

Six more terrorists killed
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces conducted an intelligence based operation in North Waziristan District, on reported presence of terrorists. During the conduct of operation, intense fire exchange took place between own troops and the terrorists, as a result of which six terrorists were sent to hell. Terrorists' hideout was also busted during the operation.



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Govt has potential to raise revenues worth over Rs24tr annually

PM says Pakistan can outperform India or even a greater economy with hard work

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said that the country had the potential to collect revenues of over Rs 24 trillion against the annual tax target of Rs 9.4 trillion. He said that an amount of around three-time of the annual revenue target was 'going down the drain' due to corruption, inefficiency and negligence. This huge amount, he said could be utilized to pay debts, construct hospitals, schools, universities and roads in the country.

Addressing a ceremony to award shields to the honest, hardworking and efficient officers of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) here, the prime minister said that time had come to separate white from the black and to take decisions of reward and punishment purely on merit as no nation could develop without strictly following the discipline criteria for the government officials. The prime minister pointed out that Pakistan was facing multiple challenges including low tax to GDP ratio and external and internal debts that were increasing every passing day.

As regards the amount worth Rs 2.7 trillions held up across various appellate forums, including commissioners' appeals, Appellant Tribunal Inland Revenue (ATIR) and various courts, he said now the law had been made to recover such amounts. He

said that under the new law, the ATIR members, equivalent to the high court judges would be appointed through an open competition and their tests and interviews would be conducted through reputable institutions such as LUMS, IBA etc. He said that those members would also get high perks and privileges equivalent to the senior judges.

Pointing to another Rs 756 billion sales tax scam recently uncovered by the FBR, the prime minister said that he had directed the authorities concerned to make every possible to recover such looted money. Earlier, the prime minister gave away the shields to the honest and hard working officers of the FBR and said that he was feeling proud that the country had plenty of such honest officers which could play their due role in development and prosperity of the country.

He said all the politicians, bureaucrats and heads of the organizations should work together for the development of the country. He said that the only aim of this ceremony was to encourage the country's heroes, who worked hard with honesty to meet the targets of the taxes. "This factor would multiply in future and the officers would be fully acknowledged only on the basis of their honesty, efficiency, hard work and sincerity toward the nation," he added.

As regards, the track and trace sys-

tem, the prime minister emphasized that it was one of the major fraud in the country's history. The prime minister said that he always tried to be fair in the governance and reiterated his commitment to put the country on the path of prosperity and development. "We, with our constant and unwavering determination, will leave India far behind."

Speaking on the occasion, Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb said that revenue collection played vital role in socio-economic development, adding that it was major source to run the government business. He said that policies were formed for broadening tax base in the country, adding that now it was time to execute these policies with full efficiency, transparency and honesty to turnaround the national economy on fast track of economic development and growth. The minister, while stressing the need for strengthening tax collection and promoting tax culture, said that there were about 3 million commercial and industrial electricity and gas connections and only 200,000 of them were paying their Sales Tax. Chairman FBR Anjad Zubair Tiwana thanked the prime minister for acknowledging the hard work of his officers. He said that the prime minister was taking keen interest in boosting the tax revenues and had held several meetings in this regard.

High-level Saudi trade delegation to reach today

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level trade delegation from Saudi Arabia is scheduled to arrive in Pakistan on Sunday (today) to explore investment opportunities in different sectors as well as to forge strong bonds with local entrepreneurs.

According to Petroleum Minister Musadiq Malik, the 50-member delegation includes representatives of about 35 companies in the Kingdom representing various economic sectors.

The minister said 76 Pakistani business companies have been shortlisted in this regard, adding that cooperation between Islamabad and Riyadh will be increased at the government and private levels. The ministry had selected a large number of Pakistani companies in the respective sectors whose officials would have business-to-business meetings with their Saudi counterparts, and would hopefully enter into business and investment deals, he added.

Earlier, the Ministry of Commerce official had said the business delegation would also participate in the Pak-Saudi Investment Conference. He said that Saudi Arabia was an oil-based economy with strong government controls over major economic activities, however, it was now undergoing a transformation to reduce oil dependence, diversify income sources and enhance competitiveness under the Vision 2030.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Saturday held a bilateral meeting with the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud on the sidelines of the 15th OIC Islamic Summit Conference, in Banjul, The Gambia.

Noting the importance of the long-standing strategic and economic relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Saudi Foreign Minister reaffirmed the resolve to further enhance economic cooperation and Saudi investments in Pakistan. The Deputy Prime Minister lauded the "Vision 2030", which aimed at socio-economic transformation of the Kingdom in the 21st century.

PTA opposes blocking of 500,000 non-filers' SIMs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has rejected the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) demand to block SIMs of approximately 0.6 million of non-filers, arguing that such order would not have legal bindings and contrary to legal framework.

Now this rejection might trigger more controversy between the FBR and PTA as both sides are citing different provision of law and legal framework. The FBR might consider the option of prosecuting against those who might prefer to breach their provision of Income Tax General Order (ITGO) under Section 114-B. The News reported.

On the other hand, the PTA has sent out an official communication to the FBR and stated that the enforcement of Section 114-B of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 and order issued vide No.C.No.6(30)S(CIR-Operation)/2024 dated 29th April, 2024, it is to inform that as per applicable legal regulatory regime, the execution of Income Tax General Order issued under section 114-B of Income Tax Ordinance 2001 does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (the "Authority").

Accordingly, ITGO dated April 29th 2024 referred to the Authority for compliance/execution would have no legal binding effect being inconsistent with the applicable legal framework. In addition, it has also been observed that before the execution of the ITGO order, factual issues with regard to usage of SIMs against Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) also need to be verified on the premise that any person may obtain eight SIMs (3 Data and 5 Voice) therefore, before issuing and implementing ITGO, procedural steps with regard to notices would require to be issued by the tax collection authority as provided in section 114-B of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001.

Nevertheless, the impact of the execution of ITGO will also have an adverse impact on prevailing social norms, inter-alia, on the following: In Pakistan, male members of the society prefer to register SIMs against their CNIC/ names instead of female(s) and juvenile members of family. Currently, as per available information, only 27% of SIMs have been registered against CNIC of females.

Subsequently, potential subscribers i.e., children and female members of

family using SIMs may be deprived from communication with specific reference to their educational activities. It may also have an adverse impact on the confidence of foreign investment in the telecom sector including the objectivity of digital transformation.

As a result of blocking SIMs, multiple issues with regard to banking transactions, e-commerce /online business activities, remittance directly into the mobile money accounts and financial support to family members as well as e-health activities carried out through mobile connectivity will also emerge.

Foregoing in view of the above and as to avoid any litigious implication, it is also suggested that instead of invoking the penal action in terms of blocking SIMs at first instance, other alternative modes for ensuring better compliance for filing of income tax returns may be sorted out by carrying out an awareness campaign, sending SMS etc. Accordingly, the instant matter needs to be reviewed holistically after consultation with the relevant stakeholders including the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecom. It was also told that this official letter was issued with approval of competent authority, the PTA letter concluded.

Canada arrests 3 Indians over killing of Sikh activist

TORONTO: Canadian police arrested three men over the killing last year in Vancouver of a Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, whose death has been linked to the Indian government. The murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar plunged Canada and India into a serious diplomatic crisis last fall after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau suggested Indian government involvement in the homicide.

India dismissed the allegations as "absurd" and responded furiously, briefly curbing visas for Canadians and forcing Ottawa to withdraw diplomats. Three Indian nationals, two aged 22 and one aged 28, were arrested Friday and charged with first degree murder and conspiracy charges.

They are accused of being the shooter, driver and lookout on the day Nijjar was killed.

They were arrested by police in Edmonton, in the neighboring province of Alberta, where they reside, and are being held pending further proceedings. All had been in Canada for between three and five years, police said at a news conference. "This investigation does not end here. We are aware that others may have played a role in this homicide," said Mandeep Mooker of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's homicide investigations team.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar — who immigrated to Canada in 1997 and became a citizen in 2015 — advocated for a separate Sikh state,

known as Khalistan, carved out of India. He was wanted by Indian authorities for alleged terrorism and conspiracy to commit murder. On June 18, 2023, he was shot dead by masked assailants in the parking lot of the Sikh temple he led in suburban Vancouver. Trudeau announced several months later that Canada had "credible allegations" linking Indian intelligence to the killing and expelled an Indian official, spurring the diplomatic tit-for-tat with New Delhi. Mooker said Canadian police are still investigating the ties of the suspects, "if any, to the Indian government." "It is a bit of a sigh of relief that the investigation is moving forward," Moninder Singh, a close friend of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. — Agencies

The Frontier Post

BODY to question ex-PM
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level committee investigating the wheat import scandal has decided to question former caretaker prime minister Anwarul Haq Kakar. The committee has already questioned former caretaker ministers Shamshad Akhtar, Gohar Ijaz, and former Punjab Chief Minister, as part of its probe into the scandal.



PESHAWAR: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim administering oath to newly appointed Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi.

Shehbaz takes notice of wheat procurement issues

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday taking notice of the issues faced by the farmers in selling their wheat and obtaining wheat bags, formed a committee under Ministry of National Food Security and Research to address their grievances.

Under the direction of the prime minister, the committee would take measures to address the farmers' concerns within four days. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired a high level emergency meeting here to review the matters of wheat procurement through PASSCO.

The meeting was attended by federal ministers Rana Tanveer Hussain, Attaulah Tarar, and other relevant officials. In the meeting, the prime minister expressed his concern over the difficulties faced by farmers in obtaining fair prices for their wheat crop and directed the authorities to take immediate action to resolve the issue. The federal government, through PASSCO, is procuring 1.8 million metric tons of wheat to ensure maximum benefit to farmers, he said. The prime minister directed the concerned officials to personally monitor the wheat procurement process and ensure that farmers receive their due payments on time.

FPSC announces CSS 2023 result

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) has announced the long-awaited results of the highly competitive Central Superior Services (CSS) exams for the year 2023, shedding light on a rigorous selection process that culminated in a mere 2.96% pass rate.

With a staggering 13,800 candidates vying for success, the journey to CSS success proved to be a formidable challenge, with only 408 candidates emerging triumphant.

Among these successful candidates, 234 were male and 152 were female, a testament to the growing participation of women in Pakistan's civil service sector.

Cases record in Punjab: PHC orders KP CM to approach LHC

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) disposed-of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur plea seeking the details of cases registered against him while ordered to approached Lahore High Court to obtain record of cases registered in Punjab, on Saturday.

PHC's issued verdict authored by Justice SM Atique Shah, states that according to the petitioner, 17 First

Kundi takes oath as new KP Governor

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Newly appointed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi here Saturday night took oath of office in a special ceremony held at Governor House. Chief Justice, Peshawar High Court, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim administered the oath to the new governor.

Besides others, the oath taking ceremony was attended by Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti, Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam, former Prime Minister Raja Pervaz Ashraf, PPP leaders Nadeem Afzal Chan, Nayyar Bukhari, Chief Secretary and IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and administrative officers.

President Asif Ali Zardari had recently approved the appointments of Faisal Karim Kundi, Sardar Saleem Haider and Jaffar Khan Mandokhail as governors of KP, Punjab and Balochistan respectively. Faisal Karim Kundi who has a long association with Pakistan Peoples Party currently holds the position of PPP's central information secretary.

He is a member of the central executive committee as well as the foreign liaison committee. He was elected as a member of the National Assembly in the 2008 general elections from DI Khan and made history when he was appointed the country's youngest deputy speaker.

Over the years, Kundi has gained the respect of his peers and also made a name for himself on the international stage through his participation in global dialogues, and interactions with diplomats.

He is particularly vocal about infrastructure development, educational reforms, and philanthropy and strongly believes in dialogue, and policy reform. He also served as the prime minister's aide, PPP KP secretary general besides being a patron of the Young Parliamentarians Forum (YPPF) and the Youth Parliament. He also worked with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and served as the chairman of the Fata Caucus.

London mayor election: Sadiq clinches third term

LONDON (BBC): Labour's Sadiq Khan has won a landmark third successive term as mayor of London. Khan, who was first elected in May 2016, beat his Conservative rival Susan Hall by more than 276,000 votes - representing a swing of 3.2% to Labour. He won nine of the 14 constituencies including two gains from the Tories. More than 2.4m votes were cast reflecting a turnout of 42.8% - ever so slightly down compared to the 2021 mayoral election.

Speaking after his victory was declared at City Hall in east London, Mr Khan said: "It is the honour of my life to serve the city that I love." "I am beyond humbled right now," he added. "It has been a difficult few months." "We faced a campaign of non-stop negativity. I am proud we answered fearmongering with facts. "It is truly an honour to be re-elected for a third term and an increased margin of victory. Today is not about making history it is about shaping our future." Mr Khan also used his victory speech to urge Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to call a general election.

His main rival Ms Hall then congratulated Mr Khan on his victory as she said campaigning to be mayor had been an "honour and privilege". "I will continue to hold Sadiq to

account, for hard-working families, motorists and women," she said. "I urge Sadiq to make London better for all our sakes." Counting started at 09:00 BST on Saturday and all candidates are expected to appear at City Hall later for an official announcement. Mr Khan won constituencies including Lambeth & Southwark, Barnet & Camden, City of London & East, Merton & Wandsworth, Greenwich & Lewisham, Enfield & Haringey and North East - all of which he won at the last contest in 2021. He gained West Central from the Conservatives, with a 5.2% swing to Labour from the Tories, and South West from the Tories with a 2.7% swing.

Ms Hall held outer London boroughs of Havering & Redbridge, Croydon & Sutton, Bexley & Bromley, Ealing & Hillingdon and Brent & Harrow. Overall Mr Khan won just under 1,088,225 votes comfortably beating Ms Hall who secured 811,518 votes. The Liberal Democrats edged the Green Party to third place, while Reform UK's candidate Howard Cox finished fifth with 3.2% of the overall vote. Speaking at City Hall ahead of the official results, London Assembly's Labour group leader Len Duvall effectively called the elec-



tion result for Mr Khan. Mr Duvall told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "I think the trends are there. I think this looks like Sadiq has crossed the line and has got a third term." He believes Liberal Democrat and Green voters appear to have "lent" their support on the mayoral ballot to Mr Khan, while Reform UK took votes from the Conservatives. The former Conservative Minister for London was critical of Ms Hall and said the Tories ran an "incredibly underwhelming campaign". Paul Scully, who stood unsuccessfully in the Conservative's selection process to be its mayoral candidate, told the BBC the Tories had "gifted" Mr Khan a third term. Counting continues for London Assembly constituency members and a London Assembly London-wide members. Those results are expected later on Saturday.



Honour of Haveliyan Sultanpur



F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Taqwa Khan daughter of Nawaz Khan from Sultanpur passed CSS exam and joined office management group.

PIA announces Hajj flight operations

KARACHI (INP): The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to initiate its Hajj flight operations from May 09 and will continue till June 10, 2024.

According to the spokesperson, PIA will operate direct flights this year to Jeddah and Madina from eight cities in Pakistan including Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Multan, Quetta, Sialkot, and Sukkur.

Announcing the Hajj flight operation, the PIA spokesperson asserted that the national airline will facilitate around 34,000 pilgrims, through 170 flights, from May 09 till June 10, 2024. The national airline spokesperson confirmed that a total of 19,000 pilgrims from the government scheme and 15,000 private pilgrims will travel through the PIA.

CM Maryam inaugurates 'Medicine Free Home Delivery' project

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has inaugurated 'Free Medicine Delivery Project' for people across Punjab.

She reached the houses of patients by herself taking medicines including the house of a cardiac patient Rasoolan Bibi after passing through narrow streets of service quarters at Shaman Kutchi Abadi. The elderly woman got emotional on seeing CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The chief minister sat with the patient on her bed, inquired about her health and prayed for her complete recovery.

CM Maryam Nawaz also went to the residence of a cardiac patient Munawar Malik at Shadman Kutchi Abadi and pre-

sented medicines to him. She talked to the patient and asked him about his health. Munawar Malik thanked CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif and said now he would not have to face problems of getting medicines in hospitals.

The CM also inaugurated Sahulat Markaz at the Primary & Secondary Healthcare Department. She formally restarted the registration process of TB and Hepatitis patients. She also inspected the Drug Testing Lab being established to check the quality of medicines. She visited chromatography, drug release lab, drug sample receiving area and hepatitis reference/public health lab. She was given briefing about the medicine home delivery programme.

CM Maryam Nawaz also visited FM Sehat Zindagi and got her podcast recorded on the FM radio. People can listen to that message on [https:// www.facebook.com/ fmsehatzindagi](https://www.facebook.com/fmsehatzindagi). She also laid the foundation stone of Primary & Secondary Healthcare Development Wing. She also inspected a van for doctors at the Primary & Secondary Healthcare Department. The CM, while addressing the ceremony, said: "We have launched such a mega welfare project in a short span of eight weeks."

"May Allah Almighty reward Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif for launching medicines home delivery projects from 2013 to 2018, but the previous government unfortunately abolished the public

welfare project," she recalled.

The ministers kept on receiving their salaries and deprived the poor people of getting medicines with the closure of the project. The Punjab government extended the scope of the project to all cities of Punjab. Under the project, two lakh patients would be delivered medicines at their doorsteps, she added.

Two months' medicines stock of hepatitis, TB and cardiac patients would be delivered at the doorsteps of patients and patients would be delivered medicines again after undergoing check-up. "I am striving to serve masses under the guidance of Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif," she added.

"I want no one to remain

deprived of treatment facility after five years in Punjab, and patients should not face any hassle in hospitals. Thirty-two field hospitals have been made functional to provide treatment facilities to people belonging to rural areas. "I witnessed during my Bahawalpur visit that women are waiting for their turn to get treatment in the field hospital. The 'Clinic On Wheel' project will be launched soon. We are establishing the first official state-of-the-art cancer hospital in Lahore, where patients will be provided free treatment of cancer disease. I have directed the Health Minister to make functional cancer hospital Outdoor wing," the CM added.

The previous government halted PML-N's development proj-

ects. "I want state-of-the-art health facility across Punjab after five years, and every city should have cardiology, paediatrics and cancer treatment facilities. Air ambulance project will be launched for the poor patients in coming few weeks. It is my dream that no patient wanders about in search of treatment and medicines." CM Maryam Nawaz commended the Health Department officers including secretary health over successful launch of the project.

Senator Pervaiz Rasheed, MNA Aoun Chaudhry, Provincial Ministers Azma Zahid Bokhari, Khawaja Salman Rafique, Khawaja Imran Nazir, Chairman P&D, Secretary Health, Secretary Information and other officials were also present.



LAHORE: Former Federal Minister Rana Nazir Ahmad and Shoaib Siddiqui addressing press conference at the Istehkam-e- Pakistan Party office. —APP Photo

JI ready to collaborate on any initiative for restoring constitution: Hafiz Naeem

LAHORE (INP): Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman has declared that the JI is fully prepared to collaborate on any initiative aimed at restoring the constitution.

Following a meeting with opposition leaders at Mansoorah on Saturday, he indicated that the specifics of this cooperation would be finalized during the meeting of the JI Majlis Shura.

The opposition delegation, led by Mahmood Khan Achakzai and including figures like Asad Qaiser, Hamid Khan Advocate, Sanaullah Baloch, Asad Naqvi, and Punjab Assembly opposition leader Ahmed Khan Bhachar, visited the JI headquarters to discuss the current political landscape and extend an invitation to a seminar planned by the opposition movement on May 8, to which the Emir Jamaat was invited.

Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman accepted the invitation, assuring JI's participation in the event. Alongside him were JI secretary general Amirul Azmi and Vice-Emir Dr

Osama Razi.

Addressing the media alongside opposition leaders, he appreciated the Army Chief's stance on upholding constitutional boundaries, expressing hope that the institution would adhere to these principles both in word and deed. He suggested that if political parties and institutions were willing to abide by the constitution, a significant dialogue could ensue. However, he stressed that the restoration of public mandate through Form-45 would serve as the foundation for such a dialogue, firmly stating, "We will never accept a government formed on a fraudulent mandate," while also demanding the establishment of a judicial inquiry commission to investigate election rigging.

The JI chief emphasized that the restoration and adherence to the constitution would encompass democracy within political parties, the revival of student unions, and the empowerment of local government. He highlighted the nation's myriad

crises, including economic turmoil, inflation, unemployment, and the grievances of farmers, asserting that progress could only be achieved through the supremacy of law and justice. He called for comprehensive land reforms and the eradication of politics dominated by electables and feudal lords.

Responding to queries, Hafiz Naeem stated that the JI's ultimatum to the Punjab government regarding the reassessment of its decision on non-procurement of wheat from farmers would conclude on Tuesday. He vowed that the JI would compel the government to review its decision through peaceful protests.

Reiterating the demand for a thorough investigation into the one-billion-dollar wheat import scandal amidst a shortage of dollars in Pakistan and wheat in stock, the JI leader criticized former caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Karar for issuing indirect statements instead of directly identifying those responsible for the import decision.

Sindh approves Rs177.517m fund to strengthen police

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presiding over a cabinet meeting approved the allocation of Rs177.517 million for the purchase of operational vehicles to strengthen and mobilize various wings of the police.

The Chief Minister stated that the police, with the support of other law enforcement agencies, has to expedite operations against street criminals in Karachi, dacoits in the riverine area, and drug mafias all over the province. He added that President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari during his special meeting regarding law and order at CM House, had given clear instructions for this purpose.

The cabinet was held at the CM House and was attended by the provincial ministers, advisors, chief secretary and other concerned officers. The Home Department told the cabi-

net that the Sindh police, (CPO, SSU, CTD, Special Branch, SPU) and Safe Cities Authority Sindh Forensic Science Laboratory requested for procurement of vehicles for their operational purposes.

The cabinet was told that the Sindh police have pointed out 405 vehicles have completed their operational time, therefore they may be provided funds to maintenance for the vehicles.

The cabinet after discussion approved Rs177.514 million for Home department to purchase vehicles for their operational purposes.

Murad Ali Shah stated that his government has taken measures to

strengthen the police force by providing them with better arms, ammunition, and salary packages as well as mobilizing them with vehicles. He acknowledged the efforts

of the police in restoring law and order in the city and the riverine area in the past and expressed confidence that they would continue to do so in the future.

The cabinet was informed that the caretaker cabinet had approved an amount of Rs 597.756 million to continue the subsidized fare of Peoples Bus Service at Rs50 and released 50 per cent or Rs. 289.878 million. The remaining 50 percent of funds of Rs 289.878 million were withheld.

The provincial cabinet to maintain the existing fare of Rs 50 of Peoples Bus Service approved the release of the withheld amount of Rs 289.878 million.

The cabinet also approved the release of Rs1.18 billion for clearing the remaining payment of 90 buses added to the Peoples Bus Service fleet. The buses were procured

through the NRTC.

Sindh cabinet approved the appointment of Muhammad Aminullah Siddiqui as Special Judge, Anti-Corruption (Provincial), Karachi and repatriated Mohammad Ahsan Khan Durani, who is a District & Session judge.

The school education department initiated a summary for the caretaker cabinet for additional funds of Rs1,011,142 million as an outside budget to meet the shortfall of free textbooks from class PG to 10th.

The caretaker cabinet approved additional funds of Rs 3.5 billion for procurement of books for the academic year 2024-25.

The CM was told that the regular budget allocation of the Sindh Text Book board was Rs 2,530 million. Out of which Rs 1,265 million have been released. It was pointed out that the Sindh Text Book Board (STBB) has not provided audit reports since FY 2020-21.

The cabinet decided to release Rs 3.5 billion and directed the school education department to con-

duct an audit of STBB and report to the cabinet.

The cabinet approved the creation of the HW&SC Board and directed the department to appoint its members and notify them.



Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre

A JCI Enterprise Accredited Organisation

Career Opportunities in SKMCH&RC Peshawar

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre (SKMCH&RC) is a specialist tertiary care cancer Centre built and funded by charitable donations with a mission to provide the best possible cancer care to all patients. SKMCH&RC has a team of UK and US-trained physicians who provide state-of-the-art diagnostic, treatment and support services to patients. SKMCH&RC is pleased to invite applications for the following positions:

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- Consultant Anaesthetist
- Consultant Breast Surgeon
- Consultant Clinical & Radiation Oncologist
- Consultant Clinical Haematologist
- Consultant Head and Neck Surgeon
- Consultant Medical Oncologist
- Consultant Nuclear Medicine
- Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon
- Consultant Paediatric Oncologist
- Consultant Pathologist
- Consultant Physician Critical Care & Pulmonary Medicine
- Consultant Physician Internal Medicine & Gastroenterology
- Consultant Physician Internal Medicine & Infectious Diseases
- Consultant Physician Internal Medicine & Nephrology
- Consultant Radiologist
- Consultant Upper GI Surgeon

- Consultant Urologist
- Locum Consultant Anaesthetist
- Locum Consultant Breast Surgeon
- Locum Consultant Pathologist
- Locum Consultant Radiologist
- Locum Consultant Urologist
- Part Time Consultant Anaesthetist

Senior Instructors:

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- Senior Instructor Breast Surgery
- Senior Instructor Clinical Haematology
- Senior Instructor Clinical and Radiation Oncology
- Senior Instructor Head and Neck Surgery
- Senior Instructor Medical Oncology
- Senior Instructor Paediatric Oncology
- Senior Instructor Radiology

Hospital Based Fellowships:

- Fellowship in Anaesthesia
- Fellowship in Radiation Oncology

Medical Officer:

- Medical Officer in Radiology

Management, Administration & Technical:

- Database Administrator

Note: All Senior Instructor positions for Karachi & Peshawar involve working at Lahore for two years, followed by two years of training overseas. For further details regarding the position and eligibility criteria, please visit our website on www.shaukatkhanum.org.pk

Apply now at: bit.ly/SKMCHJobs

Only online applications will be entertained. Please share your CV at the email address given below and do mention the position applied for in the subject line. We regret that only shortlisted candidates will be notified.

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Human Resources Department

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre
5-B, Sector A-2, Phase V,
Hayatabad, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 91 5885000 Ext. 3536,3538

Email: careers.peshawar@shaukatkhanum.org.pk



Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre

A JCI Enterprise Accredited Organisation

Invitation for Pre-Qualification

Invitation for pre-qualification of constructors for the construction of Sewage Treatment Plant at Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital & Research Centre, Peshawar

- Applications are invited from constructors for the Sewage Treatment Plant to be constructed at Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital & Research Centre, Peshawar. The estimated capacity of the plant is 60,000 gallons per day.
- Eminence One (SMC- Pvt) Ltd has been engaged for the consultancy service for design and supervision of works.
- Applications are invited from parties meeting the following criteria:

1. Valid registration as constructors with Pakistan Engineering Council in the category C – 3 or above (as per revised categories of PEC with effect from 2010) on the closing date of advertisement.
2. Firms should have successfully executed aforesaid works in at least two (02) reputable hospitals.
3. The minimum annual volume of work during any of the last five years shall be Rs 100 million.
4. Applications of firms having been blacklisted by any Governmental agency will not be considered for pre-qualification. An affidavit prepared within the current month of the submission of pre-qualification to this effect will be provided by the applicant.

- Only pre-qualified firms under this procedure will be invited to bid.
- The decision of the Employer as to whether the applicant is eligible for pre-qualification shall be final and binding on the contractors.
- The "Employer" reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications without assigning any justification.
- Application and company profile for pre-qualification should be delivered by hand or through registered mail till May 20th, 2024 at following address.

Chief Engineer

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre
7-A, Block R-3, Johar Town, Lahore, Pakistan
Ph: +92-42-35905000, Ext 3422, 3423, 3426, 3427

Police complaint cell performance

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Police Complaint Cell received a total of 3,936 complaints, with 2,865 addressed and 793 pending applications this year. The Lahore police spokesperson on Saturday mentioned that out of 2,141 complaints received in person, 1,439 have been addressed with 497 actions initiated. Similarly, out of 1779 complaints received via postal mail, 1398 have been addressed with 281 actions ongoing.

Capital City Police Officer Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana emphasized the importance of providing relief and timely justice to the oppressed, stating that Lahore police play a vital role in this regard through the complaint cell. He highlighted that common citizens issues were being swiftly addressed through the complaint cell. Bilal Saddique Kamyana stated that a dedicated helpline (1242) has been established by the CCPO office for the resolution of public complaints, ensuring continuous relief to citizens.

Implementation of TAD to remove hurdle in Pak-Afghan Trade allowed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Federal Ministry of Commerce has allowed implementation of Temporary Admission Documents (TAD) without the requirement of Passport and Visa for a period of one year starting from 1st May, 2024.

This was disclosed by Arbab Qaisar Hamid, Director Directorate of Transit Trade, Peshawar during a meeting held at Transit Trade, Custom House Peshawar with Transport Operators (TOs), Chambers of Commerce and Customs Agent Associations of KPK.

The meeting was attended by Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, President Frontier Customs Agent Association, KP, Qadir Ullah, President of Chamber of Commerce, North Waziristan, Niaz Muhammad, Founder Chamber of Commerce Kurram Agency, Azeemullah, President of Transport Association Torkham, Aimal Shinwari, President All Torkham Custom

Agent, Shams ur Rehman, Additional Director, Directorate of Transit Trade, Peshawar, Ms. Maleeka Ahmed, Deputy Director, Directorate of Transit Trade, Peshawar, Syed Jawad Kazmi, Khyber Chamber of Commerce, Eng. Manzoor Elahi Ex-SVP, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Peshawar, Imtiaz Ahmed Ali Vice President FCAA and Farooq Ahmad, Member of Pak-Afghan (PAJCCI), Peshawar.

Speaking to the participants of the meeting, Arbab Qaisar said Ministry of Commerce has taken the decision after taking into consideration the suggestions of the Pakistan and Afghan traders, transporters and relevant stake holders.

He highlighted the purpose and importance of the Temporary Admission Documents (TAD) for smooth functioning of bilateral Trade.

The chair further elaborated that due to non-avail-

ability of passport and visa with the drivers the smooth flow of bilateral trade was hindered often.

He further informed the meeting participants that in order to streamline smooth registration for implementation of TAD, the Directorate has taken following measures including constitution of a help desk comprising of designated officers at Customs House, Peshawar as well as all Border crossing Points (BCPs) of KP.

Similarly, he continued, for registration of Local transport Operators a draft application form has been prepared to obtain all the relevant particulars of Transport Operators (TO).

A Public notice has been devised for general awareness in which all the documents required has been laid down for ease of registration process of Transport Operators (TOs).

Moreover, the attendees were also informed that around 6, 000 Afghan registered vehicle and 9, 000

Pakistani registered vehicles are involved in transportation of bilateral trade and the implementation of TAD will smooth line and simplify the process which will in turn enhance the trade between the two countries.

The chair ensured all the participants that the Directorate of Transit Trade, Peshawar will be available 24/7 to address all the queries of transport operators regarding registration for Temporary Admission Documents (TAD).

Presenting vote of thanks, President Frontier Customs Agent Association, Zia ul Haq Sarhadi appreciated the decision taken by Ministry of Commerce.

He said TAD implementation will help a lot in resolving a major issue faced by businessmen dealing in Pak-Afghan trade.

Zia said for promotion of bilateral trade such decisions are needed to be taken for providing ease to business community.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur chairing a meeting of Mines and Mineral Development Department.

2 eunuchs shot in City, in critical condition

PESHAWAR (APP): Two eunuchs were shot on Kohat Road firing in the City and were in critical condition, doctors in the hospital on duty confirmed that both are in critical condition.

According to detail, some unknown gunmen shot the eunuchs returning from the program in Peshawar including Kamran alias Jaya and Muhammad Hamza alias Mehk were injured by bullets.

Kamran alias Jaya was shot in the waist while Hamza alias Mehk was shot in the foot, Police Control also confirmed the firing incident.

Both eunuchs are under treatment at LRH Hospital, the spokesman of the Hospital Muhammad Asim said. He said the condition of Kamran alias Jaya is said to be critical as he was hit in the back while another Hamza was shot at the foot.

The police have filed a report and started an investigation. Search for the shooters continued, police said.

AD&SJ grants bail to alleged smuggler F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Sessions Judge (AD&SJ) Peshawar, Bakht Alam granted bail to Ihsan allegedly involved in the smuggling of Ice-drug (methamphetamine) as well as ordered his release, on Saturday.

The Counsel Afrasiab Khattak advocate appeared on behalf of petitioner. According to the prosecution, the accused was arrested by the Agha Mir Jani Shah Police on April 7 while recovered 271 grams of Ice-drug. He was trying to smuggle the contraband, the prosecution added.

The counsel argued that the charges against the petitioner were baseless and that police had made the case fabricated and failed to produced concrete evidence which establish link the accused with the drug.

The prosecution argued for dismissal of bail plea. However, AD&SJ granted bail to the accused after conclusion of arguments.

Attempt of narcotics smuggling foiled

PESHAWAR (APP): Two major operations by the officials of the Excise Department Peshawar Region wherein recovered a total of 48 kilograms of drugs and succeeded in arresting the drug smugglers here on Saturday.

According to detail, the first action was takijz/en by Excise Police Peshawar Region on Motorway Service Road towards Akbar Pura and during the search, 36 kg of hashish was recovered from the loader, the accused Arshad Khan was arrested on the spot, Excise Official said.

Another operation was conducted at H Gol Chowk, 12 kg of drugs were recovered from the vehicle, the accused was arrested, Excise Police official said here. For legal action, both cases have been filed in Excise Police Station Peshawar Region for further investigation.

Int’l Firefighters Day celebrated

PESHAWAR (INP): Like other part of the world, the Rescue 1122 celebrated international Firefighters Day on Saturday and paid tribute to all those associated with this noble cause as professional firefighters.

Director General Rescue 1122 Dr. Mohammad Ayaz Khan was the chief guest on this occasion. Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan salutes his veteran firefighters on the occasion of International Day and paid rich tribute to all those associated with this noble profession.

All over the world, firefighters are known as heroes because of their services, Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan while paying rich tribute to the firefighters said. Firefighters always run towards the fire while common people run

away from the burning heat, Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan said.

Rescue 1122 has provided services in more than 30,000 different fire incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan disclosed. The highest number of fire incidents were reported in Peshawar, that was 8505 in number, Dr. Muhammad Ayaz Khan said.

Rescue 1122 has all the latest firefighting equipment, Dr Muhammad Ayaz Khan said and would ensure their services to the general public during firing incidents.

International Firefighters’ Day (IFFD) is observed on May 4 annually to honour the heroes who risk their lives to safeguard their communities. It was established after a proposal

by Australian firefighter, JJ Edmondson, was made on January 4, 1999, following the deaths of five firefighters fighting a bushfire in Australia on Dec 2, 1998.

On December 2, 1998, firefighters of the Geelong West Fire Brigade responded to a call for assistance by other firefighters fighting a wildfire from Linton, Victoria, Australia.

A sudden change of wind direction caused due to a cold front led to the fire truck being engulfed by the fire on the way to refilling the water tank.

As a result, five Geelong West firefighters were killed: Garry Vredevelt, Christopher Evans, Stuart Davidson, Jason Thomas, and Matthew Armstrong. This incident eventually led to the proposal for an International Firefighters’ Day.

Minister inspects provision of facilities

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Health Minister, Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Saturday visited District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital Karak and inspected provision of facilities to patients.

He was accompanied by local elders and concerned officials of health department. He also checked data of health facilities being provided to patients under Sehat Card and directed to

further improve service delivery system.

Health minister said that government is working to digitize all the record of health system for facilitation of people and said that performance of staff, availability of medicines and functioning of machineries could be monitored properly after the implementation of Health Information and Service Delivery.

Later, he attended health

summit of Insaf Doctors Forum and announced commitment of provincial government to improve health facilities in southern districts. He also urged doctors to support government in health reforms following vision of party leadership.

He also announced functioning of cath lab and doctors hostel in Bannu Hospital and said that efforts would be made to resolve all the issues of doctors.

Dr. Shah makes successful defense of PhD thesis

PESHAWAR (APP): Dr. Shah Murad Khan completed his PhD in Therogenetics (Enamel Health) under the supervision of Associate Professor Dr. Rafatullah Khan of the College of Veterinary Sciences.

He presented his research paper titled “Study on Association of Calcium Dynamics with Reproductive, Metabolic and Under Health Status in Postpartum Holstein Friesian and Their Crossbred Dairy Cows under Subtropical Condition”. Dr. Shah Murad Khan participated in

the defense seminar and the answers to the questions made by him while successfully defended his Ph.D thesis.

His article was approved not only in Pakistan but also by famous scientists in Turkey and Italy. The central hypothesis of this paper is that genetic diversity and calcium supplementation significantly affect milk production performance, reproductive performance, and udder health status in postnatal dairy cows.

It is hypothesized that crossbreeding and adequate calcium supplementation of dairy breeds can reduce lac-

tation-related health problems and have a positive effect on overall productivity and productivity as well as animal health in subtropical dairy farming environments.

Dean Faculty of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences Professor Dr. Abdul Rehman and Principal College of Veterinary Sciences Professor Dr. Murad Ali Khan along with other faculty members, researchers and scholars congratulated Supervisor Dr. Rafatullah Khan and Scholar Dr. Shah Murad Khan for their successful defense.

New form of mpox may spread more easily outbreak

PESHAWAR (Monitoring Desk): Congo is struggling to contain its biggest mpox outbreak, and scientists say a new form of the disease detected in a mining town might more easily spread among people.

Since January, Congo has reported more than 4,500 suspected mpox cases and nearly 300 mpox deaths, numbers that have roughly tripled from the same period last year, according to the World Health Organisation. Congo recently declared the outbreak across the country a health emergency.

An analysis of patients hospitalised between October and January in Kamituga, eastern Congo, suggests recent genetic mutations in mpox are the result of its continued transmission in humans; it’s happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry

the disease. “We’re in a new phase of mpox,” said Dr Placide Mbala-Kingebeni, the lead researcher of the study, who said it will soon be submitted to a journal for publication. Mbala-Kingebeni heads a lab at Congo’s National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of diseases.

The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Mbala-Kingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet. He also said that the new form seems to have a lower death rate.

In a report on the global mpox situation this week, WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the mutations.

With experts pointing out that fewer than half of people in Congo with mpox

are tested, Mbala-Kingebeni said: “The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know.”

Mbala-Kingebeni said most people were infected via sex, with about a third of mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of mpox that scientists established the disease was spread via sex, with most cases in gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in Congo for the first time.

There are two kinds, or clades, of mpox, which is related to smallpox and endemic to central and west Africa. Clade 1 is more severe and can kill up to 10 per cent of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak; more than 99pc of people infected survived.

Tehreek-e-Istiqlal argued parties for political reconciliation

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Tehreek-e-Istiqlal Central President Rehmat Khan Wardak emphasized the necessity of fostering a politics of restraint and tolerance. He asserted that the rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) cannot be attained through coercion and intimidation, urging the PTI provincial government to pursue prudence and moderation in securing provincial rights, during a meeting with senior journalists at the Peshawar Press Club on Saturday.

Wardak highlighted the significance of political reconciliation for the PTI, emphasizing that while the party garnered a sympathetic vote in the recent general elections, failure to engage in reconciliation politics could jeopardize its electoral support. He stressed the need for a shift in governance style and political system, advocating for the adoption of proportional representation, a model uti-



lized in 74 countries worldwide.

Additionally, Wardak underscored the imperative of making agriculture profitable and addressing farmers’ concerns as a priority to safeguard food self-sufficiency.

He firmly stated that political stability is indispensable for economic stability, condemning any actions that sow chaos and corruption as detrimental to

the nation and its people.

Expressing regret over recent incidents, Wardak decried the spreading of hatred against the army as anti-national. He advocated for the construction of both small and large dams, including the controversial Kalabagh Dam, as crucial steps towards national development and prosperity. Wardak urged political parties to unite in advocating for proportional repre-

sentation and system change.

He proposed strategic shifts in trade policies, suggesting the procurement of petroleum products from countries offering them at competitive prices in local and Chinese currency. Wardak also endorsed agreements with neighboring nations for barter trade, reducing dependency on the dollar and fostering economic stability.

BF leader calls retaining policy rate highest level ‘unfair’

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Leader Businessman Forum (BF), for-

IKD awards ISO certification

PESHAWAR (APP): The Institute of Kidney Disease Hayatabad has been awarded the prestigious ISO 9001-2015 certification for successful implementation.

Director IKD Mazhar Khan on Saturday said that they are delighted to announce that this achievement reflects our unwavering commitment to quality healthcare services and patient satisfaction.

The audit team, following a thorough evaluation, commended the remarkable efforts and dedication of the institute management and staff in achieving this significant milestone. It is a testament to our team’s hard work and relentless pursuit of excellence in healthcare delivery.

This certification underscores our commitment to upholding the highest standards of quality and continual improvement in all aspects of our operations. We remain dedicated to providing exceptional care to our patients and ensuring a safe and efficient environment for our staff.

We extend our gratitude to all members of our team for their dedication and professionalism throughout this process. Their commitment has been instrumental in our success.

We look forward to continuing to serve our community with excellence and compassion as we strive for continual improvement in healthcare standards.

mer senator Ilyas Ahmad Bilour described retaining policy rate at 22 percent as unfair and detrimental for business, industrial and economic growth and demanded to bring it down to 12 percent.

A statement issued here on Saturday, Ilyas Bilour, a leading businessman of the country recalled that the PML-N led government in its previous tenure had brought down the interest rate by a single digit.

The BF leader asked: “How will the business community gain loans from commercial banks at this highest interest rate?”

He added it is quite difficult for the business com-

munity to repay loans to the banks with an interest rate of 25 per cent.

Businessmen are already in high trouble in the prevailing circumstances and getting loans from the commercial banks at markup of 25 per cent is not only difficult but completely impossible for them, Mr Bilour said.

The BF leader said the government is borrowing from commercial banks through T-bill.

He said if the central government asked the Governor, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to bring down the interest rate to 12 percent from current 22 per cent, that will accelerate the process of business, trade

and industrialisation and stabilize the national economy as well.

He maintained prices will go down by making a drastic cut in interest rate that will provide relief to the poor segment of the society.

Ilyas Bilour said SBP is an independent institute of the country but the government must take action over retaining policy rate at the highest level.

He said autonomy doesn’t mean that whatever it wish to do and whatever not to do.

The BF leader urged the government and State Bank of Pakistan to bring down the current policy rate from 22 to 12 percent.

Tourists enjoy traditional sports, music

PESHAWAR (APP): Spectacular sports games and music were held on the second last of the ongoing Qaqlasht Festival on Saturday.

Organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA), district administration Upper Chitral and Qaqlasht Committee, the event continued to attract foreign and domestic tourists besides a large number of local residents, who enjoyed matches of various games held in the scenic meadow in Upper Chitral.

Deputy Commissioner Irfanuddin, District Police Officer Muhammad Attique Shah and Chitral Scouts’ Lt-Col Noor Illahi, Shahzada Sikandarul Mulk, the chairman of the Qaqlasht Committee, and

officials of KPCTA also attended the festival.

Different sports competitions, including polo, sports for the physically challenged persons, traditional food stalls, cultural show, tug-of-war, skate shooting, marathon race, volleyball, cricket, football, archery were held.

In football, Mastuj team beat the Mustajapanda team of Lower Chitral while Peshawar Browsers defeated Reshin team in thrilling matches. In cricket, Morkoh, Jan Brothers, Raja Tigers, Snowghat Heroes and Greenlath team won their respective matches in the second round and qualified for the next round.

Similarly, local hockey matches were held between Reshin Rezidors and

Charoon teams, which were enjoyed by the tourists and local residents. The tourists and guests also enjoyed traditional music and foods and thanked the KPCTA and others for organizing the event in a befitting manner.

They said the historic festival would promote tourism in the region. Besides players and spectators, foreign and domestic tourists have thronged the lush green venue to enjoy the festival.

The organizers have established a tent village to facilitate the tourists besides setting up foods and cultural stalls for the tourists. They said that a record number of teams were participating in various games.



In brief

Army holds free medical camp

SHEIKHUPURA (INP): In a commendable effort to serve the local community, the Pakistan Army organised a free medical camp catering to the residents of Chauhan and nearby villages near Sheikhupura. Led by dedicated doctors and paramedical staff, including gynaecologists, the camp provided essential medical examinations and treatments to hundreds of individuals, pvt reported. Approximately 800 patients availed themselves of the medical services offered at the camp, including various diagnostic tests such as ECG. Beyond immediate medical care, attendees received invaluable insights through awareness lectures on hygiene, balanced diet, and disease prevention, notably focusing on combating ailments like dengue. The initiative received widespread appreciation from the local populace, who lauded the Pakistan Army's consistent efforts in organising such vital healthcare interventions in rural areas. Gratitude flowed towards the Army for their ongoing commitment to public welfare, symbolising a tangible embodiment of service to the community.

Fire reduces homes to ashes

KHAIRPUR NATHAN SHAH (INP): Several homes were reduced to ashes after they caught fire following firecrackers were exploded at a wedding in a suburban village of Khairpur Nathan Shah in Sindh, local people said on Saturday. And despite the fact that the fire-fighting department was informed, firefighters did not reach Borra Lakher, the site of the incident, leaving the locals to extinguish the blaze on their own. Four members of a family belonging to Khokhar tribe were injured after a rival group belonging to the same tribe fired rockets at a village, Khokhar, in the outskirts of Larkana. The injured namely Tabassum, Sonari, Raziq and Momin Khokhar were initially shifted to Naudero Hospital and then to the trauma center at Chandka Hospital in Larkana. The assailants managed to escape after the attack. Police said the incident took place because of an old enmity between two groups of the Khokhar clan.

10 injured in clash

DADU (INP): The wedding ceremony turned into battlefield when relatives clashed over issue of making video of the bride, leaving several injured here on Saturday. The incident took place in Sourajabad Mohallah of Dadu where dispute emerged over making video of bride at time of her departure. The relatives of bride and bridegroom openly used batons, fists and kicks against each other. The clash resulted in injuries to 10 people from both sides. The injured were shifted to hospital and police registering a case into the incident started investigations.

12 suspects held

KANDHKOT (INP): As many as 12 suspects were held and arms recovered in joint operation of police and Rangers for recovery of the kidnapped persons. An exchange of fire also took place with the robbers during the operation. SSP Bashir Brohi said that the operation was conducted in Kacha area C-Section police station jurisdiction during which several hideouts of robbers were destroyed.

Installation of cameras warehouses ordered in Mardan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru conducted a thorough inspection of wheat warehouses in Mardan. During the visit, the minister was accompanied by deputy director and district food officials, meticulously reviewed all arrangements related to wheat procurement at the warehouses.

According to the briefing received by the provincial minister, the wheat warehouses 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.

Provincial Minister emphasized the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 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.

"Concerned district warehouses would be purchasing point for the procurement", said the minister, adding that this step aims to ensure thorough examination of wheat quality and quantity. He further stated that the provincial government will purchase 300000 metric ton local wheat at a rate of

Rs 3,900 per 40 kilograms, benefiting both local growers and saving significant funds for the provincial exchequer.

Food's minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to transparency in line with the vision of founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Imran Khan. Responding to a question from the media regarding concerns raised by Punjab farmers, the minister criticized the previous caretaker federal and Punjab governments for excessive import of wheat, which has adversely affected local farmers. He attributed this to the previous caretaker governments' focus on benefiting the sugar mafia, which could have negative repercussions on wheat production in the coming year.

