

Raoo's remand extended

ISLAMABAD (INP): A local court in Islamabad has extended the physical remand of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) spokesperson Raooof Hasan by two more days. As per details, the duty judge Murid Abbas announced the reserved verdict and handed over Raooof Hasan to FIA on a two-day physical remand. The court also sent PTI social media activist Syeda Arooba on judicial remand.



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Israel says Hezbollah rocket kills 12 at football ground, vows response

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP): The Middle East braced for a potential flare-up in violence on Sunday after Israeli authorities said a rocket from Lebanon struck a soccer field in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, killing 12 children and teens in what the military called the deadliest attack on civilians since Oct. 7. It raised fears of a broader regional war between Israel and Hezbollah, which in a rare move denied it was responsible.

Overnight, the Israeli military said it struck a number of targets inside Lebanon, though their intensity was similar to months of cross-border fighting between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. Hezbollah said it also carried out strikes. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Saturday's attack came at a sensitive time. Israel and Hamas are negotiating a cease-fire proposal to end the nearly 10-month war in Gaza.

On Saturday, a rocket slammed into a soccer field where dozens of children and teens were playing in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, about 12 kilometers (7 miles) south of Lebanon and next to the Syrian border. Twelve were killed and 20 others wounded, according to the Israeli military. One 11-year-old was missing, residents told Israeli media.

"I feel darkness inside and out. Nothing like this happened here," resident Anan Abu Saleh said. "There's no way to explain this. I saw children, I don't want to say what I saw, but it's horrible, really horrible. We need more security."

On Sunday, the coffins passed through a crowd of thousands.

The Druze are a religious sect that began as an offshoot of Shiite Islam. There are Druze communities in Israel, Syria and Lebanon. There are about 140,000 Druze in Israel and 25,000 in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, according to Yusri Hazran of the Hebrew University.

The Druze are considered among Israel's most loyal citizens, although those in the Golan Heights have a more fraught relationship with authorities. Israel captured the Golan, a strategic plateau, from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it in 1981. Much of the international community considers the area to be occupied territory. While Druze leaders in the Golan profess allegiance to Syria, relations with Israel are normally good.

"Big anger, big, big. I have no feelings that I can explain to you," said Hassan Shakir, a Majdal Shams resident.

Attacks along the Israel-Lebanon border have simmered below the threshold of all-out war since the start of the conflict in Gaza. But the toll and young victims in Saturday's attack could push Israel to respond more severely.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hurried home from the U.S. after the strike and warned that Hezbollah "will pay a heavy price for this attack, one that it has not paid so far." Israeli military's Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi said a Falaq rocket with a 53-kilogram warhead that belonged to

Hezbollah was fired.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday that "every indication" showed the rocket came from Hezbollah. He said Israel had a right to defend itself but the U.S. didn't want the conflict to escalate.

Hezbollah began firing rockets at Israel the day after Hamas' attack on Oct. 7. Israel has responded by targeting what it says is Hezbollah's military infrastructure with airstrikes and drones. Most attacks have been confined to border areas, though Israel has assassinated Hezbollah and Hamas leadership farther north in Lebanon. Tens of thousands of people along the border have evacuated.

Since early October, Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon have killed more than 500 people, mostly Hezbollah members but also around 90 civilians. On the Israeli side, 22 soldiers and 24 civilians have been killed.

Hezbollah has far superior firepower to Hamas. Igniting a war in Israel's north while it's engaged in Gaza would overburden the military, Barak Ben-Zur, a researcher at the International Institute of Counter-Terrorism, told journalists: "We are not, let's say, capable to do it in both places and at the same time."

In Lebanon, some prepared for more fire from Israel. Lebanon's national airline announced it had postponed the Beirut arrival of seven flights until Monday morning, without saying why. Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati had urgent calls with diplomats and politicians, his office said.

"I doubt that there will be a strike, but nothing is far-fetched when it comes to the enemy," said Abdallah Dalal, a resident of the Lebanese border village of Chebaa. Israeli officials have said the rocket that hit Majdal Shams was fired nearby.

Any conflict could bring in Iran, which warned Israel that a strong reaction to the Golan Heights strike would lead to "unprecedented consequences." Iran and Israel's shadow war burst into the open in April, when Iran launched 300 missiles and drones at Israel, most of them intercepted, in response to the killing of an Iranian general.

An Egyptian official said the attack in the Golan Heights could give urgency to negotiations to reach a cease-fire deal in Gaza.

"Both fronts are connected," he said. "A cease-fire in Gaza will lead to a cease-fire with Hezbollah."

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

In a statement, the Egyptian foreign ministry called on all influential international players to "intervene immediately to spare the peoples of the region further disastrous consequences of the expansion of the conflict."

Officials from the United States, Egypt and Qatar were meeting Sunday with Israeli officials in Rome in the latest push for a deal. The head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, David Barnea, later returned home and negotiations will continue in the coming days, Netanyahu's office said.



RAWALPINDI: Jamaat-e-Islami delegation meets govt delegation at Rawalpindi Commissioner's office on Sunday.

New visa policy to boost tourism, trade activities: PM F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said the government had introduced significant visa reforms to facilitate foreign investors, business community, and tourists.

He said the step would help promoting tourism, boost foreign investment and increase trade activities in the country.

