

Petrol price set to increase

ISLAMABAD (INP): Petrol prices are expected to increase in Pakistan from July 1 after four consecutive price cuts, sources said on Thursday. Petrol is projected to increase by Rs7 per litre and HSD by Rs8 per litre due to higher international market rates. The international prices for petrol and HSD have risen by \$4.4 and \$5.5 per barrel, respectively, in the last fortnight.



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Investigation of May 9 incident

KP Cabinet okays Judicial Commission



F.P. Report

Khan, Bannu, Kohat, and Mardan.

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Cabinet has approved the establishment of a Judicial Commission to probe into the 9th May incident. The decision was taken in the 9th meeting of the Provincial Cabinet held in the Civil Secretariat, Peshawar. The meeting was presided by Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur and was attended by cabinet members, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary Home and relevant Administrative Secretaries.

The cabinet also approved the formal conveying of the Provincial Assembly 11th resolution to the Federal Government regarding the release of Ex Prime Minister Imran Khan and all political prisoners. The cabinet also approved formal conveying 15th resolution to Federal Government to express solidarity with the Iranian people following the tragic helicopter incident resulting in the demise of the Iranian President and other dignitaries.

The Cabinet also gave its approval for the creation of 565 posts for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police in southern districts. This decision is in line with the policy to strengthen the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police and improve law and order in the province.

To ensure prompt facilitation for employment of 213 wards of Shuhada in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, the cabinet approved the necessary amendments in the Section 32 of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Act 2017 thereby increasing their previous quota.

The cabinet approved necessary amendments in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zakat and Usher Act 2011 to establish Philanthropic Contribution Fund. As first donations, the Provincial Cabinet members will contribute one month salary. Similarly, necessary amendments will also be carried out to revamp the Zakat and Usher Council, District Zakat Committees, Local Zakat Committees and formation of Scrutiny Committee at Provincial and District level. Through the amendments the department will be able to establish Zakat Management Information System in order to ensure effective management of Zakat and Usher distribution.

To redress the financial needs of Cadet College Razmak North Waziristan, Cadet College Spinkai and Cadet College Wana South Waziristan, the provincial cabinet approved provision of additional fund amounting to Rs 319.627 million. Considering the successful transition from the old traffic system to the enhanced traffic warden system in Peshawar, Swat, and Abbottabad, the provincial cabinet approved its extension to districts of D.I.

Imran, Bushra 's plea in 'illegal' marriage case rejected

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A district and sessions court on Thursday rejected PTI founder Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi's application for suspension of their sentences in the nikkah during iddat case, upholding their punishment.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Muhammad Afzal Majoka announced the verdict he reserved on Tuesday (June 25) after recording evidence and hearing arguments from all sides. The judge issued a 10-page detailed judgement ruling that offenders are not eligible for bail even in bailable offenses under Section 426.

"...[there is] no ground for suspension of [the] sentence is available to both the petitioners. Accordingly, both the petitions under section 426 Cr.PC are dismissed." The judge ruled that under the law even a woman offender cannot claim bail. The judge stated that the merits of the case cannot be discussed during the hearing of applications for suspension of sentence or release on bail. Moreover, the sentence is neither short-term nor have they served much of their term.

During the last hearing, Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi's counsel Salman Safdar, and Khalid Yousuf Chaudhry and Khawar Maneka's lawyer Zahid Asif Chaudhry appeared before the court. Bushra Bibi's lawyer Salman Safdar raised

PTI to move High Court

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf leader Omar Ayub said on Thursday the party would move the Islamabad High Court against, what he said, absolutely ridiculous decision of the district and sessions court of Islamabad.

Speaking to media outside Islamabad's court after rejection of former premier Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi's plea for suspension of sentences in the alleged illegal marriage case, he declared it a travesty of justice. "We had clearly told Shehbaz Sharif that we would not hold negotiations with anyone until our leader Imran Khan is released from the jail. Shehbaz Sharif is not the prime minister as he was elected on Form- 47. We will challenge this absolutely ridiculous verdict in the Islamabad High Court through our lawyers," he said.

objection to the jurisdiction of the trial court in the case.

Safdar argued that the nikkah was solemnised in Lahore but sentence was awarded in Islamabad, which didn't come under the ambit of this court. Talking of his long career in the criminal practice, the lawyer wondered that no lawyer ever fought a case like this in court, adding that no one knew who committed fraud as both husband and wife were languishing in the jail.

Expressing sympathy with Khawar Maneka, he said he moved court under extreme pressure after years. Safdar also mentioned suspension of sentence in the cipher case which, he said, had been challenged in the apex court before even entering the high court. The counsel also briefly talked about the suspension of sentence in the Toshakhana case which took

only three minutes for the judge to decide, adding that he expected the same briskness from him in this case as well.

"We will respect your decision either it is in our favour or against us as we have waited too long in the previous court of Shahrukh Arjumand by showing patience," he argued. Barrister Safdar said he was representing a woman and a mother in this case, who was complaining of her sore feet in the jail.

Khawar Maneka's lawyer Advocate Zahid Asif interjected by saying that Bushra Bibi had requested herself to move to Adiala Jail from Bani Gala, adding that now she shouldn't have any complaints. On this Barrister Safdar responded that plain-tiffs didn't raise objections in the cipher and Toshakhana cases.

IMF raises concerns over Pakistan's pension burden

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised concerns regarding the raising pension burden in Pakistan as some retired government employees in the country receiving more than Rs 1.6 million in pension.

Sources close to the development disclosed that the IMF is worried about the issue of double pensioners. According to documents, an estimated Rs 1,014 billion will be allocated for pensions in the upcoming budget 2024-25.

The documents further reveal that pensions will see a 15 percent increase in the new budget, requiring an additional Rs 122 billion to cover this increment. Notably, the monthly pension for 95 retired officers in Pakistan exceeds Rs 500,000, while 3,081 retired officers receive more than Rs 200,000 per month.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has imposed new conditions on the Punjab government, requiring significant financial adjustments in the upcoming fiscal year.

The IMF has set a target for the Punjab government to save at least 630 billion rupees in the next financial year. The conditions were laid out during a video link meeting between IMF officials and the Punjab government representatives.

The channel reported that this target must be achieved through savings from all sources of income and expenditures.

The Punjab government now faces the critical task of identifying areas for cost-cutting and revenue generation to meet this ambitious savings target. To reduce the financial burden, Punjab Chief Minister (CM) Maryam Nawaz constituted a 14-member high-level committee on June 20 and tasked it with submitting recommendations in 60 days about carrying out a restructuring of the provincial ministries and departments.

Naming it 'restructuring committee', the chief minister said that Punjab Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb would be its convener, while the provincial Finance Minister Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman and the provincial law minister would be its members. CM Maryam said the objective of the committee would be to identify loss-making departments and suggest measures to lay off their additional staff besides abolishing the departments formed for the same purpose.

Under the restructuring plan, which CM Maryam approved, there would be a downsizing of ministries so that official duties could be performed with ease, while different departments doing the same work would be amalgamated into one. The restructuring of ministries and departments would save the Punjab government billions of rupees.

Opp's motions unrelated to Law Ministry

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday said that the cut motions of the opposition members had nothing to do with the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Instead of demands for grants of the Law Ministry, their discussions focused solely on the judiciary's internal matters, he said while speaking in the National Assembly. The minister said the opposition legislators highlighted issues unrelated to the Law Ministry. They even did not mention the funds specifically allocated for ensuring common people's access to justice, he added.

Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, who was chairing session, put the cut motions pertaining to the Law and Justice Division for the approval of the House.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting regarding promotion of Pakistan-Azerbaijan economic ties.

Govt taking steps to provide relief to common man: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that the government had taken historic measures in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year to provide maximum relief to the common man.

He was talking to a delegation of young parliamentarians, which called on him at the PM House. The delegation included members of National Assembly Raja Usama Sarwar, Barrister Aqeel Malik, Barrister Danyal Chaudhry, Ahmed Ateeq Anwar, Nousheen Iftikhar, Rana Iradat Sharif Khan, Muhammad Usman Awaisi, Ammar Ahmed Khan Leghari, Dr Shaista Khan, Zainab Baloch, Saad Waseem and Shahid Usman.

The prime minister told the MNAs that Allah Almighty had given them a great opportunity to serve the people. He hoped that they would work diligently for the country's development and prosperity, and public welfare. The government, he said, would distribute laptops among the efficient and talented students. "The government has set aside an amount of Rs 100 billion in the budget to promote the Information Technology sector, which is a historic step."

Similarly, he said, the government had also allocated funds for the skills development and the sports sector. It was also working on several projects

for skills development of the youth and to create maximum employment opportunities for them, he added. PM Shehbaz said the government was taking steps to reduce burden on the national exchequer by privatizing the state-owned enterprises and bringing reforms in the public departments.

He also expressed his government's resolve to continue the diplomatic and moral support of the oppressed Muslims of Palestine. During the meeting, matters of the relevant constituencies and overall political situation of the country also came under discussion.

Shehbaz directs strategy formulation for stronger economic ties with Azerbaijan: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif instructed the formulation of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen cooperation and trade partnership with Azerbaijan in the fields of economy and investment.

Chairing a high-level meeting on enhancing relations with Central Asian States, particularly Azerbaijan, in the areas of economy and investment, the prime minister stated, "Pakistan geographically offers a natural economic corridor to the sea for Central Asian states." He highlighted the enduring fraternal relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, which had spanned decades.

He believed that there were significant opportunities for trade and

investment between Azerbaijan and Pakistan. "Foreign investment in the country is on the rise due to the government's business and investment-friendly policies, the prime minister mentioned.

The prime minister directed the development of a comprehensive action plan to boost trade efficiency and expand current trade between the two countries. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on initiatives aimed at enhancing trade volume, capacity, and trade and investment between Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

It was highlighted during the briefing that there was substantial potential for energy cooperation with Azerbaijan, and discussions were ongoing for a preferential trade agreement between both countries. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, along with Minister for Planning and Development & Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for Privatization and Investment Abdul Aleem Khan, Federal Minister for Power Sardar Owais Khan Leghari, Federal Minister for Petroleum Dr. Musadik Malik, Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi, and other senior officials attended the meeting.

US-Pakistan relations

Former US Ambassadors reflect on complexities

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON DC: The Wilson Center recently hosted a significant event focused on US-Pakistan relations, featuring three former US ambassadors who have served in Pakistan over the past two decades: Anne Peterson, David Hale, and Cameron Munter. The discussion provided valuable insights into the complexities and evolving dynamics between the two nations.

Ambassador Anne Peterson highlighted the missed opportunities for early negotiations with the Taliban. She emphasized that Pakistan was often a hindrance in initiating these talks. Peterson stressed the importance of not allowing Pakistan, the world's fifth most populous country, to falter. She also pointed out the potential implications

of China's growing tensions with India and advised caution regarding Pakistan's substantial loans from China.

Ambassador Cameron Munter reflected on his tenure, underscoring his efforts to maintain stable relations with Pakistan. He recognized the strategic opportunities that the US and Pakistan could explore, particularly in their dealings with China. Munter noted the advantage Pakistan holds by being an ally to two superpowers. However, he also acknowledged India's crucial role in America's Indo-Pacific strategy, suggesting that Pakistan might not have as significant a position in this context.

Ambassador David Hale offered a candid assessment of the current state of US-Pakistan relations, describing them as "out of gas."

He observed that Pakistan had historically held high expectations from the US, which were often unmet. Hale mentioned the reluctance of the Pakistani military to fully pursue the Taliban in Afghanistan. Looking ahead, he remarked on the relief felt by the US from not having to provide substantial financial aid to Pakistan annually.

Hale also dispelled the notion that the Taliban in Afghanistan would comply with Pakistan's directives, noting Pakistan's strategic pivot towards China in recent years. The event at the Wilson Center highlighted the multifaceted nature of US-Pakistan relations and the varied perspectives of the ambassadors, each offering a unique view based on their experiences and observations.

All terrorism emanating from Afghan territory: Asif

ISLAMABAD: In a major policy shift, Pakistan has decided to stringently enforce international laws at its borders with Afghanistan, to restrict the influx of militants and smuggled goods into the country, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said on Thursday.

The government seeks not only to curb economic losses caused by the smuggling of oil, fertilisers, and other goods from Afghanistan into Pakistan, but also to thwart the infiltration of terrorists, avert potential breaches, and implement security checks at the borders.

"All traffic from Afghanistan will only be allowed entry into Pakistan with a valid passport and visa," said Asif talking to media, hinting at the end of the longstanding practice of Afghans entering Pakistan without proper documentation. The statement comes as Pakistan has witnessed a

significant surge in cross-border attacks on security forces in recent months with the militants using advanced weaponry and equipment.

Islamabad has time again called on the interim Afghanistan government to prevent its land from being used by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant organisations for carrying out attacks against Pakistan. "We must secure our country, and these crossing points have been compromising our security," the defence minister said in today's interaction.

He further pointed out that after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, there had been a spike in terrorism, with most incidents tracing back to Afghan soil. "Currently, all terrorism is emanating from Afghan territory," Asif said that formal borders, where passports were required for crossing, were a standard global practice,

noting that despite Pakistan's repeated requests for cooperation, Kabul was yet to respond adequately.

"Our borders with China, Iran, and India operate with strict regulations, and it should be the same with Afghanistan," he asserted. Replying to a question, Asif said they were cognisant of the fact that there were families on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Rationalising the decision to implement visa and passport restrictions, he compared them to the families divided in Kashmir since the partition of the subcontinent.

Addressing other divided borders, Asif mentioned that similar issues exist along the Sialkot borders — with India — and the working boundary, where families are split. Afghanistan does not recognise the Durand Line, the border between the two countries, arguing it was created by the British to divide ethnic Pashtuns. — Agencies

No country allowed to interfere in Pakistan affairs: Dar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Thursday made it categorically clear that no country was allowed to interfere in Pakistan's internal matters and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had reacted swiftly to a resolution passed by the US House of Representatives against alleged irregularities in February 8 elections.

Explaining the basic features of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government in the National Assembly, Dar said Pakistan had already rejected the resolution and was ready to table one in the House to counter the move and share the country's stance. At the same time, he expressed the desire to hold constructive talks with the United States on different issues for maintaining a close relationship.

He said the previous government [the one led by PTI founding chairman Imran Khan] had stopped work on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was reinitiated by Shehbaz. CPEC was placed on backburner because of "our own mistakes". Dar noted — a reference to the fact that no major project was launched under the initiative after the PTI replaced the PML-N government in 2018.

The latest remarks came as the government has been repeatedly highlighting the efforts being made to target Chinese nationals and interests through terrorism acts to sabotage CPEC and Chinese investment. In another jibe at the PTI, the foreign minister also mentioned that Pakistan had itself damaged relations with other countries.

However, Dar rejected the impression that the country was isolated on the diplomatic front and mentioned Pakistan being elected as the UN Security Council non-permanent member after securing 182 votes as an example to argue his case.

CM reviews development schemes, orders early completion of projects

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, during a meeting at the Planning and Development Board, reviewed each development project of Annual Development Program 2024-25.

The CM directed the authorities concerned to ensure timely completion of projects in any case. She directed the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) to create a dashboard for real-time monitoring of all projects. "We have a lot of work to do; PC-1 of all schemes should be submitted by July 15," she instructed and stressed for timely completion of all schemes.

The CM said if funds were spent on cars and offices, why not on hospitals, directing the departments concerned to form a company for export of meat, prawns, animals and garments. The meeting was briefed that ambulance service was being started at every interchange of motorways in Punjab. As many as 106 development projects would be completed with the support and collaboration of foreign funding.

The CM ordered to immediately release Rs 400 million for the ongoing development projects, besides the release of remaining allocated funds based on the utilisation of funds. She also ordered to release 25 per cent of the Universal Health Insurance fund on monthly basis.

Details of 83 projects of the District Development Committee and 431 projects of the Divisional Development Working Party were presented in the meeting. The CM reviewed progress on 282 projects of the Departmental Development Sub-Committee and 378 projects of the Provincial Development Working Party. She had a detailed briefing on special schemes of the Department of Health, and directed the authorities concerned to take all possible measures to ensure early completion of renovation and rehabilitation of health centers across Punjab.

Maryam Nawaz gave a deadline of August 13 to start the construction of 189 km-long Chichawatni-Layyah road, and 93 km-long Multan-Vehari road. She was briefed that the construction of Sahiwal-Saharani and Bahawalnagar-Jhangra East Interchange Road will also be started by August 13. She was apprised the construction of Faisalabad-Chiniot-Sargodha Road will start on July 31.

Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, provincial ministers Chaudhry Shafay Hussain, Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman, Khawaja Salman Rafiq, Khawaja Imran Nazir, Syed Ashiq Hussain, Rana Sikandar Hayat, Soheib Ahmad Malik, Sohail Shaukat Butt, Bilal Akbar Khan, Zeeshan Rafiq, Faisal Khokhar, Special Assistants Zeeshan Malik and Rashid Nasrullah attended the meeting. Chief Secretary, IG, Chairman P&D, Secretaries and other officers concerned were also present.

Sikh pilgrims reach Lahore from Kartarpur

LAHORE (APP): For the 185th anniversary celebrations of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh pilgrims from India reached Lahore from Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur.

The yatrees also performed their rituals at Gurdwara Rohri Sahab Aimonabad. The pilgrims were brought under tight security by special buses while Rescue 1122 and the medical team of the Evacuee Trust Property Board were also with them.

The Sikh pilgrims will stay at Gurdwara Dera Sahib for two days.

The additional secretary shrines said that the best arrangements had been made for the accommodation of pilgrims in Gurdwara Dera Sahib Lahore.

The gurdwara had been decorated with colourful lights while electric generators are remain there in a case of loadshedding. Foolproof security arrangements have been made at entrances.

The main function of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's anniversary will be held at Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore, on Saturday, June 29, under the auspices of the ETPB, in which Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, board officers and thousands of Sikh pilgrims from all over the world will participate.

Police officers to visit China for advanced training

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General of Punjab Police Dr. Usman Anwar has said that a delegation of eleven officers from Punjab Police will embark on a 12-day training visit to China next month.

Addressing a meeting of the selected officers for the training program at the Central Police Office here on Thursday, he said that these officers will undergo training from July 1 to 12, will receive advanced training in various fields, including counter-terrorism, from Chinese experts, adding that the training program aims to enhance the professional skills and capacity of the police officers.

He appreciated the representation of Punjab Police in the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor Security Officials Training Program, calling it commendable. He briefed the officers about the significance and benefits of the training program.

According to details, the selected officers for the training program include SSP Special Branch Rawalpindi Fazal Hamid, AIG Procurement Syed Karar Hussain, SSP Punjab Highway Patrol Rawalpindi Muhammad Bin Ashraf, SP Cantt Lahore Awais Shafiq, Principal Police Training School Sargodha Anam Faryal, SP Investigation Cantt Bushra Nisar, SDPO Taxila Kainat Azhar, SDPO Peoples Colony Faisalabad Zainab Khalid, SDPO Kamalia Sundus Ishaq, SDPO Sadiqabad Rahim Yar Khan, Bangal Khan, SDPO Cantt Tayyab Wazir.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar instructed all officers to complete their training with full dedication.

The meeting was attended by Additional IG Punjab Sultan Ahmad Chaudhry, MD Punjab Safe Cities Authority Ahsan Younas, SSP Investigation Lahore Anooosh Masood Chaudhry, AIG Training, AIG Logistics, SPs, and senior officers.

Punjab aims for enhanced universal health insurance: Khawaja Salman

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique announced the government's intent to enhance the universal health insurance program during a meeting at the Punjab Health Initiative Management Company on Thursday.

The session, attended by representatives from various insurance companies, focused on improving the existing framework of the health insurance system.

The minister emphasized that all stakeholders are being engaged to refine the program. He highlighted the effective administration of the health card program under PML-N President Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's leadership but acknowledged challenges in universalizing the health card facility. "We want to provide the real benefits of the Universal Health Insurance Program to the people," he said.

He noted that Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is committed to improving government hospital conditions, aiming for a system where "healthy citizens pay for

'Kite Flying Prohibition Ordinance' to be amended

LAHORE (APP): To prevent kite flying in Punjab, the government has decided to amend the Kite Flying Prohibition Ordinance 2001.

Official sources told APP that in this connection, the Punjab Law Department had sent a draft to the Chief Minister's Office in consultation with the Standing Committee on Law.

According to the sources, in the amended ordinance, imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years and a fine of up to five lakh rupees have been proposed for the kite makers, also in the ordinance, there will be a fine for the children while the parents of the children have also been recommended to be punished.

In this regard provincial Law Minister Malik Sohaib Ahmed Bherth has said that the aim of the amendments in the ordinance is to narrow the circle around the real beneficiaries of punishment.

Cases registered against Naanbais

LAHORE (APP): On the direction of Deputy Commissioner Lahore Rafia Haider, the district government launched a crackdown to implement new prices of roti and naan and imposed heavy fines on violators.

The teams on Thursday got arrested 13 persons (Naanbais) over violating official order. The teams, according to an official spokesperson, inspected 3,699 roti/naan points (tandoors) in the city, six cases were registered, besides imposing more than Rs 800,000 fine on violators.

The teams inspected 174 points in various areas of the city and imposed Rs 500,000 fine over violations of not listing the official price of roti/naan. The teams also checked 806 roti/naan shops, registered a case, and imposed a Rs 200,000 fine on 44 violators.

On the other hand, the DC made a surprise visit to fruit and vegetable markets and checked the prices as well. The DC ordered the ACs to monitor the prices of basic commodities in tehsil as well as the district.



KARACHI A view of light rain in Provincial Capital after hot days. —INP Photo

Governor inaugurates Hazrat Abdullah Shah Ghazi's Urs

KARACHI (PPI): Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori inaugurated the 1294th annual Urs of Hazrat Abdullah Shah Ghazi. At the shrine, the Governor laid a ceremonial chadar and offered special prayers for the progress of the nation and the resolution of its issues. Following the ceremony, he distributed clothes, water, juice, and food among the visitors.

Speaking to the media, Governor Sindh expressed his strong belief that the prayers for Pakistan's economic stability, made in the presence of this great saint, will be answered, and that the country will soon stand on its own economically. He also prayed for relief from the intense heat and for rainfall in the province and Karachi.

Governor Kamran Khan Tessori mentioned that the Prime Minister and Army Chief are working hard to attract investment through SIFC. In response to a question, he acknowledged the significant damage Pakistan has suffered due to climate change over the past two years. He also shared that, at his request, the spiritual leader of the Bohra community will be visiting Pakistan, despite invitations from five other countries. The spiritual leader's visit is expected to bring over 50,000 people to the city, boosting economic activity.

Tessori highlighted his efforts in Islamabad over the past three days, meeting with various ambassadors. The UAE ambassador assured him of large-scale investment in Sindh, while the Turkish ambassador confirmed extensive cooperation. Investors from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and other countries are also expected to invest soon, which will create job opportunities and prosperity. Addressing another question, he urged K-Electric to ensure the end of unannounced load shedding during the intense heat.

Tessori meets Acting British High Commissioner in Islamabad: KARACHI (PPI): Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori met with Acting British High Commissioner Andrew Dalglish in Islamabad. The Governor Sindh stated that numerous investment opportunities are available in the province under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

The formation of SIFC aims to provide ample facilities to both local and international investors to promote investment across the country. He further highlighted that several sectors in Sindh and its highly educated young workforce are attractive to investors. He added that British investors can achieve significant outcomes by investing in these promising sectors, and the government will provide all possible assistance, cooperation, and support.

Tessori emphasized that providing the best opportunities to investors through SIFC is their top priority. The Acting British High Commissioner noted that British investors are keenly interested in further investment in Sindh.

KWSC should develop water distribution on modern lines

KARACHI (PPI): Provincial Ombudsman Dr Muhammad Sohail Rajput has said that the Karachi Water & Sewerage Corporation (KWSC) should develop water distribution on modern lines by taking emergency measures to solve the complaints related to water supply to the citizens.

An important meeting was held today at the provincial ombudsman's office between the Chief Operating Officer of the Water Board Asadullah Khan and the top officers of the water board on the instructions of the provincial ombudsman for the timely redressal of citizens' complaints.

In which the issues of water supply, continuous complaints in some areas, cracks in water lines and payment of dues of retired staff were discussed between Adviser of Provincial Ombudsman Office Hashim Raza, Registrar Masood Ishrat, Consultant Brigadier Muhammad Jameel.