AWKUM secure 2nd position: The World Time Higher Education has released the latest ranking of the world's best universities for 2024, according to which Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad has won the first position and Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan has won the second position in the whole of Pakistan and the first position in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan has won the world ranking for the fifth time in a row. This is proof that our teachers have a prominent name around the world in terms of research. According to information released by Time Higher Education the World University Rankings 2024 include more than 2,000 universities from more than 100 countries and territories, which makes them the biggest university ranking ever.

AJK PM approves Social Protection Ordinance

F.P. Report

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu Kashmir Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq has said that the approval of the Social Protection Ordinance was an important milestone towards ending a sense of deprivation amongst economically less-privileged sections of society in AJK.

He expressed these views while addressing the Azad Jammu and Kashmir State Legislative Assembly Session shortly after the House approved the landmark Social Protection of Vulnerable Population Ordinance 2024 in its ongoing season held in the state metropolis. Terming the legislative body as the biggest defender of the people's fundamental rights,

the PM said, "If someone dared to tamper with the endowment fund, he will be taught a lesson".

He expressed that the government has dealt with every kind of mafia and their patrons with an iron hand. Protection of citizens' lives and their property, he said, was the government's Primary responsibility.

The PM also appreciated the role of the Federal government and national security agencies in solving the problems in Azad Kashmir. He said that e-tendering has been instrumental in saving more than 3 billion rupees. "We have surrendered 110 posts in the Prime Minister's Secretariat," he said, adding that it was for the first time that half of the Prime Minister's Secretariat

budget had been surrendered.

The PM said that holding peaceful protests was no doubt everyone's right, but if there was any attempt to disrupt the peace, the AJK police were sufficient enough to deal with it. The prime minister made it clear that FC has been deployed to protect the foreigners posted in different areas.

Meanwhile, AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq visited the CMH in the state metropolis on Friday to inquire about the health of a machine operator who was airlifted to the hospital for treatment after getting seriously injured while conducting a landslide clearance operation in the top mountainous Neelum valley of AJK.



HYDERABAD: An elder man enjoying Lassi to get relief from hot weather.

Tree plantation drive kicks off in KKKUK

F.P. Report

KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, took a significant step towards environmental conservation as the Prime Minister's Green Youth Movement (GYM) club at the university organized a Spring Plantation campaign at the New Campus.

The event was inaugurated by the Registrar of Khushal Khan Khattak University, Dr. Rafi Ullah Khan, who planted a tree symbolizing the start of a greener future for the university. Dr. Rafi Ullah Khan commended the efforts of the GYM Club in spearheading initiatives aimed at environmental conservation and sustainability within the university community.

Speaking at the occasion, Dr. Rafi Ullah Khan stated, "It is imperative for educational institutions to take a proactive role in environmental conservation. He lauded the Prime Minister's Green Youth Movement club at Khushal Khan Khattak



University for their dedication to fostering a culture of environmental responsibility."

Shad Muhammad, the GYM Focal Person, also graced the event with his presence and expressed appreciation for the commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by the GYM Club members. He emphasized the importance of collective action in combating environmental challenges and encour-

aged students to continue their efforts towards a greener and sustainable future.

The Spring Plantation campaign at the New Campus of Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, gives the university's commitment to environmental conservation. Through initiatives like these, the university aims to inspire a generation of conscious leaders towards green Pakistan.



GILGIT: Police Khidmat Markaz staffer issuing online driving license to customers.

Minor dies 6 passengers injured in road mishap

F.P. Report

BUNER: A minor died while six other passengers were critically injured road when a Datsun pick-up overturned at remote hilly area of Chaghorzai tehsil in Buner district due to dilapidated road.

The injured have been rescued by local residents and taken to the nearest hospital where their condition is said to be out of danger. Local sources confirmed and told the media on cell phone that the work of widening and paving this road was started in the year 2016 and three different contractors were awarded the contract but six hundred meters of the road has not been paved yet.

Because of which there are difficulties in travelling and the road at this place is very rough and sharp accent, causing accidents and damage to precious human lives and precious vehicles. The people of the area have expressed concern over the accidents and appealed to Deputy Commissioner Buner for immediate steps to pave the 600 meters of dirt road leading to Bar Shamanal. In order to avoid further accidents and also demanded action against the concerned contractor.

Committees vow to support govt

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Village Peace Committees of Boshier, Dandar, Shakh and Mali Khel have assured support to government in their efforts to maintain peace in the area. The assurance was given by village peace committee members in a meeting of held under the chair of Deputy Commissioner Kurram, Javid Ullah Mehud.

On the occasion, meeting discussed measures to maintain peace in their areas and announced full support to government against miscreants. The members also expressed concerns and condemned the statement being percolated on social media about Dandar and Boshier areas demanding action on part of government to prevent occurrence of these incidents in future. The meeting concurred to visit different village and devise a well deliberated plan to ensure peace and serenity in Kurram.

Int'l Day Firefighters celebrated

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: International Firefighters Day was celebrated in Toba Tek Singh alike rest of the world. In this regard, Rescue 1122 Toba Tek Singh passed a special march in the city, in which District Emergency Officer Mian Faraz Munir, Emergency Officer Akhlaq Ahmed Farooqui, Shift Incharge Atif Iqbal, lead fire rescuer Muhammad Rizwan and media coordinator Malik Abrar including a large number of rescuers participated, on Saturday.

On this occasion, District Emergency Officer Mian Faraz Munir expressed his views regarding the International Day of Firefighters and said that on May 4, fire rescuers.

Water pollution

Anela Ismail

WATER pollution is a pressing global issue with far-reaching consequences. It occurs when harmful substances, such as chemicals, plastics, and toxins, contaminate bodies of water, including rivers, lakes, oceans and groundwater. This pollution can have devastating effects on aquatic ecosystems, wildlife and human health.

One of the main sources of water pollution is industrial discharge, where factories release chemicals and waste into nearby water bodies. Agricultural runoff, containing pesticides and fertilizers, is another significant contributor, especially in rural areas. Additionally, improper disposal of household waste, sewage, and plastic waste exacerbates the problem, leading to the accumulation of pollutants in waterways.

The impacts of water pollution are wide-ranging. Contaminated water poses serious health risks to humans, causing diseases such as cholera, dysentery and hepatitis. Aquatic life suffers from reduced biodiversity, habitat destruction and reproductive issues due to exposure to pollutants. Furthermore, polluted water can affect economies by harming industries such as fishing and tourism, which rely on clean waterways.

Addressing water pollution requires collective action at local, national, and international levels. Efforts to mitigate pollution include implementing stricter regulations on industrial waste discharge, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, improv-

ing wastewater treatment infrastructure, and raising awareness about the importance of preserving water quality.

In conclusion, water pollution is a complex environmental problem that requires immediate attention and concerted efforts from governments, industries, communities, and individuals. By taking proactive measures to reduce pollution and protect our water resources, we can safeguard ecosystems, promote public health and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.

In Dera Ismail Khan, like many other areas, water pollution arises from various sources, including industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, and improper waste disposal. Industries operating in the region may release chemicals and waste into nearby water bodies, contaminating them with heavy metals, toxins, and other pollutants. Additionally, agricultural activities contribute to pollution through the runoff of pesticides, fertilizers, and animal waste into rivers and streams.

Improper disposal of household waste and sewage further compounds the problem, especially in areas lacking adequate sanitation infrastructure. To address water pollution in Dera Ismail Khan, several remedies can be considered: Regulatory Measures: Implement and enforce strict regulations on industrial waste discharge, ensuring that industries adhere to pollution control standards and properly treat their effluents before releasing them into water bodies.

Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture:

Encourage farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural practices that minimize the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, promote soil conservation, and reduce runoff into waterways.

Wastewater Treatment: Invest in upgrading and expanding wastewater treatment infrastructure to ensure that sewage and wastewater are adequately treated before being discharged into rivers or reused for irrigation purposes.

Public Awareness and Education: Raise awareness among the local population about the importance of preserving water quality and the adverse effects of water pollution on human health, ecosystems, and the economy. Education campaigns can empower communities to take action to prevent pollution and promote responsible water usage.

Community Engagement: Engage local communities in water quality monitoring and management initiatives, empowering them to identify pollution sources, advocate for clean water policies, and participate in cleanup efforts.

Investment in Green Infrastructure: Promote the implementation of green infrastructure solutions, such as constructed wetlands, vegetative buffers, and permeable surfaces, to naturally filter and absorb pollutants before they reach water bodies. By implementing a combination of these measures, Dera Ismail Khan can work towards mitigating water pollution, protecting public health, preserving ecosystems, and ensuring sustainable water resources for future generations.

Political situation of country not encouraging

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Chairman Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), former KP Chief Minister and former Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao visited the residence of Mahmudul Islam Advocate in Kohat on Saturday to condole the sad demise of his brother. Members of the Lawyer Community and party workers were also present on this occasion.

Talking to the mediamen on this occasion, Aftab Sherpao said that the current political situation of the country is not encouraging. For political and economic stability in the country, the establishment, judiciary and political parties have to work on one platform, he added.

Talking regarding the performance of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, QWP Chairman said, if



people have voted for Tehreek-e-Insaf, then everyone should respect it's mandate and it is the responsibility of the Tehreek-e-Insaf government to deliver upto the expectations of its electorate.

Regarding the central government, Aftab Sherpao said, although Prime

Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif apparently has a one-third majority but he is dependent on other parties who can draw their support any time. In response to a question, the former interior minister said, in present political scenario, the federal government may not complete its tenure and will end prematurely.

Woman among two killed in Jacobabad firing

JACOBABAD (INP): In a tragic incident, at least two people died including a woman in two firing incidents that occurred in Jacobabad.

As per details, the first firing incident occurred near a bus stand in Dadapur police station vicinity which resulted in the killing of two people identified as Rahm Ali and Muhammad Amin. In the second incident, a woman was killed by her nephew in vicinity of Panhon Bhatti police station.

In February, at least three people died including a woman in two firing incidents that occurred in Jacobabad.

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Furthermore, SSP of Jacobabad police have taken notice of the three deaths and directed the authorities to arrest the accused immediately. Prior to this, in the course of eight hours, as many as two individuals were killed, while five others were injured in separate firing incidents in Karachi. According to the details, several firing incidents were reported from Karachi, leaving two dead and five others injured.



German foreign minister says Russia will face consequences

BRUSSELS (AP): Germany accused Russian military agents of hacking the top echelons of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party and other sensitive government and industrial targets, and was joined by NATO and fellow European countries in warning that Russia's cyberespionage would have consequences.

Relations between Russia and Germany were already tense, with Germany providing military support to Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Russian military cyber operators were behind the hacking of emails of the Social Democrats, the leading party in the governing coalition. Officials said they did so by exploiting Microsoft Outlook. Officials described a hacking campaign that persisted for months.

The German Interior Ministry said in a statement that the hacking campaign began at least as early as March 2022 — a month after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — with emails at Social Democrat party headquarters accessed beginning that December. It said German companies, including in the defense and aerospace sectors, as well as targets related to the war were also a focus. The statement said international efforts led by the FBI shut down in late January a botnet of compromised network devices used by the

Russian hackers — known as APT28 or Fancy Bear — in the cyberespionage scheme.

"Russian state hackers attacked Germany in cyberspace," Baerbock said at a news conference in the Australian city of Adelaide. She attributed the hack to a unit of Russia's GRU military intelligence unit. "This is absolutely intolerable and unacceptable and will have consequences," she said, without specifying what they might be.

A separate German statement said the hacking occurred over "a relatively long period" and also targeted various unidentified German government authorities, foundations and associations. It said the Social Democrats' executive committee was targeted. The Council of the EU and the Czech Foreign Ministry said Czechia's institutions have also been targeted by the same group. Both German and Czech officials said the GRU hackers leveraged a previously unknown vulnerability in Microsoft Outlook.

In a statement by the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, the bloc's nations said they "strongly condemn the malicious cyber campaign" by Fancy Bear "against Germany and Czechia." The EU noted that it had previously imposed sanctions on individuals and entities associated with the group for targeting the German parliament in 2015. It said it will not tolerate the continuation of

such attacks, particularly with EU elections upcoming in June.

NATO accused Fancy Bear of targeting "other national governmental entities, critical infrastructure operators and other entities across the Alliance," including in Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden. "We are determined to employ the necessary capabilities in order to deter, defend against and counter the full spectrum of cyberthreats to support each other, including by considering coordinated responses," said the North Atlantic Council, the principal political decision-making body within NATO.

Baerbock is visiting Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, with the trip focusing on security policy as China pushes for influence in the Pacific region. "The defense cooperation between Germany and Australia is close and we would like to deepen it further and together expand it, because we are in a situation where we face similar threats," said Baerbock, who is the first German foreign minister to visit Australia in 13 years.

Discussions between Baerbock and Australia counterpart Penny Wong centered on the conflict in Gaza. "I think we all understand that the only path out of this cycle of violence that we see in the Middle East at such great cost is one that ultimately ensures a two-state solution," Wong said.

Brazil floods: Dam collapses

BRASILIA (BBC): A hydroelectric dam has collapsed in southern Brazil after days of heavy rains that triggered massive flooding, killing more than 30 people. Officials say another 60 people are missing in Rio Grande do Sul state.

About 15,000 residents have fled their homes since Saturday. At least 500,000 people are without power and clean water across the state. The burst dam triggered a two-metre (6.6ft) wave, causing panic and further damage in the already flooded areas. The dam is located between the municipality of Cotiporã and the city of Bento Gonçalves.

The extreme weather has been caused by a rare combination of hotter than average temperatures, high humidity and strong winds. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has visited the region, promising help from the central government. Earlier, state Governor Eduardo Leite pleaded for urgent assistance, saying that "we need to rescue hundreds of people in dozens of municipalities". Helicopters have been deployed to search for stranded people.

In some areas, the flooding is so severe that helicopters have been unable to land and have had to winch residents to safety. In the Candelária municipality, residents took to the roofs of their homes as their houses filled with water. Meteorologists have predicted further rains to fall in the region as a cold front moves across it. Last year, more than 30 people were killed in a cyclone in Rio Grande do Sul. Brazil's National Institute of Meteorology attributed the increased intensity and frequency of rainfall to the climate phenomenon El Niño.

Bodies found in Mexico

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Mexican authorities have located three bodies in the state of Baja California where one American and two Australian tourists were reported missing, the local prosecutor's office said in a statement.

Australian brothers Callum, 33, and Jake Robinson, 30, and American Carter Rhoad, 30, were last seen on April 27, the Baja California state prosecutor's office previously announced. It referred to the missing American as Jack Carter Rhoad. Forensic tests on the remains will be conducted by a state laboratory which will allow for positive identification of the bodies, the prosecutor's office said in its statement.

Investigators continue to search the rugged area where the bodies were found for additional evidence, the statement added. The three men were on vacation surfing near the popular tourist town of Ensenada, about 90 minutes south of the US-Mexico border. State prosecutor Socorro Ibarra said that three people were being investigated in connection with the case. Her office noted that arrest warrants have been obtained for the crime of forced disappearance.

Tents were found in the area where the missing men were last seen, said Ibarra, adding that they were formally reported missing days after their actual disappearance. A burnt white pickup truck was also found in the area, authorities said. Baja California is one of Mexico's most violent states, although the Ensenada area is considered safer. The US State Department advises Americans to reconsider travel to the state due to crime and kidnapping.

Asked about the discovery of the bodies, a US State Department spokesperson said: "We are aware of those reports and are closely monitoring the situation." A spokesperson for Australia's foreign ministry said their embassy in Mexico was working closely with Mexican authorities and the Australian Federal Police. "The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recognises this is a very distressing time for the family and is in regular contact with them to provide support."

Bomb kills 12 in Congo camps



GOMA (AP): Attacks on two camps for displaced people in eastern Congo's North Kivu province killed at least 12 people, including children, according to local officials, an aid group and the United Nations. The UN said in a statement that bombs hit two camps for displaced people in Lac Vert and Mugunga, near the city of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu.

The UN called the attacks a "flagrant violation of human rights and international humanitarian law and may constitute a war crime". Lt. Colonel Ndjike Kaiko, a Congolese army spokesperson, blamed the attacks on a rebel group, known as M23, with alleged links to Rwanda, in a statement provided to The Associated Press. The M23 rebel group denied any role in the attacks and blamed Congolese forces in a statement published on X.

Details from the area were still emerging. A UN spokesperson, Jean Jonas Yaovi Tossa, told the AP that at least 12 people were killed and more than 20 injured in the attacks. Save The Children, an aid group, said it was present at one of the camps when shells struck close to a busy marketplace ahead of their vehicle. It said dozens were injured, mostly women and children, and the death toll was still unclear.

Congo's president, Felix Tshisekedi, who was traveling in Europe, decided to return home following the bombings, a statement from his office said. Tshisekedi has long alleged that Rwanda is destabilizing Congo by backing the M23 rebels. UN experts, along with the US State Department, have also accused Rwanda of

backing the rebels. Rwanda denies the claims.

Earlier this week, French President Emmanuel Macron called on neighboring Rwanda to halt its support for the M23 rebel group during a joint press conference with Tshisekedi in Paris. The bombings follow the M23 rebel group's capture of the strategic mining town of Rubaya this week. The town holds deposits of tantalum, which is extracted from coltan, a key component in the production of smartphones. It is among the minerals that was named earlier this month in a letter from Congo's government questioning Apple about the tech company's knowledge of "blood minerals" being smuggled in its supply chain.

"We are gravely concerned about the recent (Rwanda Defense Forces) and M23 expansion in eastern DRC, which has contributed to the displacement of more than 2.5 million people," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. "(We) call on both parties to respect human rights and adhere to applicable obligations under international humanitarian law." The decadeslong conflict in eastern Congo has produced one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with over 100 armed groups fighting in the region, most for land and control of mines with valuable minerals. Some are fighting to try to protect their communities. Many groups are accused of carrying out mass killings, rapes and other human rights violations. The violence has displaced about 7 million people, many beyond the reach of aid.

Footage shows Ukrainian village battered to ruins

KYIV (AP): The Ukrainian village of Ocheretyne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by The Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russian troops have been advancing in the area, pounding Kyiv's depleted, ammunition-deprived forces with artillery, drones and bombs. Ukraine's military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a "foothold" in Ocheretyne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues. Residents have scrambled to flee the village, among them a 98-year-old woman who walked almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) alone last week, wearing a pair of slippers and supported by a cane, until she reached Ukrainian front lines.

Not a single person is seen in the footage, and no building in Ocheretyne appears to have been left untouched by the fighting. Most houses, apartment blocks and other buildings look damaged beyond repair, and many houses have been pummeled into piles of wood and bricks. A factory on the outskirts has also been badly damaged. The footage also shows smoke billowing from several houses, and fires burn-

ing in at least two buildings. Elsewhere, Russia has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, in an attempt to pummel the region's energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents. Four people were wounded and a two-story civilian building was damaged and set ablaze overnight after Russian forces struck Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, with exploding drones, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said Saturday.

The four, including a 13-year-old, were hurt by falling debris, he said on the Telegram messaging app. Russian state agency RIA reported Saturday reported that Moscow's forces struck a drone warehouse in Kharkiv that had been used by Ukrainian troops overnight, citing Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His comments could not be independently verified.

Syniehubov said Russia also bombed Kharkiv, damaging residential buildings and sparking a fire. An 82-year-old woman died and two men were wounded. Ukraine's military said Russia launched a total of 13 Shahed drones at the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions of eastern Ukraine overnight,

all of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

Ukraine's energy ministry on Saturday said the overnight strikes damaged an electrical substation in the Dnipropetrovsk region, briefly depriving households and businesses of power. According to Serhii Lysak, the province's governor, falling drone debris damaged unspecified "critical infrastructure" and three private houses, one of which caught on fire. Two residents, a man and a woman, were rushed to hospital.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed early on Saturday that its forces overnight shot down four US-provided long-range ATACMS missiles over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The ministry did not provide further details. Ukraine has recently begun using the missiles, provided secretly by the United States, to hit Russian-held areas, including a military airfield in Crimea and in another area east of the occupied city of Berdyansk. US officials said last week.

Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance — up to 300 kilometers (190 miles) — than it had with the mid-range version of the weapons it received from the US last October.

US, Australia, Japan and Philippines vow to deepen ties

HONOLULU (AP): Defense chiefs from the US, Australia, Japan and the Philippines vowed to deepen their cooperation as they gathered in Hawaii for their second-ever joint meeting amid concerns about China's operations in the South China Sea.

The meeting came after the four countries last month held their first joint naval exercises in the South China Sea, a major shipping route where Beijing has long-simmering territorial disputes with a number of Southeast Asian nations and has caused alarm with its recent assertiveness in the waters. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters at a news conference after their discussion that the drills strengthened the ability of the nations to work together, build bonds among their forces and underscore their shared commitment to international

law in the waterway.

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles said the defense chiefs talked about increasing the tempo of their defense exercises. "Today, the meetings that we have held represent a very significant message to the region and to the world about four democracies which are committed to the global rules-based order," Marles said at the joint news conference with his counterparts.

Austin hosted the defense chiefs at the US military's regional headquarters, US Indo-Pacific Command, at Camp H.M. Smith in the hills above Pearl Harbor. Earlier in the day, Austin had separate bilateral meetings with Australia and Japan followed by a trilateral meeting with Australia and Japan. Defense chiefs from the four nations held their

first meeting in Singapore last year.

The US has decades-old defense treaties with all three nations. The US lays no claims to the South China Sea, but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls freedom of navigation operations that have challenged China's claims to virtually the entire waterway. The US says freedom of navigation and overflight in the waters is in America's national interest. Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich sea. Beijing has refused to recognize a 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated its expansive claims on historical grounds.

Skirmishes between Beijing and Manila in particular have flared since last year. Earlier this week,

Chinese coast guard ships fired water cannons at two Philippine patrol vessels off off Scarborough Shoal, damaging both. The repeated high-seas confrontations have sparked fears of a larger conflict that could put China and the United States on a collision course. The US has warned repeatedly that it's obligated to defend the Philippines — its oldest treaty ally in Asia — if Filipino forces, ships or aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

President Joe Biden's administration has said it aims to build what it calls a "latticework" of alliances in the Indo-Pacific even as the US grapples with the Israel-Hamas war and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Beijing says the strengthening of US alliances in Asia is aimed at containing China and threatens regional stability.

Taiwan says Chinese planes crossed median line

TAIPEI (Reuters): Taiwan's defence ministry said it had detected a renewed incursion by Chinese military aircraft across the sensitive Taiwan Strait, as China reported its navy had carried out combat drills with landing craft. Over the past four years, China's military has significantly ramped up its activities around democratically-governed Taiwan. Beijing views the island as its own territory, a position the government in Taipei strongly rejects.

The defence ministry, in its daily morning update on Chinese activities in the previous 24 hours, said 14 Chinese military aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait's median line, getting as close as 41 nautical miles (76 km) to the northern Taiwanese port city of Keelung, home to a major navy base. The median line previously served as an

unofficial border between the two sides, but Chinese military aircraft now regularly cross it. China says it does not recognise the line's existence. Taiwan said that China had carried out a "joint combat readiness patrol" near the island for the second time in a week.

China's defence ministry did not answer calls seeking comment, the country being in the middle of its Labour Day holiday. The Eastern Theatre Command of China's People's Liberation Army, which is responsible for the area around Taiwan, showed pictures on its WeChat social media account of ships carrying out what it called live combat landing drills.

It did not say when or where exactly the exercises took place, but showed images of ship-mounted guns opening fire and oper-

ating in formation. "The vanguard of the landing team are always ready to fight," it said in text to accompany the pictures. The island's top security official said that Taiwan is on alert for China to carry out military exercises following the inauguration of President-elect Lai Ching-te later this month.

