfan Siddiqui expressed the hope that all parties would work together to elevate the dignity of the Upper House.

Ahsan stresses space exploration for national development

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Friday met with the Chairman Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), emphasizing the importance of space exploration for Pakistan's development. The minister noted that six countries have successfully landed on the moon, but none of them were Islamic countries. He highlighted that the holy Qura'an encourages Muslims to explore and conquer the universe and recalled that in the past Muslim scientists made significant contributions

to space research and technology.

Ahsan Iqbal said Pakistan was a pioneer in space technology in South Asia in the 1960s and suggested upgrading the Institute of Space Technology and the National Center of Excellence for Satellite and GIS (Geographic Information System). He also proposed establishing a space museum at the Narowal Learning Center to promote science education among children. The minister emphasized the need for Pakistan to catch up with the advancements in space technology and exploration, and SUPARCO's role in achieving this goal.

'Free meal project in Capital' primary schools linked to improve growth in children

ISLAMABAD (APP): Secretary Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Mohyuddin Wani Friday said the federal government has launched an initiative to provide free lunch meals to primary students of government educational institutions in Islamabad, to improve the growth of children and to encourage schooling. In the first phase about forty elementary schools are being provided healthy, quality, and hygienic free meals, he said while talking to a Private news channel. He said that the collaboration of Allah Waley Trust and the government are providing lunches for the kids, adding, that free meals are being ensured for kids attending elementary schools under the Federal Directorate of Education's supervision. The latest acute malnutrition (AMN) analysis by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) has found that 2.14

million children in parts of Pakistan are suffering acute malnutrition, he mentioned.

The secretary highlighted the collaborative effort between the government and a trust supporting the provision of meals to school children.

He reiterated the importance of ensuring that every child has access to adequate nutrition to support their learning and development. He also mentioned that the program would further expand to reach a broader demographic of students and address food insecurity among school-going children.

"This is the first step wherein food is being provided to primary school children, and soon it will be introduced in all Secondary schools across Islamabad", he added. Replying to a question, he said that this initiative aims to reduce stunting and malnutrition, while also improving enrollment and attendance rates.

Haji flight operations Detailed schedule, departure statistics unveiled

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Friday revealed the comprehensive schedule for the Hajj flight operations, offering a detailed insight into the pilgrimage journey set to commence from May 9 and culminate on June 9.

The Ministry's Spokesperson Muhammad Umar Butt outlined a meticulously organized plan, delineating the phases of the operation.

For the initial 15 days, all flights are designated to land directly at Madina Airport, affording pilgrims a seamless entry into the sacred journey, he said adding that from May 24 to June 9, a strategic shift will see the majority of flights landing at Jeddah Airport, streamlining the pilgrimage process and ensuring effi-

cient travel arrangements for the influx of pilgrims.

Highlighting the inaugural day's departure statistics, Umar informed that a total of 11 flights would transport 2,160 pilgrims from various embarkation points across Pakistan. Islamabad will witness the departure of 680 Hajj pilgrims through 3 flights, while Karachi and Lahore will contribute 330 and 670 passengers through two and three boarding flights respectively, for the revered journey, he added.

Umar said Multan would see off 329 pilgrims via two flights, while Sialkot would mark its presence with 151 pilgrims departing for Madina in a single flight.

He also disclosed the commencement dates for flights from Quetta and Sukkur, with the former ini-

tiating its operations on May 11 and the latter on May 27, further solidifying the nationwide participation in the Hajj pilgrimage.

He further apprised that more than 68,000 official pilgrims were slated to embark on their journey to Saudi Arabia through a total of 259 Hajj flights, underscoring the scale and significance of the annual pilgrimage. Umar said the Hajj flight operations would draw to a close on June 9, marking the culmination of a profound spiritual voyage for thousands of pilgrims.

In a subsequent development, he said on June 20, the first flight carrying pilgrims would embark on their return journey, signifying the beginning of the pilgrimage's conclusion and the pilgrims' homeward bound trajectory.