It was decided in the meeting that

Youth, women-led consultations crucial to achieve Healthy Diet Policy

ISLAMABAD (APP): The speakers at the seminar on National Healthy Diet Policy demanded the government to ensure holistic consultations with all stakeholders including the youth and women to ensure robust policy document intended to curb growing child diseases.

The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) organised the seminar titled "From Concept to Action: Food Pathways Through Healthy Diet Policy" here at the SDPI Conference Hall.

Associate Researcher SDPI Khansa Naeem informed the participants that 37.6% of children under 5 years of age were stunted while 7.1% children under the age of 5 were wasted whereas obesity was recorded among 7.5% of women and men in the country. She added that diet is an important component of health that has less focus of the masses and stakeholders.

Vice Chancellor and Dean Health Services Academy Dr Shahzad Ali Khan said unhealthy diet has emerged as a universal phenomenon in Pakistan, whereas there is no convincing model to persuade poor population on quitting unhealthy diet. He added that bad eating habits and lifestyle has created universalization of poor and unhealthy diet across the country.

He said Pakistan has a law on breast feeding for mothers to administer their milk to babies for two years and banned advertisement of mother's formula milk.

"According to a survey, 72% women are feeding formula milk and 90% of those respondents claimed that their doctors had prescribed them which is illegal as per the law. SDPI should take the lead to incorporate a right-based approach component in the policy on breast feeding," Dr Shahzad Khan said.

He informed that there was 11% more risk of contracting diarrhea among children who were not fed mother's milk. It should be declared as the fundamental right of the baby to get human milk through breast feeding, he added. "Healthy diet concept needs to be addressed from mother's feed as it will help reduce disease risk among children," he added.

He added that 72% health of an individual is determined by the diet nutrition intake. "Healthy diet policy is an important consideration because without healthy diet no health is possible."

Pakistan, he said is currently having double burden of infectious and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). He mentioned that the problem of unhealthy diet was highly prevalent in upper income groups along with lower income groups.

He urged the stakeholders to ensure effective advocacy and communication campaigns to manage bad advertisements promoting unhealthy diets.

Dr Mehreen Mujtaba, Director Nutrition, Ministry of National Health, Services, Regulations and Coordination said 67% of our population did not have access to healthy diet, whereas the data of the national nutrition survey was old and repeatedly quoted at different forums.


"17.7% of children in Pakistan are wasted and the World Health Organisation has declared it an emergency. Pakistan required strong political leadership to champion the goal of healthy diet," she said.

She added that the Ministry of Health along with partners intends to support policy making process on healthy diet through inclusive feedback from the provinces.

She also underscored the need for multisectoral stakeholders' engagement involving academia, youth and private sector as part of the policy making process.

Dr Mehreen suggested to develop locally contextualised healthy recipe books to promote healthy food depending on the provinces with their local translations.

Faiz Rasool from GAIN said Pakistan is a country facing serious malnutrition issues that demanded the country to declare a malnutrition emergency.



PUBLIC NOTICE
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Details

Branch	Mansehra
Branch code	0029
Date of auction	29 th June, 2024
Time	12:00 PM
Call deposit	PKR 2000/-

Customer Name	CNIC #	Address
Yasir Irfan	13302-4700677-1	P.O. Bal Dher Akhumbandi, Tehsil & District Haripur.
Sadaqat Rasheed	13501-7293848-7	Basti Kamal Khan Chamohra, Tehsil & District Mansehra.
Fahad Ali	13503-9575761-3	Jhattan Da Maira, College Doraha, Mansehra.

Notice is hereby given to the customers in above mentioned that if payment of entire outstanding amount financed along with markup is not made by them to Mobilink Bank within 1 day of the publication of this notice, Mobilink Bank shall auction the gold ornaments and no further Public Notice shall be issued to call upon the customers to make the payments.

Mobilink Bank



PESHAWAR: Provincial President of Pakistan Business Forum Khalid Gul Mohmand addressing a press conference against the increased taxes in budget.

Chief Secretary chairs meeting on Muharram security

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level review meeting was held on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary regarding the security arrangements for Muharram.

Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Akhtar Hayat Khan, Additional Chief Secretary Home & Tribal Affairs, Member Board of Revenue, concerned secretaries, commissioners, deputy commissioners, security officials, and other officers participated in the meeting. The security arrangements during Muharram were reviewed in detail.

At the beginning of the meeting, a detailed briefing was given to the participants by Additional Chief Secretary Home & Tribal Affairs

Department Muhammad Abid Majeed. On this occasion, the Additional Chief Secretary Home & Tribal Affairs said that a control room will be set up in the Home Department.

Where all the activities of Muharram will be closely monitored through proper coordination. Speaking at the meeting, the Chief Secretary said that all possible steps will be taken to maintain the atmosphere of national unity and religious harmony during Muharram, ensure the implementation of all the security SOPs, and the scheduled routes for gatherings and processions.

The Chief Secretary further said that the administration will provide full support to the police for security arrangements.

The Divisional Commissioners and Regional Police Officers,

along with the Deputy Commissioners and District Police Officers, participated in the meeting through video link.

During the meeting Instructions were issued to PESCO and TESCO authorities to take steps to ensure an uninterrupted power supply on the 9th and 10th of Muharram. Instructions were also issued to all the district officers to stay in the districts during Muharram and keep a close watch on all matters. While proper instructions were given to take solid steps against hateful content on social media.

On this occasion, IG Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa told the meeting that the availability of security forces will be ensured in all districts as per requirement and strict security arrangements will be made in sensitive districts regarding Muharram.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur talking to Ambassador of the Netherlands to Pakistan Henny Fokel de Vries.

Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan calls on Chief Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan Henny Fokel de Vries called on the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur and discussed matters of mutual interest and cooperation and collaboration in various fields.

Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan Henny Fokel de Vries has been ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan since 2022. Additional Chief Secretary Home and Senior Officials of Planning Department were also present in the meeting.

In the meeting, apart from issues related to refugees, possible opportunities for cooperation in the fields of agriculture, livestock, water resources, tourism and energy were discussed. The two Henny Fokel de Vries and Ali Amin Gandapur have agreed to identify areas of potential in the province for

mutual cooperation and develop actionable proposals for practical progress.

Ali Amin Gandapur told the visiting Ambassador that the government wants to introduce modernized development in agriculture and livestock, which is the top priority of the provincial government.

The provincial government needs to utilize modern technology to increase production in agriculture and livestock, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said.

“We would welcome the cooperation of the Netherlands Government in this regard,” Ali Amin Gandapur said. The provincial government is working on various projects for the development of agriculture and livestock sectors, the Chief Minister said.

By developing these sectors on modern lines, the problem of food security not only in the province but also in the country can be solved, the Chief Minister

said. There is immense scope for increasing agricultural and dairy production in the province, Ali Amin Gandapur said.

For this purpose, the provincial government is working on projects for the construction of small dams besides the CRBC lift canal project, Chief Minister KP informed the Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan in Islamabad.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also has vast investment opportunities in energy, minerals and tourism sectors, Ali Amin Gandapur said. The provincial government will welcome foreign investment in these sectors, the Chief Minister added.

The provincial government is giving special attention to the development of potential sectors to increase its revenue, the Chief Minister said. “We are working on strengthening our economy instead of taking loans and grants,” Chief Minister KP added.

During the voluntary return of refugees living illegally in Pakistan, the provincial government ensured the provision of all facilities to the returnees according to Pakhtun traditions, Ali Amin Gandapur informed. Not a single complaint was received during this entire phase, Ali Amin Gandapur informed her.

The provincial government is ready to give good education and technical training to Afghan youth living here with the support of international organizations so that they can stand on their own feet after returning to their homeland, the Chief Minister added.

The government and people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been hospitable to Afghan refugees for decades, says Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan Henny Fokel de Vries.

The role of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government

Traders extend support to police ahead of Muharram



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Regarding the possible cooperation with the police and other law enforcement agencies for the peaceful celebration of the upcoming Muharram, the representative delegation of the merchant community led

by Mujibur Rehman, extended their full patronage to police officials for peaceful activities.

The delegation led by president KP Traders Association Mujibur Rehman met with SSP Operations Qashif Zulfikar. SSP Operations told traders delegation

that Peshawar Police will use all available resources for the safe conduct of the coming Muharram, for which the cooperation of businessmen is also necessary. Uninterrupted operations will continue against weapons display and vehicles with black glasses.

He also thanked the traders for extending their support to conduct peaceful religious festival in provincial city and saying extra security measures have been taken before Muharram. He told traders that the installation of more CCTV cameras is going on to improve the security of the city.

Mr Zulfikar further added a special security plan will be established and also special blockades will be established at all entrances and exits. Targeted search operations are ongoing in different areas on a daily basis, while increasing police patrols in the city, daily operations are being carried out against criminals in the suburbs and adjacent areas, he added.

The other members include Aftab Ahmed, Humayun Khan, Khalil, Aziz Khan, Nisar, Khalil, Zafar Minhas, Shahid Khan and others.

Four car lifters held

PESHAWAR (APP): Police in a successful operation and timely action in the limits of Fagirabad Police Station have arrested four car lifters and recovered nine stolen vehicles from their possession, an official of the Fagirabad Police Station said here Thursday.

According to details, the Police have a grand operation inside the city premises and have succeeded in arresting four alleged accused belonging to an organized gang, a Police official said. A case has been registered against all the accused and further investigation has started.

Arrest of senior doctor condemned

PESHAWAR (APP): Teachers association of Khyber Girls Medical College (KGMCTA) and Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) have strongly condemned the arrest of a senior doctor and a teacher at Ayub medical complex Abbottabad.

In a statement the president of the association Dr Shahsawar and general secretary Dr Muhammad Shah expressed their deep grief and sorrow over the incident where an innocent teacher and ophthalmologist-Prof Dr Zulfikar was manhandled by police.

They said that following a departmental enquiry, it was revealed that Prof Zulfikar was not directly responsible for the incident and a batch of spurious injection, which was purchased by the hospital pharmacy led to the unfortunate incident.

Dr Shahsawar demanded the government and authorities concerned to immediately release the senior faculty member, Prof Dr Zulfikar

with immediate effect and take steps to restore his dignity and honour.

The KGMCTA president also demanded the Board of Governors of the hospital and administration of Ayub Medical Complex to make every effort to provide legal assistance to Prof Zulfikar.

He said the KGMCTA teachers' association stands firmly with Prof Zulfikar and will do every effort to safeguard the legitimate rights of teachers and doctors across the province.

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World Refugees Day commemorated in Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Speakers during an event on the eve of World Refugees Day said that Afghan refugees are not alone and the world stands with them, recognizing their immense courage and resilience.

The World Refugees Day, 2024 was commemorated by UNHCR in collaboration with Commissionerate Afghan Refugees (CAR). The event featured an exhibition showcasing a range of colors of Afghan culture including art and craft, music, literature, jewelry and embroidery work,

and a ceremony to acknowledge the determination, endeavors, and achievements of talented Afghan youth.

Addressing the Afghan refugees and Government authorities, the Head of UNHCR Sub-Office Peshawar, Kofi Dwomo, said “we are here to tell you (Afghan refugees) that you are not alone. The world stands with you, recognizing your immense courage and resilience.

“The Pakistani communities have opened their homes and hearts to you, and we continue to work

together to support and uplift you.” he added.

The event explicitly highlighted social cohesion between Afghan and Pakistani communities by showcasing successful stories of Afghan students thriving in Pakistani educational institutions.

The exhibition attracted government officials, UN agencies, and partner organizations. In addition, two (02) separate events were also held in Haripur and Kohat to commemorate the World Refugee Day 2024 in collaboration with CAR and partner organizations.



PESHAWAR: Deputy Country Representative UNHCR Pakistan Fumiko Kashiwa and Head of UNHCR Sub-Office in Peshawar Kofi Ohenenana Dwomo along with other officials visiting a stall during a ceremony to commemorate World Refugee Day.

PHC rejects appeal against life imprisonment

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) divisional bench comprising of Justice Arshad Ali and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah rejected appeal against lifetime imprisonment for murdering his father-in-law, in 2017 in Swabi, and upheld the sentence awarded by the trial court, on Thursday.

According to the prosecution, the convicted culprit Abdullah had killed his father-in-law named Haider over a family dispute. The police had arrested the convict and recovered the weapon used in the crime. The trial court had found the convict guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10 lakh. The convict's lawyer argued that the case against his client was baseless and there was no solid evidence against him. However, the prosecution argued that the convict was found guilty in the trial.

Drugs destroyed

PESHAWAR (APP): The Excise and Narcotics Department destroyed drugs worth Rs. 290 million under the supervision of judicial staff. The total volume of drugs was 10141 kg, the Excise Department spokesman said here Thursday.

Saif Group, Sky Electric sign contract for solar capacity enhancement

PESHAWAR, Jun 27 (APP): Kohat Textile Mills Ltd., a unit of the Saif Group of companies has signed a contract with Sky Electric (Pvt) Limited to install an additional 3 megawatts of solar capacity.

This clean and environmentally friendly project is

financed by Saudi Pak Industrial and Agricultural Investment Company Limited.

The signing ceremony took place the other day was attended by the Board of Directors of both Kohat Textile Mills Ltd. and Sky Electric (Pvt) Limited.

Speaking on the occasion,

Barrister Assad Saifullah Khan, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kohat Textile Mills Ltd., emphasized the critical need for affordable energy solutions to sustain industrial operations.

The enhancement of solar capacity by 3MW will increase the company's

existing capacity to 5.1MW. As a socially responsible corporation, the company values the positive environmental impact of this solar project.

The officials at the ceremony also highlighted the urgent need for government intervention to review and support energy policies.



In brief

Two killed in road mishap F.P. Report

BUNER: As many as two died and eight other passengers critically injured when a vehicle of a wedding procession fell down into deep mountain ravine in Muta Khan Dara mountain range of Ghazibanda area of remote Chaghorzai tehsil, Buner, on Thursday. In the incident one man and one woman died on the spot while eight people, including children and women, were badly injured. Among the dead, the man was identified as Qamreesh son of Qalood, 38 years old and the woman was identified as Mst Bakhroullah, 35 years old. Those received injuries include Zainab age 11 years, Mst (s) age 25 years, Mehran age 14 years, Asrar age 07 years, Hansah age unknown Gul Zamina age 70, Kainat age 12 and Naveed age 16. The participants of the wedding procession and nearby locals started the rescue operation by giving immediate response while on the information the teams of Rescue 1122 also reached the spot and participated in the rescue operation. The rescue teams with the help of the public took out the dead and injured and shifted them to District Headquarters Hospital Daggar. The hospital emergency unite staff provided emergency treatment to the injured. The health staff conducted the post-mortem of the victims and handed over the bodies to the next of kin for transporting native home for performing last rituals. The health staff provided first aid to the injured and for better treatment admitted to the hospital.

Two killed, 20 injured

QUETTA (INP): At least 2 people were killed and several others injured in different rain-related incidents in Balochistan's Dera Bugti district, said PDMA in a statement. According to the PDMA report, two people died and 20 people were injured due to heavy rains in the Sui area of Dera Bugti. The condition of most of the wounded is said to be critical, the report said. After the rains, emergency was declared in the hospitals to treat the injured person. Most of the areas in Dera Bugti were without electricity due to the collapse of several electricity poles. PDMA further said in its report that rescue operation has been launched by Pakistan Army, FC and PDMA in the affected areas and people have been shifted to safer places. According to the weather department, rain with wind/thundershower is also expected in Balochistan's Lasbella, Khuzdar, Awaran, Jhal Magsi, Kalat, Naseerabad, Jaffarabad, Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Zhob and Barkhan districts from 26th to 28th June.

Three injured in petrol pump fire F.P. Report

DI KHAN: Three people were injured after a fire broke out in an oil tanker here at a petrol pump on Multan road. According to Rescue 1122 spokesman, the emergency service received information that an oil tanker engulfed in flames here at a petrol pump near Kulachi-wala area on Multan road. After receiving information, the medical and fire fighter teams of Rescue 1122 rushed to the site. The fire fighters controlled the fire and saved the area from any big loss. The medical teams shifted all the three injured to hospital after providing them first medical aid. The injured were identified as Saif ur Rehman (38), resident of Gandhi-Ashiq, Ramzan (42), resident of Darvesha and Sanan (26), resident of Wandha-Maddat.

Drive against power theft continues in Mardan

F.P. Report

MARDAN: A drive against electricity theft and kunda mafia continues successfully in various parts of Mardan district. According to district administration, the operation has been launched on the directives of the provincial government and instructions of Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayaz Khan Sherpao.

Additional Assistant Commissioner-III Shagufta Sawar Aminullah Khan along with officials of the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) and police is leading the operation. The joint team conducted operations in various areas including Abid Khan Kalay, Saleem Khan, Sheikh Yousaf and Gujar Ghari. During the operation, Additional Assistant Commissioner-III met with the people and appealed for cooperation with PESCO officials against the Kunda mafia.

She emphasized the importance of timely payment of electricity bills to ensure a permanent solution to the issue of load

shedding. According to Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayaz Khan Sherpao, the district administration, in collaboration with WAPDA officials, is conducting a joint operation against electricity theft. He stated that the operation would continue until the complete elimination of electricity theft.

Police advances parents rather than acting against drug-dealers: Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Takhtbhai said that Ice-drug and other narcotics dealers are scourge for our society due to which the young generation is going towards disaster. Do not leave all the responsibility on the police. Rather, keep a close eye on all the activities of your children. He expressed these views while talking to the media at Takhtbhai Press Club.

DSP said that those who commit drug trafficking and all other crimes do not deserve any concession. Criminals are committing crimes after crimes by resorting to the courts, but the long arms of the law

will surely catch them. The police are sacrificing their lives day and night to protect the lives and property of the public which is a living proof of the utmost commitment of the police to their duty.

Meanwhile, Additional Chief Secretary Home Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abid Majeed along with Additional Inspector General of Prisons Hameed ur Rahman visited Central Jail Mardan. On his arrival at the jail, he was saluted by the armed forces of the jail police.

Superintendent Central Jail Mardan Najam Abbasi and his team welcomed the guests. The Superintendent Jail gave a detailed briefing about the Jail to the Additional Chief Secretary. According to the press release of the jail administration, the Additional Chief Secretary Home made a detailed inspection of the various sectors inside the jail including the industrial unit (marble, surf factory) and virtual courts and the facilities provided to the prisoners and the ongoing practical measures for their improvement.

Govt depts directed to clear Pesco dues till 30th

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Deputy Commissioner Wasil Khan has directed heads of all government departments to pay their electricity bills and clear the outstanding dues during the current month so that the power consumers could be supplied with uninterrupted electricity in the district.

He gave the directives while chairing a meeting regarding the Pesco arrears and recovery at his office here on Thursday. The additional deputy commissioner finance Jan Muhammad, assistant commissioner Dr Nida Iqbal, Pesco executive engineer Muhammad Zeb and representatives of different government departments were in attendance.

The XEN Pesco briefed the participants about the company's defaulters and said that various government departments, official residences, water supply tube wells and health facilities had to pay millions of rupees. He also briefed the meeting about power outage schedules on different feeders and details of line losses. The XEN said that most of the feeders tripped due to high temperature in summer that caused faults on transmission lines. He said Pesco had to cut the power supply to remove the faults.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Wasil Khan directed all government departments to immediately clear their arrears. He said that disciplinary actions would be taken against the officers for failing to clear their dues. The DC also directed the XEN

Pesco to disconnect the power supply of the dysfunctional tube wells. He asked the Pesco to reconcile the dues and make sure that there was no more than 12 hours of power outage. The DC said the Pesco should remove faults on the lines as soon as possible and inform the consumers on social media about the fault. He said the district administration would fully cooperate with the Pesco in its recovery drive.

Meanwhile the assistant commissioner Dr Nida Iqbal visited various filling stations in Balambat and Timergara and checked the rates, gauge, legal documents and fire extinguishing equipment. The AC sealed a petrol pump in Balambat for keeping no documents and low gauge. She also warned the owners of legal action if they failed to produce documents and were found to be overcharging customers. The AC also sealed some shops for filling illegal LPG in vehicles on the Timergara bypass road.

Abdominal tumor removed from body of lady: Prominent surgeon, Dr Abdul Rehman successfully removed a 14.5 kilograms tumor from the abdomen of a 65-years old lady suffering from severe pain at a private medical hospital in Timergara here the other day. According to hospital sources, the elderly woman hailing from the Munda area was brought to the facility with severe abdominal pain whose medical examination and CT scans suggested a large abdominal tumor in her body.

Hazrat Usman martyrdom day observed F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: On the occasion of the martyrdom of Hazrat Syedna Usman Ghani Zul Noorin on the 18th of Zul-Hijj by the Shahdaddot Ahl-Sunnat wa-ul-Jamaat Council arranged magnificent rally from Madrasa Jamia Haidriya in the Waggan town of Qamber Shahdaddot, passing from different roads.

The traffic coming to different cities of Sindh was suspended for a few hours. Addressing the rally, leaders Hafiz Muhammad Ishaq Chana, Muhammad Nawaz Solangi, Maulana Manzoor Solangi, Molvi Ghulam Nabi Chandio, Abdul Qayyum Buledi, Maulana Muhammad Ali Zehri, Maulana Qadir Chandio, Lutfullah Siddiqui, Zafarullah Haidari and others addressed and said that 18th of Zil Hajj should be observed as a public holiday on the martyrdom of Hazrat Usman Ghani Zul Noorin because the Companions suffered hardships for the sake of religion.



THATTA: A view of large number of people suffering from hot days visits Keenjhar Lake to take some sign of relief.

Action against fraudulent relative sought F.P. Report

NEWSHERA: The residents of Ghanderi area of Nowshera including Syed Qamar along with his son Fazal Akbar and nephew Irshad that their relative Asad had illegally occupied their land and property.

This they claimed while addressing press conference at Nowshera press club and that Asad had fraudulently obtained their signatures on a stamp paper, which he used to transfer the ownership of the land to himself. They also alleged that Asad had sold the trees on the land for 12 lakh rupees and had kept the money for himself.

The affected individuals claimed that they had given 22 jerb of agricultural land to Asad on rent, but he had occupied the land and was refusing to return it. They also alleged that Asad had taken possession of their residential house, which was worth 15 marlas, and was not returning it despite repeated requests.

The residents appealed to the Inspector General of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the DIG of Mardan Region, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowshera, and the high officials of the Revenue Department to help them retrieve their occupied land and property from Asad. They claimed that they had filed multiple complaints with the police, but no action had been taken against the fraudulent.

LMC presents Rs3b budget for 2024-25 F.P. Report

LARKANA: A revised budget for financial year 2022-23 and the proposed budget for the year 2024-25 under Sindh Local Government Rules Budget 2017 were presented in the House of Larkana Municipal Corporation (LMC), meeting held at conference hall, on Thursday.

Residents demand action against land grabber

Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: The residents of four villages in Khudrah area of Nowshera, including Amiro, Askhel, Gajju Khel, and Shagai demanded actions against land grabber (Abdul Qayyum) as police provides protection to him.

This claimed by resident including Imran, Amjeer Shah, Zahoor Ahmad, Fazal Subhan and Abdul Razzaq along with large numbers of elders and accused Abdul Qayyum for illegally occupying

their land and stealing their livestock. The residents claim that Abdul Qayyum has used his influence to take over their land and build a garden, and has also stolen their cattle, goats, and other animals.

The residents have filed multiple complaints with the police, providing evidence of the illegal occupation and theft, but no action has been taken due to Abdul Qayyum's influence. They claimed that the police have been bribed or intimidated into silence.

The residents, who are

mostly farmers and herders, have been facing significant financial losses due to the theft of their livestock and the occupation of their land. They have appealed to the government and the media to help them get justice and recover their losses.

The situation has created tension in the area, with the residents vowing to take matters into their own hands if the government fails to act. The speakers threatened to hold protests and demonstrations if their demands are not met.

Importance of interfaith harmony stressed

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad called upon Ulama belongs to different school of thought, civil society and members of District Interfaith Harmony and Peace Committee to play their positive and responsible role to promote interfaith harmony, tolerance, brotherhood to ensure peace during holy month of Muharram-ul-Haram.

She was addressing the meeting of District Interfaith Harmony and Peace Committee Hafizabad. District Police Officer Faisal Gulzar, ADCG Hammadullah, Ulama, representatives of civil society and minorities also attended the meeting. She said that Islam is the religion of peace, love and tolerance and Suprem Sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain and his companion give lesson us lesson of peace, love, tolerance and Interfaith Harmony.