Taiwan National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai Ming-yen said China had begun using unusual new tactics, including staging night time combat patrols and using landing ships and minesweepers in those patrols. China's coast guard this week has also been carrying out more patrols around the Taiwan-controlled Kinmen islands which sit next to the Chinese coast. The patrols began in February following a dispute about the

death of two Chinese nationals who tried fleeing Taiwan's coast guard upon entering prohibited waters. Chinese state media said "normal law enforcement inspection" by its coast guard near Kinmen was to help protect fishermen. Taiwan has decried the patrols as an intimidation tactic.

Lai, who is inaugurated on May 20 after winning election in January, is strongly disliked by China which believes him to be a dangerous separatist. China's government has rejected his repeated offers of talks, including one made last week. Lai, like current President Tsai Ing-wen, rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims; both say only the island's people can decide their future. Lai has been Taiwan's vice president for the past four years.

Finland army chief urges Europe to be prepared for Russia testing unity

HELSINKI (Reuters): Finland's new armed forces chief said Russia was unlikely to test NATO's mutual defence clause by attacking a NATO member state in the coming years, but may well continue what he said were hybrid attacks such as jamming and election interference.

Some Western leaders, such as US President Joe Biden, Germany's top military official and Denmark's defence minister, have expressed concern that Russia's longer term plans could include an attack against NATO. "Of course testing the Article 5 is always possible, but if we take correct action and maintain

unity, I consider an attack unlikely," General Janne Jaakkola said told Reuters.

Jaakkola, whose job is to closely watch what Russia does behind the long border it shares with Finland, said right now Moscow was too busy preparing for its new summer offensive in Ukraine to consider an attack against NATO. At the end of last year, Russian President Vladimir Putin himself dismissed the idea of attacking NATO as nonsense but the Kremlin has also warned that a conflict between Russia and NATO would be inevitable if European members of NATO sent troops to fight in Ukraine.

However, Jaakkola said

Russia was likely to continue what he described as hybrid attacks against European countries, in the form of GPS jamming, influence operations and by targeting its neighbours including Finland with migrants. The Kremlin routinely denies meddling in elections and weaponising migration. It did not respond to a request for comment about allegations of jamming by Estonia last month but has previously denied attempting to develop jamming technology.

"The point for the Russians is that they wish to cause as much division in Europe as possible, so that our unity and cohesion is a

bit weaker," Jaakkola said. Jaakkola nomination to lead the Nordic country's defence from April 1 marked the first anniversary of Finland's membership in the Western military alliance, which it joined in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

As well as joining NATO, Finland has increased its defence spending, amounting to 2.5% of gross domestic product in 2023 and 2.31% this year, renewed its fighter jet fleet, signed a bilateral defence cooperation agreement with the US, and is doubling its ammunition production capacity by 2027. "The direction of our defence and therefore deterrence is upwards," he said.

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Pakistan's leap to the Moon

A Milestone in Collaboration and Innovation** Pakistan's foray into lunar exploration with the successful launch of the ICUBE-Q mission marks a transformative moment in the nation's scientific endeavors. Launched aboard China's Chang'E6 rocket from Hainan, China, this historic initiative is not just a demonstration of technological prowess but a testament to the spirit of international cooperation and ambition. The ICUBE-Q, meticulously crafted by the Institute of Space Technology (IST) in collaboration with China's Shanghai University SJTU and Pakistan's national space agency SUPARCO, symbolizes a leap into the future of space exploration for Pakistan.

The satellite, equipped with dual optical cameras, is designed to image the lunar surface, paving the way for a deeper understanding of our moon's mysteries. The fact that this mission is part of China's broader Chang'e lunar exploration program further highlights the strength and potential of collaborative ventures in space technology. The significance of this mission extends beyond its scientific and technical merits. It stands as a proud moment for Pakistan, celebrated enthusiastically by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, along with the entire nation. Their unified commendations underscore the national pride and joy accompanying this achievement. The leaders' separate statements not only commend the core committee of the IST and the contributing students but also emphasize the milestone this launch represents in the progress of Pakistan's space program. President Zardari's acknowledgment of the Pak-China partnership in this domain is noteworthy. His optimistic vision for future milestones and his confidence in the country's scientific community reflect a broader strategic aim to foster a robust space research infrastructure.

This approach is pivotal for Pakistan as it seeks to carve out a place for itself among the globe's space-exploring nations. Prime Minister Sharif's remarks resonate with a sense of achievement and possibility. His analogy of the Pak-China friendship reaching beyond geographical and terrestrial boundaries into space captures the essence of this mission. It's a portrayal of how partnerships can transcend conventional limits, fostering advancements that were once deemed unreachable. Sharif's pride in Pakistan's inclusion among the eight countries recognized for their capabilities in this launch further highlights the global acknowledgment of Pakistan's growing expertise in space technology. Moreover, Sharif's vision of the benefits that space technology can bring to satellite communications, scientific research, economic development, and national security is compelling.

His emphasis on the empowerment of Pakistan's youth in fields of modern sciences and technology is particularly inspiring, highlighting a commitment to nurturing a new generation of scientists and engineers. Deputy Prime Minister Dar's congratulations to the young scientists and students involved in ICUBE-Q also emphasize the role of youth in national achievements. His comments about the launch as a reflection of international cooperation for shared benefits echo a global perspective on space exploration. It underscores the importance of collaborative endeavors in achieving common goals and advancing human knowledge.

This editorial not only celebrates Pakistan's first lunar mission but also reflects on the broader implications of such a historic step. It is a story of national pride, international collaboration, and futuristic vision. The successful launch of ICUBE-Q is a beacon of hope and a call to action for continued investment in science and technology. It proves that with the right collaboration, resources, and dedication, small steps can lead to giant leaps. This mission not only propels Pakistan into a new era of space exploration but also positions it as a burgeoning player on the cosmic stage, ready to explore, discover, and innovate for the betterment of humanity and beyond.

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Crackdowns on US college protests

Hafed Al-Ghwel

A MERICAN universities have historically been bastions of free speech and conduits for great social change, addressing pivotal moments in history with a blend of academic integrity, civic engagement and youthful ingenuity.

Today, campuses still enshrine the echoes and scars of the protests against the Vietnam War that sprang up across the nation several decades ago. These centers of higher learning, the stewards of the change-makers of tomorrow, quickly became hotbeds of anti-war sentiment, deeply influencing public opinion, national discourse and, ultimately, ending ruinous policy. Students used their campuses as platforms for peaceful protest and assembly, highlighting the power of the collective student voice in effecting societal shifts.

Equally notable was the role of colleges and universities during the civil rights movement, when campuses served as incubators of nonviolent protest. They became spaces where activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. found audiences eager for change in a country far removed from the ideals on which it was founded.

From the anti-Apartheid movement for divestment from South Africa, to Black Lives Matter or climate change, student-driven protests have consistently proved the instrumental nature of universities in championing the causes of liberty and justice. They have set precedents for the active participation of America's youth in national and global discourse, providing venues where even the most disenchanted can speak and be heard.

This storied legacy seems to be faltering, however, in the face of recent campus responses to the Palestinian solidarity movement, which has sparked widespread discourse and shows of dissent. Events that have unfolded at institutions such as Columbia University in New York serve as a stark illustration of how some of America's most esteemed centers of higher learning are failing to meet the moment.

On the morning of April 30, more than 200 pro-Palestinian demonstrators

occupied Columbia University's Hamilton Hall, in an echo of the 1968 anti-war protests. Yet rather than engage in constructive dialogue or use these protests as a teachable moment, the immediate response by university authorities was to call in the police, leading to a series of escalations and arrests. This decision not only exacerbated existing tensions but raised alarming questions about the current state of free speech on American college campuses.

The arrests were part of a broader trend we are seeing across the country, with nearly 1,000 detentions reported nationwide in a matter of days in relation to the growing number of pro-Palestinian protests. This wave of confrontations and the resultant crackdowns by authorities stand in stark contrast to the expected

communities and the country at large. The fault lines signal a deeper crisis in university governance — namely, the handling of free speech, enforcement of campus rules, and the balance between collective security and individual rights. In an era of heightened polarization and intense culture wars, universities are still struggling to safeguard the very civil liberties that enabled America to engage in collective soul-searching on its campuses some 60 years ago, which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Worse, there is almost a collusive abdication of responsibility among America's tertiary institutions, the press and influential public voices, demonstrated by the deliberately erroneous framing and questioning of the legitimacy of a growing Palestinian

universities to prioritize public image and external pressure over the foundational values of academic freedoms and student engagement.

By clinging to the baton in lieu of dialogue, the unconscionable crackdowns on protests have left yet another ugly scar on the American psyche: an irrevocable maxim that only the causes held dear by a pliant majority ought to be championed.

Aggressive responses to impassioned activism that is driven by the ideals upon which this country was founded undermine the core mission of all American centers of inquiry, which is to foster a diverse and inclusive arena for the exchange of ideas. By choosing order over education, universities risk alienating their student populations, driving down student engagement and discouraging future activism.

Students, perceiving their concerns are being sidelined or outright silenced, might either withdraw from campus political life or escalate their actions, prompting further polarization. Such outcomes are detrimental to the kind of engagement, debate and exchange of differing viewpoints that universities take pride in and have enshrined in their curricula. The crackdowns on protests and the manner in which universities such as Columbia have handled them illustrate a broader crisis of confidence in the role of higher education in society. By clinging to control measures rather than embracing dialogue, universities betray one of their core missions: to champion libertarian causes in their roles as custodians of free thought and inquiry.

Only by embracing their historic role as crucibles of social change can American universities, and other centers of higher learning around the globe, hope to regain the trust of their students and reaffirm their place at the forefront of societal evolution. Columbia should be the first and only lesson we need on how not to engage with a rightfully enraged student body, serving as an example that ensures the causes of the future — of which there will be plenty — are not lost to the missteps of the present.

Arab News

By clinging to the baton in lieu of dialogue, the unconscionable crackdowns on protests have left yet another ugly scar on the American psyche: an irrevocable maxim that only the causes held dear by a pliant majority ought to be championed.

role of universities as safe spaces for open dialogue and debate.

Columbia is far from an isolated bruising; it is merely one conflagration in a globe-spanning wildfire of campus activism related to Israel's undeterred escalations in Gaza. Similar protests have surged, affecting more than 50 campuses in the US and spreading to universities in other countries, such as the Sorbonne in France and the University of Sydney in Australia, turning them into arenas for unprecedented levels of pro-Palestinian advocacy. This widespread mobilization has become an enduring solidarity movement that transcends borders and illustrates a universally resonant call for academia, at least, to take a decisive stance against the catalog of atrocities unleashed on helpless Gazans.

However, the rush to wield batons and deploy armored cars against students reveals a troubling schism in the compact between universities, their

solidarity movement. Carefully curated and well-practiced statements from university officials, for instance, have become a reflection of what they believe the American public wants to hear, thereby disguising uncomfortable truths and sidestepping the responsibilities that they demand.

As spontaneous and overwhelming as they are, the encampments, occupations, sit-ins and rallies are simply the most common forms of student activism and have been for decades. They are not devious ploys by well-practiced anarchists, as some would have us believe, in their attempts to discredit the movement and deny the agency of the students to step up where America has capitulated. Moreover, the responses to protests at Columbia and on other campuses have not only failed to stifle dissent, they have sown seeds of distrust among students and their surrounding communities. These suppressions highlight a distressing trend: the willingness of

Many Americans see Trump through rose tinted glasses

Scott Jennings

THE 2024 presidential election offers voters an unusual experience — not only is it a referendum on the incumbent, Americans will also be faced with the choice between two chief executives they know well: the current Oval Office occupant and his immediate predecessor.

And in comparison polling thus far, something fascinating is happening: there seems to be real nostalgia for the Trump years, even as head-to-head polls remain relatively close. What to make of this post-term Trump bump? After January 6, 2021, most voters and commentators (this one included) were furious with Trump, writing off any chance of his returning to the White House.

But a few years removed from that terrible day and over three years into Biden's term, it's clear that millions of Americans see things differently. "Looking back, 55% of all Americans now say they see Trump's presidency as a success, while 44% see it as a failure. In a January 2021 poll taken just before Trump left office and days after the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, 55% considered his time as president a failure."

As for Biden, "61% say his presidency thus far has been a failure, while 39% say it's been a success." The biggest problem for Biden is obvious — it's the economy, and specifically inflation. Forty-one percent of Americans have cited inflation and high cost of living as the most important financial problem facing their family today — a massive spike from just 8% in June 2017. Skyrocketing food, gas, energy, and housing costs have people souring on "Bidenomics" in a way that seriously threatens the president's reelection.

Against a normal challenger, persistent inflation would be tough enough for Team Biden. But it's an even bigger issue in a face-off against Trump, an opponent who, as president, presided over an economy that most regard as better than today's. And on top of that, prior to running for president, Trump spent years attempting to brand himself as one of the best businessmen in the world. According to a New York Times report in August 2020, several months into the Covid-19 pandemic, "The president [Trump] has built an enduring brand with conservative voters, in particular, who continue to see him as a successful businessman and tough negotiator. Many of those voters praise his economic stewardship before the pandemic hit, and they do not blame him for the damage it has caused."

Views on Trump and his perceived economic wizardry, in other words, are baked in. And so is anger about persistent inflation that has made trips to the grocery store painful for all but the wealthiest American families. When presented with a polling choice, Americans seem to be yearning for the recent past, when they felt they were getting ahead instead of being sucked under by runaway inflation. Trump was the president then, and he's benefiting from that nostalgia for better times now.

There are other signs voters may be nostalgic for Trump. A Gallup survey conducted in April found just 38% of Americans think

Biden is a "strong and decisive leader," an eight point decline from 2020. For Trump, that figure is at 57%, up a point from four years ago. While Biden's scores on a range of metrics including likability and efficacy have declined dramatically, Trump's have been remarkably stable. It's easy to see how, if voters disapprove of Biden on a specific issue like the economy or immigration (which many Americans do), the persistence of these problems might lead them to conclude he isn't strong enough to find solutions or change their trajectories for the better. This creates a perception doom loop that Biden will have a hard time breaking out of.

Biden's perceived weakness gives Trump openings on numerous fronts. He doesn't necessarily have to provide detailed policy cures as much as he has to channel the anger of Americans who have had it with Biden on various issues. For Trump, operating from the outside worked for him in 2016 and may again in 2024. In 2020, Trump was running against a different Biden, at least as a matter of public perception. Biden was old then, but not in a way that had people thinking he wasn't up to the job. And Biden benefited from a campaign run largely from his basement and on Zoom, while Trump struggled with the Covid spotlight.

Now, the tables are turned. Four years on, Biden has aged significantly, often rambling and stumbling over his own words. With the pandemic long in the rearview mirror, it's increasingly apparent that Biden is not exactly the paragon of vitality and dynamism. A group of his own staffers has recently started walking across the South Lawn alongside Biden to distract from his stiff gait, advisers told Axios. Trump has had his own gaffes and mix-ups, too, but there's no question he's viewed as more vigorous and "with it" than Biden. And it helps that Trump isn't in the spotlight the way he was as president, while Biden's gaffes have piled up.

Finally, nostalgia for Trump may also be a result of Americans losing confidence in Biden as an effective government operator. In 2020, 52% of Americans thought Biden could "manage the government effectively." Today, that number is down to 38%. Trump sits at 49% today, up one point since 2020, according to Gallup. Biden's core argument in 2020 was that he was more experienced and competent, and those attributes would result in less drama in Washington and around the world. But that notion crumbled with America's disastrous pullout from Afghanistan in August 2021 and has not recovered since. The feeling that the country is going off the rails continues to plague Biden, as protesters, including some with antisemitic slogans, shut down roads, bridges and college campuses across the country. Whether you believe Biden is directly responsible, the president of the United States catches credit and blame for most things that happen on his watch. For the team that once basically argued that the adults are back in charge, the Biden administration now faces a tough re-election campaign against a man it seems many Americans are nostalgic for.

CNN

Choice at next election is clear – only Conservatives have a plan

Rishi Sunak

THE last few weeks have demonstrated the clear choice at the next election between the Conservatives and Labour. A plan versus no plan, bold principled action versus U-turns and prevarication, a clear record of delivery versus political game playing, a leader focused on the future or a party obsessed with talking about the past.

Whether it's the economy, migration, welfare or the defence of our realm, the Conservatives have a plan and it's working, and Labour is nowhere to be seen. Take migration. I am determined to get control of migration, both legal and illegal. That is why I have introduced measures designed to halve legal migration and have got the Rwanda scheme on the statute book despite the opposition of Sir Keir Starmer and the blockers.

Just this week, our approach is being vindicated.

First, Rwanda. Already, the deterrent effect is working, and illegal immigrants are leaving this country because they fear being detained and deported. We've seen the proof that a deterrent works, given the concerns raised by the Irish just this week, less than a week after our Rwanda Bill became law.

Migrants are already leaving the UK and going to Ireland for fear of being sent to Rwanda. The way to deter illegal immigration is for people to know that if they come here illegally, they won't get to stay. The more countries that send out that message, the better. If other countries won't do that, then they will have to deal with the consequences of that. Preparations for our Rwanda flights are continuing. This week, we started detaining those who will be sent to Kigali. I am determined to keep up a regular flow of flights over the summer.

Starting the flights is how we will stop the boats, break

the business model of the criminal gangs, stop young children from losing their lives making this perilous journey and ensure that it is us – your government – who decides who comes to this country. This week, we removed the first failed asylum seeker to Rwanda, the first time a failed asylum seeker has ever been sent to a third country they have no connection to.

The exercise reassured us that the process works and that the Rwandans are ready to receive these people. It proves that, no matter what our opponents claim, Rwanda is a safe third country and the system works. By contrast, Labour has no plan to deal with illegal migration. They would scrap the Rwanda scheme with nothing to put in its place.

This would mean that they would have to release everyone we have detained to go to Rwanda, cancel the

flights we have booked to send them there and admit tens of thousands of people to the asylum system. This would double the asylum backlog. How would Sir Keir Starmer resolve this? In truth, he wouldn't be able to, so Labour would end up offering a de facto asylum amnesty. This would act as a massive pull factor bringing illegal migrants from all over Europe to our shores. And we would end up spending billions of pounds putting people up in hotels all over again, while asylum claims were processed.

Not only are we making progress on tackling illegal migration, but legal migration too. The current levels are far too high. I have taken steps to halve legal migration and data released this week shows that our plan is working. The number of student dependents is down 80 per cent, and those coming on the health and

social care visa in March were down by almost a third compared to last year.

At the same time, we have increased the immigration and health surcharge to make sure immigration doesn't place an unfair burden on our National Health Service. When it comes to dealing with migration, it is clear that only the Conservatives have a plan. Getting immigration under control is just one of my aims. Across the board, we are taking a truly Conservative approach. This week, our second personal tax cut is hitting pay packets – meaning an average worker is paying £900 less tax. I have announced a plan to clamp down on welfare spending and ensure the system is fair to the taxpayers who fund it and those who genuinely need our help.

All Labour can do is scaremonger, but their scaremongering can't hide the fact that they will always find a reason to

oppose tax cuts and welfare savings. We Conservatives are committed to our national defence which is why we have a fully funded plan to raise defence spending to 2.5 per cent by 2030.

Labour, by contrast, still refuses to match that and instead wants to maintain the civil service at its current, post Covid size. The choice is clear: a more powerful military with the Conservatives or a bigger bureaucracy with Labour, led by people who do not believe in our nuclear deterrent. Thursday's results showed that voters are frustrated and wondering why they should vote. The fact that Labour is not winning in places they admit they need for a majority shows that Keir Starmer's lack of plan and vision is hurting them. We Conservatives have everything to fight for – and we will, because we are fighting for our values and our country's future.

The Telegraph

Triumphant Starmer already seems like PM. Now his troubles really begin

Jonathan Freedland

IT was not an opinion poll. These were local elections about local issues. The results tell you only about where we are now, not where we might be come the autumn, or whenever it is that Rishi Sunak finally submits himself to the judgment of the country. You know all the caveats, to which we can add one more: some of the biggest results, namely the mayoral contests in London, Manchester and the West Midlands, won't come until Saturday. And yet, taken together, the votes cast on Thursday form an increasingly clear picture. It is a bleak one for the Conservatives – while for Labour it contains both cheer and a perhaps unexpected warning.

Make no mistake, the core story contained in these numbers is yet more confirmation of the disastrous standing of the Conservative party. As loudly and clearly as they can, voters are telling the Tories that their time is up. Nowhere was that message more deafening than in the Blackpool South byelection, where – yet again – the Conservatives suffered a colossal swing to Labour: at 26%, the third biggest such swing in history. (The second biggest came less than three months ago, in Wellingborough.) Those results can't be written off as midterm blips or one-off protest votes. These are tremblings of the seismograph, saying an earthquake is coming.

For this is now a repeating pattern, recurrent across time and across the country. The Tories' parlous vote share in the council elections of 2024 is an echo of their dismal showing in 2023. Meanwhile, the Tories lost councils to Labour from Redditch in Worcestershire to, for the first time, Adur in West Sussex, watching as Labour also took charge in Thurrock

in Essex and Hartlepool in the north-east.

As always, there are consolation prizes a beleaguered governing party can point to, including a third term for Ben Houchen as mayor of Tees Valley and an expected win for Andy Street in the West Midlands. But as the election guru John Curtice rightly told LBC, those "tell you more about the popularity of the gentlemen concerned rather than anything about the prospects of the Conservative party". Both ran on their individual brands, as virtual independents: when his victory was announced, Houchen was the only candidate on stage who did not wear a party rosette. But even so there is cause for Tory alarm: the swing away from Houchen to Labour would be more than enough to switch all the parliamentary seats in his patch from blue to red.

All of which comes as sweet vindication for Keir Starmer and what we might call his receptacle strategy. His aim has been to turn Labour into the acceptable vessel of national discontent with the party that has governed Britain for 14 years. Voter fury, at first Boris Johnson and the party-gate revelations and next Liz Truss's sabotaging of the UK economy, saw trust in the Tories plunge – but it was never automatic that that would translate into support for Labour. Starmer's central objective has been to remove every obstacle that could stand in the way of a disaffected Conservative contemplating a move towards the main party of opposition.

He has set about that goal methodically, even ruthlessly – seeking to reassure potential Tory switchers that Labour is just as patriotic, just as strong on defence and crime, just as prudent with the public finances and just as competent as they once

believed the Conservatives to be. That approach has turned off, even repelled, some of the Labour core, but this latest round of results – and its large swings, direct from Tory to Labour – suggests it's working.

In 2019, there was talk of a post-Brexit realignment of British politics, with a "red wall" of seats permanently lost to Labour. What happened in Blackpool, Hartlepool and even Tees Valley allows Starmer to say he arrested that shift – and is now reversing it. Even if the truth is that it was less Starmer than Johnson and Truss who, between them, rebuilt the red wall.

And yet the receptacle strategy comes with risks. Spooked by the antisemitism rows of the Jeremy Corbyn period, and keen to look like a hard-headed foreign policy realist and sound like a prime minister in waiting, Starmer adopted a stance on the Gaza conflict – including vocal backing for Israel after the Hamas attacks of 7 October – that has clearly cost Labour support among Muslim voters. That played a part in the loss of Oldham, but it also saw independents surge in Blackburn and in the West Midlands, where Labour believes Akhmed Yakooob, who campaigned last week with George Galloway, drew enough support to split the anti-Tory vote and hand victory to Andy Street. Gains for the Greens tell a similar story, and it is the same problem that confronts Joe Biden in the US. Like Biden, Starmer badly needs the Gaza conflict to be over, or sufficiently calmed, so that it is out of the news when polling day comes.