In a statement, the prime minister, terming the initiative a highly positive development, said the government had approved visa-free entry for businessmen from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which will increase investment and business opportunities from these countries.

The businessmen, investors, and tourists of 126 countries will be issued visas within 24 hours through an online system, he said.

Additionally, he said traders and tourists from these countries will be exempt from visa fees. The visa policy reforms will make Pakistan an attractive destination for foreign individuals in terms of business and tourism. The prime minister highlighted that special arrangements had also been made for Sikh pilgrims having passports of a third country to obtain visas on arrival.

Technical Committee to discuss JI demands: Tarar

RAWALPINDI (APP): Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture, Attaullah Tarar here on Sunday said that the demands of Jamaat-e-Islami would be discussed with the technical committee.

Talking to media persons after talks with Jamaat-e-Islami delegation at Commissioner Office, the information minister said that the government was making all-out efforts to provide relief to the people and in this regard, it was making earnest efforts to attract foreign investment which would help generate employment.

"The government is trying to convince the foreign investors that cost of production is very low in Pakistan, so factories should be established here which would help end unemployment," he said.

"Fluctuations in exchange rates were controlled and stabilized. We succeeded in bringing the country out of economic default situation," he said adding that the government's solid steps would help enhance exports and control the inflation. The government was focusing on improving the investment climate, he said and added, if petroleum prices

remain stable in international market then we would be able to provide relief to the people in the rates of petroleum products.

Regarding the sit-in by Jamaat e Islami in Rawalpindi, he said the location of Liaquat Bagh was fixed, adding that the people were facing difficulties due to road closure. The minister informed that a technical committee comprising Minister of Power, Secretary Power, FBR and Finance Ministry representatives, had been formed which would hold next round of talks with the representatives of Jamaat-e-Islami. "We will make efforts to resolve the issue amicably tomorrow," he informed.

Giving details of steps being taken by the government regarding solarization, the minister said that the Prime Minister had already launched the Solar Tube Wells project under which 38,000 solar tube wells were being installed in Balochistan. Steps are being taken to shift the tube wells on solar energy through bank financing mechanism in collaboration with the governments of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he added.

The information minister

ter said that the government was taking all possible measures to reduce the electricity tariff by generating economic and quality electricity.

He said that Rs. 50 billion subsidy was already given to electricity consumers using up to 200 units. "The government is also starting various solar projects replacing fuel powered plants" he said and added that installation of solar tube wells would reduce electricity consumption.

Tarar said that no change had been made in the government's negotiation team. He informed that the Minister for Power, Awais Leghari was in China.

The government's team will sit and hold talks with the leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami which had some issues particularly related to electricity.

"We talked to the delegation of Jamaat-e-Islami in a pleasant atmosphere, we all want that the inflation could be controlled so that the issue of unemployment can be addressed, electricity can be provided at a cheaper rates," he said and informed that the technical committee would discuss the issues with the Jamaat-e-Islami and try to address them.

Bangladesh students vow to resume protests unless leaders freed

DHAKA (AFP): A Bangladeshi student group has vowed to resume protests that sparked a lethal police crackdown and nationwide unrest unless several of their leaders are released from custody on Sunday.

Last week's violence killed at least 205 people, according to an AFP count

of police and hospital data, in one of the biggest upheavals of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year tenure.

Army patrols and a nationwide curfew remain in place more than a week after they were imposed, and a police dragnet has scooped up thousands of protesters including at least

half a dozen student leaders.

Members of Students Against Discrimination, whose campaign against civil service job quotas precipitated the unrest, said they would end their week-long protest moratorium.

The group's chief Nahid Islam and others "should be freed and the cases against them must be withdrawn",

Abdul Hannan Masud told reporters in an online briefing late Saturday.

Masud, who did not disclose his location because he was in hiding from authorities, also demanded "visible actions" be taken against government ministers and police officers responsible for the deaths of protesters.

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Landslide kills 12 people

BEIJING (Reuters): Continued heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Gaemi triggered a landslide that killed 12 people in southern China, causing flash floods in the northeast and railway disruptions elsewhere, state media reported on Sunday. Cyclonic winds from Gaemi, downgraded from a typhoon, had mostly dissipated by Sunday, but many parts of China remained under alert for flooding risks caused by earlier rains.

China to support Pakistan securing approval from IMF

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb Sunday said that the Chinese Government has commended Pakistan's negotiation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and assured to play its role in securing approval from the Fund's board.

Addressing a press conference, the minister said that he along with the Minister for Energy Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari had visited China and held constructive meetings with the Chinese authorities including the Finance Minister of China and the President Bank of China.

The minister further informed that he also visited China along with the energy minister at the start of last month (June) and held discussions on different aspects of bilateral trade and economic cooperation including local energy requirements and launching of Panda bonds in the Chinese markets.

During the recent visit to China re-profiling of energy sector loans was also discussed, he said adding that the conversion of energy plants into coal and other aspects for affordable energy generation were also discussed during different high-level meetings.

He said that the Chinese authorities acknowledged

and ensured that our issues are registered with the right forum adding that the process has to be followed to take them forward. He said they also wanted to help the country in terms of re-profiling.

He added that this would be done through the context of a memorandum of understandings or various working groups which would be formed to take the matters forward during the days to come.

Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb said that China is ranked among the world's biggest capital markets and Pakistan plans to issue these bonds to diversify its funding sources and strengthen its foreign exchange reserves by attracting Chinese investors.

He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had also discussed the local energy requirements with the Chinese top leadership urging them to evolve a mechanism for extending their support to overcome power supply needs for the socio-economic development of the country.

Regarding the IMF programme, the finance minister further informed that the discussion with the Fund had remained positive and constructive, adding that all the set benchmarks were achieved.

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KARACHI: Pakistan Markazi Muslim League supporters holf protest rally against K-Electric. —INP Photo

PUC announces flag hoisting, other events in Aug

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) has announced several initiatives for the month August, including the hoisting of the national flag at seminars and mosques from August 1 to August 30. The council would also observe 'Youm-e-Istehsal Kashmir' on August 5 and host a series of seminars focused on Pakistan's stability throughout the month. Addressing a press conference at Jamia Manzurl Islamia Lahore, PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, emphasized the need to prevent political instability in the country. He asserted that national unity is essential in the current situation, and that the 'Azm-e-Istehkam Pakistan'

(Resolve for Pakistan's Stability) initiative is a crucial component of the National Action Plan. He stressed that peace could only be achieved if this plan is fully implemented. Regarding the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) issue, Ashrafi urged the government to reassess its policy, citing the burden of increasing electricity bills on the public and the difficulties faced by seminars and mosques in managing these costs. He requested a 50 percent reduction in electricity bills for these institutions and the removal of additional taxes. The PUC chairman underscored that the dignity of Islam and the homeland are non-negotiable, and any attempt to undermine national security or compro-

mise the integrity of Pakistan's armed forces should be firmly opposed. He expressed support for the armed forces and reaffirmed that seminars would stand united in protecting Pakistan's stability. He also mentioned that a convention on Pakistan's stability would be held in Gujranwala on August 4 and a seminar in Lahore on August 11. In response to questions, Ashrafi noted hopeful progress in negotiations between Jamaat-e-Islami and the government regarding electricity bills and urged for a broader review of IPP policies. Maulana Pir Zubair Abid, Maulana Asadullah Farooq, Qari Mubashar Raheemi, Mufti Naseemul Islam, and other prominent ulema were present.

Punjab govt to upgrade health facilities in all 43 jail hospitals

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government, on the special directive of the Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, will chalk out a comprehensive plan to upgrade health facilities at all 43 jail hospitals, ensuring better health cover to all inmates across the province. Senior Superintendent of Police Central Jail Kot Lakhpat Chaudhry Ijaz Asghar, a member of the committee, headed by both health ministers Khawaja Salman Rafique and Khawaja Imran Nazir, said on Sunday the initiative

was aimed at ensuring better healthcare for prisoners, aligning with the government's commitment to upholding their welfare and improving public health standards. The upgrade would include modernising medical equipment, enhancing infrastructure, and increasing the availability of essential medicines. He said both ministers, during their maiden meeting, emphasised that providing quality healthcare to prisoners was a crucial aspect of the justice system, ensur-

ing that inmates receive the same level of care as the general population. He said this initiative reflects the Punjab government's broader strategy to reform the prison system, promoting rehabilitation over punishment. By addressing health disparities and improving living conditions, the government aims to reduce recidivism and aid in the successful reintegration of prisoners into society. This commitment to enhancing healthcare services in jails underscores the government's

dedication to creating a more just and humane correctional system. He said Inspector General of Prisons Punjab Mian Farooq Nazeer has already ordered the deployment of mobile dental and eye camps in all jails for medical checkups of prisoners. He said first ever mobile dental camp in the history of prisons was held successfully at camp jail under the supervision of Superintendent Zaheer Ahmad Virk where screening of all 6401 prisoners was conducted in 12 days.

Constitution guarantees equal rights to minorities: Ramesh

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora has said that the Constitution of Pakistan fully guaranteed equal rights to minorities as they are important pillars of society. Talking to APP, he said a country could not aspire to achieve progress unless its people had unity in their ranks. It was the objective behind observance of the minorities day on August 11 every year, he added. He urged the nation to refresh its resolve for promotion of brotherhood and tolerance in society without being hostage to any kind of prejudice. The minister said he had discussed with Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan various programmes for observing the International Day of Religious Minorities on August 11.

Women among 26 held

LAHORE (INP): As many as 26 individuals including women were arrested when police raided a dance party in Chuhang area of Lahore. The police reacting to a tip-off received through a 15 call raided a house in a private housing society where dance party was underway. The police arrested 26 individuals including women participating in the dance party besides recovering hookahs, shisha flavours, speakers and weapons. The police took the recovered items into custody and after registering a case against the detainees started investigations.

LESCO detects 484 power pilferers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 484 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 302nd day of grand anti-power theft campaign. The LESCO spokesman told the media here Sunday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 133 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 21 accused have been arrested by the respective police. Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these opera-

tions. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice. On the 302nd consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. Among the seized connections 13 were commercial, 01 agricultural, 11 industrial and 459 domestic, and all these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 405,262 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 14.082 million. Apprising the media about some major power

pilferers, he explained that LESCO charged 2,650 detection units to an electricity pilferer in Qila Gujjar Singh area; 3,971 detection units to a power pilferer in Mustafa Abad; 4,098 detection units to an electricity thief in New Anarkali area; and 8,654 units in the form of detection bill to another customer stealing electricity in Kot Radha Kishan. During the 302 days of the grand anti-theft campaign, the spokesman mentioned, the LESCO detected pilferage on 108,952 power connections and 92,241 FIRs have been registered against electricity thieves in the relevant police stations, while 34,615 accused have so far been arrested by the police. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 121,498,487 detection units worth Rs 4,348,651,484 to all the power pilferers.