DC said that cleanliness and other basic facilities would be provided on routes of processions and places of Majalis whereas CCTV cameras would also be installed to keep vigilant eye upon anti-social elements and miscreants. She

said that officers and subordinate staff of Municipal Committees and other departments would perform their duties to provide all necessary facilities to mourners and to ensure protection of processions and Majilis.

DC urged the members peace committee, Ulama and civil society to continue their pivotal role to maintain traditional peace during the holy month of Muharram-ul-Haram. Ulama, representatives of minority and civil society assured the meeting that they would continue their cooperation for promoting Interfaith Harmony, love and tolerance to ensure peace during the Muharram-ul-Haram. DPO said that foolproof security arrangements were being made and all routs of processions would be sealed with fence wire and berries.

Meanwhile, the first Inter-sects Peace Sports Festival started at Hafizabad under District Sports Department Hafizabad. Deputy Commissioner Sundas Irshad inaugurated the festival at Sports Gymnasium. AC and organizer Sports Festival Munawar Hussain, District sports Officer Nabila Cheema, Tehsil Population Officer Sajida Mushtaq,

DEO Elementary Education Samina Yasmeen and students of different religious seminaries participated inaugural ceremony.

Addressing on this occasion, DC said that first time Inter-sects Peace Sports Festival is arranged for providing healthy recreational opportunities to students of different seminaries in the district Hafizabad and a large number of students are participating in the festival which was a good omen and commendable. She expressed her hope with holding of Inter-sects Sports Festival, Intersect harmony, brotherhood and tolerance would promote among all religious sects. DSO Nabila Cheem told that students of 14 religious seminaries are participating in this sports festival.

Anti-Drug Abuse Day observed: International Anti-Drugs Abuse and Illicit Trafficking observed here on Wednesday. In this connection, District administration and Education Department arranged a walk from office of the Education Department to DC office to create awareness among people regarding to save new generation from menace of drugs trafficking and use of narcotics.

Saiful Malook lake laps visitors into pipe-dreams with fairyworld thoughts with serenity

MANSEHRA (APP): With seasonal pre monsoon flowers start budding amid hide and seek between sun and clouds over the lofty mountains of Malaka Parbath in Kaghan valley housing an oval shape famous Saiful Malook Lake with crystal greenish-blue water strikes eyes and minds of tourists with a unique sense of ecstasy.

Known for fairytales, the Saiful Malook Lake leaves mesmerizing effects and laps visitors into pipe-dream with fairy world's thoughts popping up with peace and serenity after entering the natural wonder spreading on 1.06 square miles having 113 feet depth and 3,224 meters height from sea-level following completion of boredom of tedious journey from plain areas of Pakistan to the picturesque Kaghan valley.

Named after Persian Prince Saiful Malook, the lake's waterfall emanating from nearby glaciers of Malaka Parbath on its northeast leaves enduring effects on the minds and souls of hundreds of thousands of tourists and nature lovers every year.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, a noted historian and poet in his book 'Fairytale of Saiful Malook' has narrated about Prince Saiful Malook and fairy

princes Badriul Jamala during his visit to the lake. He explained about the epic romance of Prince Malook when he fell in love with fairy prince Badriul Jamala during his visit to this famous lake of Pakistan.

"I have visited many lakes in world but the gripping natural beauty, oval shape and clean-greenish blue-water of Saiful Malook lake of upper Kaghan has impressed me the most," said former Ambassador Manzoorul Haq while talking to APP. "Saiful Malook Lake is my ideal tourist place due to its fairytales, unique natural beauty and better road connectivity than others lakes of KP," he said, adding it was my third trip to Saiful Malook.

"Families can easily come here to spend sometimes in its relaxed environment before exploring the nearby Anso and Dudipatsar lakes in Upper Kaghan through jeeps and horse riding with great fun and excitement. Besides Saiful Malook, he said the natural beauty of teardrop-shaped Anso lake being considered the highest lake of Hamalya region with 4,126 meter height of the sea level, Payala lake with 2,895 meters elevation, Payala lake with 3410 meters height Siri lake with 2,590 meters alti-

tude, Dudipatsar lake with 3,800 meters elevation and Dudibach Star lake in Kaghan valley captive adventure sports enthusiasts.

"Saiful Malook is the identity of Pakistan. I am disappointed to see garbage and polythene bags thrown by visitors at premises of these picturesque lakes," he said, adding it was the collective responsibility of Kaghan Development Authority (KDA), Wildlife Department and District Administration to ensure and maintain its cleanliness and make it pollution-free.

In international practice, he said that vehicles are parked outside of the lakes' premises in order to maintain its ecology and protect it from plastic pollution, adding there are a need for construction of parking areas outside of the premises of Saiful Malook, Mahudhand and others national lakes to protect it from pollution. Muhammad Ali Syed, General Manager, KP Culture and Tourism Authority told APP that Pakistan is home to many natural and manmade lakes and reservoirs including South Asia's largest Manchar lake spread on 260 square kilometers in Sindh province besides the country's biggest Paristan lake in Skardu and

Shimshal lake in Hunza Gigit Baltistan with 4,272 meters height draw domestic tourists in droves.

He said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is blessed with around 100 small and big natural, manmade and reservoirs lakes including the world's 33rd highest natural Lake of Karambar with 4,272 meters height of above sea level and 3.9 kilometer length that could be accessed through Broghal valley in Chitral. He said Swat was going to become tourism capital of the country due to its seven unique features including snow clad mountains peaks, trout fish, river, snowfall, Swat Motorway, waterfalls and lakes.

The Swat's Mahodand Lake with 2,900 meters height at Ushu Valley Kalam carried unique features including brown and rainbow trout and camping besides Spin Khwar and Kundal lakes take tourists into lap of serenity. Khanpoor Lake in Haripur is most suitable for water sports and paragliding, Tanda dam lake Kohat for ecotourism and Turbella lake Haripur for adventure sports. Muhammad Ali Syed said lakes of small dams including Tanda Kohat, Jalozai Nowshera, Kundal Swabi, Chatri Haripur

and Jangza Abbottabad have been selected for development of recreational spots to promote ecotourism. He said a road from Maidan to Bishigram lake would be constructed while jeep track at Kandal lake has been built.

Mahudhand lake would be converted into a model ecotourism resort with provision of enhanced facilities to tourists there. According to Tourism and Culture Authority officials, a mega project worth was launched to construct walking tracks, wood boats, huts, parking area, camping pods and others facilitation services at Mahudhand lake.

The small and medium lakes in premises of Mohudhand would be interconnected after construction of small arch bridges that would enhance its natural outlook. Besides developing four Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZ) at Mankiyal Valley, Thandyani Abbottabad, Ganol Manshera and Madaklasht Lower Chitral with financial assistance of the World Bank, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has decided to construct two roads to connect ITZs Mankiyal and Thandyani onward with Swat and Hazara Motorway that would open up these lakes for tourists.

Jeepable tracks in 16 districts mostly in Malakand and Hazara divisions would be constructed to make these lakes accessible for families throughout the year. Similarly, 10 new camping pods in tourism sites would be established where tourists coming to explore these lakes would be provided accommodation. Salahuddin Khan, Divisional Wildlife Officer told APP that Saiful Malook lake spreading on 12,026 acres had been brought under the national park established under the preservation, protection and management Act 1975 passed in 2003.

He said a project for Saiful Malook national park has been approved under which a parking complex and gate would be constructed besides purchase of machinery and equipment for its cleanliness and maintenance and establishment offices for wildlife staff there. Under Prime Minister's Protected Areas initiative, he said KP was the first province providing national parks services to people and all development as well as administrative affairs of the national parks would be look after by separate DFOs to protect its ecology, alpine ecosystem and wildlife habitats.



Bolivian president thanks people after facing down failed coup attempt

LA PAZ: Amid international outcry, an apparent coup attempt in Bolivia has subsided, with President Luis Arce asserting his authority over the country's military. Troops led by army general commander Juan Jose Zuniga had stormed the presidential palace and taken up positions in the square outside. News reports indicated a tank slammed the palace doors.

But within hours, Zuniga urged the soldiers to withdraw, after leaders from around the world blasted the army's actions as illegal. President Arce hailed the withdrawal as a victory for Bolivia's democracy and addressed the country's citizens in the aftermath, some of whom had taken to the streets in protest of the alleged coup attempt. "Many thanks to the Bolivian people," said Arce. "Long live democracy."

Dramatic footage on Bolivian television showed Arce facing down Zuniga and a group of soldiers in a palace hallway. "I am your captain, and I order you to withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination," Arce said. The news agency Reuters reported that Zuniga was ultimately arrested. Since taking office in 2020, President Arce has led an embattled government, fending off pressure from both the left and the right.

Under his leadership, right-wing forces in provinces like Santa Cruz have led deadly strikes against measures they believe are designed to keep them from power. Just last year, a prominent opposition leader, Luis Fernando Camacho, was arrested for his alleged role in 2019's political arrest. And on the left, President Arce faces pushback from his former political mentor, ex-President Evo Morales, who has declared his intention to replace Arce in the 2025 presidential race. Adding to the political turmoil has been nationwide fuel shortages and a financial crisis that has seen its currency reserves crater.

"The president of the country is in a

bit of a problem, in the sense that he's got low approval ratings. The last one in March, he was at 38 percent. The economy's not doing well at all. And he's also involved in a protracted battle with Evo Morales, the ex-president of the country," explained Al Jazeera correspondent John Holman. "So this is a difficult time for President Luis Arce." Zuniga was Arce's hand-picked leader for Bolivia's military. But as he entered the presidential palace, Zuniga cited the malaise in the country as a motivation. "The three chiefs of the armed forces have come to express our dismay. There will be a new cabinet of ministers. Surely things will change, but our country cannot continue like this any longer," Zuniga told a local TV station.

"Stop destroying, stop impoverishing our country, stop humiliating our army." The general added that he would continue to recognise Arce as the commander-in-chief "for now". But he explained that his aim was to "restore democracy" and "free political prisoners". Local media reports indicated that Arce had stripped Zuniga of his role atop the country's military earlier in the week, fuelling tensions between the two leaders.

But as armed soldiers and armoured vehicles filled the Plaza Murillo in the centre of the capital La Paz, the backlash came swiftly. The country's largest labour union announced an indefinite strike in defence of Arce's government. Videos circulating on social media appear to show crowds of people chasing away pro-coup forces. Former President Morales also denounced the military's actions, calling for criminal prosecution against Zuniga and anyone who helped him. "We will not allow the armed forces to violate democracy and intimidate people," he said.

Even the right-wing leader who replaced Morales, former President Jeanine Anez, rejected the military's advances. "Total repudiation of the

military mobilisation in the Plaza Murillo, attempting to destroy the constitutional order," she wrote on the social media platform X, adding that Arce "must leave through the vote in 2025". From the presidential palace, Arce broadcast a video presenting a united front, standing alongside all his ministers. He pledged to "confront any attempt that threatens our democracy". "To the Bolivian people and the entire international community, our country today is facing an attempted coup d'etat," Arce said in the video. "The Bolivian people are called today. We need the Bolivian people to organise and mobilise against the coup d'etat in favour of democracy. We cannot allow once again coup attempts to take Bolivian lives. Scenes brought alarm to the Andean nation, where ex-President Morales has long maintained he was removed from office in a 2019 coup after he ran for a fourth term in office. Bolivia has had a long history of political unrest since it gained independence in 1825. Kathryn Ledebur of the Andean Information Network said of all the South American nations, Bolivia is considered the one that has experienced the most coups.

"But it enjoyed a very long period of democracy until the 2019 coup," she explained in an interview with Al Jazeera. "I think it's very important to remember that Bolivia had an illegal government with the support of the military and a coup in 2019." That, she said, has fed scepticism among the public towards the armed forces, something reflected on the streets of La Paz. "The military has a bad reputation," Ledebur said. While she acknowledged some military officers were charged with crimes, the institution itself "didn't receive significant legal consequences or any sort of punishment or restructuring after this very anti-democratic activity in 2019 and 2020". Actions, however, send a strong signal about the continued threat that the military may pose,



Ledebur added. "It's a very very clear sign that the army is not firmly entrenched in democracy, nor the rest of the armed forces."

Photos from The Associated Press showed soldiers clearing away journalists near the presidential palace during the alleged coup. Ultimately, President Arce replaced General Zuniga with Jose Wilson Sanchez, who ordered all mobilised troops to return to their barracks. "No one wants the images we're seeing in the streets," Wilson Sanchez said. The public prosecutor's office said it will open a criminal investigation into those behind the failed attempt against the government.

As images of the alleged coup started to circulate across the globe, world leaders from countries like Brazil, Mexico and Colombia expressed alarm and denounced what they considered an attack on democracy. "We express the strongest condemnation of

the attempted coup d'etat in Bolivia," said Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a popular left-wing leader. Honduran President Xiomara Castro, meanwhile, called the mobilisation a "criminal coup d'etat". Gabriel Boric, the president of the neighbouring country of Chile, issued his own statement: "We cannot tolerate any breach of the legitimate constitutional order in Bolivia or anywhere else."

But the condemnation stretched well beyond Latin America. A White House spokesperson said the United States "urges calm and restraint". European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said his organisation "expresses its solidarity with the Bolivian government and people". The Organization of American States (OAS) - an international group comprised of 32 member states - also weighed in

with an appeal to the military. "We condemned the events in Bolivia. The army must submit itself to the legitimately elected civil power," OAS leader Luis Almagro said while the turmoil unfolded.

Holman, the Al Jazeera correspondent, warned that the outpouring of support did not mean that President Arce's troubles were over. As General Zuniga was arrested, Holman explained that the military leader made unverified allegations that this apparent coup was organised by Arce himself to boost his dismal approval ratings. "For now, stability of a sort returns," Holman said. "It's a really difficult, combustible situation right now in a country that has become deeply divided and polarised. The fact that whatever happened this afternoon has ended isn't going to take away the explosive nature from the country." - Aljazeera

Germany moves to ease the deportation of foreigners

BERLIN (AP): Germany's government launched new legislation to ease the deportation of foreigners who publicly approve of terrorist acts. Under the law, a single comment on social media could provide grounds for kicking people out.

The measure approved by the Cabinet was pledged by Chancellor Olaf Scholz following a knife attack last month on members of a group that describes itself as opposing "political Islam," an assault that left a police officer dead. It comes as Scholz's government faces broader pressure to curb migration.

The Interior Ministry said that the law on residence will be changed so that approving or promoting "a single terrorist crime" is grounds for a "particularly serious interest in expulsion." That means that in future a single comment that "glorifies

and endorses a terrorist crime on social media" could constitute a reason for expulsion. Anyone who publicly approves of an offense "in a manner which is suited to causing a disturbance of the public peace" could also be expelled, and a conviction would not be required. Liking a social media post would not be sufficient grounds for deportation, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said.

Faeser said that Hamas' acts during its Oct. 7 attack on Israel have been "celebrated in a repugnant way" on social media in Germany, and the attack in Mannheim "also was glorified on the net by many in the most appalling way." "Such brutalization online stokes a climate of violence that can drive extremists to new acts of violence," Faeser added. "So it's very clear to me that Islamist

agitators who mentally live in the Stone Age have no place in our country. Anyone who has no German passport and glorifies terrorist acts here must, wherever possible, be expelled and deported."

She said she was confident that lawmakers will approve the change soon, and that she didn't see it falling foul of freedom of speech laws. The government faces ongoing pressure to reduce the number of migrants coming to and staying in Germany. Earlier this year, lawmakers approved legislation that is intended to ease deportations of unsuccessful asylum-seekers.

At the same time, Scholz's socially liberal administration is easing the rules on gaining citizenship and ending restrictions on holding dual citizenship. It says the plan will bolster the integration of immigrants and help

attract skilled workers, while opposition conservatives have argued that it cheapens German citizenship. Faeser defended the new naturalization law, which takes effect on Thursday. The legislation stipulates that people being naturalized must be able to support themselves and their relatives. The existing law requires that would-be citizens be committed to the "free democratic fundamental order," and the new version specifies that antisemitic and racist acts are incompatible with that.

The government has said that issues such as antisemitism, Israel's right to exist and Jewish life in Germany are being given a greater weight in the citizenship test applicants have to undergo. Faeser said that, by that measure, "we have made obtaining German citizenship more difficult."

Zelenskyy visits front-line troops

KYIV (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Commander in Chief Oleksandr Syrskiy visited troops in the eastern Donetsk region who have weathered fierce Russian ground and air assaults in recent months. The Kremlin's army has escalated its efforts to dislodge exhausted and outgunned Ukrainian forces holding eastern and north-eastern areas. It aims to capture more land during spring and summer as muddy fields have dried out, allowing heavy military equipment to roll into key positions across the countryside.

Russia illegally annexed parts of Donetsk and three other regions in 2022 shortly after it invaded Ukraine, and the Kremlin regards taking control of all of Donetsk as a priority. Moscow is looking to exploit its advantages in troops and weaponry before Ukraine can get promised additional Western supplies to the front. Civilians have also felt the force of Russia's onslaught. Ahead of Zelenskyy's visit, Russian forces dropped a powerful glide bomb on the Donetsk city of Selydove, causing extensive damage to 37 homes, six multi-story buildings and administrative infrastructure, regional authorities said. They reported no injuries.

Over the previous 24 hours, the Russian military shelled 20 Donetsk region settlements, killing one person and injuring at least nine, regional head Vadym Filashkin said. About 250 people have been evacuated from their homes in the Donetsk region, officials said. Zelenskyy also discussed with local officials the public drinking water supply, social issues, evacuation plans and the rebuilding of local homes, he said.

Zelenskyy signaled he wants a better response from Kyiv officials overseeing those matters. He didn't elaborate on the perceived problems and which officials he would speak to. Zelenskyy has frequently visited front-line areas during the war. His said his trip to the Donetsk region was to introduce the new commander of the Joint Forces Command, Andrii Hnatov. Hnatov replaced Yuriy Sodal, who had held the position since February 2023. Zelenskyy didn't give a reason for the change, but it came after the widely admired chief of staff of the Azov brigade, Bohdan Koryevych, released a statement rebuking an unnamed general for having "killed more Ukrainian soldiers than any Russian general," in what was seen as a reference to incompetent management of troops. Several Ukrainian media outlets, quoting unidentified sources in the armed forces, said he was referring to Sodal.

Opposition activists arrested in Mali moved to prisons

BAMAKO, Mali (AP): Opposition politicians who were arrested in a crackdown in Mali were sent to prisons across the country this week, their families said, in a move rights groups decried as another step back for the country where the ruling junta has suspended all political activities. Mali, a landlocked nation in the semiarid region of Sahel, has been embroiled in political instability that swept across West and Central Africa over the last decade. The nation has seen two military coups since 2020 as an insurgency by jihadi groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group worsened. The junta has ruled the country with an iron fist, and earlier this year suspended all political activities.

The eleven opposition politicians were arrested earlier this month during a meeting in a private residence, the Malian National Human Rights Commission, a government agency, said in a statement, denouncing what it called "arbitrary arrests" and "violations of private homes." A family member of one of the detainees said that they were divided into two groups, one sent to Koulikoro prison, 60 kilometers (37 miles) from Bamako, and the other to a new prison 70 kilometers (43 miles) from Bamako. The family member spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions from authorities.

The dissidents are held

on charges of attacks and conspiracy against the government, opposition to legitimate authority and breach of public order, but they haven't been tried yet, a judicial official said. Ousmane Diallo, Dakar-based researcher on the Sahel region at Amnesty International, a rights group, said the arrests demonstrated "the pattern of abuse of civil and political rights" in Mali since February.

"We denounce the crackdown on the opposition politicians in Mali, the dissolution of political parties and suspension of all political activities," Diallo said. "We denounce how the security and intelligence services and sheer force have been used to clamp down on any possibility for Malian citizens to share their political views." In April, the junta issued a decree suspending all activities by political parties and "associations of political nature" in the name of maintaining public order. The political parties appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, but it is not clear when the appeal would be considered.

It's becoming increasingly perilous to express dissatisfaction with the Malian authorities, experts said, with those who dare to speak out risking arrest. Journalists and activists have also disappeared, only to return later, while many media correspondents have left Mali because they were not allowed to work. The

junta is driving the country toward "a political impasse," said Alioune Tine, the founder of the AfrikaJom Center, a research organization and UN expert on human rights in Mali. "The complex security crisis can be resolved by bringing Malians together, respecting political and democratic pluralism, but not by the dogmatic use of repression against all political dissent."

Earlier this month, a coalition of political parties opposed to the junta, Appel du 31 Mars, called on citizens to demonstrate against the shortage of electricity in Bamako and the high living costs, and to demand a return of constitutional order. Only one person showed up to cover the event - Yeri Bocoum, a young social media activist.

The next day, Bocoum wrote on Facebook that he was being followed by unidentified men and threatened. A day later, on June 8, as he was leaving his house in the city of Kati, the junta's stronghold, he was kidnapped. "He left his house at 2 p.m. on June 8, and a few hundred meters away, armed men arrested him and asked local people watching the scene to go back into their homes and close their doors," his sister, Kadidia Bocoum, told The Associated Press. "The men who kidnapped him took him and his car away." The family reached out to the authorities but has not heard from him since, Bocoum said.

Reform candidate defends calling Putin 'very good'

LONON (BBC): A Reform UK general election candidate who described Russian president Vladimir Putin as "very good" has clarified his comments. When asked about remarks he gave at a hustings event, Julian Malins said the leader was a "good Russian president" but not a good man "in the Christian sense".

Mr Malins is standing to be MP in Salisbury, a Wiltshire town where a woman was poisoned and later died after a suspected Russian nerve agent attack. Leader of Reform UK, Nigel Farage, said he did not agree with the original comment, but he did not want party candidates to be told what to think. Mr Malins told a hustings event he had met Mr Putin, the Salisbury Journal reported, "I have actually met Putin and had a 10-minute chat with him, and he seemed very good," Mr Malins reportedly said. When asked about the comments by BBC Radio Wiltshire, he said: "He's a very popular Russian presi-

dent - as such, he's a good Russian president. "It doesn't follow in the Christian sense he's a good man, of course not."

BBC Radio Wiltshire asked Mr Malins about his remarks in context of the 2018 Salisbury nerve-agent attack. He said: "The poisoning was a wicked act, unquestionably, and caused immense damage to this city." The Kremlin has always denied any responsibility for the attack. Speaking about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mr Malins said Mr Putin needed to be involved in negotiations to end the war and called for "diplomacy". He talked about the thousands of people being killed and wounded and said "the adults in the room should be negotiating, not escalating". "He's the president of the country with the largest land mass on the planet. "Simply to categorise him as a wicked person with whom we can't deal is absurd," Mr Malins added. Responding to the candidate's initial comments

calling Mr Putin "very good", Mr Farage said: "I don't agree with it, but do I want a political party to be full of nodding donkeys who were told what they must and must not think? No I don't."

It is not the first time the party leader has had to address comments made by candidates. Melksham & Devizes candidate Malcolm Cupis described women dancing in a music video in derogatory terms on social media, calling one a "malignant old hag". Mr Cupis told the BBC he stood by his comments. He said of the video: "This disgusting performance should not be available to... children. It demeans girls and encourages misogyny in boys." Responding to Mr Cupis' language, Nigel Farage said: "It's not polite, but you've got to remember something: we're a start-up and we're going to have one or two candidates who are a bit rough round the edges." "All political parties have these problems," he added.

'Breathing smoke': Brazil's Pantanal wetlands hit by record fires

CORUMBA (AFP): Erica Cristina has been "breathing in smoke every day" since a large fire broke out across the river from the city of Corumba, the gateway to Brazil's Pantanal, the world's largest tropical wetlands. The blaze, which filled the bar she owns with soot, is one of hundreds burning in the vast, wildlife-rich Pantanal which is experiencing record fires for this time of year.

"It's chaotic," the 44-year-old told AFP in central-western Corumba, where the fire last week turned the sky bright red. Originally from Rio de Janeiro, this long-time resident of the Pantanal region said increasing fires were making the situation for residents "worse with the passing of the years." "Many people lost their homes" in fires since 2020 -

- the worst year on record for blazes in the region -- and "the main problems are due to health, respiratory problems," said Cristina.