But strategic caution carries other risks, too. Playing safe, saying nothing that could frighten the floating voter, might bring victory – but it

doesn't deliver a mandate. Starmer is right to ensure he rides the anti-Tory wave, and if these local results were repeated it would carry him into Downing Street. But once there, it helps if you can claim the electorate's backing for your planned programme in government. As things stand, Labour could not quite do that.

There is a subtler problem, more in the realm of vibes than policy. So keen to seem like the adults in an increasingly chaotic room, Starmer and, say, Rachel Reeves do now look the part of PM and chancellor. Indeed, they look like incumbents. But the trouble with looking responsible is that people hold you responsible. The left challengers to Starmer act as if he is to blame for the absence of a ceasefire in Gaza, as if Benjamin Netanyahu – who has happily defied a US president – would have crumbled before a demand from the leader of the UK opposition. But this problem could endure even in government. Voters will be impatient for results from Starmer and Reeves, because of the vague, albeit irrational and indeed unfair, sense that they have been around for years. They will be cut little slack.

Which brings us to the scariest aspect of these results for Labour. They confirm an electorate that is unhappy and angry, frustrated by all that does not work as it should – whether it be the NHS or the buses, the courts or mental health services, schools or the local police. The Tories are so unpopular because so much is broken and there is not enough money to fix it. Right now, that is the Tories' problem, one that promises to sweep them out of power. But once it has, it will become Labour's problem. And it could hardly be more daunting.

The Guardian

Did we really expect Tory MPs

Marina Hyde

ARE you, like me, struggling to get a handle on the current government's approach to empathy? It increasingly seems to be a commodity that many Conservative MPs believe should be available to Conservative MPs only. A few weeks ago the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, described William Wragg – fellow Tory MP and then-chair of the public administration and constitutional affairs committee – as "courageous". By way of a reminder, "courageous" is the sort of word we would typically reserve for people who've singlehandedly held a bridge for the Allies against the Germans despite being wounded/posted a picture on social media of themselves without makeup; whereas Mr Wragg had simply shared MPs' private phone numbers with a blackmailer in the current security environment. Is that brave? If it is, can the no-makeup girls please get a VC?

Further bravery seems to have been on show during yesterday's local elections, which took place under electoral law changed by the Tories in 2022. All voters are now required to present an approved form of photo ID, which even Jacob Rees-Mogg last year implied was an attempt to "gerrymander" and "upset a system that worked perfectly well". Flash-forward to the eve of this week's polls, and the Ipswich MP Tom Hunt – who, naturally, voted in favour of voter ID – could be found informing a WhatsApp group of local party members that it "turns out I have no appropriate ID to vote tomorrow", and requesting someone to "do the honours" and assist him in getting an emergency proxy vote. Unclear which lucky local did "the honours", but Ipswich Labour used a screenshot of his APB in their own ad to remind people that they need voter ID, warning: "Don't be like Tom."

Alas, Tom Hunt was having none of this, posting in response a searingly brave no-makeup selfie. No, hang on – that's not right. Hunt in fact posted an X thread in which he explained: "I do tend to be bad at losing stuff. I'm also very dys-

praxic. Though I don't want to blame this on everything it does make things challenging for me and I do my best but I do lose things and today it was my passport." Of Labour's decision to mention his failure to have the requisite ID, Hunt made something of an Olympian logical leap. "I find it shocking how Labour figures locally have sought to exploit this situation," he bleated. "Saying 'don't be like Tom Hunt', kind of like 'don't be dyspraxic'. They claim to want a more inclusive Parliament then pile on when I make a genuine human error."

Erm ... no. Forgive the interruption of such bravery, but if that logical leap can be made then we are well within the margin of error to suggest that Tom voting in favour of voter ID in the first place was also "kind of like 'don't be dyspraxic'". Certainly he seems to have voted for something despite the apparently reasonable assumption that it could disfranchise other people with dyspraxia. What does he want, a medal? Because I'm afraid William Wragg's already taken the DSO.

We seem to be at the stage of this particular administration in which its parliamentary supporters are asking for empathy for their inability to comply with its own policies, which they voted for, even as they crack down on the idea that empathy might be deserved by anyone else. Furthermore, these requests are cloaked in the sort of bleeding-heart language to which they seem performatively opposed in almost all other arenas. At this rate we could be mere weeks out from a backbencher claiming to have been diagnosed with PTSD for being the perpetrator in a sexual misconduct scandal. The idea that Tom Hunt's defensive sob-story should be floated in the very week that the government previewed a draconian overhaul of the disability benefits system feels a little tin-eared. What's the approved form of words in this situation? Something along the lines of: buck up, Mr Hunt. I think you'll find it could be a lot worse.

And with that, we can avoid the daddy of them all no longer. To South

Oxfordshire, then, where Boris Johnson left his moated mansion on Thursday in order to vote, only to discover when he tried to do so that he himself was without the requisite voter ID that his own legislation had demanded. Stop me if you've had this vibe off Johnson before, but it seems he said one thing at a press conference during the pandemic, which was then undermined by events directly involving him. Back in 2021, Johnson was challenged that introducing voter ID would prevent some people from voting, a possibility he dismissed as "complete nonsense". He had – of course – previously written that if any representative of the state ever asked him for an ID card he would "take that card out of my wallet and physically eat it". Unclear whether that kind of consumption occurred in South Oxfordshire yesterday, when he returned to the polling station for a second time. (After Johnson's Ozempic experiment failed, he may well be back to eating anything.)

So as far as we know currently, two people out of the 365 Tory MPs elected back at the last general election made the voter ID mistake – a very high incidence of error/bravery, which, if replicated across the country, would see tens of thousands of people turned away from polling stations. We don't yet know if those heights/depths were reached at yesterday's polls.

But anecdotally speaking – yes, I am about to tell you an anecdote – I did see two people turned away when I was trying to vote. Or three, if you count me. I don't drive, and my passport is in my maiden name (I think we still call it that), while I'm on the electoral roll in my married name. Fortunately I was able to locate my almost 25-year-old marriage certificate for the second trip to the polling station, thus returning armed with a document that could verify my verification document. Were things like this predictable? Yes. Predicted? Also yes. Absolutely bally heroic? I fear not. Like so much else, it seems rule-breaking is heroic only if you're one of the rulemakers.

How Israel's rogue soldiers were let off hook

Dr. Amal Mudallali

IT has been two weeks since reports first emerged that the US intended to impose sanctions on the Netzah Yehuda battalion of ultra-orthodox soldiers in the Israeli army for human rights violations in the occupied West Bank. The reports raised expectations that the Biden administration was at last standing up to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right extremist government on the issue of international and human rights law, imposing penalties for the first time on an Israeli military unit.

The Leahy Laws, introduced in 1997, prohibit the US State Department and Defense Department from providing military assistance to foreign security force units that have been credibly implicated in a serious abuse of human rights, until the host government takes effective steps to bring the responsible people to justice.

Before the Gaza war, a State Department special panel investigated allegations about the conduct of five Israeli military and police units that operate in the occupied West Bank, and recommended their disqualification from receiving US aid. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was asked during a press conference in Italy last week about the recommendations and he gave the impression that sanctions would follow in a matter of days. The Netzah Yehuda, established in 1999, comprises ultra-orthodox men and religious nationalists from the settler movement. They are a separate unit to accommodate their religious beliefs, including a refusal to serve with female soldiers. When the unit was based in the West Bank it was accused of numerous human rights

violations against Palestinians. One case in particular attracted Washington's attention. Omar Assad, an 80-year-old US citizen, was bound and gagged and forced to lie on his stomach for up to an hour after being detained by Netzah Yehuda troops at a checkpoint near Ramallah in January 2022, and died from stress-induced cardiac arrest.

In June 2023, the Israeli military said the soldiers involved in the incident would be reprimanded but would not face criminal charges because there was no medical evidence that they had caused Assad's death. Israel temporarily moved Netzah Yehuda to the Golan Heights but the unit returned to Gaza and the West Bank after the October attack by Hamas. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz described proposed sanctions on Netzah Yehuda as a "big deal" that sent "an unambiguous political message." But it added: "Israel's entire political echelon needs to be held accountable. The US should say so unequivocally ... instead of sanctioning a rogue battalion, the US should focus on Netanyahu and his ministers."

Predictably, however, the official Israeli reaction was to reject sanctions, which Netanyahu said would be "the height of absurdity and a moral low" that he would "fight with all my strength."

The Israeli army said the Netzah Yehuda soldiers were "currently participating in the war effort in the Gaza Strip ... professionally and bravely conducting operations in accordance with the IDF Code of Ethics and with full commitment to international law." Benny Gantz, a member of the Israeli war cabinet, told Blinken that sanctions

would be a mistake because they would harm Israeli's international legitimacy at a time of war, and because Israel's judicial system was "strong and independent." The State Department appears to have buckled under the pressure. In a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson, Blinken said he planned to postpone "a decision on blocking aid to the unit to give Israel time to right the wrongdoing." Blinken said the Israeli government had not so far adequately addressed the abuses by Netzah Yehuda, but had "presented new information regarding the status of the unit and we will engage on identifying a path to effective remediation."

The decision came at a time when a coalition of lawyers, including at least 20 who work in the Biden administration, wrote to Attorney General Merrick Garland and general counsels across the administration arguing that its actions in Gaza do not comply with US and international law. The delay also coincided with Blinken's visit to Israel last week, and the continued American opposition to an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah, where up to 1.5 million Palestinian civilians have sought refuge.

The delay in a decision to impose sanctions on Netzah Yehuda was received with dismay by human rights advocates, who say that selectivity and leniency toward human rights violations in one place sends the wrong message, not only to the perpetrators but also to the whole world. It encourages impunity and disregard for the rule of law, and impacts justice – because, as Martin Luther King said as long ago as 1963: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Future of UK, and wider world, boosted by Scottish National Party's decline

Andrew Hammond

THE union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has appeared highly prone to rupture over the past decade or so owing, primarily, to the rise of the Scottish National Party. However, the unexpected resignation last Monday of First Minister Humza Yousaf, the leader of the party, which rules the devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, underlines the fact that the almost two decade-long era of SNP control of Holyrood politics is ebbing fast.

The declining fortunes of the party are significant because not only has it enjoyed a very long period in control of the Parliament, dating back to 2007, the SNP also charged the debate over Scottish independence and came within a relative whisker of winning the 2014 referendum on whether or not Scotland should leave the UK. This "near miss" should matter to the wider world because Scottish independence would damage the UK, including its ability to "punch above its weight" on the world stage. Losing the Scottish tax base, for example, especially at a time of huge fiscal challenges in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, would make it harder for the UK to meet its new plans to spend 2.5 percent of gross domestic product on defense in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Moreover, the UK's large overseas aid budget and its extensive network of diplomatic and trade missions would also be affected. Collectively, this would undermine both the hard and soft power that has enabled the nation to punch above its weight for so long. Scottish independence would also erode the UK's voice in international forums, includ-

ing the UN, G7, G8, G20 and NATO. It could also, potentially, and perhaps most significantly, be seized upon by some nonpermanent members of the UN Security Council, or other UN member states, to catalyze calls for a review of the UK's role as a permanent member of the council.

Certainly, reform of the Security Council is overdue. However, Scottish independence could have resulted in this issue being decided on less favorable terms for the UK than might otherwise be the case. Though a resurgence of support for Scottish independence in the longer term cannot be ruled out, the current era of SNP rule is on its last legs. The resignation of Yousaf, after he terminated a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Green Party, will probably hasten the transition to a new administration in Holyrood through an election that could take place as soon as this year, and no later than 2026.

While Yousaf made multiple missteps during his year in office, and his was the second-shortest term of a first minister in the 25-year history of the Scottish Parliament, he inherited a troubled legacy from predecessor Nicola Sturgeon, the nation's longest-serving first minister. From at least 2014, following the independence referendum and the resignation of her predecessor Alex Salmond, she was the dominant Scottish politician, until her resignation last year. While Sturgeon proved to be a formidable politician, even she was unable to find a solution to the vexed conundrum of how to stage and win a second referendum on Scottish independence within a generation of the previous poll. Therefore she spent much of the final years of her time in

power on the back foot.

Part of the reason for this also lay in her championing of a number of controversial policies, including one on trans rights through a Gender Recognition Reform Bill that would have allowed people in Scotland as young as 16 to easily change their legal gender (the bill was ultimately vetoed by the UK government on the grounds that it would undermine UK-wide equality laws). The combined effect was that some polls showed backing for the SNP had slumped to its lowest level in five years by the time Yousaf took office.

However, the issue of independence was the one on which the SNP most significantly failed to grasp the nettle. Its case was not helped by a clear ruling by the UK's Supreme Court that the Holyrood legislature does not have the authority to unilaterally call a fresh referendum on the issue without the consent of the UK government. Since 2014, Sturgeon and Yousaf repeatedly sought ways to push the independence debate in their favor, but a decade later there is relatively little to show for their efforts. This despite their attempt to capitalize on the political unpopularity of the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Though the UK-wide result was a narrow victory, by 52 percent to 48 percent, in favor of leaving the EU, the people of Scotland voted 62 percent to 38 percent in favor of remaining.

The SNP argued that Brexit represented a material change to the UK in the aftermath of the 2014 independence referendum, and so this justified granting the Scottish people another chance to vote on whether or not to remain part of the union. Latterly,

Sturgeon's favored tactic was either to wait for the next UK general election, which must take place by January 2025, and use a good result for the SNP to put pressure on the UK government to agree to another referendum, or to wait and portray the next Scottish Parliament election as a de facto vote on independence.

Given the declining popularity of the SNP, however, neither approach is likely to be a game changer. The party therefore still lacks a road map for delivering the independence that would unravel the UK, one of the world's longest and most successful political unions. Any new referendum is now unlikely to take place until the 2030s, at the earliest. Certainly, Scotland has legitimate concerns about the "thin" Brexit deal agreed between the UK and the EU in 2020. However, the failure of the SNP project is welcome because it was potentially leading Scotland, and the wider UK, down a political and economic black hole that would probably weaken all members of the union, given that their futures are better together.

For Scotland, there remain huge uncertainties about whether it would benefit significantly from independence, not least because of the deficit between tax revenues and public spending in the country, which it can better deal with as part of the union with England, Wales and Northern Ireland. All of this underscores the fact that Scottish independence is a bad idea which would weaken the domestic underpinnings of the UK's international influence. At a time of growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, the future of Scotland and the UK is better together.

Keep an eye on Balkans: It's world's next flash point

Luke Coffey

WHEN considering the security and stability of Europe, the first thing that comes to mind is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After all, it is the largest outbreak of war in Europe since the 1940s. However, about 1,000 kilometers to the southwest of the front lines in Ukraine, another European security crisis is brewing.

The Balkans region in southeastern Europe is prone to instability. It faces many economic challenges. Ethnic, religious and sectarian differences remain a source of friction in society. And for better or worse, it is also susceptible to the influence of outside actors: Russia, the US, China and Türkiye, among others, all have interests and hold sway in the region. After several bloody sectarian wars in the 1990s, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Europeans and Americans were able to stabilize the region through a series of peacekeeping operations. The geopolitical situation in the Balkans has since remained stable but fragile. There has not been a serious threat of instability – until now.

The Balkans is a good example of Europe's unfinished business in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration. In part, this could be a source of the region's current difficulties. Croatia and Slovenia are in the EU and NATO. North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro are in NATO but not in the EU. Kosovo aspires to membership of both the EU and NATO. Serbia remains firmly in the Russian sphere of influence, serving as Moscow's toehold in the region, but occasionally sends signals it wants to

get closer to the EU. But perhaps the most complicated, yet consequential, country in the region is Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although it has started the formal processes for joining both the EU and NATO, little progress has been made. Like its neighbors, it faces many social and economic challenges and, as you might expect, these challenges are exacerbated by sectarian divisions inside the country that are being fueled by those outside it.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, two sub-state entities emerged as a result of the Dayton Accords following the civil war of the 1990s: the ethnically Bosnian and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the ethnically Serb Republika Srpska. The leader of the latter, Milorad Dodik, has long advocated for independence. In recent years he has also taken steps to undermine the legitimate state structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina by creating parallel institutions inside Republika Srpska. Last month, for example, Republika Srpska's National Assembly passed a new electoral law, considered to be unconstitutional, and established a legal framework for holding referendums, which many people fear could be used for a future vote on independence. Not only do these measures undermine the state sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they threaten to bring instability to the Balkans by jeopardizing the success of the 1995 Dayton Accords.

Two upcoming events could serve as a pretext for fresh instability in the region. The first potential flash point

is a draft resolution being debated by the UN General Assembly that proposes to designate July 11 as the "International Day of Remembrance for the Genocide in Srebrenica." In 1995, Bosnian Serbs, along with paramilitary units from Serbia, massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica after the UN declared the city a safe area. Of course, Dodik and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic have vehemently criticized the resolution. This criticism from people such as Dodik is unsurprising; there are many officials in Republika Srpska and Serbia who downplay what happened in Srebrenica in 1995. Dodik has said that reports of Serbia's involvement in the deaths of nearly 8,000 Bosnian Muslims are "untrue," and many of the victims are "still alive."

Raising the stakes even higher, Dodik has stated that should UN General Assembly adopt the resolution, he will seek out the next opportunity to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering his previous rhetoric on the issue of independence for Republika Srpska, his threats should be taken seriously. Secondly, next week a so-called grand Easter Assembly of Serbia and Republika Srpska will convene in Belgrade (next week marks the Easter holiday in the Orthodox Christian world). According to a statement by the Serbian government, "important decisions will be made about the survival of the Serbian people in their hearths, their economic progress, the preservation of the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet and com-

mon cultural heritage."

The political elite in Serbia have often discussed their vision for the so-called "Serbian world," with Belgrade as its center. There is concern that the vote in the UN General Assembly, combined with the staging of the so-called Easter Assembly, could convince Dodik that the time is right to declare independence from Bosnia and Herzegovina and form a union with Serbia. Such a move would be disastrous for the region. Redrawing borders based on ethnic and sectarian lines would open up a Pandora's box. The Balkans already went through a tidal wave of border changes in the 1990s. During this period, more than 100,000 people died and millions were displaced during sectarian conflicts.

The effects of redrawing the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia would be felt elsewhere, too. This is particularly true in other regions of the Balkans, such as Kosovo, with its Serbian minority, Macedonia, with its ethnically Albanian regions, and even Serbia, with the Muslim-majority Sandzak region and Vojvodina region. Since the 1990s, the international community has invested a lot of blood and money to ensure that the Balkans remains peaceful and stable. Even countries as far away as Argentina, in Latin America, Morocco, in North Africa, and the UAE, in the Middle East, have served as peacekeepers in the region over the years. With the present focus of the international community on Ukraine, Iran, Taiwan and Gaza, it should not ignore the Balkans. Over the next few weeks, things will start to heat up there.

CCP approves scheme of arrangements for privatization of PIA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved a Scheme of Arrangements for the acquisition of 100% shareholding of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited (PIA) by PIA Holding Company Limited (Holdco). This approval is part of the Government of Pakistan's ongoing privatization process for PIA.

Holdco, a public limited company wholly-owned by the Government of

Pakistan, was recently incorporated to succeed to specified assets, liabilities, and subsidiaries of PIA, including its business, property, rights, and obligations both domestically and internationally. PIA, a public listed company, provides aviation and allied services such as engineering, handling, cargo, flight kitchen, and training.

The Federal Government approved the transaction based on the 'Divestment of PIACL - Legal Segregation Plan and Transaction Structure' submitted by the Privatisation

Division on February 6, 2024. As per the approved Scheme, Holdco will acquire 100% shareholding of PIA, and Non-Core Assets and Non-Core liabilities of PIA will also be transferred to Holdco.

The relevant market identified in this case is the real estate market in Pakistan, as PIA owns properties across the country with homogenous competition conditions. However, the core aviation activities and allied services of PIA will remain with the company and will not be transferred to Holdco.

CCP's assessment concluded that the proposed transaction will not lead to the dominance of Holdco in the relevant market post-transaction, as defined under Section 2(1)(e) read with Section 3 of the Act. Therefore, CCP has authorized the merger in Phase-I.

CCP's prompt approval of this merger demonstrates its commitment to furthering the Government of Pakistan's economic revival plan, particularly in attracting investment through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

'The Mediator's Magic: Transforming Conflict into Collaboration' held



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Center for Executive Education (CEE) at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi hosted a seminar on 'The Mediator's Magic: Transforming Conflict into Collaboration' at the IBA City Campus. Distinguished guests and participants from the judiciary, corporate sector, academia, and international institutions attended the event.

The seminar delved into the transformative power of mediation in resolving conflicts and fostering collaboration in diverse settings. Eminent speakers and panelists from various sectors shared their insights and experiences on the significance of mediation in today's world. The event commenced with a welcome address by Kamran

Bilgrami, Director IBA-CEE, followed by a welcome address by Justice (R) Tassaduq Hussain Jillani, Former Chief Justice of Pakistan.

Dr. Ishrat Husain, Professor Emeritus, IBA, delivered the keynote address on 'The Power of Mediation in Conflict Resolution,' discussing the significance of mediation and the role of IBA in promoting its use.

Special addresses by Zmarak Khan, Chief Legal Counsel, CLDP and Siddharth Jha Counsel, SIMC focused on 'US Government Support and International Mediation Landscape, and Prospects for Pakistan.' The seminar also featured a discussion on 'Mediation in Pakistan - Future Prospects,' with insights shared by esteemed judges, and a panel discussion moderated by SIMI

Qualified Mediator, Syed Bulent Sohail, explored 'The Landscape of Mediation.'

Justice Junaid Ghaffar gave the closing remarks, emphasizing the importance of fostering mediation skills for a more peaceful society. Muhammad Sohail, CEO Topline Securities, delivered the vote of thanks. The seminar concluded with a networking reception.

Based on the Harvard Negotiation Project, the IBA Dispute Resolution Forum (IBA-DRF) at the Center for Executive Education (CEE), was established in 2019, to offer alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services to relieve the burden on Pakistan's court system. The ADR at IBA-CEE aims to be focused towards promoting ADR mechanisms

for domestic and international disputes, training, research, and advocacy. The ADR project is supported by the US Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP), the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC), the New York International Arbitration Center (NYIAC), High Courts of Sindh, Islamabad & Lahore, FBR, SBP, PSX, FBR & SECP. The ADR at IBA has the potential to improve Pakistan's legal and commercial landscape by: Reducing the court case backlog and expediting dispute resolution; Providing government, enterprises, and businesses with cost-effective solutions to their disputes; Establishing Pakistan as a leader in promoting international ADR and Paving the way for Pakistan's accession to the Singapore Convention on Mediation. The IBA will achieve these goals by investing in research, advocacy, and capacity building for Pakistani professionals by establishing a strong panel of qualified trainers, experts, mediators, and arbitrators.

Businessmen call for judicial commission for impartial enquiry

ISLAMABAD (INP): The businessmen have demanding establishing a judicial commission to investigate the wheat import scandal in an independent and impartial way, as the former caretaker government's decision to import wheat worth one billion dollars in Oct 2023 during a severe shortage of dollars and in spite of ample wheat stock in the country, was deeply concerning.

The business community also lashed out at the Punjab government for not purchasing wheat from farmers, warning it of severe consequence if the decision regarding the non-procurement of grain was not revoked.

Former Vice President FPCCI and senior leader of the BMP Muhammad Ali Sheikh observed that the private sector leadership under the banner of Pakistan Businessmen Panel has always stood firm and united against harmful actions to national economy and the people of the country and has not accepted any move by mafias, who were responsible for creating chaos through unnecessary and unwarranted proposals, detrimental to national cause.

"We shall continue our efforts for the protection of our community and the countrymen at large, who have been directly and indirectly involved in national economic growth" he stated and added that BMP has never safeguarded the vested interests of mafia, which not only halt the progress of the country but curb the large part of society.