Punjab's municipalities gear up for competition in Suthra Punjab programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab's municipalities are set to compete in a series of contests in May under "Suthra Punjab" Programme aimed at identifying the best-performing local government bodies across the province. According to details, this initiative will involve Municipal Committees, Municipal Corporations, and District Councils, with winners declared at both the divisional and provincial levels.

The first stage of the competition will evaluate performance at the divi-

sion level. The top-performing Municipal Committee, Municipal Corporation, and District Council in each division will then move on to the provincial-level competition. The winners at the Punjab level will be honoured with certificates and prizes at a formal ceremony, which will be attended by division officers and the Secretary of Municipalities, among other dignitaries.

This event aims to promote excellence in local governance, with a focus on public service and accounta-

bility. In addition to the main competition, there will also be contests among Assistant Directors of Local Government at the tehsil level and Deputy Directors at the district level. This multi-tiered approach seeks to encourage outstanding performance at all levels of municipal governance in Punjab. Participants are expected to bring their best efforts, demonstrating a commitment to public service in line with the vision of the Department of Municipalities and the Government of Punjab.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Sardar Awaiz Ahmad Leghari was called on by Charge d'Affairs of Tajikistan H.E Mr. Shafiev Saidjon.

28,000 foreigners visit Afghanistan

KABUL (Ariana News): The National Statistics and Information Authority said this week that in the past year, almost 28,000 foreign nationals have visited Afghanistan. The authority said that over the past year, it registered the entry and exit of 27,914 foreign citizens through land border crossings and airports in the country. According to the figures the highest number of border crossings of foreigners was through Nimroz province crossing, Herat airport, Torkham crossing, Haritan crossing and Kabul Airport.

1.5m migrants returned to country

KABUL (TOLNews): The acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, Khalil Rahman Haqqani, said that in the past year, over 1.5 million Afghan migrants returned to the country. Speaking at the inauguration of a hospital, the acting minister of Refugees and Repatriation added that some countries, including Iran and Pakistan, treat Afghan migrants poorly and have been urged to stop harassing and mistreating them.

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

80% of female journalists in Afghanistan forced to quit jobs: UN



KABUL (Khaama Press): The UN Women's Division has announced that 80% of female journalists in Afghanistan have been forced to leave their jobs due to restrictions, harassment, and fear. The organization stated its support for female journalists striving for women's rights and gender equality. The UN Women's Division released this message on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd. The UN Women's Division wrote on its social media platform X, "On World Press Freedom Day and every other day, we stand with media initiatives and female journalists."

The organization shared a message from an Afghan female journalist who said, "I wanted to continue my work. But it wasn't long before I was pursued and received threatening messages warning of my death." The Afghanistan Journalists Center announced on Thursday that since the Taliban came to power in August 2021, they have issued at least 17 directives. Restrictions such as banning women from working in national radio and television, prohibiting coverage of protests and civil unrest, mandating referring to the Taliban as the Afghan government, banning music broadcasts, mandating female journalists to cover their faces, prohibiting women's participation in media entertainment programs, separating the roles of men and women in the media, and banning interviews between women and men are among the restrictions imposed by the Taliban, according to the Afghanistan Journalists Center.

Meanwhile, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported in its latest classification of the status of media freedom in the world that among 180 countries, Afghanistan is recognized as one of the most dangerous countries for journalism and has dropped from rank 152 to 178.

Taliban opponents lack strong leadership and foreign support: SIGAR

KABUL (Khaama Press): Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, known as SIGAR, has written in a new report that anti-Taliban groups do not have foreign support and strong leadership. However, SIGAR stated that resistance groups have taken responsibility for 43 attacks against the Taliban in the past three months. SIGAR compared this figure to attacks by anti-Taliban groups in the three months prior, during which anti-Taliban forces were responsible for 57 attacks. The report by the United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction states that Afghan people's fatigue from war and retaliatory actions by the Taliban are two other major reasons for the lack of escalation in anti-Taliban attacks. SIGAR quoted a United Nations report stating that resistance groups have not posed any challenge to



Taliban control of territories. It also quoted the UN report stating that the Afghan Freedom Front continued its guerrilla attacks in cities and villages. Additionally, it was quoted that the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, led by Ahmad Massoud, did not launch any attacks in Panjshir, its traditional base. A resident of Panjshir told SIGAR that due to pressures imposed by the Taliban on the people of Panjshir, the resistance front is currently not operating in this province. Based on the report by SIGAR, the Taliban has continued attacks and the disappearance of former Afghan government officials despite claims of amnesty in the past nine months. SIGAR criticized Taliban authorities for not taking sufficient action to prevent retaliatory killings by their members.