WCLA to host mango festival

LAHORE (APP): The Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) is all set to host mango festival, named as 'Megh, Malhaar Aur Mango', which would take place at the historic Shalimar Gardens on August 2-4, 2024. The festival would run daily from 4pm to 11pm and it would promise a delightful experience for all mango enthusiasts and families. According to a press release issued here on Sunday, the mango festival would showcase an impressive array of activities and attractions, including 80 varieties of mangoes from different regions, delectable mango-based desserts, deli-

cious mango shakes, and traditional lassi. Visitors can also enjoy a variety of savory and sweet mango dishes, witness exciting mango cuisine competitions featuring innovative recipes, and treat themselves to an assortment of mango-flavored ice creams. The festival will also feature vibrant cultural performances celebrating the rich heritage of Lahore, live music to enhance the festive atmosphere, and various food stalls offering delicious treats and snacks. The In charge Shalimar Garden Salahuddin Mazari said, "Designed to celebrate the king of fruits in the most delightful manner, the mango

festival aims to bring together the community for a memorable experience amidst the historic beauty of Shalimar Gardens. With something for everyone, this festival is the perfect summer outing for families and friends". "The WCLA, in collaboration with COTHM and Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture Multan along with the local vendors and cultural groups, is committed to making this festival a grand success. This is going to be the first ever mango festival at the Shalimar Gardens, and we will make it a regular feature every year", explained the Director Marketing & Tourism Tania Qureshi.

No one can become revolutionary leader with judiciary help: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Punjab Azma Bokhari said on Sunday that no one could become revolutionary leaders like Che Guevara and Nelson Mandela by using the judicial shoulders. In a statement issued here, she said the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government's letter to the Peshawar High Court to form a judicial commission on May-9 incidents was a failed attempt to hide under the judicial hammer. She said judicial commissions were always formed on hidden and unexplained matters. There were videos, photos and audios of the May-9 violence, adding that the incident was a conspiracy against the country. The information minister said the truth had become crystal clear as all characters of the rebellion including its facilitators and masterminds had been exposed now.

BISP chairperson meets Punjab governor

LAHORE (APP): Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Chairperson Senator Rubina Khalid met Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan in Murree on Sunday and briefed him about the institution and its working. She said millions of deserving families were benefiting from the support programme, according to a handout, issued here.

Sardar Saleem Haider said the Benazir Income Support Programme was the best way of providing financial assistance to people living below the poverty level. He said the scope of Benazir Income Support Programme should be expanded so that more deserving families could benefit from it. The Punjab governor said that difficulties in getting financial assistance to the women registered under the BISP in the backward areas should be removed.

'Killer' arrested at airport

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Police Special Operations Cell conducted an operation, arrested an alleged killer attempting to flee abroad. According to details, a murder case was registered against Jamshed Mohsin two days ago at the Mangowal police station in Gujrat. The Police promptly included his details in the PNIC list. When the alleged killer reached the airport, he was arrested and handed over to Gujrat police for further legal action. The IGP praised RPO Gujranwala and DPO Gujrat for timely action leading to the criminal's arrest.

Free eye camp arranged

KARACHI (APP): A one-day free eye screening camp was organized for police personnel and their families at the Special Security Unit (SSU) Headquarters on Sunday. The camp was established in collaboration with Digital Media Network Voice Of Nation (VON) and POB Trust Eye Hospital. Specialist doctors from POB Eye Hospital conducted comprehensive eye screenings and police personnel diagnosed with cataract illness were offered free surgery at the hospital. DIG Security & Emergency Services Division Dr. Maqsood Ahmed expressed his gratitude to the administration and doctors of POB Eye Hospital for their support in conducting eye screening and providing free cataract surgery. DIG Dr. Maqsood Ahmed highlighted the importance of eye health, stating that many people lose their sight due to eye diseases, often due to expensive treatment and lack of awareness. He emphasized the need for regular eye check-ups and timely treatment.

Socio-Economic Registry project formally launched

LAHORE (APP): On the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, the Socio-Economic Registry project was formally launched across the province, on Sunday. In this connection, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz in which the Socio-Economic Registry Project was reviewed. Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari and other officials were also present, while Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner participated in the meeting through video link. The task of monitoring the Socio-Economic Registry has been assigned to the commissioners. Under the Socio-

Economic Registry, houses will be counted across the province, the economic status of each household will also be recorded in the project, cattle will also be counted in the villages under the Socio-Economic Registry. Likewise, 5,000 registration centers will be established across the province. Only those registered in the project will be eligible for the social protection project, registered citizens will be eligible to apply for e-bike, Roshan Gharana solar programme, Himmat card, Kissan card and other social protection programmes. In this connection, registered citizens will be eligible for health card, livestock and will also be eligible to apply for card and

scholarship program. People can also register themselves on the portal from the comfort of their homes and approach the helpline 02345-0800 and also register their details on the online web portal www.pser.punjab.gov.pk. In this regard, CM Maryam Nawaz said that due to having authentic data, the right would be given to the original right holder, registration in the Socio-Economic Registry project has been made easy for the public, this project will help the government to solve the problems of the people. Maryam Nawaz directed the commissioners and deputy commissioners to provide ease to the citizens visiting the registration centers.