In the first half of this year, satellites recorded more than 3,300 fires in the region slightly bigger than England, 33 percent more than in 2020. Experts say that the blazes result from harsh drought linked to climate change and deliberate fires set to expand agricultural land into the forest burning out of control. The Pantanal, which extends into Bolivia and Paraguay, is home to millions of caimans, parrots, giant otters and the world's highest density of jaguars. Seasonal flooding across plains, marshes, savannahs and forest areas during the rainy season is crucial to the biodiverse ecosystem.

Environment Minister Marina Silva warned that

the Pantanal was facing "one of the worst situations ever seen." "We did not have the usual floods or the gap between El Nino and La Nina," two weather phenomena that affect rainfall, she said. A study published by the MapBiomas network said the wet surface of the Pantanal was 61 percent drier than the historical average last year. The drought "caused a large amount of organic matter at the combustion point to cause these fires," said Silva, who will visit the region on Friday.

The fires are hitting new records even before the peak of the dry season. "Strong winds, the fire and the heat usually start in August," but "it hasn't rained in the region for 50 days," Bruno Bellan, a 25-year-old rancher, told AFP. Bellan has 900 head of cattle on his family farm in

Mato Grosso do Sul State, home to much of the wetlands, which declared a state of emergency over the fires. His property is two kilometers (1.2 miles) from one large blaze which firefighters have struggled to access.

"We are worried that the fire will enter the farm and cause destruction. The cattle are afraid and could get lost in the flames," said Bellan. Retired soldier Naldinei Ivan Ojeda, 53, said he was considering leaving his hometown due to the breathing problems he and his 15-year-old son have experienced. He points the blame squarely at the people who start the fires, rather than the dry conditions that spur them along. "There are no accidental fires in the Pantanal. I have never seen a fire come out of nowhere here. Every year, it is the same."

Honduras ex-president sentenced to 45 years for helping drug traffickers

NEW YORK: Juan Orlando Hernandez, the former president of Honduras once seen as an important US ally with tough-on-crime politics, has been sentenced to 45 years in prison for his conviction on drugs and weapons charges.

A Manhattan jury in March found Hernandez, 55, guilty of accepting millions of dollars in bribes to protect United States-bound cocaine shipments belonging to traffickers he once publicly proclaimed to combat. US District Judge Kevin Castel passed down the sentence in

a Manhattan courtroom.

"I am innocent," the 55-year-old Hernandez, who led the Central American nation from 2014 until 2022, said at his sentencing. "I was wrongly and unjustly accused." Hondurans at home and abroad had cheered the conviction, celebrating it as a rare instance of accountability for corruption and deceit by a member of the country's ruling class. In March, the jury found that the former leader, often known by his initials JOH, had taken millions of dollars in bribes to shield large ship-

ments of cocaine bound for the US.

Prosecutors had asked for a life sentence, arguing that it would send a firm message to other politicians who use their power to protect powerful criminal groups. "Without corrupt politicians like the defendant, the kind of large-scale, international drug trafficking at issue in this case, and the rampant drug-related violence that follows, is difficult if not impossible," prosecutors wrote. During a two-week trial, prosecutors said Hernandez used drug money

to bribe officials and manipulate voting results during Honduras's 2013 and 2017 presidential elections. Several convicted traffickers testified they bribed Hernandez. Testifying in his own defence, Hernandez denied taking bribes from drug cartels.

His lawyers, meanwhile, accused the convicted traffickers of being out for revenge over Hernandez's anti-drug policies. JOH's brother Tony Hernandez was sentenced to life in prison in the US in 2021 on drug charges. — Aljazeera

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Trump's backers are probing for weaknesses

THE Carter Center, founded by former president Jimmy Carter, normally sends election observers to countries such as Sierra Leone, Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This fall, the group will deploy nonpartisan monitors in Michigan, Arizona and, yes, Georgia — not the country but the state where the group is based. Such vigilance, in the world's oldest democracy, reflects the corrosive downstream effects of former president Donald Trump's years of relentless election denialism.

Mostly under the radar, Trump backers in some key states are probing for weaknesses in the nation's decentralized election administration system. For example, Mr. Trump's allies appear to be exploring whether county-level officials can block the certification of vote tallies, if the election doesn't go their way.

The United States has more than 3,000 counties. Dragging out certification in one could create a cascading problem in which a state is unable to certify its results by the Dec. 17 deadline to cast its electoral votes so that they can be sent to the Capitol for counting on Jan. 6, 2025. If no candidate receives 270 electoral votes, the House might be forced to pick the president — with each state's delegation getting one vote, a system that favors Republicans.

The Electoral Count Reform Act that passed in 2022 addressed weaknesses exposed by Mr. Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election. State legislatures will find it harder to block certification, and the threshold is higher for members of Congress to block the counting of electoral votes a state submits. Yet, while significant and valuable, the bipartisan measure did not address every vulnerability.

That's why it's concerning that county-level officials have tried to block the certification of vote tallies in five battleground states since 2020. The Post's Amy Gardner, Patrick Marley and Colby Itkowitz report that deep-pocketed, pro-Trump groups are backing these efforts, including a test case underway in Georgia's Fulton County, home to Atlanta and the first presidential debate on Thursday. Courts in Pennsylvania are also considering whether local boards must include in their certification totals ballots with certain errors, after local election boards in three counties withheld thousands of votes two years ago. (Certification doesn't forestall litigation or other challenges.)

Fortunately, none of the efforts has succeeded — so far. Some states have strict rules limiting county election boards' autonomy for just this reason. Two commissioners in rural Arizona face criminal charges for refusing to certify midterm results. "Last month in Michigan's Delta County, the Board of Canvassers voted not to certify local results," The Post reports. "A similar attempt to not certify May election results occurred in Nevada in Washoe County, home to Reno. ... Officials cited mistrust in election machines or ballot errors but offered no evidence of widespread fraud. In all four, certification proceeded after state intervention."

These machinations come as Mr. Trump refuses to commit to abide by the 2024 results, a reprise of his posture in 2016 and 2020. At their first debate four years ago, Joe Biden expressed confidence that Mr. Trump would accept the results after all the ballots were counted. "That'll be the end of it," he said. Unfortunately, Mr. Biden was wrong. Exit polls in the GOP nominating contests showed that a majority of Republicans have embraced the lie that the president did not win legitimately. Two-thirds of Iowa caucus-goers said so, for example.

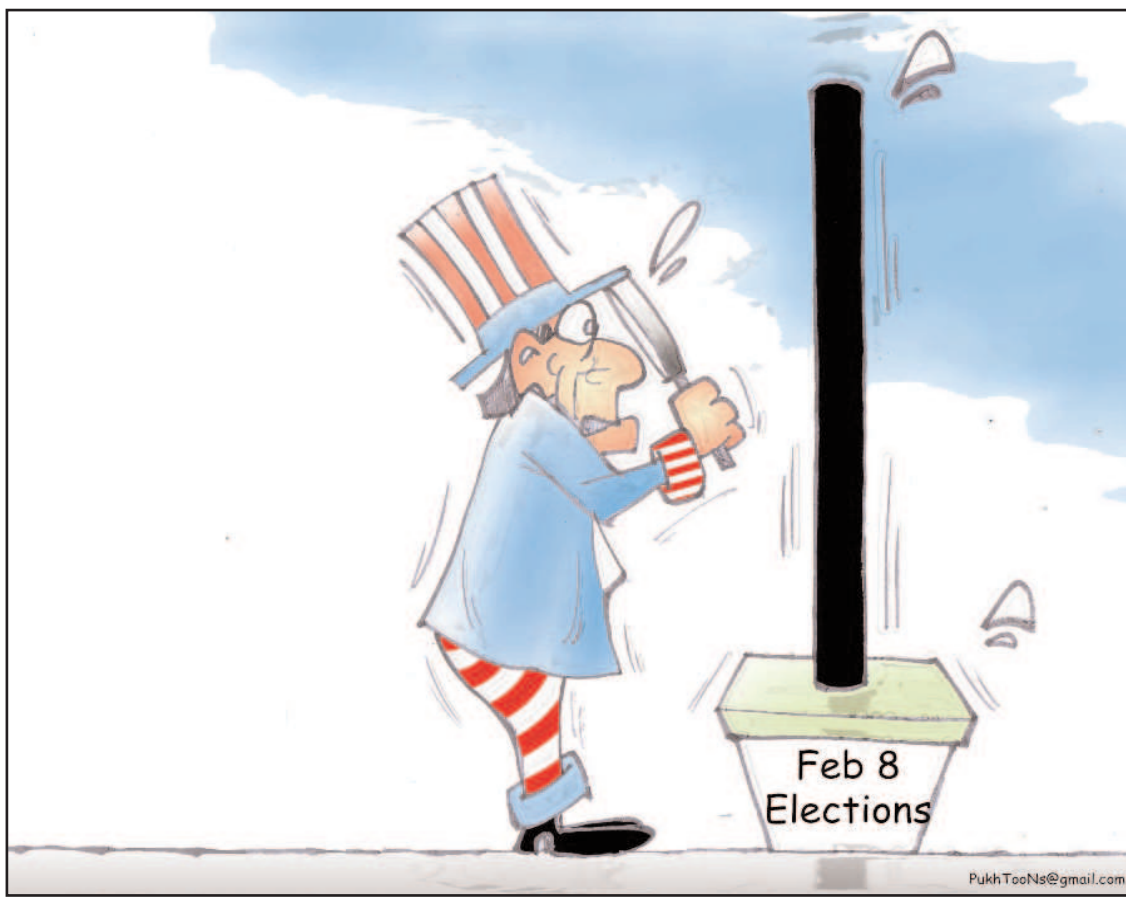
Mr. Trump demanded that the Republican National Committee make "election integrity" its No. 1 priority as he ousted its chairwoman earlier this year. The RNC announced plans last week to enlist at least 100,000 poll watchers, workers and election judges for November. Training sessions are being held in every battleground. In one welcome contrast to four years ago, however, the national GOP is embracing early, mail-in voting — something Mr. Trump previous called "corrupt," even as he cast his own ballot that way.

To be clear, many elections officials, and legions of lawyers in both parties, are preparing earnestly for the 2024 vote. Some state election administrators have identified voters in key jurisdictions who might serve as plaintiffs in emergency lawsuits demanding that county boards certify results if officials balk. These efforts, along with state-level safeguards and Trump backers' record so far, give reason to hope the nation's democratic structure will hold. The election system also remained mostly uncontroversial during the 2022 midterms. But Mr. Trump, of course, wasn't on the ballot.

A mere handful of officials in one or two major battleground states could sow widespread doubt or upend the certification process, and motivated partisans appear to be searching for any hole in the system to exploit. Americans should not be manipulated nor lulled into thinking 2020 was a one-off. Instead, they should take seriously continuing threats to their vote — and demand their leaders stop discrediting their democracy.

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Keir Starmer is about to kill Brexit dream for good

Martin Howe

SIR Keir Starmer and his Labour team enjoy warm cuddly feelings about the European Union. Although Starmer has ruled out returning to the customs union or the EU's single market, Labour says that it will improve the UK's relationship with the EU by negotiating a veterinary agreement to reduce border checks and seeking mutual recognition agreements allowing touring artists and professionals to export their services to the EU.

But what is equally clear is that Labour's feelings about the EU are not reciprocated. Labour's overtures were met with a brutal put-down from EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier. He warned that the EU will block Labour's plan to improve the terms of Brexit as "cherry picking", unless the UK accepts the full obligations of the single market, including free movement of workers. Barnier's intervention highlights a truth which is apparent to everyone, except, for some reason, to those who still hanker for a step by step return to EU membership. The EU is not interested in improving trade with its neighbours as an end in itself. What it wants is to use trade terms as a carrot and stick to force its neighbours into following product standards and rules dictated by Brussels. The EU has achieved near total compliance with its single market rules by the EEA countries Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Switzerland has put up more of a fight against the EU's attempts to impose control on it, but still has to follow EU rules in many areas and to accept the free movement of workers.

This is what makes negotiating about trade with the EU much more difficult and dangerous than negotiating with other trading partners around the world. They will agree to things like mutual recognition if they think it makes trading sense from their point of view, for example by allowing their professionals to export their services into the UK market in return for giving access to professionals from the UK.

But the EU will also demand control over the UK's own rules as part of

the price of this kind of arrangement. In return for mutual recognition of professional qualifications, it will demand that UK professions comply with the rules laid down in the EU's own directives. In return for a seemingly innocuous veterinary agreement to ease border checks on meat, it will demand that

over which we have no control is extremely damaging. We have no vote on future changes to them, which will be made in the EU's interests and not in ours. This negates democracy and our right to control our own laws. It prevents us from innovating and improving the competitiveness of our economy, and

They will agree to things like mutual recognition if they think it makes trading sense from their point of view, for example by allowing their professionals to export their services into the UK market in return for giving access to professionals from the UK. But the EU will also demand control over the UK's own rules as part of the price of this kind of arrangement. In return for mutual recognition of professional qualifications, it will demand that UK professions comply with the rules laid down in the EU's own directives. In return for a seemingly innocuous veterinary agreement to ease border checks on meat, it will demand that the UK comply with the whole panoply of the EU's own ossified veterinary medicines law. Most worryingly, Rachel Reeve has suggested that Labour would seek mutual recognition for bankers and financial services workers, which would open the door to Brussels reimposing some of its anti-competitive rules from which the City has only just been freed.

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Aligning with EU rules

the EU's demands - probably the most likely outcome - but if they do a deal, it is likely to involve a very heavy price in loss of independence and control in return for modest trade benefits.

But Labour would only be following more overtly and enthusiastically a route already embarked on surreptitiously by Rishi Sunak and his government. Last year he abandoned Liz Truss's Northern Ireland Protocol Bill which had been passed by the House of Commons and would have solved the problem of EU laws applying in Northern Ireland. Instead he agreed the so-called Windsor Framework, which entrenched the EU's control over all laws relating to goods in Northern Ireland, in return for some narrow and limited easings on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

It is not only Northern Ireland which is affected. Jeremy Hunt was unable to increase the VAT registration threshold for the whole of the UK by more than a paltry £5000, because of the EU's VAT rules which apply in Northern Ireland. And as part of the government's deal to get the DUP back into power sharing, it agreed to limit divergences between the rules relating to goods in Great Britain and EU rules, in order to avoid further barriers to trade across the Irish Sea inside the United Kingdom.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with preventing barriers to trade inside the UK, but this should be done by freeing Northern Ireland from EU rules, not by shadowing EU rules across the whole of the UK. So the choice is between Labour which enthuses about easing trade with the EU, an innocuous objective in its own right, but is naïvely willing to cede hard-won control over our laws back to the EU.

The Conservatives, whose record over the past two years is one of tying the UK deeper into aligning with EU laws, despite their protestations of delivering Brexit. Reform which promises to axe all remaining EU laws and scrap the Windsor Framework. Or of course the Liberal Democrats, who have a longer term objective of returning to EU membership.

than the one Boris Johnson secured.

It remains to be seen whether Starmer's fellow MPs and Labour party supporters have come on that journey with him, because for the most part they are solidly anti-Brexit and pro-EU. That has not always been the case, and there was a time in the 1970s and early 1980s when, under Tony Benn's influence, Labour was the more Eurosceptic of the two main parties.

But after Labour's drubbing at the 1983 election there was then a shift towards a more pro-EU stance amid hopes that Brussels-style socialism offered a way to circumvent the policies of Margaret Thatcher. To say the least, the party is not entirely comfortable with Starmer's decision to rule out rejoining the EU. Labour's Brexit strategy was summed up by Starmer on one of the few occasions the issue has surfaced during

Macron may soon resign

Anne-Elisabeth Moutet

WITH Britain swept up in its own election, it easy to miss the equally momentous one taking place across the Channel. After his party was mauled in the Euro elections, President Macron gambled, hoping that by calling an election he would catch both the Right and Left off guard: to an aide, he called it, self-congratulatingly, "throwing a live grenade among the pretenders".

But the opposite has happened: Le Pen's party, the National Rally, which he so often chose as his favourite, unelectable opponent, has now seized the momentum, as was on display in the important debate yesterday. Pitted against Emmanuel Macron's Wunderkind PM Gabriel Attal, and the pugnacious outgoing Left-wing France Unbowed MP Manuel Bompard, the 28-year-old National Rally president, Jordan Bardella - fluent and self-assured - stood his ground easily.

In his sights - increasingly realistically if you look at recent polls - is the PM job, leading a "cohabitation" government led by Bardella representing a Rally majority in the National Assembly, while Emmanuel Macron, bunkering down at the Elysée Palace, would be officially reduced to his constitutional presidential prerogatives: foreign and defence policy. This is no longer fanciful. Polls are now more reliable - it took time to take into account the names and local situations of 4011 actual candidates in 577 constituencies, published only six days ago. Most now give the Rally (with its dissident Republican allies) a 36 to 38 per cent share of the vote, while the Left-wing alliance hovers around 30 per cent and the Macronists lag just below 20 per cent.

This, the grand old pollster Jérôme Jaffré said today, reaches the tilting point where the majority system favours the larger bloc, just as when General de Gaulle or François Mitterrand called snap elections that gave them massive majorities each. It's a bleak prospect for the mercurial, not-so-young president who, seven years ago, took to calling himself "Jupiter", and notoriously treated his Cabinet ministers like subordinates and his MPs like employees. He would find himself nearly powerless over a banlieues-born second-tier business school dropout whom he, and his supercilious Elysée SpAds, dismissed for months as a "light-weight". They called Bardella the "selfie candidate", because he never refuses one when mobbed at each of his walkabouts; noting that his narrow smart suits copied, in less expensive makes, Macron's own. (In recent weeks, Bardella has taken to less fashionable three-piece ones, more in the Jacques Chirac style.)

Yet, yesterday, Bardella sounded an increasingly serious contender, even when faced with Gabriel Attal's far more precise facts and figures. Attal (and Bompard) both accused him of walking back from most of the Rally's manifesto policies

- on reversing Macron's pensions reform, on taxes, on forbidding civil service jobs to bi-nationals - sometimes "so fast, he blurred". But to swing voters in the audience, this was more a feature than a bug: the capacity of the new and improved Rally to be realistic, faced with economic reality. This is the 'GiorgiaMelonisation' of Bardella: like an increasing number of populist leaders in Europe, he has been watching Italy's PM admiringly - and enviously. Far from Marine Le Pen's equivocations about Ukraine, Bardella talks of "Russian aggression" and the need to help fight it. He has dropped an earlier RN promise that France would leave Nato's integrated command, disappointing that fraction of the Rally that, like the old French Right, is obsessively anti-American.

What remains of the economic platform in the National Rally manifesto seems designed to reassure bourgeois voters still hesitating to make the decisive step and vote for the Rally. The wealth tax on property would be abolished, to be replaced, not by a financial wealth tax, but by taxation of financial transactions, a measure that can easily be tweaked to minimise hurt, and that does not stigmatise "the rich" (a very French passion; with both the Catholic and Marxist traditions so strong in our history, defiance against wealth is baked into the national psyche) as compulsory wealth declarations do. Bardella appeals to the young with a higher emphasis on a non-punitive Green transition, and to the rest of the country with his championing of nuclear energy, as both decarbonated and a creation of French science at its national best. The young, too, appreciate his plan to cancel income tax for anyone under 30, "to encourage the most productive young people to stay in France". What he is intent on projecting, mainly, is "Fear not! We're not the irresponsible thugs the people you already hate say we are".

Sunday's first round, especially the proportion of voters who decide to cast their vote directly for the Rally (instead of waiting for a dispiriting reduced choice in next Sunday's second round) will tell Macron whether he still has a slim hope to lead the country, or will be sentenced to three years as an impotent lame duck in the prettiest prison in France, the gilded and manicured Elysée Palace, with regular sorties in international circles. One has to ask: can he stand this, or will he once again throw his toys out in a huff and resign, calling upon us yet another election, in which he cannot run? Faced with hung parliament or a Le Pen-led majority, this is highly plausible.

He even might think, if he resigns, that five years from now - when he probably can stand again in constitutional law - he will appear a better choice than today. He can, after all, hardly look worse. The next week or so will prove critical for our nations on both sides of the Channel.

The Telegraph

Brexit may have felt absent from this election - but it will still define it

Larry Elliott

IT is one of the oddities of this weirdest of election campaigns that the issue that helped give the Conservatives an 80-seat majority in 2019 has barely been mentioned. As far as the main parties are concerned, Brexit is a done deal. The decision has been made. Time to move on.

To be sure, much has happened since 2019, most notably a global pandemic, a cost of living crisis and the brief - yet drama-packed - premiership of Liz Truss. Making ends meet features more prominently in voters' lists of concerns than whether the UK should rejoin the single market.

Even so, the fact that the UK left the EU since the last election matters. It matters because Brussels can no longer be blamed for the UK's problems or the failure of UK politicians to deal with them. The EU can't, for example, be fingered for record net migration numbers in 2022. Those are entirely due to decisions

taken at Westminster. The likely scale of the Conservative defeat on 4 July will be the result of voters holding the government fully to account for rising prices, falling living standards and a failure to deliver on levelling up. There is no hiding place, and that's good. Many of those who voted leave in 2016 because they felt ignored and marginalised still feel ignored and marginalised. They gave the Tories a chance and they blew it.

From next week, they will almost certainly be able to see whether Labour can make a better fist of things. Keir Starmer has been on quite a journey since he was the shadow Brexit secretary under Jeremy Corbyn, pressing for a second referendum. He has not just ruled out rejoining the EU but has also said there will be no return to the single market or the customs union. Instead, Labour wants to smooth out the wrinkles by negotiating a better trade deal with the EU

than the one Boris Johnson secured.

It remains to be seen whether Starmer's fellow MPs and Labour party supporters have come on that journey with him, because for the most part they are solidly anti-Brexit and pro-EU. That has not always been the case, and there was a time in the 1970s and early 1980s when, under Tony Benn's influence, Labour was the more Eurosceptic of the two main parties.

But after Labour's drubbing at the 1983 election there was then a shift towards a more pro-EU stance amid hopes that Brussels-style socialism offered a way to circumvent the policies of Margaret Thatcher. To say the least, the party is not entirely comfortable with Starmer's decision to rule out rejoining the EU. Labour's Brexit strategy was summed up by Starmer on one of the few occasions the issue has surfaced during

the campaign - a BBC Panorama interview with Nick Robinson. "If you look at the problems for growth over the last 14 years, they were there, or many of them were there, before Brexit, so the idea that the sort of single silver bullet is simply the relationship with the EU is not something I accept."

Starmer is right about this. The parts of the country that voted most strongly for leave were those that saw the sharpest rises in unemployment in the 1980s and the biggest increases in incapacity benefits as attempts were made to massage the jobless figures down. They had the heaviest reliance on the tax credits to top up poverty pay, and they bore the brunt of the welfare cuts introduced by George Osborne after 2010.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies has noted, progress towards the 2030 levelling up goals set in a 2022 white paper has been "glacial" and

in some areas the UK has gone backwards.

Political developments on the other side of the Channel are helpful to Starmer, because he can point out to his critics that the EU is not exactly a haven of contentment and prosperity, and hasn't been for some time.

There is some irony in the fact that the left's love affair with Europe began in the 1980s at a time when the EU's economic performance took a marked turn for the worse. Then in the 90s, the single currency was supposed to deliver faster growth and greater shared prosperity. Instead, as the growing support for populist parties shows all too clearly, monetary union has been accompanied by economic stagnation and rising inequality.

Voters in the UK's industrial heartlands are not the only ones who feel marginalised and ignored: the same sentiments are widespread in struggling parts of Germany and France, particularly

among young voters. Starmer may find that improving trade links with the UK is not top of the EU's list of priorities. Instead, the pressure is on him to use all the tools at his disposal - tax, procurement, state aid, nationalisation, subsidies, skills, control of migration - as part of an activist industrial strategy designed to boost growth and narrow regional divides. This was what those on the left who supported Brexit called for in 2016 and there is now even more of a need for such a strategy.

Doubtless, some will say a Brexit growth strategy is an oxymoron. Others will say - with some justification - that Labour's growth strategy is too small to make a difference. Some may even be quietly hoping for Labour to come a cropper because it will ease the way to rejoining the EU. But there is no real difference between Labour's growth strategy and its Brexit strategy. If one fails then so does the other.