Afghanistan ranks 178th, below North Korea: World Press Freedom Index

KABUL (Khaama Press): Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan dropped 26 places to 178th place in the world press freedom index in 2024. This ranking was released on Friday, May 3rd, on World Press Freedom Day by Reporters Without Borders. According to this ranking, Afghanistan scored 19.9 points among 180 countries in 2024, dropping 26 places compared to the previous year and ranking 178th. Afghanistan was ranked 152nd in this ranking last year. North Korea was ranked 177th before Afghanistan, and Syria and Eritrea are placed after Afghanistan at the bottom of the table. These four countries are considered the worst countries in terms of press freedom. According to the global press freedom ranking, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden are the top three countries respectively. Reporters Without Borders has stated that Afghanistan has dropped 44 places after the return of the Taliban, who continuously harass and intimidate journalists. Since the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan, they have imposed severe restrictions on the media and

journalists. Most of Afghanistan's media outlets have been shut down or exiled after the group took control. Currently, media operating in Afghanistan face censorship by the Taliban. During their over two and half years of rule over Afghanistan, the group has repeatedly detained and imprisoned journalists from independent media outlets.

Aafia Siddiqui's defense attorney seeks evidence in Kabul

KABUL (Khaama Press): Aafia Siddiqui's defense attorney, a Pakistani woman imprisoned in the United States, has come to Kabul to search for clues and prove the innocence of this woman. Clive Stafford Smith, Aafia Siddiqui's defense attorney, said at a press conference at the Continental Hotel in Kabul on Thursday, May 2nd, that he has two witnesses showing that Ms. Siddiqui was innocent when she was arrested in Ghazni in 2008. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist, migrated to the United States in 1990 and disappeared in Karachi in 2003 while visiting her family, only to be detained five years later in Ghazni province, Afghanistan, on charges of carrying explosives and intending to kill American soldiers. Aafia Siddiqui's defense attorney said at the press conference: "I want to start



by thanking the Afghan government for the help they have provided us. I and everyone who knows about what has happened to Aafia and her children in the five years the United States has detained them here (in Bagram prison) need help." Mohammad Ajmal, one of the residents of Ghazni province who witnessed Aafia Siddiqui's arrest, said at the press conference that Ms. Siddiqui did not have any explosives with her at the time of her arrest. It is worth mentioning that Ms. Siddiqui was sentenced to 86 years in prison in 2010 and is currently imprisoned in Texas, United States. The United States has also claimed that one of Ms. Siddiqui's relatives was involved in the September 11 attacks.

Women's participation in 30th Agricultural Exhibition in Kabul



Hakim Bigzaad Women entrepreneurs participated in the 30th exhibition of agricultural products, Badam Bagh, held in Kabul. The exhibition opened on Wednesday, May 1st at Badam Bagh. Out of the 263 exhibition stalls, 56 stalls belong to women entrepreneurs who showcased their agricultural products and handicrafts. Women expressed satisfaction with their presence at the exhibition and urged the Taliban administration to support women's work. Nazanin, one of the women who exhibited Afghan handicrafts at the show, told Khaama Press: "I am glad to showcase Afghan handicrafts today and I ask the Taliban officials to allow women to participate in exhibitions and demonstrate their abilities." The exhibition opened with the presence of Taliban officials, but none of the officials spoke about supporting women in the agricultural sector. Women exhibited handicrafts, Afghan clothing, and various foods at the exhibition. Farideh Seddiqi, a determined woman from Logar province who attended the exhibition, asks the officials to support women traders. The exhibition will continue for four days and aims to introduce Afghan agricultural products and domestic production to domestic and international markets.