‘Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmi’ on August 5

LAHORE (APP): On the call of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control would observe August 5 as Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir [Day of Exploitation of Kashmir] to register their protest and defiance against Narendra Modi-led Hindutva Indian government's illegal and fraudulent action taken on this day in 2019. The APHC asked Kashmiri people to observe the day to underscore their rejection of the Indian government's ille-

gal actions. In a statement in Srinagar, the APHC spokesman emphasised that despite 77 years of illegal occupation and extreme brutality by Indian troops, the determination and spirit of the Kashmiri people remained unshaken. APHC Spokesman Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas said that Indian government's Aug 5, 2019 action was a direct attack on Kashmir's unique identity, culture, employment, demography and basic fundamental rights. Meanwhile, the APHC said that August 5 was another exploitation,

mourning and a black day for the people of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir which had now turned into a big open-air prison. Meanwhile, Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, head of Pakistan Ulema Council, said on Sunday that the Kashmir Exploitation Day would be observed on August 5 across the country. Addressing a press conference here, he said that unfortunately the world was not focusing on occupied Kashmir and people of Occupied Kashmir were being suppressed.

CCPO orders expediting IBOs against criminals

LAHORE (APP): Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Bilal Siddique has issued orders for expediting intelligence-based operations (IBOs) against criminals, increasing pace of crackdowns on illegal weapons and drugs and ensuring swift arrest of proclaimed offenders. He was presiding over a meeting at his office here on Sunday to review progress on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to performance of divisional officers. During the briefing, it was informed that the 15 Call Data, issued by the Punjab Safe Cities Authority, indicated a significant reduction in crime rate in the provincial capital. The CCPO emphasised that the police force must ensure timely response and

actions upon receiving calls through the 15 service. He urged that in the light of the Punjab government's KPIs, every department, officer and official should align their performance with the required targets and adopt modern technology to move away from the traditional work practices. The CCPO Lahore also instructed supervisory officers to enhance their command and regularly visit field offices to assess the performance of subordinate staff. He stressed the need for officers to serve the public with dedication and enthusiasm. Additionally, he advised supervisory officers to personally visit crime scenes in heinous cases, set up checkpoints in crime-prone areas, and maintain strict surveil-

lance on criminals. He also called for effective measures to address incidents of aerial firing. The CCPO emphasized the prompt registration of cases and investigations based on merit, crimes against women by reaffirming that providing justice to victims is his top priority. He reiterated that working in the police is not merely a job but a lifestyle focused on the public service. DIG (Investigation) Zsheshan Asghar, DIG (Organized Crime Unit) Imran Kishwar, DIG (Operations) Muhammad Faisal Kamran, CTO Lahore Amara Athar, SSP (Admin) Atif Nazir, SSP (Investigation) Anooosh Masood Chaudhry, SSP (Operations) Tassawar Iqbal and divisional SPs attended the meeting.

PDP demands urban development ministry in Sindh

KARACHI (PPI): Noting neglect to crucial uplift of our major cities in Sindh, Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor Sunday demanded of the Sindh government to set up a separate ministry of urban development in the province. "Urban development is a key driver of economic uplift. It has the potential to become a positive transformative force for every aspect of sustainable development, including the reduction of inequality," he said in a statement. He said: "When properly planned and managed, urbanisation can reduce

poverty and inequality by improving employment opportunities and quality of life, including through better education and health. But when poorly planned, urbanisation can lead to congestion, higher crime rates, pollution, increased levels of inequality and social exclusion. This is what we see in Sindh's urban centres, particularly Karachi." Shakoor said larger cities were generally richer but more unequal than smaller cities. "The opportunities that cities bring are unevenly distributed in space, preventing entire neighbourhoods and

groups of the population from accessing proper health care, good schools, sanitation, piped water, employment opportunities and adequate housing among others. Slums are the most notable extreme of the spatial concentration of urban poverty and disadvantage." He said: "Cities rely on urban planning to remain functional, grow in population, and attract businesses. Every crucial aspect of an urban environment is under the effect of how its layout is planned. This includes key infrastructure, transportation, and city area layout and density."

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Museums reflect history, culture of nations: Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday said that museums reflect the history and culture of nations, highlighting rich heritage includes the Gandharan civilization and various religious traditions.

He said this during visit to the Peshawar Museum.

Upon arrival, Dr. Abdul Samad, Director of Archaeology and Museums, welcomed the Governor.

During his visit, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi inspected the Gandharan civilization artifacts and the unique cultural heritage of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa showcased at the museum.

Dr. Abdul Samad briefed the Governor on the historical and cultural significance of the museum's valuable collection, as well as details regarding the museum's renovations.

Governor Faisal Kundi praised the Archaeology and Museum Department for maintaining the museum to a state-of-the-art level and ensuring the protection of precious historical artifacts.