He felt pity on the current leadership of FPCCI, which was trying to protect wheat mafias and providing shelter to most recent act of importing massive wheat

just few months before the country's wheat crop is being harvested.

"This act of the current office bearers of FPCCI is not only ruining farmers, across Pakistan, but also worsening wheat crisis in future," he further added and stated that such action will also motivate mafia to adopt similar tactics, halting the preparation of rice crops because massive bunch of wheat crop is not being harvested yet.

Leadership of Businessman Panel condemned the act of current office bearers of FPCCI and demands a transparent inquiry of wheat import crime by judicial commission so that such criminal acts which may sabotage country's economy were stopped.

It was to be noted that the initial report of the probe regarding wheat import scandal revealed shocking details as it stated that the federal institutions were responsible for the unnecessary import of wheat. Despite existing reserves of 40.47 lakh metric tons in Punjab, an addi-

tional 35.87 lakh metric tons were imported, creating an artificial shortage.

The investigation has found that wheat was imported at a cost of Rs2600-2900 per maund and sold at a higher price of Rs4700 per maund. The import permission was granted for 1 million metric tons, but it was exceeded without limit.

The federal institutions allowed private companies to import wheat without proper checks, and some officials from the Ministry of Finance also failed to scrutinize the large-scale import.

Furthermore, the wheat import continued from September 26, 2023, to March 31, 2024, resulting in a massive influx of wheat in the market. It was pertinent to mention here that the wheat import caused a \$1 billion loss to the national kitty. The private sectors favored in wheat imports in Pakistan, and these wrong decisions have resulted in a loss of \$1 billion to the national exchequer.

Court Notice

In the Court of Abdul Haleem Civil Judge-V/Alaqa Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No. 02/12/2, Institution 13/2/2024, Date of hearing 9/5/2024. Sekhonay Vs. Nor Dali. Notice to No. 3, Bakht Wali s/o Nor Dali. 11. Sher Ali s/o Badshah Khan. 17. Muamber s/o Merdullah. 10/1. Sabz Ali s/o Khan Bacha. 14/5. Asma. 14/6. Shah Jihan sons of Bacha Zadgai.15/1. Samiul Haq. 15/2. Matiul Haq. 15/3. Taibul Haq. 15/4. Shoibul Haq sons. 15/5. Mian Jabena. 15/6. Sekhonay. 15/7. Mataba. 25/8. Khamedon. 15/9 Khayezon daughters of Mst. Muhsina resident of MullaYousaf Tehsil Daggar District Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants cannot be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 a.m. dated 9/5/2024 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

LAHORE (INP): Senior Vice Chairman Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) Shahbaz Aslam has said that due to continued increase in energy price, the industry is heading towards closure which will ultimately result in amplifying unemployment rate and diminishing Pakistan's export capabilities.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, he urged the government to explore and provide affordable energy alternatives for the industry and stressed that such measures were crucial for ensuring the competitiveness of Pakistani products in the global market.

As the industrial sector grapples with the ramifications of the gas price hike, the FRIA leader's stance advocates for the preservation of industrial stability and the prevention of potential economic setbacks for Pakistan.

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

Strongly opposing gas price surge, he said that the gas tariff hike has threatened the industrial sector, besides

increasing unemployment, saying that the every government had poor economic policies that unleashed the free fall of rupee against the dollar, ensuing in input cost escalation to pull down the manufacturing growth.

The FRIA senior vice chairman demanded the government to take back the decision of hike in gas tariff in the larger interest of national economy and to save the industries from collapse. He warned that in case, the decision was not withdrawn, the industries will close down, resulting in decline in exports and mass unemployment.

In an appeal, he said that



LAHORE: Labourers busy in loading sacks of wheat after drying in field.

Gold rates dip by Rs1,600/tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,600 and was sold at Rs. 238,000 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs. 239,600 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,257 to Rs. 204,047 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs.187,043, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs. 2,620 and Rs. 2,254.80 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$4 to \$2,301 from \$2,297, the Association.

KSA's \$20b investment welcomed

TASHKENT (APP): The business communities of Pakistan and Uzbekistan on Saturday welcomed Saudi Arabia's \$20 billion investment in Uzbekistan in energy sector.

Meanwhile talking to APP, besides the Tashkent International Investment Forum (TIIF), Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Uzbekistan, Vakhobov Davron Abdjalolovich said that at the opening ceremony of the Tashkent International Investment Forum on May 2, the Minister of Energy of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman announced the investment of \$20 billion by the Saudi government and the private sector in the energy sector, which will start projects in various energy sectors.

He said that the announcement of investment of \$20 billion by the Saudi government would also create opportunities for the business community of Pakistan due to which the business communities of both countries will work on many bilateral projects.

He said that after the execution of the projects not only Uzbekistan but also the economy of the region will benefit from this and regional countries can take advantage of this opportunity.

Talking to APP, Deputy Chairman of Kazakhstan Commodity Exchange, Nabikhon Samatov Samatov said that there is already a agreement between Pakistan and Uzbekistan Commodity Exchange for bilateral cooperation and now after the announcement of \$20 billion investment by Saudi Arabia, now there are big opportunities for Pakistani businessmen here.

EFU Life commences health insurance

F.P. Report

KARACHI: EFU Life Assurance Ltd., the leading private sector life insurance and family takaful provider in Pakistan, is pleased to announce the commencement of health insurance, by 100% acquisition of EFU Health Insurance Limited (the country's premier specialized health insurance company) and subsequent complete amalgamation of EFU Health into EFU Life. The scheme of amalgamation was recently approved by both the Boards. This strategic step marks a significant milestone in EFU Life's commitment to address its customer's holistic financial and personal health needs, by offering integrated Life and Health Insurance, and Takaful solutions under a single ecosystem.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Mohammed Ali Ahmed, MD & CEO of EFU Life, elaborated "With the acquisition of EFU Health and subsequent amalgamation of the entire

health business into EFU Life, we are determined to elevate the standards of healthcare coverage in Pakistan. We believe that access to basic healthcare is a fundamental right and the potential for growth of health insurance in Pakistan is vast, offering numerous exciting opportunities at both corporate and retail levels. The customers of former EFU Health Insurance Limited, now under the EFU Life umbrella, will experience a wider range of health insurance solutions and an enhanced service experience fueled by technology, backed by the strong financial position of EFU Life with assets of Rs.217 Billion."

the best-in-class solutions they deserve.

"We are embarking on an exciting journey of growth and transformation. With this acquisition, EFU Life will continue to prioritize the insurance requirements of its customers by delivering tailored health solutions that meet their evolving needs. It marks a significant step forward in EFU Life's mission to empower individuals & families with the tools they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives", remarked Mr. Mohammed Ali Ahmed, MD & CEO of EFU Life.

As a leader in the Insurance industry, EFU Life continues to invest in human capital along with technology solutions to deliver seamless, personalized experiences to its customers. With an unwavering focus on innovation and agility, EFU Life is well-positioned to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of the insurance market and deliver sustainable value to its stakeholders.

Govt to put country on track of sustained growth

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Federal Minister for Industries and National Food Security Rana Tanveer Hussain has expressed the optimism that with restructuring, collective hard work and the government's sincere efforts, they would be able to put the country on track of progress and sustained growth.

He also hoped that the government with the support of trade and industry would take these initiatives forward to achieve the ultimate goal of high economic growth. He was talking to the Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Fahimur Rahman Saigal who met him here on Saturday along with a delegation of PIAF Executive committee, including Rana Amir Rehman Mehmood and Sheikh Umar Sarraz.

Fahimur Rahman Saigal congratulated Rana Tanveer Hussain on becoming the Federal Minister for Industry and Production and said that the problems of the business community are expected to be resolved soon.

He said the government was considering business community's all proposals at all levels and discussing in detail about their incorporation in the coming annual federal budget.

The federal minister appreciated the suggestions of Chairman and promised to solve the problems of the business community as soon as possible.

He said that he will soon visit the PIAF central office and meet with the senior leadership and executive committee members of PIAF and all the relevant issues will be discussed and resolved in consultation with the stakeholders.

The Minister was highly appreciative of the contribution of the traders and the business community towards strengthening the economy and promoting a tax culture regime.

PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rahman Saigal demanded the minister of a business-friendly, export-oriented and pro-poor budget to gear up trade activities, besides restoring the confidence of investors with a basket of lucrative incentives to attract foreign investments.

He said all proposals were mainly aimed at ensuring growth-oriented and business-friendly environments to boost economic activities in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, prevailing political turmoil and economic uphe-

aval grappling the country.

He said Pakistan was passing through crucial times of chaotic political conditions, adding, at this uncertain time, the business community has come forward with a clear vision to stamp out the quagmire of prevailing critical crisis.

The PIAF with the consultation of all stakeholders tailored such viable proposals which would ultimately help the government to revive the economy through the upcoming budget, he added.

He said the PIAF fully supported bringing the identified millions of non-taxpayers into the tax net to lessen the burden on existing taxpayers, broaden the tax base and promote tax culture in the country.

The next budget should also feature a balanced tax collection approach and the government must adopt a strategy for documentation of the economy, he added.

He also thanked the minister for his assurance of all viable budget proposals in the forthcoming budget.

Transport investment hits 712.5b yuan in Q1

BEIJING (APP): Fixed-asset investment in China's transport sector maintained a high scale in the first quarter (Q1) of 2024, an official with the Ministry of Transport said.

Total fixed-asset investment in the sector reached 712.5 billion yuan (about 100.3 billion US dollars) during this period, according to the official.

Of the 102 key projects mapped out for China during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) period, more than 260 transport-related projects are either underway or have been completed, involving total investment of 1.3 trillion yuan.

Fixed-asset investment in the transport sector has provided a strong guarantee for the country's economic recovery, the official stated.



In brief

Sinner withdraws from Italian Open

MILAN (AFP): Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner announced Saturday he will not play at the upcoming Italian Open due to a hip injury which forced him out in Madrid earlier this week. Italian Sinner was a doubt for the Rome event which starts on Wednesday and is the last big tournament before the Grand Slam French Open. "After speaking again with the doctors and specialists about my hip problems I have to announce that unfortunately I will not be able to play in Rome," the world number two said on X, formerly Twitter. "I'm very sad that I wasn't able to recover as it is one of my favourite tournaments." The 22-year-old would have been one of the favourites for the Masters 1000 tournament in the Italian capital after winning the Australian Open, his first Slam title, at the start of the year and following that up and his second Masters 1000 crown in Miami in March. Sinner, who holds a 28-2 record on the season, was due to face Felix Auger-Aliassime in the Madrid quarter-finals on Thursday but revealed he had been battling through a hip issue in the Spanish capital. Sinner joins world number three Carlos Alcaraz in withdrawing from the clay-court event in Rome after the Spaniard succumbed to a right forearm injury that sidelined him in Monte Carlo and Barcelona. The pair will now try to recover in time for an assault on the French Open, the season's second major, which starts in Paris on May 26.

Wilson beats Gilbert

SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Kyren Wilson claimed a comfortable 17-11 win over David Gilbert as he reached his second World Championship final at the Crucible Theatre. Wilson, 32, laid the platform for his success with a clinical display on Friday evening when he opened up a 14-10 advantage, then continued in the same vein in Saturday's concluding session. While Gilbert took the first with a wonderful break of 70, Wilson - the only seed left in the tournament - punished his opponent's errors as he took the next two. He sealed his victory with a break of 67 after Gilbert missed a red to the right corner on 49. "I didn't even know what it was first to, I just kept playing," Wilson told BBC Sport. "It felt like I broke the back of the match yesterday and I was very focused on hitting home the advantage. It was nice to kill off the match in one clean hit." The world number 12 will now face Jak Jones or 2015 champion Stuart Bingham in the showpiece match - remarkably also his first final of the season. Wales' Jones currently leads the Englishman 13-10, with their best-of-33 semi-final set to conclude at 19:00 BST. Emotional Wilson sets up chance of glory When Wilson reached the world final four years ago he did so in dramatic fashion, fluking the green in a final-frame decider and emotionally apologising to his opponent Anthony McGill. It was another poignant moment on Saturday afternoon when he pointed up to his family in the crowd after dispatching the match-clinching blue ball. Wilson has dominated all four of his matches and is a deserved finalist once again. He thrashed Dominic Dale 10-1 and looked in top form against Joe O'Connor (13-6) and John Higgins (13-8) before advancing past world number 31 and 2019 semi-finalist Gilbert.

PCB, franchise owners reflect on HBL PSL 2024, discuss window for 2025 event

LAHORE (PPI): The Pakistan Cricket Board and its six franchisees, in the build-up to their General Council meeting, met on Saturday morning at the Gaddafi Stadium to reflect on the HBL Pakistan Super League 2024 and also to look ahead to the HBL Pakistan Super League 2025. The PCB praised the franchisees for their support, interest, and passion that has continued to contribute to enhancing and strengthening the profile and reputation of the league as one of the most challenging, competitive, and exciting. The franchise owners congratulated the PCB for the excellent delivery of the tournament held from 17 February to 18 March 2024. Some of the key highlights from the HBL Pakistan Super League 2024 were: Four of the six sides played, at least, five matches each at their home venues. The average first innings team score was 167; there were 10 200+ scores; eight matches went down to the last ball, including the final 45 per cent increase in media rights from the previous rights cycle 113 per cent increase in live-streaming rights from the previous rights cycle 41 per cent increase in international media rights from the previous rights cycle Upwards of

350 million, live audience was the highest in history Achieved an unprecedented digital media reach, in excess of 1.5 billion For the HBL PSL 2025, the PCB proposed the following with further discussions to take place in the Governing Council in due course: Due to the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 being held in the traditional event window, the event window for the 2025 event will be 7 April 2025 - 20 May 2025 Karachi, Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi to host matches in Pakistan with each side playing, at least, five matches on home ground. The PCB will continue to explore additional venues. Four playoffs proposed to be staged at a neutral venue Some innovative tweaks and changes in the event playing conditions were explored with an aim to make the HBL PSL 2025 more exciting and competitive, as well as involve, engage, and increase the fan base. PCB Chief Operating Officer Salman Naseer: "As always, we had a very exciting and interesting brainstorming session with the franchise owners on the window for HBL Pakistan Super League 2025. The passionate franchise owners provided their all-rounded insight and views on the

PCB-recommended window and playoff venues for the 2025 event and beyond. "At the back of this meeting, and in relation to the most suitable window for HBL PSL 2025 and beyond, the PCB will share further data with the franchise owners so that they can discuss amongst themselves, make a more informed decision and share their ideas and thoughts at the General Council meeting. "We look forward to working closely with the franchisees to take timely decisions for the future trajectory of one of Pakistan's biggest brands." Islamabad United Owner Ali Naqvi: "On behalf of the franchise owners, I would like to express our gratitude to all stakeholders and appreciate their resolve to taking HBL PSL to greater heights. "We need to continue to engage in discussions and find our ways and options so that we can collectively achieve our overarching objectives. Here, I would like to congratulate and thank the entire PCB and the PSL team led by HBL PSL Commissioner Naila Bhatti for her role, vision, and leadership that has helped the league to continue to move in the right direction."

Sultan Azlan Shah Cup Pakistan seals thrilling 5-4 victory over Malaysia

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): In a gripping showdown at the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup, Pakistan secured a sensational 5-4 victory over Malaysia, fueled by Abu Mahmood's last-minute heroics in Ipoh, Perak. The match, brimming with excitement, showcased some of the tournament's finest goals as the Green Shirts clinched victory in the dying moments of a fiercely contested 60 minutes. The match began with Pakistan earning a penalty corner in the ninth minute which was converted by Sufyan Khan without much problems. However, Malaysia responded quickly and leveled the score with

Abu Kamal Arzai scoring for the home side. The first quarter ended 1-1 but Malaysia took the lead in the second quarter as Arzai scored for his once again. The third quarter was no different than the previous one as Arzai completed his hat-trick and put his side in the driving seat. Malaysia were dominating the match and it looked difficult for Pakistan to break through their defense but they bounced back and scored two goals in quick sessions. Sufyan and Zikriya Hayat scored in the 50th and 53rd minute respectively. Malaysia once again took the lead

in the 56th minute with Marhan Jalil scoring for them and with just four minutes left in the conclusion of the match, it looked over for Pakistan to come back in the game. But, once again, that was not the case as Pakistan continued to push for a goal and Sufyan once again found the back of the net and levelled the score in the 59th minute. Seconds after Sufyan scored his third and Pakistan's fourth, they earned a penalty corner which was converted by Abu Mahmood as Pakistan emerged victorious after a nail-biter. Pakistan's next match is now against Korea on Sunday at the same venue.



LONDON: David Raya of Arsenal during the Premier League match between Arsenal FC and AFC Bournemouth at Emirates Stadium.

Arsenal power four points clear as Burnley sink towards relegation

LONDON (AFP): Arsenal defeated Bournemouth 3-0 to move four points clear at the top of the Premier League, while Burnley are on the verge of relegation after a 4-1 thrashing by Newcastle on Saturday. The Gunners' fourth successive victory ensured second placed Manchester City will not be able to knock them out of pole position this weekend even if they beat Wolves in Saturday's late game. Bukayo Saka's penalty put Mikel Arteta's side ahead on the stroke of half-time at the Emirates Stadium. Leandro Trossard and Declan Rice struck in the closing stages to secure a vital three points. Chasing their first title since 2004, the Gunners will pray for a shock City stumble against Wolves at the Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's team, who have two games in hand on Arsenal, can clinch an unprecedented fourth successive English title if they win their last four matches. Arsenal's 26th Premier League victory this season equalled the club's top-flight record for a single campaign. "It was probably the best first half we've played all season," Arteta said. "We were unbelievable. Everything flowing, super composed on the ball. We generated so many chances, we could have gone three, four, five up easily." Arteta's men gifted the title to City last season after blowing an eight-point lead in the closing weeks. But the north Londoners have learned from that meltdown, winning 14 of their 16 league games in 2024 to stay firmly in the hunt. Arsenal travel

to Manchester United in their penultimate game next weekend before hosting Everton in what they hope will be a potential title clincher on May 19. Burnley's hopes of avoiding relegation suffered a huge blow as Newcastle ran riot at Turf Moor. Vincent Kompany's second bottom side are five points from safety, with only two games left to avoid an immediate return to the Championship after last season's promotion. Forest eye survival Callum Wilson put Newcastle ahead with a 19th minute tap-in and Sean Longstaff doubled their advantage in the 35th minute, sliding in to finish off Jacob Murphy's pass. Bruno Guimaraes made it three in the 40th minute with a powerful strike from Anthony Gordon's pass.

Gordon is only the second player to score 10 goals and provide 10 assists in the Premier League this season after Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins. Gordon was involved again when his shirt was tugged by Josh Brownhill, earning a 50th minute penalty that Arijanet Muric saved to deny Alexander Isak. Sweden striker Isak made amends five minutes later when he converted Murphy's pass for his 20th league goal this season. Dara O'Shea's 86th minute header was no consolation for bedraggled Burnley. At Bramall Lane, fourth bottom Nottingham Forest took a giant step towards survival with a 3-1 win against already-relegated Sheffield United. Gonzalo Montiel brought down Ben Brereton Diaz and Blades forward picked himself

up to lash in the 17th minute penalty. But Callum Hudson-Odoi grabbed Forest's equaliser in the 27th minute with a superb strike that curled into the far corner. Ryan Yates slammed in Forest's second from close-range after 51 minutes and Hudson-Odoi curled home in the 65th minute. That gave the Blades an unwanted record as the first club to concede 100 goals in a 38-match Premier League season. Swindon were relegated in 1993-94 after allowing 100 goals over 42 games. Forest, awaiting the result of their appeal against a four-point deduction for financial breaches, are three points ahead of third bottom Luton, who drew 1-1 with Everton on Friday. West London rivals Brentford and Fulham shared a dour 0-0 draw.

Verstappen wins Miami sprint from Leclerc



MIAMI GARDENS (Agencies): Red Bull's Max Verstappen took a controlled victory ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in the sprint race at the Miami Grand Prix. Verstappen was in control after fending off an attack from Leclerc at the first corner. Sergio Perez dropped behind RB's Daniel Ricciardo at the first corner, after trying to pass Leclerc, but recovered to take third. Ricciardo drove an exceptional race, fighting a rearguard battle, to hold off Carlos Sainz's Ferrari and Oscar Piastri's McLaren to take fourth. Lewis Hamilton was left frustrated by some over-aggressive defence from Haas driver Kevin Magnussen in eighth place, taking the final point on the track. But Hamilton was penalised for speeding in the pit lane and given a drive-through penalty, which added 20 seconds to his race time and dropped him to 16th. Magnussen earned himself two 10-second penalties - one for leaving the track and gaining an advantage and one for forcing

Hamilton off the track. The second incident was especially annoying for the seven-time champion because it allowed RB's Yuki Tsunoda to slip by for eighth place after Hamilton had spent 14 laps trying to pass the Haas. Hamilton, though, managed to reclaim the place on the final lap, only to be hit with the penalty. Magnussen told Sky Sports that his penalties were "well deserved, no doubt about it, but I had to play the game again." He added: "I was fighting like crazy and I had to create the gap like in Jeddah and I started using this stupid tactics which I don't like doing, but at the end of the day I did my job as a team player and Nico [Hulkenberg] scored his points [for seventh] because I got that gap for him so Lewis and Tsunoda couldn't catch him. Not the way I like to go racing at all but it's what I had to do today." Hamilton was also involved in a first-corner incident that led to the retirement of McLaren's

Lando Norris that will be investigated by stewards. Hamilton dived for the inside of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who was pincered by the Mercedes and his team-mate Lance Stroll on the outside. When the three came together, Stroll bounced into Norris, who stopped in the run-off area. Stroll was also forced into retirement and Alonso fell to the back in an incident that brought out a safety car for three laps. Ricciardo started fourth, his best performance by far in a season that has been difficult for the Australian so far, but used all his guile and experience to hold off Sainz and Piastri. At the front, Verstappen was imperious as always, but Leclerc hung on well for much of the race to finish 3.3 seconds behind. Perez passed Ricciardo in the course of lap five but could do nothing about Leclerc, who was more than comfortable in holding off the second Red Bull as the action all happened behind the top three. The drivers' return to the track at 16:00 local time (21:00 BST) for qualifying for the grand prix.

Imad denies rift with Babar, wants to win World Cup

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan all-rounder Imad Wasim on Saturday, once again brushed aside the claims of any rift between him, Mohammad Amir and white-ball captain Babar Azam. Imad interacted with the media on the sidelines of the national team's training session for the Ireland tour and emphasized that his and the entire team's only goal is to win the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024. He further asserted that he would support Pakistan captain Babar Azam, adding that he returned from international retirement for the country. "We have no issues with Babar. He is the captain of the team and we are all supporting him," said Imad. "Maybe Babar has become captain again because he will lead us to the World Cup trophy," he added. Imad Wasim further talked about his return to Pakistan colours and reiterated that his primary goal is to win the World Cup, highlighting the team's narrow misses in the previous two editions. "Amir and I returned for one goal - to have one last go and win the World Cup. For the last while we've been playing [T20 World Cup] semi-finals and finals, which is a very big achievement.

"But the truth is no one remembers the semi-finalists and finalists. People remember the champions. Our goal is to play those semi-finals and finals, and then to win that tournament. The result is in God's hands, but the players' mentality is to go and win the tournament." It is worth mentioning here that the Pakistan men's cricket team is currently participating in a three-match training session here ahead of their T20I series against Ireland. All three matches will be held at Clontarf in Dublin on 10, 12 and 14 May 2024 and will start at 3 PM local time. The three-match away series, followed by four T20Is in England, will serve as a stepping stone for the Green Shirts to boost their preparations for this year's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the West Indies and the United States of America (USA). Pakistan squad for Ireland and England T20Is Babar Azam (c), Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Rizwan, Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Salman Agha, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Usman Khan.