UNAMA emphasizes protection and support for Afghan journalists

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) office called for the protection and support of Afghan journalists on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. Roza Outonbayeva, the representative of the UN Secretary-General in Afghanistan, emphasized the security of journalists on Friday, 3rd May, and stated that journalists' work is crucial for an informed nation. Ms Roza wrote in a message: "Despite the significant risks, journalists exert utmost effort to provide accurate information to the people of the country." This UN official in Afghanistan further added that journalists' activities in the fields of environmental issues, "good governance," economy, and health are commendable and should be supported and protected. Meanwhile, the Afghanistan Journalists Center stated that in the past year, it recorded 136 violations of media freedom and journalists, including 73 threats and 64 cases of journalists' detention in Afghanistan. The U.S. Embassy for Afghanistan also emphasized on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day that a free press plays a key role in keeping citizens informed and shaping public discourse on important issues, and called for strengthening press freedom in Afghanistan.





FAISALABAD: People offering funeral prayer of a family. A man committed suicide after killing his two wives and four children.

KP CM launches Rs1b Youth Entrepreneurship Programme

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As an important step towards promoting self-employment in the province, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has decided to launch “Youth Entrepreneurship Program” under which, soft loans would be provided to skilled youth, thereby enabling them to initiate their own business.

This decision, he has taken while chairing the 1st meeting of Sports & Youth Affairs department held here at Chief Minister’s House Peshawar, the other day. It was decided in the meeting that the proposed program, initially, would be launched at a cost of Rs. 1.00 billion. It is imperative to mention here that the soft loans under this program, would not be provided to any individual but to the clusters of skilled youth interested in initiating their own business. Each cluster of professionals will be able to avail loan ranging from Rs. 2.00 million to Rs. 10.00 million.

The Chief Minister has directed the relevant quarters to finalize the strategy for implementing this flagship program of the provincial government, adding that ultimate purpose of this program is to assist the talented and skilled youth interested in initiating their own business in accordance with their professional skills and capabilities.

He said that promoting employment opportunities in the province is one of the priority areas of his government; skilled youth across the province would be provided with full support in this regard. Similarly, the chief minister gave go ahead to launch Youth Skill Development and Employment Program as well, and directed the authorities concerned that youth from all the districts across the province, should be provided with this opportunity, adding that quota of each district be allocated according to its population for this purpose.

Under the program, initially

20,000 youth would be imparted with specialized technical and vocational trainings. It will also be integral part of the program to ensure that the youth being trained under this program, are provided with employment within country and abroad. Apart from this, the chief minister accorded approval to the proposed initiatives under Youth Education Program, through which, merit based scholarships would be provided in IT, modern technical and digital sectors, in addition to establishing Incubation Centre,-E-Learning facility, Career Counseling and providing access to educational institutions worldwide. Certification in advance courses in Digital Skills and provision of Merit Based Internships in market driven disciplines are also the parts of this program.

The Chief Minister has termed merit based internships in markets driven disciplines as need of the hour and directed the quarters concerned to devise proper policy for this purpose. He, on this occasion, also directed the authorities to ensure implementation of the project regarding establishment of playgrounds at Tehsil Headquarters across the province and added that in the first phase, available government lands/sites should be utilized for this purpose.

“Where there such sites are available, should be notified as playground immediately”, he directed and added that formal letters should be sent to the Deputy Commissioners of all districts to identify suitable land in the remaining tehsils for this purpose. Similarly, the chief minister directed them to devise a plan for promoting polo and other traditional games of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, further directing them to form a provincial polo team without any delay and make sure that the polo team has participated in the upcoming polo festival. While deciding to hold Horse and Cattle Show in Peshawar this year,

the chief minister has directed to complete all the necessary arrangements in this regard.