The Guardian

For anti-war Russians abroad like me, nowhere feels safe

Maria Kartasheva

THIS year has started for me with my story being shared around the world, as I was on the verge of getting my Canadian citizenship application refused because of political conviction in Russia for my anti-war activism. The story had a happy ending and I was naturalized days after the CBC article was published. Sadly, it is not the first, and most certainly not the last, time that the Russian government tried to harm its citizens who fled abroad.

I came to Canada in February 2019. For years I worked full-time in a tech company, paid taxes and cared about my neighborhood. I was looking forward to becoming a Canadian citizen and was sure I would make a good one.

Sometimes, I would go to the Russian embassy to protest when I thought it was important. In the fall of 2021, I registered as a volunteer observer in the Russian parliamentary election. That's when I got a chance to work closely with the people who worked at the Russian Embassy in Ottawa. When I woke up and read the news that Russian troops were marching on Kyiv, my world ended. It was as if I read that there was a comet heading to Earth that would kill us all. It felt like nothing else mattered, and I just had to do anything I could to stop the war.

I started posting about it on my lifestyle blog and also reached out to embassy staff, begging them to speak up against the war. Every day I left letters near the building's door and would try to talk to the people walking in and out. I hoped this would somehow help to stop the bloodshed.

One day one of the embassy workers called me by my name and told me that he was reading my blog. Now, I understand that it was a threat. But at the time I brushed it off. Around the same time, my spouse and I applied for Canadian citizenship. In the fall of 2022, I learned that there was a criminal case opened against me in Russia for a post about the Bucha massacre, and that I am wanted in Russia. I hoped it was some kind of mistake since I could not obtain any proper documents confirming the prosecution.

In April 2023 I was arrested in absentia and finally found a lawyer to represent me. Only at this point did I receive any documents. I immediately sent translated copies to the Canadian immigration ministry (IRCC), along with a detailed explanation that the law that I'm charged with breaking is only used for silencing the truth about the war. I arrived at my naturalization ceremony on June 7 thinking I was going to become a citizen. But when a question about the criminal charges was asked, it was clear that either IRCC didn't notice or ignored my letter.

That December I received a letter from the Canadian immigration officer saying, that in their opinion the article that I was convicted for posts against the war would equate to false information under subsection 372(1) of the Canadian Criminal Code. Thus I may be subjected to prohibitions under the Citizenship Act. I had 30 days to send IRCC documents to persuade them otherwise. This was the most stressful time for me after the start of the war. It felt like a betrayal from Canada.

Everyone in Russia learns to live with a feeling of helplessness. You have to get used to the fact the government doesn't care about you and will try to harm you. You run from that fact or fight it. But I wasn't ready to feel the same way in Canada. Despite knowing about the country's problems with racism and its colonial legacy, I never expected that the government would make me prove to them that I am not a criminal in such an obvious case of political persecution from the same Kremlin they claim to oppose. It felt like the ground from under my feet, that I came to Canada to find, was taken away.

The first thing I did was call my immigration lawyer and ask him whether I could be deported to

Russia. He told me it was possible. I couldn't believe what I heard. He explained this would be the worst-case scenario but the fact that this was even theoretically possible, crushed me. With how many things had already gone wrong, the worst-case scenario didn't feel unrealistic. The lawyer explained that the IRCC saw me as a criminal. I just had to explain to them that it was a mistake. One reason why Russia opens these criminal cases against activists is to ruin their lives even from afar. It's one thing to explain this to someone you know. It's another to explain it to the government you thought would be on your side with the risk of being deported hanging over your head.

The first thing I did was write to my Member of Parliament, notifying them about the letter from the IRCC and asking for help. They said they couldn't help and that I should follow my lawyer's advice. Later, after my case received press coverage, my MP apologized, explaining that there was a mistake in the office and that she didn't know anything about my situation. If she had known, she would've helped me earlier. It was nice to hear, but at the time I thought that I couldn't count on their support. It felt like I was going against the Canadian government alone. So I decided to look for support elsewhere.

Before the letter from IRCC, I stayed quiet out of fear for my safety. It was clear that this criminal case was mainly an attempt to silence me. I knew there were more risks involved if I continued to do my activism publicly, so I stopped. But this time the risk of being sent to Russia outweighed everything else, so I turned to the media. Even though it was Russian actions that made me an activist, it was Canada who forcefully outed me as one, even though it carried other risks involved with this publicity that I never wanted and now have to live with.

But even getting the media's attention wasn't easy. I reached out to Canadian media to cover my story. After repeatedly being told there were too many sad immigration stories to cover, I realized I was completely on my own. Though my family and friends supported me, they were powerless to solve my situation. Eventually, I was able to get media attention thanks to Rev. Karen Niven-Wigston. I will be forever grateful to her and Matthew Kupfer, the CBC reporter who covered my story. I still believe that if it wasn't for media and public attention, I would still be in that bureaucratic limbo or maybe would even have to go to court. I'll never forget the paralyzing feeling of facing the life-threatening risk of being deported to Russia, to a potentially fatal sentence of at least 8 years in prison.

But there was another side to this that horrified me even more. If I lost my case, it could have become a precedent that could affect Russian citizens in other countries. This fear might sound silly to people unfamiliar with how Russian citizens have had to live since the start of the invasion. But since Feb. 24, a lot of Russians, particularly those opposed to the war, have felt like the ultimate bad guys. While the Russian government hunts us down, many democratic countries don't want to let us in, close our bank accounts, and tell journalists poisoned on their territory that they should have been more careful.

At the same time, we feel guilty. Because how can we complain while Russia is bombing Ukraine? People and even public figures around the world tell us that we deserve every bad thing that happens to us because of this war. The feeling that I had to stand up for others in my situation gave me the strength not to give up when I felt the most desperate. By Jan. 7, all my documents arguing that I am not a criminal had to be delivered to IRCC. With other activists from the Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance, we prepared a petition in my support. But I felt so

lonely and helpless from facing so much indifference already that I couldn't stop crying while I was sending the first bunch of letters. I was afraid that no one would sign the petition. I felt guilty asking for help when I was in a safe country. The first person to sign the petition other than my friends, was Maxim Katz - a Russian politician and blogger. That was the first moment when I finally felt like I wasn't alone.

On Jan. 9, I was crying again, overwhelmed with fear. I had Nobel Peace Prize laureates signing the petition and MPs reaching out in support but I still didn't know if it was enough. That day around noon I received a call from IRCC, and a couple of hours later I had a private naturalization ceremony. I wasn't able to sing the anthem and didn't get to hear a speech from the judge about how much I deserved to finally become a citizen like my husband did. But I was finally a citizen, and could finally feel relieved. Right?

It has been months since that day. Yes, my story had a happy ending, but why did I really need to go through this? Being thrust into the public eye was the last thing I wanted. For people who were closely following the story from the beginning, it was obvious, that this whole situation was either a series of horrible mistakes or, at worst, a supporter of Russia was assigned to my case. I was never given any explanation. I hope it wasn't the latter, since this would probably raise some national security concerns for Canada. I understand this is not the worst thing in the world that could happen to a person. And yet I cannot help but cry whenever I have to remember everything I had to go through to get the citizenship I deserved, just because my homeland decided to terrorize me. It feels like the Canadian government has contributed to that, and I cannot shake off this feeling of betrayal no matter how hard I try.

I want Canada to finally start putting its money where its mouth is and truly protect activists from authoritarian regimes in action so nobody else has to go through this. If other people in my situation didn't get the attention I did, what would happen to them? I don't know. But I'm determined to make sure it won't happen again. I started a petition asking the Canadian government to implement a list of laws used by foreign countries, like Belarus, China, Iran and Syria, for political persecution and that do not have any analogous laws in Canada. The idea is that immigration officers could refer to this list, and know that people convicted under laws from this list can be given citizenship, a visa, or refugee status.

I realize that politically motivated cases like mine are rare. But even if there is just one affected every year, would that not already be too many? If we all agree that these activists are precious to the democratic world, then I think we can start changing things to make their lives easier, so that they can focus on making the world a better place. Easing the immigration process can be a step in that direction. The stress I have lived under for the last year is not going to go away any time soon. As long as Putin's regime thrives I, and other anti-war Russians around the world, will have to be cautious. We can't go back home to see our families, even if they need us. We will just be arrested the moment we try to cross the border.

There are even cases of people who protested against the war and thought they were safe because there were no criminal cases opened against them, only to be arrested at the airport with the case being opened after the arrest. This happened to the Russian singer Sharlot, who publicly burned his Russian passport, saying he no longer considers himself a Russian citizen and wanted to go to Kyiv. He was arrested at St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport in November 2023 after arriving from Armenia. Months later, he is still under arrest, with a fifth criminal case opened against him in May.

The most common risk for those living abroad is being arrested while traveling in countries with agreements with Russia about exchanging criminals. The best-case scenario here is getting arrested at the border, and then being released at court. At worst, they could be returned to Russia. This almost happened to Sergey Kurovop, who was deported from Vietnam at Russia's demand because of his anti-war statements. He had already lived in Vietnam for years before his deportation. Afterward, he applied for refugee status and started a new life in Canada.

The case of Bi-2, a popular rock back who was almost deported back to Russia, demonstrated how dangerous it can be for Russian citizens abroad. There are cases of the Russian government straight-out kidnapping people in other countries, like deserter Dmitry Setrakov in Armenia. Since they're technically barred from leaving the country, Russian citizens abroad with criminal convictions at some point will also face the issue of not being able to renew their passports. They can't visit an embassy or consulate, their documents could be confiscated. This means they wouldn't be able to apply for a visa or citizenship in any other country since they won't have a valid travel document. We don't know the solution yet other than trying to get another citizenship as soon as possible after getting convicted, which is not easy and might be very hard to do for some people.

There are many other ways for the government to silence the anti-war voices around the world that the public doesn't know of. Most independent media and researchers have now been labeled "foreign agents," banning them from promoting their services and raising revenue from advertising. This puts these people and organizations that rely on donations in a tough position, as they can no longer receive money from abroad, with even access to cryptocurrencies restricted. In this pile of concerns that Russian citizens and activists face it was important to me to tackle at least this one and make the immigration process easier for people facing political persecution. The risks I faced after going public with my story I wanted to at least bring some benefit to other people in my position. After all the media attention my story received, I hoped that the Canadian government would recognize the need for change. I was wrong.

On May 31, I received an official response from the immigration minister, who told me the process "does not place the burden on those facing political persecution to prove that foreign laws that they may have violated are not crimes in Canada." They claimed assessing everyone on a case-by-case basis was better than an automatic list as it allowed officials to assess each candidate on their own merit. I'm furious at this response, which fails to recognize that activists must prove to the immigration officer that they are not criminals and refuse to take responsibility and accept that this takes place at all. I feel like I am being gaslighted into believing that everything that happened to me was actually for my own good. I guess it's true that I did not have to prove I am not a criminal. But if I didn't, I would have been deported to Russia. The ordeal I went through meant I had to work with a psychotherapist to avoid developing PTSD.

I know it's not over. I plan to fight further. Before I had to only fight Russia to stop the war and let people in Russia and occupied Ukraine live free. But now, it seems I also have to fight the Canadian government as well. What immigration to Canada taught me is that no country is perfect, and no government will help people just out of the goodness of politicians' hearts. So I want to ask everyone who reads this to keep fighting. Take breaks when you need them and take care of yourself, but never give up. We can win if we work together.

The Moscow Times

Other former president who used Trump's playbook - and lost

Sean Jacobs

I arrived in South Africa shortly before last month's national elections. I was attending a conference on the country's 1994 transition from white minority rule to democracy in Stellenbosch, a university town about a 30-minute drive east of Cape Town.

The conference participants were mostly local academics in our early to mid-50s; all of us had voted for the first time in our 20s in 1994, the year of South Africa's first free election. Riding the shuttle from the airport, we saw very few campaign posters on the streets; still, the upcoming elections were on everyone's mind. Most of us rightly assumed the African National Congress (ANC) - the party of Nelson Mandela - would lose its majority after 30 years and be forced to govern via a coalition.

But the figure of former President Jacob Zuma and his new political party uMkhonto - or simply "MK" - provoked more reaction. The group discussed him - and his Zulu-nationalist-flavored populism - with a mix of dark humor and trepidation.

After the conference, I met up with a close friend, Herman Wasserman. We started our journalism careers together in the early 1990s, and later, both went into academia. These days, Herman is a professor of journalism at Stellenbosch University, where he researches disinformation. We discussed the upcoming elections and the parallels between Zuma and Donald Trump's attempted comeback as president of the United States, where I have lived with my family for the past two decades.

We now have two former presidents with questionable ethics, legal troubles and significant evidence of misogyny, their children thrust into the spotlight to defend and work for them, casting doubts on the electoral system and slippery principles, running on personalistic populism with a base that includes people unafraid to engage in political violence. Moreover, according to Herman, pro-Zuma conspiracy theories and propaganda, some with Russian fingerprints, had been flooding South African social media in the lead-up to the election. Still, despite the parallels, there are key differences that tell a bigger story of how these countries perceive democracy. And even as Zuma takes pages from Trump's playbook, South Africans may be telling a different narrative.

Zuma was renowned for his resistance against apartheid. He was arrested at 17, sent to Robben Island - where Mandela was also imprisoned - for 10 years, then spent a long time as an ANC operative, mostly in exile. Rising (and falling and rising again) in the ANC, he became president in 2009, but his tenure was marred by economic decline and further corruption scandals (what South Africans call "state capture").

Facing pressure, Zuma resigned as South African president in 2018. Three years later, he was convicted of contempt of court for defying a commission investigating corruption and served a brief stint in jail. His imprisonment triggered violent protests by his supporters. Zuma was released on medical parole after two months, marking the end of a tumultuous era in South African politics. Since then, miraculously, he has recovered enough to start a political party. (Though he himself is barred from running for parliament because of his 2021 conviction.)

Policy-wise, Zuma's MK is a mixed bag. Most alarmingly, it plans to abolish the constitution, which forms the cornerstone of South Africa's democracy, and return to apartheid-era parliamentary sovereignty with the addition of an upper house of traditional leaders. It taps into economic populism, promising radical changes like reclaiming land without compensation to address historical disparities, and seeks to solve the country's energy crisis (planned periodic blackouts, or "load shedding," have become common), by dumping plans for safe, green energy in favor of coal and nuclear power. Other proposals tap into cultural conservatism;

the party proposes reinstating the death penalty and curtailing LGBTQ+ rights. Predictions that the ANC would lose its majority were quickly confirmed. Ultimately, the ANC received just over 40% of the vote, down from 57% in 2019. The real surprise of this election and the largest beneficiary of the ANC's slump was MK. They finished third with just over 14% of the vote. Since neither the ANC nor MK is inclined to cooperate, the ANC is now poised to govern in a coalition with three other parties. These parties, including the white-run Democratic Alliance (DA), favored by elites, have historically been to the right of the ANC in terms of economic and social policy. The DA opposes affirmative action and a minimum wage, and in the Western Cape, the provincial government and municipalities

Africans prioritize political moderation over populism. Even though only roughly half of registered voters participated, citizens still trust social and political institutions as the vehicle for social progress rather than reject them entirely. Indeed, even though Zuma has borrowed so heavily from Trump's playbook, the outcome of this election seems to me to signal the United States' waning influence on South Africa's popular consciousness. Under Apartheid, some Black South Africans looked to the United States, especially its Black community operating in the heart of American capitalism, for inspiration.

For Black South Africans, despite our very radical political vision, America was the idealized place they saw in films and TV, a place of the American dream. For others like me, the radicalism of African Americans attracted us to

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like Cape Town governed by the DA, they have not built a single public housing unit in a former white area since 2009. For most, however, this is preferable to bringing Zuma's brand of politics back into government. Some parties complained about minor discrepancies in the results, but all except the MK endorsed them.

On the eve of the announcement of the final results, Zuma and his daughter Duduzile arrived with a large entourage at the electoral commission headquarters. Duduzile told reporters that MK's goal was to return the country to the "nine amazing years" of her father's presidency. For his part, Zuma announced (falsely) that, in fact, his party had won with a two-thirds majority, warned the commission not to announce any other result, and that doing so would "provoke" him and his party and "start trouble when there is no trouble." When the country's chief justice declared that the new parliament would have to convene on June 14th to elect a new president and senior parliamentary offices, form a government, and announce a cabinet, Zuma notified the media that his party would ask the constitutional court (ironically, the very court MK wants to abolish) to prevent Parliament from sitting because of supposed electoral fraud. (No evidence of such fraud was produced and the court declined his request.)

Even though Zuma's threats have previously led to violence, as in July 2021, most people looked at Zuma and MK's latest antics with amusement and dismay. Zuma is 82 years old, and in media interviews, he appears tired, incoherent and confused. Zuma's cries of a rigged election made the Trump comparison even more inescapable than it already seemed. (Indeed, this past March, Duduzile tweeted an unmistakably doctored video depicting Trump endorsing her father and urging "all South Africans to vote for uMkhonto weSizwe.") On various social media platforms, exasperated South African voters jestingly likened Donald Trump to the Jacob Zuma of America. Moreover, it's striking how swiftly Zuma's supporters, just like many Trump supporters, align themselves with Putin and Russia, often endorsing conspiracy theories surrounding Covid-19 or expressing general opposition to medical science, facts-based politics and journalism.

However, South Africa isn't the United States. Despite Zuma's disruptive, wrecker campaign, South

South Africans still trust social and political institutions as the vehicle for social progress rather than reject them entirely. Indeed, even though Zuma has borrowed so heavily from Trump's playbook, the outcome of this election seems to me to signal the United States' waning influence on South Africa's popular consciousness. Under Apartheid, some Black South Africans looked to the United States, especially its Black community operating in the heart of American capitalism, for inspiration.

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China, Latin America justified in bolstering ties

Renato Baumann

ECONOMIC exchanges between Latin America and China have gained momentum since the 1990s, especially through trade between China and Latin American countries on the Pacific coast but have gradually spread to, and intensified in, other areas.

China is the main trading partner of several Latin American countries, and direct investment from China in Latin America and the Caribbean has remained above \$4.5 billion a year. This has made the region an important destination for Chinese investment. The region now attracts resources similar to those destined for the United States and the European Union.

Another dimension of Sino-Latin American ties is the amount of loans provided by China for the Latin American and Caribbean economies. According to Boston University Global Development Policy Center, from 2005 to 2022, China lent \$136 billion to these countries, about 82 percent of which was invested in the energy sector mostly in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela.

Even though the energy sector has attracted by far most of the loans, Chinese interest in Latin America is diversified in terms of sectors. For example, Brazil

intends to jointly develop semiconductors with China. Also, Chinese companies are building subways in Bogota, and China is buying lithium mines in Argentina, as well as renewing its swap agreements with the country. Recently, Chinese-made electric vehicles have found a potentially big market in South America.

Chinese investment in transportation infrastructure, too, has increased. The \$3.6 billion mega-port in Chancay, Peru, built by COSCO and to be inaugurated later this year, is bound to become an important export and import hub for South America, especially for trade between South American countries and China and other Asian countries. The port will reduce transportation time by one-third, benefiting exporters from countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia, Venezuela and Guyana. Those that stand to especially benefit from this new facility are producers of soya, corn, meat and different types of minerals. This increase in Chinese presence in Latin America has often led some analysts to gauge the reaction of the US, given the frequent reference to the so-called Monroe Doctrine ("America for the

Americans").

At least until recently, the official position of the US was one of favoring competition, as it believed more players are good for healthy competition. But that has changed somewhat after Chinese investments increased in the energy sector and some strategic minerals. The rise in the trade of minerals has evoked reactions from the US Army Southern Command, which has raised concerns over the possibility of China getting easier access to strategic minerals in the region. Furthermore, the potentially important role the Chancay port, after completion, seems set to play has raised some Western countries' worries that the Chinese navy may use the port not only for commercial purposes but also as a geostrategic tool.

Yet such fears have not prompted Latin American countries to boost trade relations with their traditional major trading partner. Instead, the Latin American countries have simultaneously maintained good economic and diplomatic relations with both the US and China, and there is no indication of any change in their position in the near future. One cannot say there has been no pressure on the

Latin American countries, given that the US often refers to security issues related to Chinese products or companies, and says that there should be an orchestrated movement against China's human rights policy.

Most Western states remain committed to the international mechanisms for human rights protection, because they view them as a source of morality and legitimacy, and believe states can be "punished" for violating the agreed parameters classifying policies on human rights. China's policy on human rights is a bit different. It views human rights not only in legal terms, but also accords priority to socioeconomic rights and the right to development, and insists that laws to protect human rights be enforced according to each country's national conditions.

Latin America accepts that there may be differences on specific issues due to the peculiarities of each society, and hence opts for non-interference, whereas China does not seem to be trying to convince other states of its position. Acting separately on such sensitive matters has allowed the two sides to strengthen their partnership and seek common development.

The China Daily

CNN



PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah addressing a press conference.

SCCI, Health minister agree on formation of joint body to resolve pharma sector issues

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fuad Ishaq and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Health Syed Qasim Ali Shah have agreed to form a joint committee to establish close coordination and relations and resolving issues which were faced by the business community attached with pharmaceutical sector.

The committee will consist of two members from the chamber and high officials of the provincial health department, which would frame modalities and strategy to take up issues of the pharma sector with authorities at provincial and central level to address genuine grievances and problems of the business community attached with this sector.

Similarly, the committee will make joint efforts to promote pharma industries and business in the province.

This agreement came during a meeting between SCCI chief Fuad Ishaq and provincial health minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah at the chamber house here on Thursday.

FPCCI former president Ghazanfar Bilour, chamber senior vice president Sanaullah Khan, Vice president Ejaz Khan Afridi, for-

mer presidents of the SCCI Malik Niaz Ahmad, Riaz Arshad, Faiz Muhammad Faizi, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, former senior vice presidents Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, Imran Khan Mohmand, members of the SCCI executive committee Haji Ghulam Hussain, Monawar Khurshid, Fazal Muqem, Fahad Amin, Muhammad Ismail Safi, and Imtiaz, Hamayun Fazal, Nadeem Rauf, Ihsanullah, Saddar Gul, Faiz Rasool, Fazl e Wahid, Waqar Ahmad, Nisar Ahmad, Ishaq Muhammad, Acting Secretary General Muqtasid Ashan and Secretary Sohail Anjum and members of business community attached with pharma sector were present in a large number.

Fuad Ishaq addressed the meeting, stating that despite the difficult condition, pharma industries and business of medicines grew exponentially, which is a welcoming sign.

He, however, said the business community attached with the pharma sector was being faced with enormous issues and needed proactive initiatives at governmental level to resolve them amicably.

SCCI has prepared a documentary, in which medical tourism was visibly highlighted, Mr Ishaq said. He added medical tourism has a vital role in

promotion of trade with regional countries and stressed the need to resolve issues attached with this sector on priority basis.

Giving proposals for resolving issues of the pharma sector, Mr Ishaq demanded the provincial government and health department to ensure representation of the chamber in provincial quality control board and Board of Governors (BoGs) of the MTIs Hospitals in Peshawar. He called for enforcement of section 34 of the DRAP with letter and spirit.

The chamber president emphasized making the DRAP local office fully functional.

He also stressed the provision of facilities to the business community under one window operation.

He said all authorized agents should be allowed to participate in tender for sale and purchase of medical equipment.

Fuad Ishaq suggested formation of a joint committee between SCCI and Health Department on which the provincial health minister agreed and made an announcement on the spot for the constitution of the committee, which will also notify next week on Monday.

Riaz Arshad, former president, also spoke on the occasion, calling for imple-

mentation of section 34 of the DRAP Act.

Participants of the meeting presented number of demands and proposals, mostly relating to audit of central research fund, bringing uniformity in system, enforcement on principles of guarantee, quality, extending in period of license business community attached medicine business from 2 year to five year, halting of category C, hurdles in sale, supply chain and import of medical equipment and nomination of focal person in the health department.

Ghazanfar Bilour also addressed the meeting and expressed hope the minister health will take proactive steps for resolution of the business community issues.

Qasim Ali Shah, while responding to various proposals and demands of the business community, announced the constitution of a joint committee of officials of the health department and SCCI members.

The minister said the provincial government is committed to provide the best healthcare facilities to people.

He said initiatives have been made to promote the local pharma industry and business.

He assured the government will take effective measures to resolve business community issues.

Deputy Governor SBP encourages banks to embrace SME finance

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) joined the global community in celebrating Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Day by highlighting the pivotal role these enterprises play in driving economic growth, fostering innovation, and creating jobs. SBP celebrated this day by organizing an MSME seminar under this year's theme, 'MSME Finance: Catalyst for Inclusive Growth'.