He emphasized that museums reflect the history and culture of nations, highlighting that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's rich heritage includes the Gandharan civilization and various religious traditions. The Governor suggested that special tours of the Peshawar Museum be arranged for the youth, especially students, to familiarize them with their cultural and historical heritage.

Governor Kundi described the Peshawar Museum as crucial for projecting a positive image of the province to international tourists.

He stressed the need to promote Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for its peace and tourism potential.

Governor Kundi also mentioned that the first session of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly was held in Peshawar Museum. He said that the museum and its artifacts are valuable assets.

He asserted that while there may be political differences, the primary goal should be to advance the province's rights and public welfare.

He called for a collective political effort to present the province's case at the federal level and highlighted the need for more industries to create job opportunities for youth.

Regarding ongoing issues, the Governor criticized the provincial government's silence on a land dispute in the merged district of Kurram, which has seen recent clashes and rocket fire.

He urged the Corps Commander, IG, and Chief Secretary to address the issue.

He said that the provincial should resolve the problems of universities instead of selling university lands.

Meanwhile, Minister Local Government Azad Kashmir Faisal Rathore called on Governor Faisal Karim Kundi here at Governor's House and discussed tourism, culture and political issues on this occasion.

Governor House is committed to playing a pivotal role in promoting tourism and culture in the province, said Governor Faisal Karim Kundi.

Students of different KP universities spend one day with Pakistan Army



PESHAWAR (APP): The girls and boys students of different universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have spent a day with the Pakistan Army here Sunday.

The students observed the underused large and small weapons of Pakistan Army and underused planes of Army Aviation and took keen interest in it.

The boys and girls students presented great tributes to the matchless sacrifices of Pakistan Army for defense and protection of the motherland, a security official told APP.

They reaffirmed their strong commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with their armed forces.

The students termed such events as positive and welcome step. This event removed many misconceptions and this enjoyable event would always be remembered, they said.

The students made proud that our armed forces were laying down their lives with great courage and steadfastness for the protection and defense on Pakistan.

They said both the country and the army are their own and they are with the armed forces of Pakistan.

GB Forests – Preserving an asset



PESHAWAR (APP): At a time when Pakistan is under severe climate change threats, fresh afforestation and protecting existing forest covered area has become a challenge for the federal and provincial governments.

With forests in many areas under extreme pressure due to mounting power prices and activities of timber mafia, the responsibility on the government departments to preserve our precious forests has increased manifold.

Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of breathtaking beauty, is home to some of the most valuable forests being a treasure trove of biodiversity and source of livelihood for local communities.

However, these precious resources are also under threats like deforestation, illegal logging and climate change.

Although the government has initiated numerous measures to protect these forests yet it needs to implement a strict mechanism of penalties and educate local communities to preserve these forests and valuable habitat in the region.

According to Forest and Wildlife Department, Gilgit-Baltistan region has total 249,205 hectare forest covered area with Diamer having the highest forest cover (71%) followed by Astore (12%) and Gilgit (10%). These three districts together contain 93% of the total forest area of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Therefore, the Gilgit-Baltistan government headed by Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan is making every possible effort to protect these forests. It has established Forest, Wildlife and Environment Department, to manage region's forestry, wildlife and other resources through sustainable and integrated natural resource management.

The department is also a center for biodiversity and eco-tourism while Conservation Committees have been constituted to effectively protect wildlife and forests besides necessary legislation to educate local people about forest conservation.

Secretary Forests, Parks and Wildlife, Zafar Waqar Taj has also mentioned to different measures for forests conservation especially to raising a regular force. "The region lacked a dedicated force to protect forests and wildlife. But, now we have started training cadets for this purpose."

He informed that a batch of 50 graduate cadets of GB's new Forest and Wildlife Force has recently passed out at Police Training College in Gilgit. "This marks a crucial step towards bolstering region's forest and wildlife protection capabilities."

According to Zafar Taj, the region lacked a dedicated force to protect forests and wildlife. "But, now we have initiated a program where the department aims to train 200 cadets annually to finally build a force of over 800 trained members within next four years."

Besides other efforts and seasonal plantation, a special initiative was also launched under the banner of Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Program in 2019 to plant 170 million plants across Gilgit-Baltistan. Total PSDP allocations for forest component under this program was Rs 6,920 million with Rs 650 million for protected areas initiative and Rs. 359 million for wildlife protection.

Although the government claims to achieve the target of planting 10.765 million plants under this program, many local people are skeptical about the post plantation protection of these trees.

"Scores of plants planted under this initiative either uprooted or dried due to lack of proper care," said Abdul Rehman, a Gilgit city resident. "There was perhaps lack of sustainable planting practices, proper maintenance and care for plants to ensure their survival and growth."

He said program's success depends on long-term viability of plants and address the issues faced by this sector to achieve the desired results. As the forests are fragmented and scattered, their management and conservation always remains a challenge. Then, the illegal logging and deforestation also continue to pose significant threats to the region's forests, with thousands of hectare forest cover area already lost during last 20 years.

"We have seen a significant decline in forest cover in recent years," says Muhammad Iqbal, a local environmentalist. "If we don't take action now, we risk losing our forests forever."

He appreciated national parks and wildlife sanctuaries established by the government including Deosai National Park, Central Karakoram National Park, Khunjerab National Park, Shandur National Park and several others, as a step in right direction. But, he emphasized more efforts to protect our forests and wildlife.