He underlined the need for pragmatic steps for promoting tent pegging, archery, horse riding, swimming and all other traditional games of the province, adding that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has rich talent in all traditional sports, we just need to brand this talent in an effective manner. Moreover, he directed them to take necessary steps for providing shooting club, riders club and other necessary facilities in the province. He also directed for speedy completion of remaining works of Arbab Niaz Cricket Stadium Peshawar and said that the funds required for this purpose would be provided on priority.

He further directed to ensure completion of ongoing development projects including Hayatabad Cricket Stadium, D.I.Khan Sports Complex and Kalam Cricket Stadium adding that available resources must be utilized in a judicious and useful manner. He also directed that the development projects of sports sector should be made part of the development portfolio being assisted by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

He emphasized to have a special focus on promoting sports and other recreational activities in the merged districts and said that all available options should be utilized for the purpose. The chief minister, on the occasion, was also briefed about the upcoming sports events in the province and was told that inter-regional games would be held by the end of this month. These games would be arranged at sports complexes of Peshawar, Charsadda and Kohat. Immediate after these inter-regional games, provincial coaching camps would also be arranged, in which, the players would be trained and prepared for participation in the upcoming event of inter-provincial games.

Key reshuffle in KP’s bureaucracy

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR In a significant administrative reshuffle, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government announced a series of key appointments and transfers across various departments. Witnessing the changes are Syed Nazar Hussain who was Secretary forest appointed as the Secretary Social Welfare & Zaka Ushr, Shahid Zaman as the Secretary Forest, and Rab Nawaz Director Anti Corruption establishment.

Meanwhile, Shehzad Mehbob assumes the role of Deputy Commissioner swat, and Aun Gondal becomes the Pso To Chief Minister. Notably, 25 officers have been subjected to transfers, ranging from Deputy Commissioners to Additional Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners. Among these shifts are Adnan Betani who was currently serving as PSO To CM is now appointed as deputy Commissioner and Mansehra Bilal Shahid taking charge as Additional Home, and Habib Ullah assuming the position of ADC orakzai. Shagufta becomes Special Secretary Home Department, and Shah Adnan takes on the role of DMO EMA, while Muhammad Azhar Khan is appointed as Adc R&HR Kohistan A highly competent officer, ijaz ur rehman, previously serving as mD Marged Areas Education has been appointed to the Member-II board of revenue.

KP sets bounty on wanted terrorists

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a bid to combat terrorism, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Counter-Terrorism Department has put a collective bounty of 13.1 million rupees on the heads of 11 highly wanted terrorists. These individuals are believed to be involved in recent attacks in the region.

The Counter-Terrorism Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has released a list of wanted terrorists for the year 2024, featuring names and pictures of the 11 individuals considered highly dangerous. Among them, 5 are from Lucky Marwat, 4 from Bannu, with one each from Shangla and Chitral.

The head of Lucky Marwat’s terrorist, Habibullah alias Saifulah, has the highest bounty set at 5 million rupees, followed by Bannu-based Mohammad Jameel at 3 million rupees. Lucky Marwat’s Mohammad Gul alias Saki and Bannu-based Rabbullah alias Chag’s heads are valued at 1 million rupees each.

Last year, the Counter-Terrorism Department issued three lists of wanted terrorists, with bounties placed on 294 individuals. As of now, the department has set bounties for 305 wanted terrorists. Sources indicate that the recent list includes individuals involved in the latest wave of attacks.

IHC bins IB’s plea

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court on Friday dismissed a miscellaneous petition filed by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) seeking withdrawal of its objections to the bench constituted to hear the audio leaks case.

At the outset of the proceedings conducted by Justice Babar Sattar, Assistant Attorney General Munawar Iqbal Dogal told the judge that the Intelligence Bureau wanted to withdraw its plea against the bench formed to hear the audio leaks case. The judge remarked that the petition had already been dismissed and that the order would be provided upon issuance.

The court mentioned that in the order, the IB director general had been put on notice and asked why contempt of court proceedings should not be initiated against him and who gave him the authority to file the petition. Justice Sattar proposed the IB provided its response after the receipt of the order.