The theme underscores the importance of financial support in unleashing the potential of SMEs.

The event was attended by Presidents/CEOs of banks/DFIs, senior SBP management, government officials, and representa-

tives of trade bodies.

In his keynote address, Deputy Governor Saleemullah stated that SMEs are the lifeline of the country's economy, providing employment to 80 percent of the non-agricultural workforce, contributing 40 percent to GDP, and accounting for more than 25 percent of total export earnings.

He informed the audience that SBP's focus is on creating an enabling environment where SME finance can grow enabling SMEs to thrive and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

As part of its Vision 2028, SBP aims to double SME financing to Rs 1,100 billion over the next five years, with Rs 100 billion to be added to the SMEs' outstanding portfolio by the end of June 2025.

The Deputy Governor called on all banks to play their part in promoting SME finance and surpass the Rs 100 billion estimated increase for FY 2024-25.

To further support SME finance, SBP has proposed the government to provide risk coverage to banks on their fresh financing to SMEs, whereby 20% and 10% first loss coverage would be provided to banks' fresh exposures against SEs and MEs respectively.

The necessary allocations for FY25 have been made in the FY25 budget.

In his concluding remarks, the Deputy Governor urged all stakeholders to renew their commitment to creating a

supportive environment where small and medium-sized enterprises can flourish, thereby driving economic growth and innovation across the nation.

An event was also held at the Banking Hall of SBP on this day to raise awareness about the significant contributions of MSMEs to the country's economy. Throughout the day, commercial banks and SMEs showcased their products.

The visitors took keen interest and praised this initiative of the banking industry and SMEs.

Deputy Governor Saleemullah and other dignitaries visited the stalls and congratulated the organizers for displaying valuable products on the MSME day.

Pakistan aims to boost trade with Central Asia: Abdul Aleem Khan



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Privatisation, Board of Investment and Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Thursday said that Pakistan wants to promote bilateral trade and business activities with all the countries of Central Asia for which practical efforts have already been initiated.

Talking to the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov, who called on him, the minister said that States of Central Asia can be beneficiaries of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project which will significantly increase economic activities in the region, said a press release.

Abdul Aleem Khan apprised the Ambassador about his recent visit to Central Asia and the trade agreements held at the Ten Shen Conference in Tajikistan.

Speaking on the occasion Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan expressed his gratitude to the minister for offering promotion of bilateral cooperation and said that there is a large capacity for manpower from Pakistan in various fields of professional expertise for which steps would be welcomed.

Khazar Farhadov reiterated his determination that Pakistan and Azerbaijan will increase bilateral cooperation in various fields and in this regard, the visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Pakistan will be a milestone.

Palm oil imports decline by 25.36 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of palm oil into the country declined by 25.36 percent during the first eleven months of the current fiscal year compared to corresponding period of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

Pakistan imported palm oil worth \$2,531.531 million during July-May (2023-24) against the exports of \$3,391.488 million during July-May (2022-23), according to PBS data.

In terms of quantity, the

palm oil imports decreased by 3.52 percent by going down from 2,839,098 metric tons to 2,739,137 metric tons.

The soyabean oil imports during the period also decreased by 56.75 percent by falling from \$ 282.201 million last year to \$122.052 million during the ongoing fiscal year.

It is pertinent to mention here that the trade deficit contracted by 15.25 per cent during the first 11 months of the current financial year (2023-24) as compared to the corre-

sponding period of the last year.

During the period from July-May 2023-24, exports grew by 10.65 per cent as these were recorded at \$28.070 billion as compared to the exports of \$25.368 billion during the same period of the last year.

The imports into the country during the period under review decreased by 2.37 per cent to \$49.802 billion as against the imports of \$51.010 billion in the same period of last year.

Megacaps boost Nasdaq after economic data slump

NEW YORK (Reuters): The Nasdaq rose on Thursday while other indexes were flat to slightly higher, as a dip in Treasury yields after a string of economic data boosted megacap stocks.

Data showed new orders for key United States -manufactured capital goods unexpectedly fell in May, while core durable goods orders fell 0.1% versus forecasts for a 0.2% rise, boosting hopes that a weaker economy could prompt the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September.

Weekly jobless claims fell to 233,000, missing expectations of 236,000. Further, a final print showed the U.S. economic growth increased more than estimated in the first quarter.

Megacap stocks firmed as Treasury yields slipped after the data, with Amazon.com rising 0.9% after hitting \$2 trillion in market value for the first time on Wednesday.

Consumer services led gains with a 0.8% rise, led by gains in Meta Platforms and Netflix, while financial stocks were the biggest drag on the Dow, and the biggest S&P 500 sectoral decliner.

Meanwhile, Micron slipped 5% after an inline fourth-quarter rev-

enue forecast disappointed investors hoping for more upside from the memory chipmaker's performance in the artificial intelligence boom.

With a handful of expensive heavily weighted stocks supporting Wall Street's ascent since the last leg of 2023, market participants have highlighted concerns over the rally's sustainability and have called out for the need to diversify portfolios to hedge against possible sharp losses.

"It's really a question of whether corporate earnings in the tech sector can remain resilient. If they can't, then we will see probably intermittent profit-taking and small corrections," said Mike Gallagher, director of research at Continuum Economics.

"It's going to be a bit difficult for the tech sector to drive on the market the way that it's done."

Walgreens Boots Alliance slumped 23.8% after cutting its 2024 profit forecast and announcing plans to close more underperforming United States stores.

Nvidia fell 1.7% in another day of choppy trading for the AI-trade favorite.

Thursday's data comes ahead of Friday's release of the monthly personal

consumption expenditures (PCE) price index - the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge.

Meanwhile, investors have largely stuck to their view of around two interest rate cuts this year, as per LSEG's FedWatch data, even though the United States central bank has projected only one, and a nearly 66% chance of a cut in September.

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump are set to face each other in the first debate during the day.

At 9:59 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 12.72 points, or 0.03%, at 39,140.52, the S&P 500 was up 3.58 points, or 0.07%, at 5,481.48, and the Nasdaq Composite was up 39.06 points, or 0.22%, at 17,844.21.

Denim maker Levi Strauss slumped 16.7% after falling short of expectations for second-quarter revenue.

International Paper dropped 10.4% after the world's largest pulp manufacturer, Brazil's Suzano, terminated talks to buy the United States-based firm.

The S&P index recorded eight new 52-week highs and two new lows, while the Nasdaq recorded 23 new highs and 58 new lows.

PBS organizes session for execution of agriculture census

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on Thursday organized a comprehensive session for the confidence building and successful execution of the upcoming 7th Agricultural Census 2024 operations to achieve the desired objectives. The main objective of the session was to present the design, the implementation plan and the proposed census tools to the academia, researchers and the relevant departments for the broader involvement, ownership and their valuable feedback for improvement before implementation.

Dr Naeem-uz-Zafar, Chief Statistician, PBS, highlighted the pivotal role of an integrated approach in conducting an effective agricultural census and

stressed on the importance of the pre-training brainstorming session, said a press release.

He, underscored that an integrated agricultural census is vital for capturing comprehensive data that accurately reflects the dynamics of Pakistan's agricultural sector which is the second major sector for contribution to GDP.

He said that this session serves as a platform for stakeholders to discuss and refine execution strategies, including questionnaire development and training methodologies. This will enable PBS to improve the plans especially for efficient and accurate data collection for provision of reliable statistics for informed decision making.

Muhammad Sarwar Gondal, Member and Focal

Person on Agricultural Census, PBS, presented key innovations and strategic approaches aimed at optimizing data collection for provision of timely & credible data for enhancing agricultural policies.

He briefed the participants on the integrated approach adopted for the first time in Pakistan to collect extensive information on agriculture, livestock, and machinery. He explained that this approach is designed for efficient management of human & financial resources for encompassing the whole agriculture landscape. He underscored the importance of data-driven policies, drawing comparisons with regional countries that have successfully used data for boosting their agricultural sectors.

Highlighting Pakistan's agricultural significance, he emphasized that increasing population has immense pressure on country resources, therefore there is a need for robust data regarding agriculture land, yield, livestock concentration and data regarding use of methods for irrigation to help in devising national food security initiatives as per ground realities.

He further apprised the forum that PBS in line with the Digital Transformation, has taken innovative strides and BS IT team has developed an indigenous ERP solution with digitalization of all the activities specifically from human resource management, training, monitoring and data collection, enhancing efficiency in data management and analysis.

US weekly jobless claims fall; business spending on equipment softening

WASHINGTON (Reuters): First-time applications for U.S. unemployment benefits drifted lower last week, but the number of people on jobless rolls jumped to a 2-1/2 year high in mid-June, suggesting that labor market conditions were easing amid slowing economic growth.

Ebbing economic momentum was underscored by other data on Thursday showing business spending on equipment declined in May, while a slump in exports pushed up the goods trade deficit. The stream of softer data on the heels of a sharp slowdown in economic growth in the first quarter increases the probability of the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates in September.

Retail sales were tepid in May and inflation pressures subsided considerably. Economists do not see the data as suggesting that a recession was imminent.

"The U.S. economy is on track for a soft landing, just what the Fed wants to see," said Sal Guatieri, as senior economist at BMO Capital Markets.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 6,000 to a seasonally adjusted 233,000 for the week ended June 22, the Labor Department said. The claims data included last Wednesday's Juneteenth National Independence Day, a new holiday.

Claims tend to be volatile around public holidays. They have risen to

the upper end of their 194,000-243,000 range of this year. Economists are split on whether the recent increase in claims points to rising layoffs or the repeat of volatility experienced during the same time last year.

Claims, which remain at historically low levels, are being closely watched to see whether employers are laying off more people as the economy slows in response to the 525 basis points worth of interest rate hikes delivered by the U.S. central bank since 2022 to tame inflation.

The government confirmed in a separate report on Thursday that economic growth moderated sharply in the first quarter.

Gross domestic product increased at a slightly

upwardly revised 1.4% annualized rate last quarter, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said in its third estimate of GDP for the January-March quarter.

Growth was previously estimated at a 1.3% pace. The economy expanded at a 3.4% rate in the fourth quarter. While the growth pace likely picked up in the second quarter, it will probably not exceed a 2.0% pace.

The U.S. central bank has maintained its benchmark overnight interest rate in the current 5.25%-5.50% range since last July.

Continuing claims increased between the May and June survey weeks. The jobless rate rose to 4.0% in May for the first

September.

U.S. stocks opened lower. The dollar fell against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices rose.

The number of people receiving benefits after an initial week of aid, a proxy for hiring, increased 18,000 to a seasonally adjusted 1.839 million during the week ending June 15, the highest level since late November 2021, the claims report showed.

The so-called continuing claims data covered the period during which the government surveyed households for June's unemployment rate.

Continuing claims increased between the May and June survey weeks. The jobless rate rose to 4.0% in May for the first

time since January 2022. Most economists, however, did not view the rate at the current level as posing a danger to the labor market, arguing that the increase was concentrated among the 35-44 age group, recent immigrants and certain industries.

"Though job growth will slow, it will remain sufficient to limit a significant and broad-based increase in the unemployment rate," said Ryan Sweet, chief economist at Oxford Economics.

A separate report from the Commerce Department's Census Bureau showed non-defense capital goods orders excluding aircraft, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, dropped 0.6% last month

after rising 0.3% in April. Economists had forecast core capital goods orders edging up 0.1%.

Business spending on equipment is under pressure from the higher interest rates and softening demand for goods.

A survey from the Institute for Supply Management this month noted that "demand remains elusive as companies demonstrate an unwillingness to invest due to current monetary policy and other conditions."

Core capital goods shipments dropped 0.5% after rising 0.4% in April. Non-defense capital goods orders decreased 0.9%, falling for a second straight month. Shipments of these goods tumbled 1.5% after increasing 2.1% in April.

COURT NOTICE

In The Court of Miss Dua Mehreen Civil Judge VI Kohat. Suit no.52/1 Date of hearing 28-06-2024, Titled:- Murad Khan Vs Inam Gul, Notice against:-(4) Ishaq Son of Ibarahim R/o Dhok Shindi Gul Shadi Khel Baadoziarat Road District Kohat Presently R/o (now.in.Abroad Dubai UAE)Defendant Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendant in which date of hearing 28-06-2024 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 28-06-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on.06-06-2024(Court of C.J VI Kohat)



In brief

Commissioner gives cash prizes hockey players

B A H A W A L P U R (APP): Commissioner Bahawalpur Division Nadir Chatha has said that Bahawalpur is rich in sports activities and has produced remarkable hockey players in the past who have illuminated the name of the nation and the country at the national and international levels. He expressed these views while distributing incentive checks of two hundred thousand rupees each to hockey players Arshad Liaqat and Muneeb ur Rehman for their outstanding performance in Sultan Azlan Shah Hockey Tournament on behalf of the Divisional Sports Committee here Thursday. Regional sports officer Muhammad Aamir Hamid and sports personalities and enthusiasts were present at the occasion. The Commissioner stated that our hockey team had excelled in displaying excellent sportsmanship and has qualified for the final match of the Sultan Azlan Shah Hockey Tournament 2024, for which our players deserve congratulations. He extended appreciation to the players who displayed excellent performance. Commissioner Bahawalpur mentioned that Arshad Liaqat and Muneeb ur Rehman are a pride of Bahawalpur. He expressed the hope that these two players would continue to illuminate Pakistan's name in the future. He also announced the distribution of hockey sticks among players in Bahawalpur to promote the sport.

Ali to attend seminars

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) Normalization Committee (NC) has nominated Mohammad Ali, an AFC Elite Assistant Referee, to participate in two significant seminars organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF). The nomination was recommended by the Pakistan Football Referees Association (PFRA), said a press release. Mohammad Ali will attend the SAFF Aspiring Match Commissioner seminar in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from July 29 to 30. He will also participate in the AFC Match Commissioner Seminar 2024 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from August 26 to 29. Expressing his gratitude, Mohammad Ali said, "I am honored by the nomination, I wouldn't have been here without the Pakistan Football Federation's consistent support."

Paolini beats Boulter

E A S T B O U R N E (AFP): French Open finalist Jasmine Paolini ended home hope Katie Boulter's fine run on grass at Eastbourne on Thursday, winning their quarter-final 6-1, 7-6 (7/0). The Italian third seed broke twice as she dominated the first set but the second set was more even as the players swapped breaks. However, Paolini, who lost to Iga Swiatek at Roland Garros earlier this month, stepped up a gear in the tie-break, winning the first seven points to seal victory. "Today, I played a really good match," Paolini, 28, said in her on-court interview. "She's a really good player on grass, of course she's British, so it's tough to beat her here, especially. I'm happy, I'm enjoying the grass here in Eastbourne." Boulter, ranked 32nd in the world, came to Eastbourne in good form after retaining her Nottingham Open crown earlier this month.



TAROUBA: South Africa's players greet Afghanistan's players after South Africa's victory in the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup 2024 semi-final cricket match between South Africa and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan World Cup heroics can inspire next generation: Trott

TAROUBA (AFP/APP): Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott hopes his side's historic T20 World Cup run, which ended in a heavy semi-final defeat Wednesday, has "inspired young kids to pick up a bat and ball" in the war-ravaged country. South Africa demolished Afghanistan by nine wickets to saunter into the final, where they will face India or holders England. Afghanistan were bowled out for 56 off 11.5 overs after they chose to bat at the Brian Lara Stadium in Trinidad. Trott conceded that his players had struggled to handle the pressure of a maiden World Cup semi-final, but he was still "very proud" of the team. "A lot to process really emotionally, physically, so all new territory for the guys and it all plays its

part," said Trott, a former England batsman who was born in South Africa, admitting his side had been "outplayed." "I'm sure the guys hopefully learn from this experience," he said. "(Learn) what it takes to play international cricket and play against a bowling side like South Africa on a pitch that's perhaps not conducive to high-scoring. "We've found ways of winning games, we just couldn't find a way today," he said, adding that despite surpassing all expectations by reaching the last crestfallen. "Obviously it hurts at the moment," said Trott. "We arrived to the ground in high spirits ready to take on a strong South African side and make sure we gave a good account of ourselves.

"I feel like we haven't done that today so that's the most disappointing thing. "I'm very proud of the guys. This one performance doesn't necessarily define the tournament." Trott said Afghanistan's World Cup run, which included beating New Zealand, Australia and Bangladesh in a nerve-shredding win to reach the semi-finals, had been "a great ride." The team provided rare moments of widespread celebration back home in a country ravaged by four decades of war and beleaguered by economic, humanitarian and political crises. "I hope that we've inspired young kids to pick up a bat and a ball and play cricket, and want to play for their nation and hopefully that everybody's proud of the side," said Trott.

Michael Vaughan highlights India's "unfair advantage" in T20 WC

LONDON (Agencies): Former England cricketer and renowned commentator Michael Vaughan slammed the International Cricket Council (ICC) for allegedly favouring India during the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024. Vaughan, a notable voice in world cricket, spoke about Afghanistan's tight schedule for their semi-final against South Africa and stressed that India and England should have played the first semi-final.

"Surely this [Afghanistan vs South Africa] semi should have been the Guyana one .. but because the whole event is geared towards India it's

so unfair on others," he wrote in a post on X. "So Afghanistan qualify for the WC semi winning in St Vincent on Monday night .. 4 hr flight delay on Tues to Trinidad so no time to practice or get accustomed to a new venue .. utter lack of respect to players I am afraid," Vaughan added. Michael Vaughan then went on to accuse India of getting an unfair advantage throughout the T20 World Cup 2024. "Surely this [Afghanistan vs South Africa] semi should have been the Guyana one .. but because the whole event is geared towards India it's so unfair on others," he further stated.

Earlier, Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott also expressed dissatisfaction with his side's tight schedule as they got less time to prepare than their opposition. "Playing the last group game and then playing the first semi-final isn't ideal - travelling and not really having, a day off if you like. But that's not a reason we didn't win. "We knew the schedule, so that's not an excuse as such. In tournaments you can't have everything your own way, you've got to fight and play against the odds. We have done that at times and I'm very proud of that."

Asia Snooker C'ship 2024 starts in Riyadh Thursday

RIYADH (SPA/APP): The Asian Snooker Championship 2024 started on Thursday at the Saudi Billiards and Snooker Federation training center in Riyadh, running from June 27 to July 5. Over 200 players will participate from Saudi Arabia, Mongolia, Hong Kong, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Singapore, Iran,

Lebanon, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE. All 15 of the Asian countries are scheduled to participate in the championship across five events: Six-Red Snooker Teams, Men's Six-Red Snooker, Women's Six-Red Snooker, Men's U-21 Six-Red Snooker, and English Billiards for Men. The championship opening ceremony will be held

Thursday at 5:00 PM local time. It will be attended by International Billiards and Snooker Federation President Mubarak Al-Khayarin, Asian Confederation of Billiards Sports President Mohamed Al-Nuaimi, and Saudi Billiards and Snooker Federation President Dr. Nasser Al-Shammari, as well as heads and members of participating countries.

Ahsan, Hasnain bag victories in Snooker C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Ahsan Ramzan and Hasnain Akhtar earned victories in the ACBS Asian 15Red U21 & 6Red Men's Snooker Championship 2024 at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. According to details, Ahsan Ramzan (Pak) beat Talal Alanazi (KSA) 3-0 (83-05, 103-01(70), 107-0(57)) while Hasnain Akhtar (Pak) bt Abdullah Alqabbani (KSA) 3-0 (65-22, 71-07, 89-0(52)).

Steyn, Smith go emotional as SA reaches T20 WC finals

NEW YORK (INP): The South African cricket team has been labeled as "chokers" due to their repeated failures to win crucial matches in high-stakes tournaments, particularly in the knockout stages of major international competitions like the ICC Cricket World Cup and the ICC Champions Trophy. Former South Africa Dale Steyn said "It's emotional down here. We're into a final." Graeme Smith said: "We're in the Finals."

1992 Cricket World Cup: In the semi-final against England, South Africa was in a strong position but was affected by an unfair rain rule, leaving them with an impossible target of 22 runs off 1 ball due to a rain delay. 1999 Cricket World Cup: South Africa tied with Australia in the semi-final. They needed just one run to win with four balls remaining but ended up getting run out, resulting in Australia advancing to the final based on a superior net run rate. 2003 Cricket World Cup: Playing at home, South Africa miscalculated the Duckworth-Lewis target during a rain-affected match against Sri Lanka. Believing they had achieved the required score, they stopped playing for runs and ended up tying the match, which led to their elimination from the tournament. 2007 Cricket World Cup: South Africa lost in the semi-final to Australia in a one-sided match, where they were bowled out for a low score and never really challenged their opponents. 2015 Cricket World Cup: In another semi-final, South Africa lost to New Zealand in a closely contested match that went down to the final over.

Chris Silverwood steps down as Sri Lanka head coach

COLOMBO (INP): Sri Lanka head coach Chris Silverwood stepped down from his position on Thursday following the Asian side's dismal ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 campaign.

The former England pacer cited personal reasons for his resignation from the post which he held since April 2022.

"Being an international coach means long periods away from loved ones. After lengthy conversations with my family and with a heavy heart, I feel it is now time for me to return home and spend some quality time together," said Silverwood. "I would like to thank the players, coaches, backroom staff, and management of the SLC for their support



during my time in Sri Lanka. Without your support, none of the success would have been possible." Sri Lanka won the Asia Cup 2022 under Silverwood's tenure and reached the final of the 2023 edition, where they were decimated by India. The Asian side also defeated Australia in a home ODI series, however,

they failed to reach the knockout stage of any of the ICC tournaments with Chris Silverwood at the helm.

They were eliminated from the Super 12s in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in 2022, meanwhile, in the ODI World Cup in 2023, they were knocked out from the group stage.

The abovementioned campaigns were followed by a disastrous T20 World Cup 2024, where Sri Lanka lost their group stage matches against South Africa and Bangladesh while their fixture against Nepal was washed out. They were officially eliminated after Bangladesh defeated the Netherlands and qualified for the Super 8s stage.

Andy Murray not giving up on Wimbledon farewell after surgery

LONDON (AFP): Andy Murray remains hopeful he will play at Wimbledon but admits it is unlikely to be in the singles competition after undergoing surgery on a spinal cyst.

The 37-year-old, who confirmed he is planning for the Olympics in Paris to be the final event of his career, had the procedure on Saturday after experiencing weakness in his right leg while playing at Queen's last week.

He was forced to pull out of his second-round match against Jordan Thompson at the London tournament after just five games. Murray, who has won two of his three Grand Slams at Wimbledon, said he had been told to seek immediate treatment by multiple surgeons.

"The last week's been pretty tough," said the British former world num-

ber one. "There's obviously a lot going on with me planning on finishing at the Olympics." He added: "Although the surgery is not a major surgery, the problem was a serious problem because, if the cyst continues to grow -- obviously at Queen's I basically lost the strength, coordination and everything in my right leg on my way to the court -- you're likely to have other complications as well."

The Scot, who is also a two-time Olympic champion, said the operation had gone "really, really well" and he was hitting balls again but added that it was "impossible to say" when he would be able to compete.

The draw for the singles takes place on Friday, with first-round matches starting on Monday, and Murray, who is also entered in the doubles with his brother

Jamie, said he would wait until the last moment to make a decision. "It's complicated, and it's made more complicated because I want to play at Wimbledon one more time," he said.

"I would say it's probably more likely that I'm not able to play singles right now. "I spoke to my brother a couple of days ago in terms of the doubles to see if he wants to find someone else to play with, and I was obviously absolutely fine with that. But he also wants the opportunity to try to play. We'll see how the next few days go."

Olympic entries will be confirmed next week, with Murray hoping to play singles and doubles with Dan Evans. Should Murray not make the Olympics, he revealed he could yet play another event, such as the US Open, in order to bow out on his own terms.

Norris eyes perfection in bid to beat Verstappen

LONDON (Agencies): McLaren's Lando Norris says he is searching for perfection in his quest to consistently beat Red Bull's Max Verstappen in Formula 1.

Norris has been a close second behind Verstappen in the last two races in Canada and Spain and feels he and McLaren need to tidy up "just tiny things" to beat the world champion. "Everything needs to be executed perfectly well and last weekend everything was not executed perfectly well," Norris said. "And that's where it cost us."