Pakistani youth win gold medals

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): In a remarkable display of skill and determination, young athletes from Karachi have defeated India in U-10 and U-13 categories and won gold medals in the South Asian Jump Rope Championship. Marwah Kamran won the gold medal in the speed event in Under-10 category while Muhammad Hussain won a gold medal in the U-13 category. India got the second position while Nepal remained at the third position. Pakistan's team so far have won two gold and four silver medals on the first day of the event being held at Katmandu Nepal. Muhammad Hussain and Marwah Kamran also won silver medals in the endurance event. Another player Syeda Warisha brought laurel for the country by winning a silver medal in the U-13 freestyle speed and endurance event. The South Asian Jump Rope Federation (SAJRF) is organizing the event.

Wapda, Asia Ghee Mills, WSTC, SA victorious in NCC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wapda, Asia Ghee Mills, WSTC and SA Gardens earned victories in the National Challenge Cup (NCC) 2023 final round here at the Jinnah Stadium of Pakistan Sports Complex on Saturday. In the first match, Wapda secured a 3-0 victory over Pakistan Police. Alamghir netted two goals, while Shayek Dost contributed with one. In the second match, Asia Ghee Mills emerged triumphant against Pak Railways with a narrow 1-0 win, courtesy of Muhammad Suleman Ali's lone goal. In the third match, WSTC edged past Otto Crains with a scoreline of 3-2. Raza showcased his prowess with a brace, while Zaid added another goal for WSTC. However, Muhammad Saad and Saddam Hussain's goals for Otto Crains remained in vain. In the fourth match, SA Gardens clinched a hard-fought 3-2 victory over PAF. Murtaza Hussain found the net twice for SA Gardens, with Samnan adding another. Meanwhile, Haseeb and Fasil managed to score one goal each for PAF.

Volleyball League from May 11

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) on Saturday announced that the Engro CAVA Nation's Volleyball League, would take place from May 11 to 17 here at the Liaquat Gymnasium of Pakistan Sports Complex. The event would see six national teams from Central Asian countries, including Iran, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and host nation Pakistan. The Volleyball League promises an exhilarating showcase of athletic prowess and sportsmanship as teams battle it out on the court. Fans can expect a week-long extravaganza of volleyball action, featuring intense matches and thrilling showdowns. In addition to the volleyball action, spectators can look forward to a vibrant atmosphere filled with fan engagement activities, entertainment, and food stalls, ensuring an unforgettable experience for all attendees. Following the conclusion of the Volleyball League, Pakistan's national teams would embark on their respective international campaigns. The Pakistan National Senior Men's team would compete in the AVC Challenge Cup for Men in Bahrain, while the Pakistan National Junior Men's team will participate

in the CAVA U18 Volleyball Championship in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Event Schedule: May 11, 2024 (Day 1): Match 1: Sri Lanka Vs Afghanistan Match 2: Iran Vs Kyrgyzstan Match 3: Pakistan Vs Turkmenistan May 12, 2024 (Day 2): Match 4: Kyrgyzstan Vs Turkmenistan Match 5: Pakistan Vs Afghanistan Match 6: Iran Vs Sri Lanka May 13, 2024 (Day 3): Match 7: Iran Vs Afghanistan Match 8: Sri Lanka Vs Turkmenistan

Match 9: Pakistan Vs Kyrgyzstan May 14, 2024 (Rest Day) May 15, 2024 (Day 5): Match 10: Afghanistan Vs Kyrgyzstan Match 11: Iran Vs Turkmenistan Match 12: Pakistan Vs Sri Lanka May 16, 2024 (Day 6): Match 13: Afghanistan Vs Turkmenistan Match 14: Sri Lanka Vs Kyrgyzstan Match 15: Pakistan Vs Iran May 17, 2024 (Final Day of the League): 3rd Position Match: P3 Vs P4 Final Match: P1 Vs P2.



In brief

Mushaal condoles demise of Shiekh Tahnoon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mushaal Hussein Mullick, former SAPM on Human Rights and Women Empowerment, expressed her heartfelt condolences to the President, the entire Al Nahyan family, and the honourable people of the UAE on the sad demise of Shiekh Tahnoon Bin Mohammad Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Ruler's Representative in Al Ain Region. Mushaal, a wife of unlawfully incarcerated Hurriyat leader Muhammad Yasin Malik, in her condolence message said that the entire people of Kashmir were grieved over the passing away of the Shiekh Tahnoon Bin Mohammad. "May his soul rest in peace and May Allah have mercy upon Him and grant him Jannat Ul Firdous and make him dwell in His spacious gardens of Heaven," she prayed. Mushaal said that may Allah grant patience, solace and Sabr-e-Jameel to His entire family in this time of grief and the irreparable loss for Humanity and Muslim Ummah.

Pak-EPA team confiscates 70kg plastic bags

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Enforcement Team of Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) conducted a field operation against single-use plastic polythene items in Blue area, Trail 3 and 4 of Marghalla Hills National Park upon the directions of Coordinator to Prime Minister on Climate Change and DG Pak-EPA. During the Inspection, the team visited Hotels such as Tabaq Hotel, Salt n Pepper Hotel, Pak-Chinese Samosa Centre, Diet Chinese Samosa Centre, Usmania Hotel and others. The team confiscated about 70 kilograms of polythene or plastic bags and Single-Use Plastic materials, a news release said. "Resultantly, Pak-EPA's is making efforts to enforce the Single-Use Plastic (Prohibition) Regulations 2023 in ICT limits. The Enforcement Team is vigilantly visiting different zones of Islamabad to ensure compliance with the regulations and prevent the use of harmful single-use plastic items. This initiative aims to protect the environment and promote sustainable practices in the capital city," the EPA said.

IRSA releases 131,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 131,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 192,300 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1464.50 feet and was 50.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 35,500 cusecs and 5,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1163.80 feet, which was 113.80 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 65,500 cusecs and 35,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 65,700, 69,800, 41,000 and 12,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 66,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 16,100 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.



GWADAR: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh inaugurates the Hengeng & Agricultural Industrial Unit at North Free Zone. —APP Photo

Qaiser inaugurates Free Zone agriculture park in Gwadar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif. The purpose of this visit is to inspect the mega projects of Gwadar and speed up the work of the projects under completion, he added. He said that many important projects for the people of Gwadar have been completed, adding that these projects include 100 MW of electricity from Iran, dams, desalination plants, roads and hospitals. Qaiser Sheikh said that the federal and provincial governments are keen to complete the ongoing projects of Gwadar soon and with the support of our

friendly country China, a desalination plant has been installed in the free zone which will provide 1.2 million gallons of water to the citizens per day. All that remains is to connect the desalination plant water to the city, which will be done soon, he maintained. Speaking at the event, Chairman China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) said that Pakistan and China are doing exemplary work on economic corridor projects. Seeing the completion of these projects makes one feel proud of Pakistan-China friendship.

According to the ceremony, the minister said that he has come to Gwadar on the special instructions of

Randhawa commends ICT Police's efforts in maintaining law, order

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Commissioner Islamabad Muhammad Ali Randhawa Saturday commended the dedication and professionalism exhibited by the ICT Police in upholding law and order in the federal capital. He said this during a meeting with Inspector General (IG) of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police, Ali Nasir Rizvi, said a press release. During the meeting, IG Police provided a compre-

hensive briefing to the Chief Commissioner regarding the current law and order in Islamabad. He highlighted key areas of focus and ongoing efforts by the police force to maintain peace and security in the region. Ali Nasir reiterated the administration's unwavering commitment to supporting the endeavors of the police force. Emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts, Chief

Commissioner stressed the need for close coordination between the administration and law enforcement agencies to effectively address emerging challenges and ensure the safety and security of the citizens. The meeting underscored the administration's proactive approach towards enhancing public safety and reaffirmed its support for the ICT Police in their mission to uphold law and order in the federal capital.



ISLAMABAD (INP): Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad (QAU) convened a crucial meeting chaired by Prof. Dr. Niaz Ahmad Akhtar, the Vice Chancellor, to address pressing concerns regarding the recent Federal Ombudsman's verdict on the QAU Alumni Association's election conduct. The meeting, attended by representatives from all contesting panels, aimed to tackle issues including the constitution of the association, extension of voter registration, audit of previous association activities, and unauthorized use of the university's logo. The Federal Ombudsman's verdict recommended a thorough review of the association's constitution and an extension of the voters' registration process, along with the postponement of the election by one month. The Vice Chancellor questioned the need for involving the Federal Ombudsman, considering previous deliberations on election matters in joint meetings involving university administration and all panels.

Saeed Ahmad Ch from the QAU Stars Panel clarified why he approached the Ombudsman, stating that he hadn't been invited to the meeting where the final election date was set. He also mentioned sending nine separate requests to the Steering Committee regarding the alumni association's constitution, voter registration process, and the MOU for outsourcing previous alumni affairs to a group of former Qaidians. He also emphasized the necessity of auditing the accounts of the alumni association for transparency. Responding to the issues raised, the Vice Chancellor announced significant measures. Firstly, the administration will thoroughly examine the concerns related to the constitution of the QAU Alumni Association, with a possibility of rewriting the existing document. Secondly, the elections are postponed until a comprehensive document is prepared and approved by the statutory bodies of QAU. Furthermore, the administration pledged to con-

duct a financial audit assessment of the accounts of the previous alumni association for its entire duration. In response to requests from the QAU Forever and QAU Stars Panels, voter registration will be reopened, with elections to proceed only if a minimum of 15% of graduates register with the official QAU Alumni Association database. The Vice Chancellor cautioned against the unlawful use of the university's logo for data collection purposes by contesting panels, emphasizing that only the university administration is authorized to collect graduate data for elections. Any unauthorized collection of data may result in legal action. Representatives from all contesting panels, including Wajahat Latif of the Founder Panel, Aziz A. Nishtar of the United Panel, Shahid Minhas of the QAU Forever Panel, and Saeed Ahmad of the QAU Stars Panel, were present at the meeting, signaling a unified effort to address the issues at hand. Lastly, regarding the conduct and scheduling of elections, the administration will seek approval from the Syndicate of the university, the central governing body of QAU. Representatives from all contesting panels affirmed their attendance and cooperation in the decision-making process during the meeting.

LG&CD appoints Dr Abdullah as Focal Person Media

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Local Government & Community Development (LG&CD) Department Punjab has appointed Dr Abdullah Tabassum as Digital Monitoring Officer and Focal Person Media. The announcement came in a recent notification, highlighting Dr. Abdullah's extensive experience in media-related roles. According to a notification, the appointment was made in view of service background as he served as Focal Person Media Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad. While he also served as the Focal Person of Media & Event Management in the Tourism Department. Similarly, now he is serving as a Spokesman of Islamabad Capital Territory Administration. With his varied experience in government communications, Dr. Abdullah is set to oversee media relations for the LG&CD Department, ensuring smooth communication and public engagement. The appointment signals the department's intent to strengthen its digital and media outreach efforts.

FPSC announces results

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) has announced the results of the Central Superior Services (CSS) exam 2023. As per the FPSC, out of 13,800 candidates who appeared in the exam, only 401 passed the written test, with a success rate of 2.96%. Whereas the FPSC has recommended 210 successful candidates for appointment with Adil Riaz securing the first position, Shaher Bano second, and Oqasha Abrar Rana third. Among the successful candidates, 126 are male and 84 are female. The successful candidates will start working on their designated posts of Grade 17. Last year, only 1.85% of candidates out of more than 20,000 were able to pass the CSS 2022 exams.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Special Healthcare & Medical Education and Emergency Services Punjab Khawaja Salman Rafique paid rich tribute to the firefighters, who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty while rendering their services to protect precious human lives and properties of the citizens. He appreciated the Fire Rescue Service for saving Rs 664 billion in 231,056 fire incidents by professional firefighting on modern lines. He stated that the 23 martyrs of Rescue 1122 are great heroes of the nation who sacrificed their lives to provide sense of safety to community. One-minute silence was observed and special prayer was also offered for their highest place in Janah. Furthermore, he emphasized the 100% implementation of the Punjab Community Safety Buildings Regulations 2022.

Jam Kamal holds meeting to tackle border area challenges

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan chaired a meeting on Saturday to discuss innovative solutions and proactive measures to address the challenges faced by the country's border areas, aiming to foster socio-economic prosperity in these regions. Formed under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's initiative, the high-level committee is tasked with devising comprehensive strategies for the holistic development of these areas, said a press release issued by the Ministry of Commerce. The meeting covered various matters, including tariff rationalization and employment creation, reflecting the committee's commitment to addressing challenges faced by the border communities. The committee aims to present its recommendations to the Prime Minister within 10 days, signalling a promising start to collaborative efforts for socio-economic development in the region."

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Sehrai was an embodiment of freedom struggle: Altaf

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prominent Hurriyat leader and vice chairman Jammu Kashmir National Front (JKNF) Altaf Hussain Wani has paid rich tributes to Shaheed Muhammad Ashraf Sehrai on his martyrdom anniversary. In a statement issued here Saturday, Wani, while remembering the supreme sacrifices rendered by Sehrai and his family, said that the martyred leader was an embodiment of freedom struggle who lived and

died for a noble cause. Sehrai, he said, was a great freedom fighter and a strong proponent of Kashmiris' right to self determination. "His life-long struggle and contribution to the ongoing freedom struggle is the brightest chapter of resistance history that will continue to inspire future generations", Wani said adding that Shaheed Sehrai would be remembered in the annals of Kashmir history as a great patriot who

preferred death rather than compromising his ideals. Terming Sehrai's sudden death in prison as a clear case of custodial killing, the APHC leader said that successive Indian governments have been using illegal detentions as a tool to suppress political dissent in Kashmir. The JKNF leader reiterated his party's demand for an independent probe into the custodial killing of the deceased leader and other such incidents.

Timely response remain hallmark of dedicated firefighters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Dedication to assignment, courage and timely response are the hallmarks of our firefighters to counter any fire emergency. A proven record of successful operations in various firefighting emergencies by the valour firefighters, shows the commitment and professional preparedness of District Emergency Service. On the occasion of International Firefighters Day, we reiterate our full resolve to continue delivering our best services to the nation. This was stated by the District Emergency Officer (DEO) Rawalpindi, Engr. Sibghat Ullah in a brief talk with APP in the context of International Firefighters Day-2024 here Saturday. The Day is celebrated on May 4 every year to commemorate the sacrifices laid by the Australian firefighters while distinguishing the fire in 1999. Engr. Sibghat Ullah termed the unparalleled bravery, great sacrifices and selfless service of firefighters around the world as iconic for emer-

gency personnel. Our emergency force fights with the fire without any fear and is always ready for the security of the country and nation, he said adding that timely information to the emergency service was the foremost step for a successful operation. To miscellaneous questions, the DEO informed that 1330 incidents were reported in the year 2023 in which 96 lives were saved by the Rescue-1122 besides saving the property worth Rs. 2103.82 million. Among these, a number of big tragedies were also averted by the rescue team. There were 15 casualties in some unfortunate incidents during the preceding year, he informed. He further said that besides special training in fire fighting, modern safety procedures have also been introduced in the Punjab Emergency Service. The brave firefighters of Rescue 1122 have made eternal sacrifices in the line of duty. S p o k e s m a n Muhammad Usman on the occasion paid tribute to 13

valour firefighters who sacrificed their lives during the operation in Gakhar Plaza Sadar incident, occurred in 2008. The morale of rescue personnel is always high, so be it fire or flood, accident or tragedy, they are always ready to face any storm, he said. Usman, while talking on professional preparedness of the rescuers' personnel said that regular drilling and mocks had been exercised to maintain the readiness of firefighters. When asked about comparative placement of Rescue 1122, Usman noted that since its establishment in 2004 by Secretary/Founder and Director General Rescue 1122 Punjab Dr. Rizwan Naseer, Rescue-1122 has become the largest and most effective emergency management system in Pakistan, having continued rich experience of facing natural and man made calamities. The assistance given by the emergency service is always based on knowledge and practical experience, he said.

Emergency services responded to 231,056 fire incidents

He also congratulated the best fire rescuers of the year 2023 during the event of International Firefighters Day held at Emergency Services Headquarters here on Saturday. Secretary Services Department Dr. Rizwan Naseer, Rescue Officers from Headquarters, Academy, Districts, best fire rescuers of Punjab attended the ceremony. Speaking on the occasion, Secretary Emergency Services, Dr. Rizwan Naseer paid rich tribute to Shaheed Rescuers and congratulated the best rescuers of the year 2023. He said Rescuers are our heroes who risk their lives to save other lives and properties. Dr. Rizwan Naseer also paid tribute to Hamza Malik, describing him as a true son of the soil and an exemplary firefighter. He briefed that through his efforts, the Glasgow Fire Service and Rescue Service Pakistan signed a Memorandum of

Understanding, which enabled firefighters of Rescue 1122 Pakistan to receive modern fire training from Glasgow. He advised that all rescuers should continue their job with the same commitment to serve humanity without discrimination. He highlighted that today Rescue Fire Service has responded over to 2,31,056 fire incidents in Punjab during last 18 years & saved losses worth of Rs 664 billion. Not only Rescue 1122 has set highest service delivery standards in field of fire but also become the first United Nations certified Team in South Asia. This certification is an honor for all citizens of Pakistan. Secretary Emergency Services, Dr. Rizwan Naseer advise the public to install fire hydrants, alarm systems, emergency exits and stairs as per Punjab Community Safety Buildings Regulations in high rise buildings. Dr. Rizwan Naseer

acknowledged and awarded the best fire rescuers of the Punjab with cash prize of double salary, shields and certificates and awards to best team of the division for year 2023. He said that fire fighters are real heroes because when people are running in fear during fire emergencies, brave fire fighters enter in burning buildings to rescue people and save lives. At the end of the ceremony, Provincial Minister of Punjab Khawaja Salman Rafique along with Dr. Rizwan Naseer presented the Best Performance Award 2023 to three best fire rescuers at provincial level including Muhammad Atif Mehmood Lead Fire Rescuer Bahawalpur, Muhammad Zeeshan Fire DERT Rescuer Sheikhpura and Muhammad Asim Javed DERT Rescuers and Team of District Lahore of Lahore Division. The best performing rescuers have been presented with Cash Awards and appreciation certificates.

China provides \$100,000 aid

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Red Cross of China has announced that it has donated \$100,000 to the office of the Deputy Ministry of the Red Crescent of Afghanistan to support flood victims. According to the Chinese ambassador in Kabul, the country's Red Cross deposited this money with Mullah Nuruddin Turabi, the Deputy of the Red Crescent of Afghanistan. Previously, China had also announced that it would send 100 million yuan to "address humanitarian challenges."

Prisoner stabs inmate to death

KABUL (Ariana News): An Afghan prisoner in Delhi stabbed another prisoner to death on Friday after a dispute over food, the Times of India reported. The deceased was identified as Deepak Soni, who was 29-year-old. The killer has been identified as Abdul Basir Akhundzada who is 44 years old. Abdul Basir Akhundzada had been arrested in connection with a case of attempted murder in Lajpet Nagar area of New Delhi in 2019.

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

Afghan CG in Mumbai resigns

KABUL (Ariana News): Zakia Wardak, Afghanistan's consul general in India's Mumbai city, resigned on Saturday, following reports of gold smuggling.

The Times of India has reported that Wardak was caught at Mumbai airport with 25 kilograms of gold smuggled from Dubai.

While announcing her resignation, Wardak said on X that over the past year, she had encountered numerous personal attacks and defamation not only directed towards her but also towards her close family and extended relatives.

"These attacks, which appear to be organized, have severely impacted my ability to effectively operate in my role and



have demonstrated the challenges faced by women in Afghan society who strive to modernize and bring positive change amidst ongoing propaganda campaigns," she said.

Afghan surgeon wins international award

KABUL (TOLONews): The head of the National Examination Authority, Abdul Baqi Haqqani, said that it is now time to revive Afghanistan's self-sufficiency and excellence in the education field.

Speaking at an event honoring Dr. Bismillah Shiwamal, an Afghan physician who was awarded the prestigious "Leonardo Schwalbe Medal," Abdul Baqi Haqqani said that the country's educational and academic sectors have been severely damaged by recent wars.

The head of the National Examination Authority, said: "We have opportunities to restore history to its original state, to use our efforts and bring this devastated Afghanistan to self-sufficiency."

Bismillah Shiwamal, the Afghan doctor, said that with tireless efforts, he has managed to receive this medal.

He called on the youth and medical staff to work for Afghanistan and not to bow down in the face of challenges.

Bismillah Shiwamal told TOLONews: "We have had tough days at the Wazir Mohammad Akbar Khan Hospital. To the young generation, I say becoming a surgeon, becoming a doctor is not an easy job. Strive for your dreams."

A number of doctors and officials of the Islamic Emirate, who have gathered to honor Bismillah Shiwamal, winner of the German Leonardo Schwalbe Medal, said that this honor is not only for Shiwamal but is a major achievement in the country's medical sector.

"We can continue our political and military independence and stand on our feet when we have scientific independence, health independence, cultural independence, and national independence and are not dependent on neighboring countries; otherwise, they will take our patients as



hostages," said Abdul Waheed Siddiqi, a doctor.

"The teacher (Shiwamal) went beyond this award and always worked hard for humanity and for their community to deserve this award," said Ishaq Jawad, Another doctor.

Another group of these doctors said that support should be provided for Afghan cadres to help Afghanistan achieve self-sufficiency in the health sector as well.

"In the past two years, we have been more upset because the female class could not continue their education and engage properly in the medical profession," said Samea Hisham, a gastrointestinal surgeon at the Ali Abad Teaching Hospital.

"Help our nation so that this balance that exists in society can be conducive to services for both girls and boys," said Esmatullah Sajad, the head of the Afghanistan Health Workers & Institutions Union.

Bismillah Shiwamal, born in 1954, is now 68 years old. He is among the Afghan doctors in the surgery sector who has for the first time won the prestigious "High Medal of Leonardo Schwalbe Germany" awarded by the German Society of Surgery.

Women's presence in media increased

KABUL (TOLONews): The Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) said that the presence of women in the country's media has increased compared to previous years.

According to the center, after the Islamic Emirate took over the country, about 600 women were active in the country's media, but this number has increased to 700 over the past year.

"After the political changes in Afghanistan, 600 women were working in the media, but fortunately today, 700 women are working in various media," said Mirajuddin Rahimi, a representative of Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC).

The head of the department of Information and Culture of Balkh, Ata Mohammad Saho, said: "In Afghanistan, the mass media law is currently enforceable, and no restrictions have been imposed. We are actively working in Balkh province and have better coordination."

Radio Banowan is a private media outlet in Badakhshan province managed by a woman, where currently 15 women are actively working.

Najla Shirzad, director of Radio Banowan, said: "Overall, at Sadai-e-Banowan (Voice of Women) radio station, approximately 15 young ladies are active here, and all personnel are females."

"Regarding the challenges we face in the media, the most significant are economic challenges because I work here voluntarily," said Najia Matin, a radio employee.

A number of journalists, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, called for the legal ratification of mass media law, access to information, and addressing their economic challenges.

"We ask the interim government to ratify the law that has gone to Kandahar for approval by the leader of the Islamic Emirate as soon as possible because we do not know what kind of work to do," said Mohammad Naser, a journalist from Kunar.

"Due to the absence of media laws, we journalists in Takhar often face a lack of access to information, and authorities do not provide information to us on time," said Saddam Hussain, a journalist from Takhar.

Lack of access to information and poor economic conditions are other challenges faced by journalists in the country.

"We really work impartially, we work hard, please support us, be cooperative with us," said Sajad Mosawi, a journalist from Balkh.