Forests, wildlife and ecosystems of Gilgit-Baltistan are a source of livelihood for local communities in terms of tourism related seasonal earning and a treasure trove of biodiversity needed to be protected for future generations.

"We need to find a balance between conservation and livelihood," says Ghulam Rasool, a local forest dweller. "By working together, we can safeguard the region's ecological and economic sustainability and preserve natural beauty of our incredible region."

Just to conclude, protection our forest covered area as a whole and Gilgit-Baltistan in particular is a daunting task in wake of rising population, increasing energy prices, threats of illegal logging, post plantation poor management and unsatisfactory survival rate of plants.

In view of failure in getting desired results despite repeated efforts by respective governments, there is dire need for re-visiting our policies and strategies to preserve our forests as their loss would be a national tragedy, bringing about more disasters and losses to our people and economy.

KP Food Authority cracks down on adulterated milk

Shuts Down 72 Dairy Businesses across the Province

FP. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority has initiated a large-scale crackdown on milk sellers across the province following the conclusion of a milk sample collection and testing campaign.

The detailed analysis report of the milk samples has led to intensified actions against milk sellers categorized in the Black and Red categories.

The Food Authority spokesperson, while releasing details of the operations, stated that food safety teams have so far sealed 72 milk-related businesses in the province.

The spokesperson noted that in the Peshawar Division, under the supervision of Director General of Food Authority Wasif Saeed and Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Sarmad Salim Akram, raids were carried out, resulting in the sealing of 23 milk shops."14 shops were sealed in Mardan Division, 8 in Swat, 21 in Hazara, 1 in Kohat, and 5 in D.I. Khan", added the spokesperson.

The spokesperson further revealed that the licenses of milk sellers in the Black and Red categories have also been revoked, and heavy fines have been imposed.

Director General of Food Authority Wasif Saeed has warned that any elements involved in the heinous business of milk adulteration who interfere with official duties during further actions will face stricter disciplinary measures.

It is noteworthy that during the ten-day milk sample collection and testing drive, the KP Food Authority tested 583 milk samples from large and medium-sized dairy businesses across the province. Approximately 93% of the total samples, equating to 541 samples, were reported as substandard and hazardous to health, while only 7% or 42 samples were deemed satisfactory.

The spokesperson emphasized that the crackdown on substandard and adulterated milk sellers is ongoing, with the campaign's aim being to ensure the provision of high-quality and pure milk to the public.



New series of monsoon rains likely to start in most districts of KP

PESHAWAR (APP): A new series of monsoon rains is likely to start in most districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Sunday, said a Provincial Disasters Management Authority issued here.

From Sunday night, more monsoon winds will enter the upper regions of the province from the Arabian Sea due to which Dir, Chitral, Swat, Kohistan, Malakand, Bajaur, Shangla, Battagram, Buner, Kohat, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Peshawar, Charsadda, Kurram, Waziristan, Bannu would receive rain with strong winds and thunder in Dera Ismail Khan.

The new series of rains will continue intermittently till Wednesday, and there is also a risk of landslides in the mountainous areas of the province due to rains, the PDMA release said.

PDMA has issued an alert to all district administrations in view of the weather situation and directed them to pre-emptively deal with any untoward incident due to dusty winds, wind, storm and thunder.

The district administration is also directed to ensure the availability of small and large machinery to deal with any unpleasant incident in advance, the release said.

In case of strong winds, people should stay away from power lines, dilapidated buildings and structures, sign boards and billboards and farmers arrange their routines keeping in view the weather forecast, the release revealed.

Tourists and local population in sensitive upper areas are instructed to take precautionary measures to be aware of weather conditions and messages to the district administration in sensitive districts should be conveyed to the local population in local languages, PDMA said.

In any emergency situation, all concerned agencies should be vigilant in maintaining road links and provide alternative routes for traffic in case of road closure and tourists should be informed about the weather situation, PDMA spokesman said.

PDMA's Emergency Full Operation Center is fully functional. People can report any untoward incident to 1700, spokesperson PDMA confirmed.

World Hepatitis Day: time for collective action to win fight against fatal disease

PESHAWAR (APP): Muhammad Hamayun, a struggling farmer from Mohib Banda village in Nowshera district, has succumbed to hepatitis after a brief but harrowing battle in a local hospital.

At 52 years old, Hamayun, who balanced his duties as a Federal Government employee with farming, was unaware of the severity of his liver condition until it was too late.

For the past year, Hamayun experienced persistent abdominal pain that escalated significantly, prompting his family to seek medical help. "My father had been complaining of abdominal pain for the last year, which worsened over time. He was eventually rushed to a local hospital, where doctors diagnosed him with liver inflammation caused by hepatitis C," Kamal Khan, Hamayun's son, recounted to APP.

With tears in his eyes, Kamal shared that his father survived only six months following the diagnosis.

"The disease stole my loving father from me. He had dreams of seeing me become a doctor, to serve ailing humanity," Kamal said.

He emphasized the urgent need for widespread awareness about hepatitis—its causes, prevention, and treatment—as a crucial step toward eradicating this life-threatening disease.

"Hepatitis is a liver inflammation often caused by viral infections and the treatment become difficult if diagnosed in later stage," said Dr Riaz Khan, senior medical officer at Govt hospital Pabbi Nowshera while talking to APP.