"I'm very happy and 99.5% I'm probably happy with." Norris said he felt he had been "over-critical" of his race in Spain last weekend, when being passed by Verstappen and George Russell's Mercedes at the start cost him victory.

Verstappen was able to pass Russell at the start of the third lap, while Norris was stuck behind for the entire first stint. Norris closed to within two seconds of Verstappen by the end, but his victory in Miami in May remains his only F1 win so far.

Asked if he felt he and McLaren could strain together a series of wins, Norris said: "A run of wins... I don't want to be over-confident and say that at all." But he added: "We could go on and win races. I definitely think that's possible with how the team are performing and how I'm performing."

"But we're against one of the best drivers ever in F1 and one of the best performing teams in F1 and then you have everyone else apart from that who can easily get in the mix too."

"Everything needs to be executed perfectly well and last weekend everything was not executed perfectly well and that one thing that wasn't, that's where it cost us."

The 24-year-old Briton moved into second place in the championship with his result in Spain. He is 69 points behind Verstappen with 14 races still to go, starting in Austria this weekend. Norris said that now he had a competitive car, the frustrations are bigger any time he does not quite do the very best he can. "I've only won one race," Norris said. "That is still amazing but everything becomes relative to what you know you are able to achieve and the reason I

was frustrated was that small thing cost me."

"Being in this position you are just more hungry to win and therefore you are more disappointed when you don't. I think it's as simple as that. And a win in F1 means an incredible amount because it's what I've dreamt about since I was a kid."

What does Verstappen think? Norris felt he could also have won in Canada two weeks before Spain, but Verstappen was victorious in both races.

He and Red Bull remain the team to beat after three wins in the past five races and seven out of 10 this year, but McLaren have emerged as their most consistent challenger at the front.

Verstappen said: "We're pushing as hard as we can, of course, to keep on improving. So that's what we'll try to do now in the coming races, which I think are, of course, very important to see where we're at."

"McLaren at the moment, they're just very solid. They're good everywhere, every single track, kind of. And also, I think you could see in Barcelona, they were very good on their tyres."

Pak players move in Asian Jr Squash C'ship semis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani players have moved in the semi-finals of the Asian Junior Squash Championship here on Thursday. In Boys U-13, Mohammad Iffat Zulkifli (MAS) beat Faizan Ali (Pak) 12-10, 13-11, 9-11, 11-6, Sohail Adnan (Pak) beat here, especially. I'm happy, I'm enjoying the grass here in Eastbourne." Boulter, ranked 32nd in the world, came to Eastbourne in good form after retaining her Nottingham Open crown earlier this month.

Simerver Singh (MAS) 11-1, 11-7, 11-8, Shiven Agarwal (IND) beat Abdul Ahad Butt (Pak) 11-4, 11-7, 11-5. In Boys U-17, Abdullah Nawaz (Pak) beat Yusha Nafees (IND) 11-1, 11-7, 11-2, Altamis Aqhar (MAS) beat Shu Takahashi (JAP) 11-9, 6-11, 11-7, 11-9, Nikhelswar (MAS) beat Aqil Mirza (MAS) 13-11, 1-11, 11-7, 7-11, 11-6, Azaan Ali (Pak) beat Yahya Asad (Pak) 11-7, 11-7, 11-4. In Boys U-19, Hamza Khan (Pak) beat Anas Ali Shah (Pak) 11-8, 11-8, 11-4, Muhammad Ahammad (Pak) beat Tam Tsz Shing (HKG) 11-8, 11-2, 11-9, Harith Danial (MAS) beat Azan Khalil (Pak) 11-3, 11-3, 11-5,

Jooyoung NA (KOR) beat Law Arthur Pak Ki (HKG) 11-3, 5-11, 13-11, 11-9. In Girls U-13, Aadya Budhia (IND) beat Mahnoor Ali (Pak) 11-4, 11-8, 6-11, 11-6, Maisarah Mohd (MAS) beat Lee Ka Man (HKG) 11-9, 11-6, 4-11, 11-6, Goushika (IND) beat Makaela Lin (HKG) 11-8, 11-9, 11-8, Chiu Hau (HKG) beat Yu Hui Ching (HKG) 11-8, 11-6, 5-11, 11-3. In Girls U-15, Harlecin Tan (MAS) beat Anika Dubey (IND) 11-2, 11-5, 11-5, Yek Rui Jean (MAS) beat Tang Lok Yin (HKG) 8-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-8, Ooi Wen Min (MAS) beat Jayna Lim (SIN) 11-7, 11-8, 11-6, Lo Pui Yin Chloe (HKG) beat Diva Shah (IND) 11-6, 11-6, 11-9.

In Girls U-17, Enna Wong (HKG) beat Chung Yee Ling (HKG) 11-3, 11-2, 11-3, Doyce Lee (MAS) beat Unnathi Tripathi (IND) 11-3, 11-1, 11-6, Tang Helen (HKG) beat Najwa Zara (MAS) 11-4, 11-6, 11-7, Whitney Isabelle (MAS) beat Cheeung Tsz (HKG) 10-12, 11-3, 11-8, 1-11, 11-9. In Girls U-19, Thanussa Uthrian (MAS) beat Anrie Goh (MAS) 11-7, 9-11, 11-3, 11-3, Leung Ka (HKG) beat Valerie Kaitlyn (HKG) 11-4, 11-6, 11-9, Akari Midorikawa (JPN) beat Nirupama Dubey (IND) 11-7, 11-9, 6-11, 9-11, 11-5, Goh Zhe (MAS) beat Au Ling Yu (HKG) 11-7, 11-4, 11-0. The semifinals of both Men & Women Events

would be played on Friday.

In Boys U-13, Sohail Adnan (Pak) will play against Mohammad Iffat Zulkifli (MAS) and Julius Tan (MAS) will play against Huzaifa Shahid (Pak).

In Boys U-15, Muhammad Raziq Puttra (MAS) will play against Abdullah Zaman (Pak) and Nouman Khan (Pak) will play against Shiven Agarwal (IND).

In Boys U-17, Abdullah Nawaz (Pak) will play against Altamis Aqhar (MAS) and Azan Ali (Pak) will play against Nikhelswar (MAS).

In Boys U-19, Hamza Khan (Pak) will play against M Ammad (Pak) and Harith Danial (MAS) will play against

Jooyoung NA (KOR).

In Girls U-13, Maisarah Mohd (MAS) will play against Goushika (IND) and Chiu Hau (HKG) will play against Adiya Budhia (IND).

In Girls U-15, Harlecin Tan (MAS) will play against Yek Rui Jean (MAS) and Ooi Wen Min (MAS) will play against Lo Pui Yin Chloe (HKG).

In Girls U-17, Enna Wong (HKG) will play against Doyce Lee (MAS) and Tang Helen (HKG) will play against Whitney Isabelle (MAS).

In Girls U-19, Thanussa Uthrian (MAS) will play against Leung Ka (HKG) and Akari Midorikawa (JPN) will play against Goh Zhe (MAS).



In brief

ANF recovers 344 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations countrywide here on Thursday, nabbed three accused and recovered 344 kg drugs. According to an ANF Headquarters spokesman, about 316.7 kg of ice and 17.2 kg of opium were recovered from Nokundi Chagai. Around 6 kg of hashish was recovered from a motorcycle rider intercepted near Sohrab Goth town in Karachi. In the third operation, 2.9 kg of hashish was recovered from an accused rounded up near Qayyumabad in Karachi. In the fourth operation, 1 kg of ice was recovered from the possession of an accused arrested on DG Khan Road in Multan. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act. Further investigations are in process.

Police arrest bike lifters

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police in an action against bike lifters managed to arrest four accused, members of two gangs and recovered three stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Pirwadhai police netted two bike lifters namely Asad and Zaki and recovered two stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. In another raid, Kahuta police rounded up Nasir and Faizan and recovered a stolen motorcycle from their possession. Separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Divisional Superintendent of Police directed police to accelerate ongoing operations against car and bike lifters.

Action against encroachments

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the directive of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon, a large-scale anti-encroachment operation is underway in the federal capital. Assistant Commissioners (ACs) are actively involved in removing illegal structures across various areas. The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration's spokesman said that AC Nilore, along with district teams, carried out a raid in Khanna Pul. They cleared temporary encroachments from the green belt in the area. In a similar effort, AC City led operations in Blue Area and F-7. They dismantled 14 illegal structures and revoked the license of a hotel that had extended its seating area onto the footpath. Additionally, AC City supervised another operation in F-7 Markaz, working with the Directorate of Municipal Administration (DMA) to remove further illegal structures. During these operations, DC issued a stern warning, stating that strict action would be taken against anyone occupying government or public spaces for personal use.

Police recover 5.5 kg charras

RAWALPINDI (APP): The district police in a crackdown against drug peddlers managed to recover 5.5 kg charras and arrested six accused, said a police spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that Taxila police recovered 1260 grams hashish from an accused namely Amjad, 1200 grams hashish from Arshad and 530 grams hashish from the possession of Ahsan. The Newtown police conducted raids and recovered 1500 grams hashish from an accused Aarsalan and 540 grams hashish from Sameer Sadiq.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for States & Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Engineer Amir Muqam addressing a seminar on "World Refugee Day-2024" organized by UNHCR.

UNHCR calls for solidarity and solutions for Afghan refugees

ISLAMABAD (APP): UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency Thursday lauded the people and government of Pakistan for hosting Afghan refugees for over four decades and called for protecting those seeking safety in Pakistan.

UNHCR acknowledged that as Pakistan has been facing its challenges, the country's generosity must be matched with international responsibility-sharing.

World Refugee Day is an international day designated by the United Nations to honour refugees around the globe. It's marked annually and celebrates the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution. According to UNHCR's flagship global trends report, global forced displacement rose to 120 million by May 2024, of which some 43 million are refugees.

Tragically, about 40 per cent of all displaced individuals are children aged 17 or under, highlighting the pro-

found impact on young lives.

Reflecting the global 2024 theme, "solidarity with and solutions for refugees" an event was held in Islamabad to pay tribute to refugees and express appreciation for the enduring generosity of the communities hosting them.

The event was attended by Federal Minister for SAFRON, Amir Muqam, UNHCR's National Goodwill Ambassador Mahira Khan as well as other members of the government and civil society.

UNHCR's Representative in Pakistan, Philippa Candler, expressed concern at the increase in the number of people forcefully displaced from their homes across the world and paid tribute to their resilience. "I am inspired by the many Afghan refugees I have met in Pakistan, whose strength, ambition and determination are an example to us all," she said.

The Representative called for all stakeholders to

seize the opportunity to commit to a more ordered and predictable refugee management policy, show compassion for people forced to flee and seek solutions to their plight. "We can all do more to show solidarity with refugees. No action is too small, whether it's welcoming a refugee into your community or advocating for their protection," she added.

The Federal Minister underlined the financial challenges of Pakistan in hosting Afghans in the country and noted the generous support of the international community. However, he emphasised that international attention is dwindling and continued solidarity is a must.

UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassador Mahira Khan called for a renewed collective pledge to stand with refugees. "Let us work together to ensure that every displaced person has access to safety, dignity, and a place to call home".

RDA launches operation against illegal housing schemes

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Divisional Intelligence Committee has launched operation against illegal housing schemes in Taxila. According to a RDA spokesman, the Task Force had accelerated its ongoing operation against illegal housing schemes.

The RDA Enforcement Squad while conducting operation took action against eight illegal housing schemes namely Aroura Housing Scheme, Al-Khan Enclave, Land Sub-Division, Wah Residencia, Fahad Builders (office of illegal schemes Education Town/Wah Hills), Al-Madina Land Sub-Division, Education Town/Wah Hills/Kashmir Town and Khawas Town.

The schemes are located in Mouzas Lab Thatho, Niko, Bhoti Pind, Buddu, Gari Afghana, and Bajar, Tehsil Taxila, District Rawalpindi.

The Enforcement Squad sealed and demolished the site offices and land subdivisions of the illegal housing schemes, the spokesman said.

The operation was conducted on the orders of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Muhammad Abdul Aamir Khattak, Director General RDA, the Additional DG RDA, the Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi and the City Police Officer, Rawalpindi.

The spokesman informed that despite warnings to cease illegal advertisements, booking of the plots, and development work, the owners of the housing schemes continued to operate booking offices in violation of the rules.

The DG RDA said that under the Commissioner's guidance, the crackdown on illegal housing societies would continue to prevent fraud and protect the citizens from exploitation.

She said that the RDA had advised the citizens not to invest illegal housing schemes and visit the RDA website www.rda.gop.pk to check status of all legal and illegal housing societies.

Muhammad Usman Bajwa, Assistant Director Building Control RDA/In-charge Enforcement Squad, Mehwish Naseem, Assistant Director Planning RDA, along with RDA Scheme/Building Inspectors and other team members took part in the operation.

Unity must to end Kashmirs' sufferings: Sultan

ISLAMABAD (APP):

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Barrister Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry Thursday stressed the need for unity among the entire Muslims nations as vital for ending the plights of the oppressed people of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Talking to a private news channel, he urges the international community and organizations to take practical steps to hold India accountable for its gross and widespread human

rights violations in IIOJK.

He said Pakistan is continuing its political, diplomatic and moral support to Kashmir cause and Kashmiri people have great respect for Pakistani nation as well.

The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) should also play a pro-active role in resolving the conflict by uniting the entire Muslim world under one umbrella, he highlighted.

He further said that the world is also aware of the Indian aggressive policies

and expressing concerns over the grim situation in IIOJK, adding, the time is not far when the Kashmiris will get their fundamental right to self-determination.

The economy and culture of occupied Kashmir had also been destroyed by Indian occupied forces, he added.

"I would like to request the Pakistani nation and friends of Kashmir across the globe to support our call to support the Kashmiris' fighting for their right to self-determination", he added.

Punjab govt conducting first school census

ISLAMABAD (APP):

Punjab's Education Minister, Rana Sikandar Hayat Thursday said that all-out measures would be taken to standardise the education system in public schools of Punjab where for better policies, the first school mapping programme to collect data about all school kids will be conducted soon transparently.

Talking to a Private news channel, he stressed on conducting school census at the national level, adding that the Punjab government is taking the lead among all other provinces and recently with the direction of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif school mapping was being conducted to count kids.

Through NADRA data will be checked about the enrollment data of students

at every district level, he said, adding that long-term policy-making for government schools and enhancing the quality of education will be the top priority of the Punjab government.

He also praised that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has also announced the formation of a 19-member Education Task Force to address the pressing issues related to the national education emergency which is another historic step.

He said that collective efforts of all provinces related to out-of-school children's need of hour, adding, that Punjab government authorities are collaborating with other provinces in this regard.

Replying to a question, he mentioned that the government is also conducting an inter-provincial education

conference next month to devise a national strategy to bring improvement in the education system across the country. He said education ministers of all the provinces and other stakeholders would be invited to the conference and to find out consensus-based solutions to address the education system.

To another question, he stressed the need to devise a strategy for education and skill-based training programmes for public schools, adding that the prime minister had a vision of creating employment opportunities for the youth.

Skills-based programs for students completing 8th class will also be conducted in public schools, he said, adding that skill education will only play a critical role in the economic prosperity of the country.

Dengue larva; 8842 spots positive, says report

RAWALPINDI (APP):

Dengue Prevention and Control, District Administration Rawalpindi has released its report containing statistical data of dengue presence during the first half of the current year. The report, issued here on Tuesday shows the increasing trend of presence of dengue larva which requires continued surveillance and response actions.

Over 22 lakh houses were checked out of which 7312 have been detected positive.

Report shows that 573000 spots were visited by the dengue eradication teams and found 1530 positive spots. According to the report, Rawalpindi Municipal area ranks top in the district with the highest 2416 houses detected positive of dengue larva presence, followed by Rawalpindi Cantonment area with 2262 positive cases. Murree, with comparatively windy and cold weather has shown lowest positive cases with only 160

houses. Above 760,000 houses and spots were fined while taking punitive actions by the administration.

Dr Sajjad, DCP and Focal Person Dengue Prevention and Control in a brief interaction with APP said that continued surveillance for dengue control was underway to maximize awareness dengue issue among the masses. He informed that all DDHOs and filed teams have been actively engaged in surveillance and creating general public awareness.



RAWALPINDI: People enjoying a ride on boat in water pond at Ayub National Park. —APP Photo

Romina underlines urgency of 'collective action' for safeguarding GB's significant natural heritage

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam on Thursday underlined urgency of 'collective action' for safeguarding the Gilgit Baltistan (GB)'s globally significant natural heritage.

Romina Khurshid Alam said, "Pakistan's northern region is home to unique biodiversity and ecosystems of global repute. But, they are grappled with several significant threats stemming from both natural and human-caused factors." Addressing as a keynote speaker at a national seminar on the 'Biodiversity Safeguarding Initiative: Global Assessment of the State of Nature and Biodiversity Safeguarding Actions in Northern Pakistan' here, the PM's climate aide stressed that tackling escalating risks to the resource-rich biodiversity and ecosystems was a

need of the hour to protect the biodiversity and resource-rich ecosystems for overall environmental and human sustainability and development.

Spelling out the threats to the sustainability of biodiversity and ecosystems, Romina Khurshid Alam said, "Continuing loss of habitat and fragmentation, deforestation and land degradation, soil erosion, water and soil pollution and contamination, illegal wildlife poaching and trade, unsustainable agricultural practices, use of chemical fertilizers in farming, unsustainable production and consumption patterns and climate change are among the key pressing challenges facing the unparalleled biodiversity in the country's north."

She emphasized the need for urgency of collective action for safeguarding the region's natural heritage comprising unique bio-

diversity and natural ecosystems. "Northern Pakistan is blessed with unparalleled biodiversity, but it is under threat. Through collaboration and shared responsibility, we must work together to protect our ecosystems and conserve the biodiversity in the country, particularly in the northern parts for sustainability of the environment, of our own and future generations," PM's coordinator Romina Khurshid told the participants.

She also hailed the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN-Pakistan) for organising an important seminar on the Biodiversity Safeguarding Initiative for sharing the project achievements and collectively focuses on the conservation of biodiversity in the country.

"On behalf of Government of Pakistan, I extend our heartfelt

gratitude to Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), Government of Italy, Government of GB, IUCN Pakistan and local communities for making this possible to achieve important benchmarks in safeguarding the biodiversity of the fragile ecosystems of northern Pakistan through the joint initiative of national importance," the PM's climate aide said during her address.

Gilgit-Baltistan is the biodiversity rich region of Pakistan, being home to the national animal of Pakistan Markhor. Unique flora and fauna of this region is exceptional with the highly conservation orientated local communities. Community based Trophy hunting programme has become most interesting and rewarding initiative that has not only increased the population of key Cites species

and in-turn elevated the lives of local communities.

"However, I consider this Biodiversity Safeguarding Project a major milestone in establishing collaborative initiatives by key stakeholders in the environmentally-sensitive region of Gilgit-Baltistan," Romina Khurshid said.

"Assessment of key wildlife species has been a remarkable advancement with regards to status of biodiversity in the country," she highlighted. She also highlighted that establishment of bio-diversity corridors in the Khunjerab National Park jointly with the local community and GB Forest, Parks and Wildlife department is another unique initiative, which would significantly help for biodiversity conservation.

"Establishing the corridors has proved a positive step because the Khunjerab National Park has

been selected as a candidate for the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas, which will help draw global support to protect and conserve the globally-important unique biodiversity in the national park," The PM's coordinator Romina recalled.

"No doubted community-based eco-tourism pilots have paid fruitful dividends and proved as excellent examples towards establishing sustainable tourism in the northern region, she highlighted. "Given the positive outcomes of the community-based ecotourism, there is serious need for launching similar initiatives needed to be launched in other locations by the local communities in collaboration with the relevant departments like Forest, Parks and Wildlife department and tourism department for promotion of the nature-based tourism in fragile ecosystems of the country," she underlined.

BAMIYAN (Amu TV): The death toll in deadly flooding in the central province of Bamiyan has increased to 19, sources from the province said on Thursday. The sources told Amu that the victims were members of two families. The bodies of nine victims have been recovered, but ten others remain missing. Among the dead are women and children. The floods struck the villages of Podedna Tou, Hazarcheshma, and Duzdan Cheshma in Yakawlang district on Wednesday.

The Frontier Post

GHANISTA

Zil-Hajj 21 1445 — Friday, June 28, 2024

HERAT (Amu TV): Three people were killed and six others injured in a traffic accident in Rabat-e Sangi district of Herat province on Wednesday evening, according to a Taliban official. Abdulrahim Rahmani, Taliban deputy district governor in Rabat-e Sangi, said the accident occurred when a private Toyota Corolla collided with a transit truck parked on the side of the Herat-Torghundi highway.

China for improved education for girls in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Special Representative for Afghanistan has called on the Taliban to uphold their commitments regarding girls' education and improve access to schooling in Afghanistan.

Yu Xiaoyong, China's Special Representative for Afghanistan, made these remarks in an interview with an Iranian media outlet.

Furthermore, China's Special Representative for Afghanistan added that the Taliban regime has stated its interest in improving the situation of girls' education.

Meanwhile, it has been over a thousand days

since girls above sixth grade in Afghanistan have been deprived of attending school.

Recently marking the thousand-day milestone of the ban on girls' education in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the country, expressed support for Afghan girls, stating, "We must stand with girls."

This comes as the Taliban regime, since coming to power in August 2021, has banned girls above sixth grade from attending schools. As of now, there has been no indication of efforts to resume

education for girls above sixth grade in Afghanistan. Amid the Doha meeting, Afghanistan faces severe human rights challenges, exacerbated by the absence of women's representatives and human rights advocates. This exclusion highlights ongoing concerns about inclusivity and rights protection in the peace process. The decision not to invite these crucial voices has sparked international criticism, underscoring the need for comprehensive and inclusive dialogue that addresses the rights and representation of the people of Afghanistan.

Balkh religious scholars call for Muslim unity



BALKH (TOLONews): A number of religious scholars and residents of Balkh, condemning the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, have called for Muslim unity in response to these atrocities.

At a gathering in Mazar-e-Sharif, religious scholars stated that killing innocent people, including children and women in the Gaza Strip, is against all Islamic values and global norms.

Sayed Haidar Hashemi, the Friday prayer leader of Mazar-e-Sharif, said: "One of the greatest injustices is truly the oppression of the people of Gaza and Palestine. It is obligatory for the Islamic world to awaken and create conditions to remove this dark and seditious point from the body of humanity so that the oppressed people of Gaza and Palestine can live in peace."

Sayed Saleh Sadr, a religious scholar, said: "If you are a Muslim, if you follow the religion of Islam, if you love the Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt, and if you pray and worship; but remain indifferent to the blood unjustly shed in Gaza and to the children and mothers brutally killed, you will not be part of the Muslim community."

The participants of this gathering and the residents of Balkh accuse the international community and leaders of Islamic countries of being blind. They demand an immediate stop to the war in the Gaza Strip.

Faheem, a participant, said: "The people of Palestine are being killed innocently and without any reason. Our demand from the international community is to immediately stop the killing of Palestinians by Israel and to bring those

responsible for this massacre to justice."

Shadab Shayiq, a resident of Mazar-e-Sharif, said: "We see that war continues daily in Palestine and thousands of women, children, and men are being killed. When unity comes, oppression will be eradicated from Islamic lands."

Qasim Hashemi, a resident of Mazar-e-Sharif, said: "Every day we witness the martyrdom of innocent people, and in addition, many are suffering from hunger, which leads to their deaths due to lack of food and water. It is truly regrettable for Islamic countries, and as a Muslim, I also consider myself responsible."

This comes as, in the past twenty-four hours alone, 32 Palestinians have been killed and 139 others injured as a result of Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

Completion of Machalgho Dam demanded



KABUL (TOLONews): Residents of Ahmad Aba district in Paktia demand the resumption of the unfinished work on the Malchalgho water and power dam.

They say that the completion of this dam will not only boost the agricultural sector but also increase the groundwater level.

Jan Mohammad, a resident of Ahmad Aba district, said: "Our demand from the government is to build this dam so that a lot of land can be irrigated and developed, and poor people can find work."

Wakil, another resident of this district, said: "The dam's work is halted and should resume as soon as possible so that people can

benefit from it. There is still no dam and nothing else."

Mirza Jan, a resident of Ahmadaba, about the completion of this dam's work, said: "We need this work very much because all our lands and all the dry plains depend on it."