According to officials at the Afghanistan Journalists Center, after the return of the Islamic Emirate, in addition to 30 new media outlets, 27 other media that were previously inactive have also started operating, and currently, in 470 public media outlets, more than 5,000 individuals are actively working.

IEA, Indonesia strengthen ties through diplomatic talks

KABUL (BNA): In a diplomatic meeting, Naqibullah Ahmadi, the acting ambassador of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Malaysia, engaged in fruitful discussions with the Indonesian ambassador, emphasizing the historical ties between the two nations and exploring avenues for further cooperation and development.

During the meeting, held in Kuala Lumpur, Ahmadi and the Indonesian ambassador delved into the rich history that has shaped the close relationship between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Indonesia.

Both sides acknowledged the deep-rooted cultural, economic, and diplomatic connections that have fostered collaboration in various sectors over the years.



SIGAR: US provided over \$17b to Afghanistan since political change

KABUL (TOLONews): Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in its latest report that the United States has appropriated or otherwise made available \$17.19 billion in assistance to Afghanistan and to Afghan refugees since the return of the Islamic Emirate.

SIGAR said \$3.5 billion in assets were moved from the Afghan Central Bank to the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTEF), and it counted this amount as part of the \$17.19 billion total.

According to SIGAR's report, these funds have been spent on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and the cost of relocating and resettling Afghans who have worked with the US.

A part of the SIGAR

report states: "\$3.50 billion (was) transferred to the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund that is intended to protect macro financial stability on behalf of the Afghan people and could, in the long-term, include recapitalizing Afghanistan's central bank, should the conditions materialize." Officials of the Islamic Emirate said the funds in the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund are part of the strategic reserves of the people of Afghanistan.

Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, said: "The money of the people of Afghanistan, which has been seized and belongs to Afghanistan, and can never be considered as a favor by anyone and has not yet

been made accessible to the Afghan people, should be freed as soon as possible."

The deputy minister of Economy, Abdul Latif Nazari, said: "The money held in the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund is related to the Afghan people and is part of the strategic reserves of Afghanistan. No country has the right to consider and interpret it as its own." A number of economic analysts said that including \$3.5 billion from the Central Bank in SIGAR's total of US aid is incorrect.

"The transfer of \$3.5 billion from the blocked foreign currency reserves of Afghanistan by the US to the trust fund in Switzerland, reported in the sum of US government aid to the people and the recon-

struction of the Afghan economy, I think is purely a mistake," said Mir Shekib Mir, an economic analyst.

"Unfortunately, we have not seen any positive result today in terms of reducing poverty, reducing unemployment, and changing the level of purchasing power of the people in Afghanistan from the money that has entered Afghanistan," said Seyar Quraishi, an economic analyst.

According to the numbers provided by SIGAR, \$2.8 billion of this money has been spent on humanitarian and developmental aid for Afghanistan, and \$10.89 billion has also been spent on the evacuation, resettlement, and hosting programs for Afghan refugees in the US.

Railway project expected to be completed by end of 2027: Official

KABUL (Ariana News): The Trans-Afghan railway project is expected to be completed by the end of 2027, Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Transport Jasurbek Choriev said.

"The project will help to connect three countries: Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The railroad will play an important role in the creation of the Eurasian Transport Corridor. As a result, Central Asian countries will have access to an Indian Ocean port," he said during the III Tashkent International Investment Forum, Trend news agency reported.

The Uzbek deputy minister noted that the railroad will reduce the delivery time of goods from 35 to 5 days, and the cost of goods delivery will be reduced by at least 40 percent.

The Trans-Afghan railway project, first suggested by Uzbekistan in December 2018, proposes to extend the Afghan rail network from Mazar-e-Sharif to Kabul and then to Paktia province.



IFRC calls for rethink of approaches to Afghan aid

KABUL (Ariana News): The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is gravely deteriorating, and a new approach is urgently needed, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said.

In a statement, IFRC said that without a radical

rethink of approaches to humanitarian aid, the root causes of the crisis cannot be tackled sustainably, as time and funding are running out.

"We have been responding with emergency aid in Afghanistan for years now, and it is time for a rethink," said Alexander Matheou, IFRC Regional Director for Asia Pacific. "We need to focus on Afghan institutions like the Afghan Red Crescent, which have a permanent role in the country. Their capacity is durable and will serve people before and after aid operations. We need to adapt our programming to focus on resilience and economic independence while still showing solidarity and providing assistance after sudden shocks like the Herat earthquake and the current floods."

He went on to reiterate the IFRC's call for investment in people.

"With limited access to education and jobs, we need a focus on youth, on professional and vocational training, and other learning opportunities—interventions designed to boost confidence and give hope. Otherwise, the future really does look grim."

This call comes ahead of a partnership meeting host-

ed in Doha by the Afghan Red Crescent Society in cooperation with the Qatar Red Crescent Society and attended by participating national societies from Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Norway, Sweden, Singapore, and Türkiye, as well as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. "Communities are lurching from crisis to crisis at a time when their resilience is sub-zero and their coping mechanisms are exhausted. We ask our valued partners to take a long-term view and commit to tackling the root causes of the humanitarian crisis sustainably by investing in Afghan capacity, people, and systems," said Mutiul Haq Khaled, the Acting President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

"The needs of over 24 million people are vast and interconnected. Many have been caused by a combination of lingering impacts from decades-long conflict, climate shocks, and a deep economic crisis. The country's resources are stretched, but capacities exist, and it is important that solutions are implemented to address the root causes of all these overlapping needs," he added.

Nargis masters beadwork, finds contentment in earning



KABUL (Khaama Press): Earning a living through "needlework" has engaged Nargis since six months ago. She has mastered the intricate art of beadwork through instructional videos available on YouTube and now has an income she's content with. Nargis aims to expand the scope of her work according to her abilities.

Using her smartphone, she has learned techniques for incorporating pearl beads into her needlework projects and has now, after seven months of independent work, achieved an income that satisfies her. She acquired this skill in an environment that imposed restrictions on girls' education.

This young woman, Nargis, is around 20 years old and lives in Kabul. She

has formed a team consisting of her brother, mother, and sister-in-law. The product of this small team is girls' bags (party bags) featuring the art of beadwork. Each of the girls' bags that Nargis skillfully works on sells for 700 to 1800 Afghanis.

The time it takes Nargis to make handcrafted bags varies depending on the design and the complexity of the orders. It also depends on the type of beads used, sometimes small pearls – which are more difficult – and sometimes larger pearls – which are simpler. A simple bag takes about 10 hours to complete and deliver to the customer.

She says heart-shaped designs are among the most ordered, with more orders from girls.

While it's been about seven months since Nargis started working, she says she now earns more and imports her pearls from "China."

The pearls she imports are of good quality and don't lose their colour.

As Nargis's work has flourished, she aims to launch a large-scale training workshop in the near future. She herself says, "I want to pass on the art I possess to others, especially girls."

She is striving to start an online training workshop soon to collaborate with other girls who wish to learn this art through social networks and Instagram.

Nargis adds that in the past week, she has received several orders from countries like the USA, Australia, and Uzbekistan,

so she wants to expand her business.

The creamy pearls have worked magic in Nargis's hands. Even though she wasn't unaware of the potential of her beadwork skills, she is pleased with her current income and believes she has achieved results beyond her imagination.

According to Nargis, thousands of people may use YouTube, but most don't know how to utilize it effectively. She says, "One must start something, regardless of whether it yields results or not, but one must do it."

Nargis believes, "Success means allowing oneself to make mistakes until eventually reaching the goal, trying life's challenges, and not living today like yesterday."

Sindh govt to fulfill all promises: Murad

Automated Fare Collection System in People's Bus Service launched

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Transport Department Government of Sindh has launched an Automated Fare Collection System in the People's Bus Service. The launch ceremony of the Automated Fare Collection System was hosted by Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, at a local hotel in Karachi. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the automated fare collection system at the ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said, "Today, I feel very happy on this historic occasion. We are committed to our promise of public convenience, and we have moved the transport sector in the province towards digitalization. This revolutionary initiative of our government will provide maximum convenience to the people, and we are proud to be the champions of this great initiative."

He said, "We are going to give a new shape to the communication system in the country. The Government of Sindh has always been a leader in the welfare of the people, whether it's in terms of digitalization or creating a human-friendly environment, or in the energy sector. We have taken the initiative to bring innovation in every sector."

Syed Murad Ali Shah said, "The Sindh government has made significant innovations in every field, whether it's education, health, electricity generation from Thar, or establishing a vast network of roads. I wholeheartedly congratulate all those who are part of this important journey of facilitating the people. The promotion of electric buses will save energy and protect the environment."

He said, "The introduction of the AFC system marks a significant advancement in our efforts. It will enhance the convenience and efficiency of transportation. We are committed to offering better facilities to the public. The Minister of Transport should continue to enhance the infrastructure of public transport, and the Government of Sindh will extend all possible support in this regard."

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah stated, "We are committed to fulfilling the promises made by our leader to the people. At one time, KTC was operational in Karachi, and SRTC in other districts of the



province. We initiated the People's Bus Service System, which is progressing towards success." He mentioned that the People's Bus Service stands as a successful project of the Sindh Government and Public-Private Partnership. Additionally, he emphasized the imminent completion of the Red Line and the initiation of work on the Yellow Line. Moreover, he highlighted the Sindh government's efficient collaboration with donor agencies, surpassing the performance of other provinces in this regard.

Syed Murad Ali Shah highlighted that during the devastating floods of 2022, the Sindh government remained steadfast in its support for the people. He emphasized that every effort was made to ensure the convenience and well-being of the populace. Furthermore, he proudly noted that following the floods, Sindh has experienced a bountiful wheat harvest, reflecting the resilience and perseverance of the region.

He emphasized that criticism often arises regarding the People's Party government's purported lack of development work in Karachi. However, it's important to acknowledge the tumultuous period when Karachi faced significant challenges such as frequent target killings, bomb blasts, and daily arson incidents. Since the restoration of law and order, substantial efforts have been dedicated to Karachi's development, and these endeavors are ongoing. Within the upcoming month, the entire People's Bus Service will be seam-

lessly integrated into the automated fare system. Under the leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto and President Asif Zardari, the commitment to serving the people will persist unabated.

The Chief Minister of Sindh remarked that while the number of seats won in the election was lower than anticipated in Karachi, this time there was an increase in both seats and votes compared to previous elections. This surge is indicative of the trust and confidence bestowed upon us by the people of Karachi. I assure you that we are committed to serving the people with even greater dedication than before, guided by the principles and directives of the party leadership.

Speaking at the event, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, Mass Transit, Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Sharjeel Inam Memon said that We are spearheading innovation in the transportation sector, and the launch of the Automated Fare Collection System in the People's Bus Service is a testament to this endeavor. Initially, the automatic fare collection system will be implemented on two routes, namely Route One and Route Nine, with plans for expansion to other routes in the near future.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that in line with the directives of President Asif Ali Zardari, People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, numerous pioneering schemes have been initiated in Sindh, marking a first in Pakistan's history. Among these, the introduction of the Pink Bus Service for women and eco-friendly electric buses in Sindh stands out as significant milestones.

He said that it was the vision of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari that we have diligently pursued. The Government of Sindh initiated the endeavor to provide affordable, superior, and contemporary travel facilities to the people for just fifty rupees.

He said that when the Transport Department presented a summary of fare increases to the Sindh Cabinet due to inflation, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah instructed that the fares of the People's Bus Service should not be increased. The government of Sindh will provide subsidies for the people.



LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif distributing awards among the high performing officers of Federal Board of Revenue.

I'm ready to hold talks: PTI founder

E.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has said that he had been saying for 18 months that he was ready to hold negotiations but not for striking deal.

Talking to journalists at the Adiala jail, Khan said negotiations had always been part of politics but they were held with opponents, not friends. He reiterated that his party would hold talks with everyone but the three parties. "Someone who wants to leave the country or avoid imprisonment makes a deal," he said.

He named Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Leader of the Opposition in National Assembly Omar Ayub and Leader of the Opposition in Senate Shibli Faraz for holding negotiations. "I have proposed these three names for talks and not a deal," the incarcerated leader maintained.

Khan also apprised the media that "they" were going to lodge the fourth case against him with regard to the Toshakhana gifts. They should make whatever the cases they wanted all at once, he added. A day ago, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan had claimed that his party was neither holding dialogues with anyone nor had any special message for talks.

Barrister Gohar, speaking to journalists outside Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, had said that former premier was facing "politically-motivated" cases. He added that the PTI founder requested the judiciary to give judgements on his cases at the earliest. "Ali Amin Gandapur, Omar Ayub Khan and Shibli Faraz have been given the go-ahead to hold talks, but not to strike a deal," Gohar said, adding that they were to talk to anyone except three political parties.

PM to nominate Nawaz as PML-N president

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was expected to nominate Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif as the party president in the key hurdles, slated to happen next Saturday (May 11).

Sources divulged that the meetings of the party's central executive committee and core committee had been convened on May 11. The invitations for the forthcoming meetings had also been issued.

According to the sources, it had not decided yet to change any other organisational posts, with the expectation of the party president post. Few days ago, former interior minister Rana Sanaullah said he personally urged Nawaz Sharif to resume his role as the party president. Separately, PML-N senior leader Khawaja Saad Rafique, saying, "Everyone wants former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to spearhead the party". "Now there is no constitutional obstacle for Nawaz Sharif to become the party president. Nawaz Sharif has been requested to take charge as the party president," he said.

Focus on to facilitate investors: KP CM

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In order to develop the mines and minerals development sector on modern lines, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided in principle to establish an international standard Mineral Development & Management Company in the province. The decision was made in a meeting of Mines and Mineral Development Department, held here at Chief Minister's House the other day with Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair.

Provincial Minister for Law, Special Assistant to Chief Minister for Industries, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries and Administrative Secretaries of relevant provincial departments attended the meeting. The chair directed the authorities concerned to complete all the required homework to this effect in minimum possible time and table the matter to the provincial cabinet for formal approval. The proposed company once established, will facilitate effective and efficient use of mineral resources and attract national and foreign investment, thereby ensuring multifold increase in the annual income of the sector.

It will also help simplify the long and complicated investment process, and facilitate the investors. The meeting has further decided to make regulatory mechanism more effective with the purpose to ensure better management of the mineral resources; necessary amendments in the relevant legal framework would be made for this purpose.

Various initiatives, proposed for introducing modern mechanical mining were also discussed in the meeting. The chief minister said that mechanical mining mechanism is much needed, because the conventional and old method of mining

causes wastage to valuable mineral resources of the province. He has directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps for introducing mechanical mining mechanism across the province so as to ensure full advantage of available mineral resources.

It was also decided that stern action would be taken against illegal mining activities in the province and authorities were directed to immediately initiate process for establishing specific mining police for this purpose. The chief minister further directed them to take result-oriented steps against illegal mining activities on river beds.

Similarly, he said that all the companies working in the mineral sector should be bound to install their processing plants within the province. Ali Amin Khan Gandapur maintained that work on the installation of CCTV Cameras for monitoring mineral leases in the province should be geared up, adding that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was replete with precious mineral resources; incumbent provincial government will take all possible steps to ensure that these resources are utilized in an effective manner.

He also ordered for ease of doing business to attract foreign investment, and added that it is also the priority of provincial government to ensure utilization of available natural resources in an effective and useful manner, thereby enhancing income generation of the province.

We need an efficient assets management system to achieve this purpose, he directed and said that the provincial government would extend its all-out support for strengthening productive sectors of the province. The meeting also decided to establish Gems and Jewelry City in Peshawar, which would have a state of the art laboratory and other allied facilities.

Hamas negotiators begin Gaza truce talks

CAIRO (AFP): Hamas

negotiators began intensified talks on Saturday on a possible Gaza truce that would see a halt to the fighting and the return to Israel of some hostages, a Hamas official told Reuters, with the CIA director already present in Cairo for the indirect diplomacy.

The Hamas delegation arrived from the Palestinian Islamist movement's political office in Qatar, which, along with Egypt, has tried to mediate a follow-up to a brief November ceasefire amid mounting international dismay over the soaring death toll in Gaza and the plight of its 2.3 million inhabitants. Taher Al-Nono, a Hamas official and adviser to Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh, said meetings with Egyptian and Qatari mediators had begun and Hamas was dealing with their proposals "with full seriousness and responsibility."

However, he reiterated the group's demand that any deal should include an Israeli pullout from Gaza and an end to the war, conditions that Israel has previously rejected. "Any agreement to be reached must include our national demands; the complete and permanent ending of the aggression, the full and complete withdrawal of the occupation from Gaza Strip, the return of the displaced to their homes without restriction and a real prisoner swap deal, in addition to the reconstruction and ending the blockade," the Hamas official told Reuters. An Israeli official signalled its core position on this was unchanged, saying "Israel will under no circumstances agree to ending the war as part of a deal to free our hostages."

The war began after Hamas stunned Israel with a cross-border raid on Oct.

Hamas 'only thing standing between people of Gaza and a ceasefire': Blinken

WASHINGTON (AFP): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Hamas was the only holdup to a Gaza ceasefire as the militants prepared to send a delegation back to Cairo on Saturday for talks. "We wait to see whether, in effect, they can take yes for an answer on the ceasefire and release of hostages," Blinken said late Friday.

"The reality in this moment is the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas," Blinken pointed to difficulties in negotiating with Hamas, which the United States considers a terrorist group and does not engage with directly and which Israel has vowed to eliminate. "The leaders of Hamas that we're indirectly engaged with — through the Qataris, through the Egyptians — are, of course, living outside of Gaza," Blinken said.

7 in which 1,200 people were killed and 252 hostages taken, according to Israeli tallies. More than 34,600 Palestinians have been killed — 32 of them in the past 24 hours — and more than 77,000 have been wounded in Israel's military operation, according to Gaza's health ministry. The bombardment has laid waste to much of the coastal enclave.

Before the talks began there was some optimism over a potential deal. "Things look better this time but whether an agreement is on hand would depend on whether Israel has offered what it takes for that to happen," a Palestinian official with knowledge of the mediation efforts, who asked not to be named, told Reuters. Washington — which, like other Western powers and Israel, brands Hamas a terrorist group — has urged it to enter a deal.

Progress has stumbled, however, over Hamas' long-standing demand for a commitment to end the offensive by Israel, which insists that after any truce it would resume operations designed to disarm and dismantle the faction. Hamas

said on Friday it would come to Cairo in a "positive spirit" after studying the latest proposal for a deal, little of which has been made public. Israel has given a preliminary nod to terms which one source said included the return of between 20 and 33 hostages in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and a weeks-long suspension of fighting.

That would leave around 100 hostages in Gaza, some of whom Israel says have died in captivity. The source, who asked not to be identified by name or nationality, told Reuters their return may require an additional deal with broader Israeli concessions. "That could entail a de facto, if not formal, end to the war — unless Israel somehow recovers them through force or generates enough military pressure to make Hamas relent," the source said. Egyptian sources said CIA Director William Burns arrived in Cairo on Friday. He has been involved in previous truce talks and Washington has signalled there may be progress this time. The CIA declined to comment on Burns' itinerary.

Leaks case: IHC issues contempt notices

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In an important development in the audio leaks case, the Islamabad High Court has dismissed the objection petitions filed against Justice Babar Sattar, terming them as "malicious" and motivated by "bad faith".

The court has also issued preliminary contempt notices to the chiefs of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). Furthermore, preliminary notices for contempt of court have been issued to chiefs of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). This move signals the court's determination to hold accountable those who may have violated legal standards or obstructed justice in the case.

The court imposed a fine of Rs 500,000 on the petitioners for filing "frivolous" applications, which were aimed at pressurizing the judge and stopping the hearing of the case. The court observed that all four organizations - IB, FIA, PTA, and PEMRA - had jointly filed applications under a single scheme to influence the proceedings. Additionally, an order has been issued for the officer who allowed the court to file the criminal petition to pay out of pocket, emphasizing the importance of diligence and accountability in legal proceedings.

In a 40-page order, Justice Babar Sattar wrote that the objection pleas to stop the hearing were based on malice and were an attempt to undermine the judiciary's independence. The court emphasized that it is committed to giving a full opportunity to all parties in the case related to phone tapping of citizens, which has exposed the federal government's failure to protect citizens' constitutional fundamental rights.

May 9 was a planned conspiracy: Kh Asif

E.P. Report

SIALKOT: Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif has said that military installations and properties were attacked under a planned conspiracy of a political party on May 9.

Addressing a press conference at his residence, he said the Corps Commander House Lahore, Mianwali Air Base and GHQ Rawalpindi were attacked under a plan. "There have been differences of political parties with the establishment throughout our history and it was expressed from time to time. However, it was the first time that a political party expressed its anger after a vote of no-confidence was passed against it," he added.

He said, "The evidence was recorded by the media in the form of videos and hundreds of people were arrested and it was a day in which the red line was crossed. Ideological and political differences have

their place but one political party decided all the targets under joint planning with its leadership. The way these people reached Lahore, Mianwali and Rawalpindi without any hindrance was a huge conspiracy against the integrity of Pakistan and against the forces of Pakistan. The party leader demanded sacrifices from workers and asked them to attack the military installations, martyrs' memorials, but the workers were abandoned in difficult times. Some of them have been punished by terrorism courts and some cases are pending."

He said that attempts were made to destabilize national institutions and all methods were tried that no one had dared before in the 75-year history of Pakistan. "Even India, Pakistan's worst enemy, could not attack Pakistan with such boldness till date. There is a contradiction in the leadership of the political party which attacked the military installations. Yesterday,

they formed a three-member committee and said that they will negotiate only with the Army Chief and the ISI DG. They made a small amendment that they will negotiate with all political parties except three parties. If they have to hold selected negotiations, the failure is decided from the first day," he added.

He said, "I am a supporter of a national dialogue in which the judiciary, establishment, political parties and other power structures are also present and the problems of the country and the people should be resolved. If there are negotiations, all stakeholders should be included. The head of the party, who tried to rebel against the Army, also used abusive language against JUI head Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman. But now they are asking for negotiations. There is no principle in Imran Khan's politics and statements. The May 9 incident will also be discussed in the National Assembly."

Salaries of govt officials likely to increase by 12%

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In the coming federal budget, the salaries of government employees are expected to increase by 10 to 12 percent. According to the media report, if the Finance Ministry's proposals are accepted, the increased salary will come into effect by July 2024; however, the government will make the final decision.

It should be noted that on May 1, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif hosted a luncheon at his Lahore house in honor of the laborers. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif says that he will bring an immense reduction in wasteful expenses, despite the difficulties, he will try to increase the salaries in the budget.

However, the federal government has made the decision to finish working on the budget objectives by the middle of this month, ahead of

the IMF mission's arrival. For this reason, the economic team has also been given the aim of finishing the budget working by the Prime Minister's Office.

According to the sources, work on the budgeting strategy has started and the achievement of the 6 major targets is the focal point, the sources also say that the mechanism has been finalized with the IMF officials to achieve the targets. First and foremost, all foreign debt must be repaid on time. Money obtained from bonds, banks, friendly nations, and institutions will go toward funding spending reductions to lower deficits and prohibiting additional borrowing.

Govt decides to end subsidies to public officials: The federal government has decided to stop providing subsidies to government officials ahead of this month's planned discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a new loan pack-

age.

According to media reports, the subsidy given to customs officers from grades 17 to 22 has been abolished. Sources say that the subsidized house rent and medical charges to customs officers have been abolished. According to sources, the customs officers were being given these incentives from the common pool fund, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) had ordered to end subsidies and incentives from the common pool fund.

It is to be noted that there will be talks with the IMF this month on a new loan program, sources say that unnecessary subsidies and pension reforms will be part of the talks. Earlier Friday, after Pakistan completed a short-term loan program of \$3 billion, a schedule was set between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for negotiations on a new major loan program.