Later, the court dismissed the miscellaneous petition filed by the Intelligence Bureau. During the previous hearing, the Islamabad High Court had dismissed various miscellaneous petitions from PEMRA, FIA and PTA objecting to Justice Babar Sattar presiding over the hearing of the audio leaks case.

PM optimistic for a polio-free Pakistan very soon

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday expressed the hope that the government, in collaboration with the global partners and national institutions, would be able to eliminate polio from the country very soon.

The prime minister, in a meeting with a delegation of Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) led by Dr Christopher Elias, Chair of Polio Oversight Board and President of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Global Development Division, said the government was fully resolved to purge the country of this fatal disease.

The prime minister directed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to launch a joint awareness drive, in collaboration with the GPEI. He told the delegation that the government would carry out the accountability of the institutions involved in the polio eradication to ensure transparency in the process.

He also assured to provide full security cover to the vaccination teams. Prime Minister Shehbaz lauded the \$500 million donation by Saudi Arabia during the World Economic Forum for polio eradication. He said the Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation was a must to eradicate polio from the region.

The members of the delegation apprised the prime minister of the ongoing measures for polio eradication and appreciated the government’s resolve to get rid of the disease. The delegation also highlighted the problems faced during the immunisation. The delegation members observed that the government was resolved to ensure success of polio eradication drive by providing necessary technical expertise.

Dr Christopher told the prime minister that Bill Gates was extremely pleased over the anti-polio initiatives taken during his both stints as Punjab chief minister. The meeting was attended by Regional Director of EMRO Dr Hanan Balkhi, Sanjay Wijesekera Unicef Regional Director of South Asia, Dr Omotayo Bolu, Polio Branch Chief of Centres for Disease Control, Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative in Pakistan, Abdullah A. Fadil, UNICEF Representative in

Pakistan, Dr Hamid Jafari, Director Polio Eradication, EMRO and Michael Galway, Deputy Director Polio Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, State Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja, PM’s Coordinator on Health Mukhtar Malik and relevant senior officers were also present.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed the hope that the interaction with the delegation of Saudi businessmen expected to visit Pakistan in the next few days would prove productive.

The prime minister, who chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress on Saudi investment and projects in the country, directed the authorities concerned to accord warm hospitality to the delegation. The participants were briefed about the upcoming visit of Saudi businessmen and their expected investment in different sectors.

The prime minister thanked the Saudi leadership for promoting investment in Pakistan and taking measures for the country’s progress and prosperity. Apprising the meeting of his recent Saudi visit, Prime Minister Shehbaz appreciated the relevant ministers and officers for their well-preparedness. He told the participants that the Saudi leadership had assured their all-out support for Pakistan’s prosperity which was welcoming.

Referring to the bilateral cordial ties with Saudi Arabia that spanned over decades, he said Pakistan was fortunate to have a well-wisher friend like the Kingdom. Prime Minister Shehbaz told the meeting that Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman were keenly interested in promoting investment in Pakistan.

Federal ministers Jam Kamal Khan, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Ahad Khan Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Dr Musaddik Malik, Abdul Aleem Khan and Sardar Awais Khan Leghari, State Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Jahanzeb Khan, PM’s Coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal, National Coordinator of SIFC Lt. General Sarfaraz and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

Police clear pro-Gaza sit-in at top Paris Varsity

PARIS (AFP):

Police entered Paris’ Sciences Po university on Friday to remove dozens of students staging a pro-Gaza sit-in in the entrance hall, AFP journalists saw, as protests fire political debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One student told reporters “around 50 students were still inside the rue Saint-Guillaume site” when police entered.

Bastien, 22, told AFP he and other protesters had been peacefully brought out in groups of 10 by officers. Another, Lucas, studying for a master’s degree, said “some students were dragged and others gripped by the head or shoulders.” Administrators had closed Sciences Po’s main buildings on Friday in response to the sit-in and called for remote classes instead.

They said “around 70 to 80 people” were occupying the foyer of the central Paris building.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal’s office said such protests would be dealt with using “total rigour,” adding that 23 university sites had been “evacuated” on Thursday. Students from the university’s Palestine Committee had earlier told reporters they faced a “disproportionate” response from police, who had

blocked access to the site before moving in. They also complained of a lack of “medical assistance” for seven students who had started a hunger strike “in solidarity with Palestinian victims.”