If the dam is built, water will reach these lands, apples and other crops will yield very well, and job opportunities will be provided for people."

The Machalgho Dam is located in Ahmadaba district of Paktia, and the work on it remained unfinished after the fall of the previous regime. Residents of Ahmadaba district say that if the remaining work on the Machalgho Dam is not completed, the work

already done will be destroyed due to flooding."

Ahmad, a resident of Ahmadaba district, said: "The work on Machghal Dam has stopped. The canals that were built have also been damaged by floods. But now that security has been established, the remaining work on this dam should also start because we desperately need water and electricity."

Meanwhile, local officials say that, if the World Bank resumes work on incomplete projects in Afghanistan, the work on this dam will also be completed.

Mohammad Karim Fateh, head of the Pakтия sub-basin, said: "The work on Machghal Dam began

Afghans proud
in defeat as
fairytale World
Cup run
ends in semis

KABUL (AFP): Afghans mourned the end of their T20 World Cup dreams on Thursday but said the cricket team's performances in reaching a first semi-final gave them hope for the future.

An all-male crowd of hundreds -- among them armed Taliban -- watched on two large screens at the Kabul Cricket Stadium as South Africa thrashed Afghanistan by nine wickets in Trinidad.

Hopes had been high the Afghans would defeat South Africa, after shocking the mighty Australia for the first time on the way to the last four. Fans cheered and clapped their support even as Afghanistan were routed for a meagre 56 runs.

Instead of the celebrations seen after Afghanistan's wins during the dream run to the semi-final, sombre crowds petered out of the stadium as South Africa's triumph was sealed with ease.

"We still commend our heroes," spectator Tila Mohammad Kharaoti told AFP, saying he thought the Afghan team was emotionally hungover after defeating Bangladesh just two days earlier in a nail-biter.

"They made Afghans proud and they raised our flag high in the stadiums, and we were very happy with that," said the 45-year-old dichar fan.

The surprise World Cup run provided rare moments of widespread celebrations in a country ravaged by four decades of war and beleaguered by economic, humanitarian and political crises. "We'll always support our team, we'll welcome them at the airport when they come home," said 25-year-old fan Aziz Rahman Rahmani.

"The Afghan cricket team is more than a cricket team... this is not only a game of bat and ball for us, it's a source of joy, a reason for the Afghans to unite," the Kabul based money-changer told AFP.

In a country still reeling from the upheaval of the Taliban takeover in 2021, many Taliban members joined the crowd at the stadium watch event organised by the national cricket board. They waved the white and black flag of the Taliban authorities, cheering on the team still bearing the banned tricolour flag of the previous government.

During breaks in play, speakers boomed out Taliban anthems calling for unity and rebuilding of the country. The Taliban authorities deployed extra security and the crowd was all male, women having been effectively banned from sports and sports venues. Watching the match on TV at home, Shkula Danish was dis-

heartened by the heavy loss. "The match didn't go as we'd hoped," she told AFP over the phone from eastern Paktia province.

"It's heartbreaking."

For Javid Momand, however, the team's journey in the competition was still worth celebrating. The university lecturer was proud of the "men in blue" saying, "They lifted up Afghanistan's name."

"Wherever you go, if people are talking about cricket, they're talking about Afghanistan." As Tilash Mohammad filed quietly out of the stadium, he said the team's showing gave him hope for the future.

"God willing, the time will come when they will bring a World Cup trophy home to Afghanistan."

during the republic era, about 35 percent of the work was completed, and the canals were also built. The Islamic Emirate is also committed to completing incomplete projects. If the World Bank, which had announced the completion of unfinished projects in 1403 (2024), starts these projects, we are hopeful and assure our compatriots that, God willing, the work on the Machalgho Dam will also begin.

According to information from the Paktia sub-basin administration, the Machalgho Dam has the capacity to irrigate 2,300 hectares of land and produce about 10 megawatts of electricity.

Ministry of economy denies interference in int'l aid

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Economy, in response to the approval of the US bill that the interim government does not have access to financial aid, has once again denied claims there is any interference in the aid of the international community to Afghanistan.

Abdul Latif Nazari, Deputy Minister of Economy, emphasized that to reach the goal of helping people in need, this ministry only monitors how it is distributed.

Nazari told TOLONews: "The Islamic Emirate only supervises the distribution of aid and the reason is for this aid to not be wasted and so it is distributed to needy people; but the fact that there are some reports related to the involvement of the Islamic Emirate, we completely and strongly reject them."

The House of Representatives of the United States of America has approved a bill based on which the interior government's access to foreign aid is prohibited.

Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the US House of Representatives, said: "Second, it calls for a report on cash assistance



programs in Afghanistan that puts the safeguards in place to prevent the Taliban from accessing it, keeping them from getting to the money. Third, it requires a report on the Afghan Fund in the Afghanistan Central Bank and what controls are in place to make sure these funds are not diverted or misused."

In the last three years, the United States has provided 2.8 billion dollars to Afghanistan, but several economic experts said that this aid can be effective if

they are spent on long-term infrastructure projects.

Mohammad Nabizadeh, an Afghan, who is knowledgeable about economic issues, said: "No matter how these funds come to Afghanistan, they will be very useful in several of our sectors. First, the entry of the dollar itself is useful. Second, aid has been provided, although most of it has been used for their purposes."

Abd al-Zohar, an expert on economic issues, said: "Foreign aid can

increase liquidity and money inside Afghanistan, although in the short term. But when aid is reduced or cut off, it can renew the deterioration and economic crisis in Afghanistan." Previously, the United States special inspector for the reconstruction of Afghanistan claimed that from August 2021 until now in Afghanistan, America's partners have paid 10.9 million dollars as taxes, expenses, and funds for water and electricity to the interim government of Afghanistan.

Deported Afghans claim Iranian Forces seized their money

ABUL (TOLONews): Deported Afghan migrants from Iran claim that the security forces of this country forcibly take their money and belongings. Many of these migrants arrive in Afghanistan with no money and cannot afford transportation to their provinces.

Saif-ur-Rahman, deported from Iran, said: "Iranian security forces took our money and belongings by force. I went to the UNHCR office in Nimroz for travel expenses to return home, but I received no help."

Jawed, another deportee from Iran, said: "I was in Iran when the Iranian forces took me from my workplace, subjected me to severe mistreatment and beatings. Now that I've arrived in Nimroz, they stamped my hand but provided no assistance. I don't know how to get home."

Agha Mohammad, deported from Iran, said: "In Iranian prisons, the security forces emptied all the money from my account, and I waited ten days until some Afghans helped me pay the fare to the border. I went to the



Juma Khan Qureshi, a resident of Baghlan province, had illegally gone to Iran three months ago. He says he doesn't have the money to return home.

Juma Khan told TOLONews: "I had illegally gone to Iran three months ago. I was arrested by Iranian forces and deported through the Pole Abrisham (Silk Bridge bor-

der) in Nimroz. Along the way, Iranian forces took all my money under various pretexts, and now I can't afford to return home."

However, the Nimroz Directorate of Refugees and Repatriations says that with financial cooperation from some foreign organizations, they are providing cash assistance to some of these deported migrants.

Abdullah Riaz, the head of the Nimroz Directorate of Refugees and

Reparations, said: "With the cooperation of some foreign organizations, we have tried to provide financial assistance to newly returned migrants from Iran. In the past two months, we have provided financial assistance to 60,000 migrants."

According to local Nimroz officials, around 120,000 Afghan migrants have been deported from Iran to Afghanistan in the past two months.

UNDP: Natural disasters becoming major threat in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) said in its new report that climate is affecting Afghanistan and to support the country, effective actions should be taken.

According to UNDP, natural events such as floods, droughts, and earthquakes have made the communities of Afghanistan vulnerable and in need of humanitarian aid.

UNDP said that it has helped people with aid of more than \$230 million dollars in 2024.

According to the UNDP report: "Afghanistan ranks as the world's seventh most vulnerable country to climate change despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions. Natural disasters are becoming a major threat for Afghanistan as floods, earthquakes, and droughts deal major blows to communities with limited capacity to respond to and recover from these shocks."

Abdul Nasir Rashtiya, an expert on economic issues, said: "The first world countries or industrialized countries were able to earn huge profits by permitting more greenhouse gas emissions, so there is a need to



help developing countries in preventing the damage caused by the emission of greenhouse gases." The Agriculture and Livestock Room said that the United Nations organization must provide shelter and food for those farmers who are harmed by natural disasters.

Mirwais Hajizada, the first deputy of Agriculture and Livestock Room, said: "Charity institutions, charitable foundations, and businessmen should help our nation, the nation that suffered, whether the com-

On the other hand, the Ministry of Economy said it is important to continue providing aid to those affected by natural events in Afghanistan.

The ministry adds that after the floods in some provinces in the past three months, most families have faced economic challenges, and until now, along with the United Nations institutions, the European Union, and some other countries, including Turkey,

Uzbekistan, Qatar, and Iran. They have given their aid to the people of Afghanistan.

Abdul Raman Habib, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Economics, said: "Responsible committees in addition to emergency aid, and health services assist financial aid to the heirs of martyrs and farmers whose cattle were lost in various provinces."

This comes as recent floods have caused major damage in Baghlan, Faryab, Ghor, Takhar, and Badakhshan.

ECP misinterpreted SC verdict by excluding PTI from polls: Justice Minallah

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Athar Minallah, while referring to the Supreme Court verdict which upheld an Election Commission of Pakistan order of declaring the PTI intra-party elections null and void, remarked on Thursday that the ECP had misinterpreted the court's verdict when it excluded the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf from the election process.

The judge's comments came during the hearing of the petition filed by the Sunni Ittehad Council – an ally of the PTI – challenging the denial of reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies. The PTI had, after losing its electoral symbol 'bat', directed the independent candidates who won election with its backing to join the SIC.

A full-court bench, led by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa, conducted Thursday's proceedings. Other judges on the bench were Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Ayesha A. Malik, Justice Athar Minallah, Justice Syed Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Shahid Waheed, Justice Irfan Saadat Khan and Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan.

At the outset of the hearing, ECP lawyer Sikandar Bashir came to the rostrum to advance his arguments. At one point, Justice Muneeb Akhtar remarked that the Supreme Court had upheld the decision of the Election Commission but it did not mean that the party should be excluded from the elections. He reiterated that the apex court never intended to exclude the PTI from the elections.

Justice Athar Minallah commented that the electoral exercise determines the will of the electorate, adding that if someone raises questions over elections, the matter goes to the Election Commission. Justice Jamal Mandokhail remarked that a candidate runs for election, not a political party, adding that a candidate just demonstrates his political affiliation and it is their right that they get an electoral symbol.

He questioned how the ECP declared [these] candidates independent and under which law. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah said that the answer to this query was that the ECP kept this party [PTI] out of the election simply because it did not have an election symbol. "Just tell us when and where the ECP had these thoughts," he questioned.

Justice Athar Manullah interjected, remarking that this means the ECP wrongly interpreted the verdict of the Supreme Court and expelled a main party from the election process. During the course of proceedings, CJP Isa observed that there is a conflict in the documents provided to the court by the Election Commission. Subsequently, the court adjourned the hearing until July 1.

In its 30-page written submission filed through Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan on Wednesday, the federal government sought dismissal of the instant petition, contending that the SIC was not entitled to reserved seats for minorities and women as it was composed entirely of independent candidates. It maintained that the SIC did not field even a single candidate in the Feb 8 elections or furnish a list required under Section 104 of the Elections Act 2017.

The only constitutionally permissible solution, the government added in its response, was to allot the additional seats to other parties in proportion to the general seats secured by them based on the formula having been figured out after the exclusion of winning independent candidates.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, which had directed the independent candidates who won election with its backing to join the Sunni Ittehad Council after losing its electoral symbol 'bat', has sought to become party to the case through a petition filed with the apex court.

The move came after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) levelled certain allegations against the party during the hearing on the SIC petition. The PTI accused the ECP of "unconstitutionally" allocating reserved seats belonging to the PTI-SIC alliance to other political groups. The PTI petition details that both PTI and SIC were deprived of reserved seats despite being eligible.

During the proceedings on June 25, CJP Isa remarked that neither the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) nor any of its elected representative were respondents in the case. "Since the instant case concerns the allocation of reserved seats for the SIC, then why the case which was not before the bench was being discussed," he asked.

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah questioned how the ECP could declare all the [PTI-backed] candidates as independents when it has not had such an authority. Justice Ayesha A Malik remarked that allocating reserved seats against the principle of propor-

tional representation was not permissible. She also questioned the advantages other parties would gain if the SIC lost this case.

Justice Minallah interjected at one point, emphasising the importance of women and minorities having representation in Parliament. He noted that the PML-N and PPP faced similar issues in the past without support from the Supreme Court. "This mirrors the situation from 2018 where one party is the aggrieved party. The court has not learned from past instances," Justice Minallah added. The judge predicted that there would inevitably come a time in the future when the apex court would regret its decision once again.

In March, the ECP ruled that the SIC was not entitled to claim quota for reserved seats "due to having incurable legal defects and violation of a mandatory provision of submission of party list for reserved seats".

Later, the ECP accepted applications of the opposing parties and decided that the seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies would not remain vacant and would be allocated by a proportional representation process on the basis of seats won by political parties. The development resulted in the PTI-backed SIC losing a total of 77 reserved seats - 23 National Assembly seats (20 women and 3 minorities), 25 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly seats (21 women and 4 minorities), two Sindh Assembly seats (women) and 27 Punjab Assembly seats (24 women and 3 minorities).

The PTI dismissed the ECP verdict as unconstitutional. The SIC then challenged the ECP ruling in the Peshawar High Court, but its plea was dismissed. In May, a three-judge bench of the apex court took up a petition filed by the SIC. The court suspended the ECP decision to allocate SIC's reserved seats to other parties. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, during the proceedings, remarked that the mandate given by the people should be properly represented in parliament.

The court sent the matter of reserved seats to the Judges Committee to decide whether the case would be heard by the same bench or a larger bench would be constituted. The court also ordered the ECP to suspended victory notifications of 77 lawmakers [on reserved seats], causing the ruling coalition to lose its two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. In late May, a full court was constituted to hear the case.



NEW YORK: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi shaking hands with his counterpart from China, Qi Yanjun.

Court orders BRT contractor to appear on July 3

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has filed a plea at Accountability Court regarding issuance of red warrant for the arrest of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project Contractor Masood Ahmed Shah, on Thursday. The contractor is living currently abroad, and NAB is seeking the court's assistance in securing his arrest through Interpol.

NAB's Special Prosecutor General Muhammad Ali and Deputy Prosecutor General Azim Dad filed the plea before the Accountability Court, alleging that Shah has been involved in corrupt practices worth billions of rupees in the BRT project. The plea stated that Shah was initially served a call-up notice to appear before NAB in the inquiry, but he didn't comply.

Subsequently, NAB conducted a raid on Shah's residence, but he was not present. The chairman of NAB has also issued an arrest warrant for Shah, but his absence from the country has hindered the bureau's efforts to apprehend him.

The plea seeking issuance of red warrant, which would enable Interpol to arrest BRT contractor Masood Shah and extradite him to Pakistan to face trial. NAB has argued that the court has the authority to issue a red warrant under Section 204 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Accountability Court summoned BRT Contractor Masood Shah to appear on 3rd July and has issued a notice to him.

Madyan lynching: 8 remanded

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: An anti-terrorism court in Swat on Thursday remanded the eight more accused arrested in the Madyan lynching case to police for six days. Shaukat Ahmad Khan, Special Judge of ATC-I Malakand division, pronounced the judgment.

The accused were booked under sections 302, 326, 353, 436, 427, 460, 341, 186, 148, 149 of Pakistan Penal Code, and 7-ATA. After hearing the argument, the court granted a 6-day remand of the accused mentioned in the FIR subject to their pre-arrest medical examination. On June 20, a mob had lynched a man and set him on fire after he was suspected of desecrating the Holy Quran in Swat.

The tourist was allegedly accused of committing blasphemy by a mob in Swat district. The KP police took him to the police station however the enraged mob went inside and beat the tourist to death.

Israel storms Gaza, orders Palestinians to go

GAZA (Reuters): Israel stormed a neighborhood in Gaza City on Thursday, telling Palestinians as the tanks moved in that they must move south, and bombed the southern city of Rafah in what it says are the final stages of an operation against Hamas militants there.

Residents of the Shejaia neighborhood in Gaza City said they were taken by surprise by tanks rolling in and firing in the early afternoon, with drones also attacking after overnight bombing. "It sounded as if the war is restarting, a series of bombings that destroyed several houses in our area and shook the buildings," Mohammad Jamal, 25, a resident of Gaza City, told Reuters via a chat app.

The Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said there were reports of people killed and wounded in Shejaia but their teams were unable to reach them because of the ongoing offensive. Three people were reported killed there in the earlier bombing, with five killed in the Sabra neighborhood. The armed wing of Hamas ally Islamic Jihad said it had detonated a pre-planted explosive device against an Israeli tank east of Shejaia. Israel accuses the militants of hiding among civilians and says it warns displaced people to get out of the way of its operations against the fighters.

"To all residents and displaced people in the Shujaia area and the new neighborhoods ... For your safety, you must evacuate immediately south on Salah Al-Din Street to the humanitarian zone," army spokesperson Avichay Adraee posted on X. Residents and Hamas media said the tanks had rolled in before the post and that people from the eastern suburb were running westward under fire as Israel had blocked the road south. There was no other immediate comment from the Israeli military.

More than eight months into Israel's war on Gaza triggered by the Hamas-led cross border attack on Oct. 7, aid officials say the enclave remains at high risk of famine, with almost half a million people facing "catastrophic" food insecurity. "We are being starved in Gaza City, and are being hunted by tanks and planes with no hope that this war is ever ending," Jamal said.

The death of another girl in Kamal Adwan Hospital late on Wednesday

raised the number of children who have died of malnutrition and dehydration to at least 31, a Gaza health official said, adding that the war made recording such cases difficult. Israel denies accusations it has created the famine conditions, blaming aid agencies for distribution problems and accusing Hamas of diverting aid, allegations the militants deny.

In southern Gaza, drone footage on social media, which Reuters could not immediately authenticate, showed dozens of houses destroyed in parts of Rafah, with the Swedeya village on the western side of the city completely wiped out. There was no immediate Israeli military comment on the overnight military action. International mediation backed by the US has failed to yield a ceasefire agreement although talks are continuing amid intense Western pressure for Gaza to receive more aid.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on Wednesday that he had discussed his proposals for governance of post-war Gaza that would include local Palestinians, regional partners and the US but that it would be "a long and complex process." Senior US officials told Gallant, who was visiting Washington, that the US would maintain a pause on a shipment of heavy munitions for Israel while the issue is under review. The shipment was paused in early May over concerns the weapons could cause more Palestinian deaths in Gaza.

Hamas says any deal must bring an end to the war and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, while Israel says it will accept only temporary pauses in fighting until Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007, is eradicated. When Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, they killed around 1,200 people and seized more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

The Israeli offensive in retaliation has so far killed 37,658 people, the Gaza health ministry said on Tuesday, and has left the tiny, heavily built-up Gaza Strip in ruins. The Gaza health ministry does not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, but officials say most of those killed have been civilians. Israel has lost 314 soldiers in Gaza and says at least a third of the Palestinian dead are fighters.

Sudan faces famine risk in 14 areas

CAIRO (Reuters): There is a realistic chance of famine in 14 areas across Sudan if the conflict that began in April last year between military factions escalates further, a global hunger monitor said on Thursday.

The areas include parts of the capital Khartoum, the regions of Darfur and Kordofan and El Gezira state, according to an update from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). As previously reported by Reuters, some 755,000 people in Sudan face "catastrophe," the most severe level of extreme hunger. In total, 8.5 million people — or 18 percent of the population — face food shortages that could result in acute malnutrition and death or require emergency coping strategies, according to the update.

War between Sudan's army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted more than 14 months ago in the capital, and quickly spread to other parts of the country. It has triggered waves of ethnically-driven violence in the western region of Darfur, caused the world's biggest internal displacement crisis and split control of the country between the rival camps.

The IPC is a collaboration that includes UN agencies, national governments and aid groups, and produces internationally recognized assessments of food crises. Its most extreme warning is Phase 5, which has two levels, catastrophe and then famine. The IPC said its assessment released on Thursday meant that famine could occur with reasonable probability under a worst-case scenario in the 14 areas.

Famine can be declared if at least 20 percent of the population in an area are suffering extreme food shortages, with at least 30 percent of children acutely malnourished and two people out of every 10,000 dying daily from starvation or malnutrition and disease. Since the IPC warning system was created 20 years ago, famines have only been declared twice — in parts of Somalia in 2011 and in parts of South Sudan in 2017.



KARACHI: A view of light rain in the Port City after hot days.

Ukraine war: Russia suffers setbacks

MOSCOW: Russia has suffered multiple diplomatic and judicial blows during the past week over its war on Ukraine, despite President Vladimir Putin's high-profile visits to North Korea and Vietnam and Moscow's claims that it is founding a "Eurasian security architecture that will replace the discredited Euro-Atlantic security arrangements".

Putin signed a "comprehensive strategic treaty" with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on June 19, incorporating what he said was a defensive alliance. South Korea's government condemned the agreement. Its national security adviser, Chang Ho-jin, declared that Seoul would reconsider lifting a ban on arms supplies directly to Ukraine. Until now, South Korea has only sold weapons to Ukraine's allies. Chang later added that the type of weapons supplied to Ukraine would depend on Russia's cooperation with North Korea. Putin said it would be a "grave mistake" if South Korea changed its policy of not supplying belligerents.

Russia also suffered judicial embarrassments. The International Criminal Court at The Hague issued arrest warrants on Tuesday for former Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of Military Staff Valery Gerasimov, saying

that they bore responsibility for attacks on Ukrainian electricity infrastructure. The court said, "There are reasonable grounds to believe that the alleged strikes were directed against civilian objects," and that "the expected incidental civilian harm and damage would have been clearly excessive to the anticipated military advantage." On the same day, the European Court of Human Rights declared that Russia was in violation of several fundamental human rights in occupied territories. These include abducting people, illegally detaining or torturing them, forcing them to obtain Russian nationality, and numerous other violations.

On the diplomatic front, Russia suffered setbacks in the European Union, which on Tuesday officially opened accession talks with Ukraine and Moldova. A day earlier, the EU announced a 14th package of sanctions against Russia. Among other things, these sanctions forbid any EU organisation that is part of the "public opinion forming process", including political parties, think tanks and media, from accepting Russian money or indirect support. The EU also formally released 1.4bn (\$1.5bn) in proceeds from Russian frozen assets to Ukraine. Ninety percent of

that money is to be used for military procurements.

Meanwhile, Russia has been unable to make significant headway on the ground in Ukraine, despite opening a new front in the northern Kharkiv region on May 10, designed to pull Ukrainian soldiers away from the eastern front. That incursion brought its own problems, including prompting the US and Germany to follow Britain and France in allowing Ukraine to use their weapons on Russian soil. According to figures sourced from the Kharkiv mayor's office, and quoted in The Washington Post, the partial lifting this month of what used to be a total ban on strikes inside Russia using US equipment has made a difference. Air alerts have so far lasted a total of 62 hours compared with 475 hours in May; there were three strikes on Kharkiv city, compared with 76 in May; and one civilian was killed and seven injured this month compared with 39 killed and 239 injured in May, the Post reported.

The new rules of engagement appeared to have stopped attacks using S-300 air defence missiles and Iranian Shahed drones completely, but glide bombs were still getting through to the city, and many more to the front lines in the northern Kharkiv region. — Aljazeera



گیس چور جائیں گے سلاخوں کے پیچھے

Factory's connection severed for using domestic meter

Unit found using gas worth Rs400,000 to Rs450,000 per month

SNGPL detects 325,000 gas pilferage cases, recovers Rs2.4b during crackdown

Over 180 gas connections disconnected in anti-theft drive

گیس چوری آپریشن 35

'Massive action' kicks off against gas theft in Punjab, KP

گیس چوری 10

گیس چوری قابل سزا جرم ہے

گیس تحفیہ کنٹرول اینڈ ریکوری ایکٹ 2016 کے تحت کٹرل یا صنعتی میٹر کو نقصان پہنچانے پر
10 برس قید اور 50 لاکھ روپے جرمانہ یا دونوں سزائیں ہو سکتی ہیں

گیس چوری کی اطلاع 1199 پر دیں

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