Sciences Po, widely considered France’s top political science school, with alumni including President Emmanuel Macron, has seen student action at its sites across the country in protest against the war in Gaza and the ensuing humanitarian crisis. Protests have been slow to spread to other prominent universities, unlike in the United States — where demonstrations at around 40 facilities have at times spiralled into clashes with police and mass arrests.

But demonstrations have so far been more peaceful in France, home to the largest Jewish population outside Israel and the US, and to Europe’s largest Muslim community. The University of California, Los Angeles, announced that Friday’s classes would be held remotely after police cleared a protest camp there and arrested more than 200 people.

Sciences Po administration took the same step for its Paris student body of between 5,000 and 6,000.

Protesters occupied the entrance hall in a “peaceful sit-in” following a debate on the Middle East with administrators on Thursday morning that their Palestine Committee dubbed “disappointing.” The university’s interim administrator, Jean Basseres, refused student demands to “investigate” Science Po’s ties with Israeli institutions.

The war in Gaza began after Palestinian militant group Hamas launched an attack on Israel on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel estimates that 129 hostages seized by militants during their attack remain in Gaza. The Israeli military says it believes 34 of them are dead. Israel’s relentless retaliatory offensive on Gaza has killed at least 34,596 people in the Palestinian territory, mostly women and children, according to the besieged enclave’s Hamas-run health ministry.

Outside the Sorbonne University, a few hundred meters (yards) from Sciences Po in central Paris, members of the Union of Jewish Students in France (UEJF) were setting up a “dialogue table” on Friday.

Hicks testifies about Trump, women and 2016 campaign

NEW YORK (Reuters):

Hope Hicks, a former top aide to Donald Trump, testified on Friday that staffers on his 2016 presidential campaign were alarmed when they learned that a tape in which he made lewd comments about women was about to be made public. Hicks testified there was a clear consensus the tape of Trump’s comments on the “Access Hollywood” TV show was damaging and that its release would be a crisis.

“Everyone was just sort of absorbing the shock of it,” she said. She said Trump was upset, but also played down the comments. “Mr. Trump felt like this wasn’t good, but it was also just like two guys talking, locker-room talk,” she testified.

Hicks’ testimony gave jurors an inside view of damage-control efforts in the final days of the 2016 election, when Trump weathered widespread criticism from fellow Republicans as he faced multiple accusations of unflattering sexual behav-

ior. Trump has pleaded not guilty to charges of falsifying business records to cover up a \$130,000 payment to porn star Stormy Daniels, who was threatening to go public at that time with her story of their 2006 sexual encounter, an alleged liaison that he denies.

Trump sat expressionless at the defendants’ table during her testimony. Hicks is the first person who worked directly for Trump to testify in the 11-day-old trial. Hicks began working for Trump, then a New York businessman, starting in 2014 and served as spokesperson during his first campaign for president and later as communications director in the White House.

She told jurors she was surprised by his entry into politics. “One day he said, ‘We’re going to Iowa,’ and I didn’t really know why,” she testified. She said she thought Trump was joking when he asked her to be the campaign’s press secretary. “I wasn’t sure if I should take it seriously,” she said.

Former National Enquirer tabloid publisher David Pecker testified at the trial that Hicks was in a 2015 meeting where Pecker promised to serve as “eyes and ears” for the Trump campaign and help suppress unflattering news stories that could have threatened his presidential prospects.

Hicks testified that she heard Trump praise Pecker multiple times for the National Enquirer’s negative reporting on his rivals for the Republican presidential nomination. The 12 jurors and six alternates have yet to hear from the main players in the case, including Daniels and Trump’s former lawyer Michael Cohen, who arranged the payment. Along with Pecker, they have heard from Daniels’ former lawyer Keith Davidson, who testified he arranged the payment with Cohen. Under questioning from Trump’s defense team, he acknowledged pursuing similar cash-for-dirt deals with other high-profile people.