Hepatitis can also be caused by factors such as unsafe injections, alcohol consumption, certain medications, and autoimmune diseases.

The primary types of viral hepatitis include hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E, each with unique modes of transmission and varying health impacts, he said.

Every year on July 28, world hepatitis day is observed as a global effort to raise awareness about various types of hepatitis, emphasising the importance of its prevention, testing, and treatment in members states of UNO including Pakistan.

The theme for this year is "It's time for action," highlighting the urgent need for swift and decisive measures to tackle hepatitis on global scale.

The July 28 date was selected to honor the birthday of Dr. Baruch Blumberg, the Nobel Laureate who discovered hepatitis B virus (HBV) in the 1960s and developed a diagnostic test and vaccine for it.

Initially celebrated on May 19, the date was later moved to July 28 in 2010. The first community-driven world hepatitis day was organized in 2008 by the World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) established in 2007.

The day provided an opportunity for governments, communities, individuals, healthcare providers and policymakers to learn about negative consequences of different types of hepatitis, as well as prevention strategies, testing, and treatment options.

Fostering global advocacy and cooperation in combating the increasing number of hepatitis-related illnesses and deaths, the day emphasized the significance of enhanced vaccination, early diagnosis, and better access to healthcare services.

Dr Riaz said that day is crucial for promoting a coordinated worldwide response and working towards the WHO's goal of eliminating viral hepatitis as a major public health threat by 2030.

In Pakistan, he said the patients are either diagnosed incidentally or get symptomatic when their illness advances after getting the hepatitis infection. "One person died from a hepatitis-related illness in every 30 seconds at world."

Dr Riaz referred to the World Health Organisation (WHO) 2024 report, which indicated that around 8.8 million people are suffering from hepatitis mainly due to unsafe medical injections in Pakistan.

The data from 187 countries showed the estimated number of deaths from viral hepatitis increased from 1.1 million in 2019 to 1.3 million in 2022 and as of these, 83pc caused by hepatitis B and 17pc by the hepatitis C. The report noted that 10 countries account for nearly two thirds of the global burden of viral hepatitis B and C, with Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines and Russian Federation rounding off the top ten.

For hepatitis C, six countries including China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russian Federation and US represent 50pc of the global burden.

Dr Riaz said this data showed a matter of great concerns, and underlined the need for global fight like of polio eradication to eradicate hepatitis once for all. On the world hepatitis day message, the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi underlined the need to increase public awareness and joint efforts to control hepatitis.

He said the hepatitis remains a significant issue worldwide and its eradication requires raising awareness on consistent basis and taking joint measures at regional and global levels.

The rising number of patients in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is alarming, the Governor said and stressed following health safety guidelines essential for preventing such diseases imperative for a healthy and prosperous society.



In brief

PFA disposes of chilli powder

MUZAFARGARH (APP): Punjab Food Authority (PFA) raided against the adulteration mafia, recovered 1120 kg of red chilli powder and 880 kg of black chillies which were destroyed later. The operation was conducted at the grinding unit near Muhammad Musa shrine. The adulteration of color and dye color was found in chillies. The peppers were to be supplied to various grocery stores. The food authority disposed off hundreds of kilos of chillies by taking timely action. Director General PFA Muhammad Asim Javed said that operations were being made against elements hostile to health on a large scale.

Blind murder case solved

MUZAFARGARH (APP): Police claimed to have solved the blind murder case of the truck driver and arrested the killer. According to the FIR, a truck driver named Ghulam Muhammad resident of Pawliwala was shot dead in his house two and half months ago. Rohilanwali police registered a case on the application of Ghulam Rasool, the brother-in-law of the deceased. SHO Rohilanwali police Hasnain Raza along with the police team has expanded the scope of the investigation and traced the killer of the truck driver, named Muhammad Mujahid s/o Khadim Hussain Baloch, who was a resident of Mouza Daren and sent him behind the bar.

Five killed in Faisalabad

FAISALABAD (INP): At least five people including a woman were killed and another injured in separate incidents in different localities of Faisalabad, police said on Sunday. According to details, accused Tariq strangled his wife Fazeelat Bibi 27, to death over domestic disputes in Millat Town area. Abdul Sattar 40, a paan shop owner committed suicide over poverty by shooting him in Ghulam Muhammad area. Robbers gunned down 45-year-old Imran s/o Arslan over resistance in Chak No 51 GB of Nishatabad and fled the scene. In Madina Town, armed men gunned down their rival Adnan 36, and escaped the scene. Two youth while doing one-wheeling in Chak 253 RB fell down after hitting another youth. As a result of accident, one youth Muzzamil Hussain died while Dilawar was injured. The police registered separate cases in all incidents at respective police stations and started investigations.

Bridge opened F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Kano Amluk Dara Bridge in Talash, built by the local community with a total cost of Rs 10.8 million was opened for vehicular traffic after its formal inauguration by area elders here on Sunday. A function in this regard was held at Kano Amluk Dara which was attended by elders of the Talash Dushkhel Qaumi Jirga, members of the dispute resolution council, villagers and social volunteers. Addressing the gathering the village elders including DSP Bakht Jamal, engineers Murad Khan, village council chairman Rehman Zada, president Sir Foundation Daim Shah Akhunkhail, president Talash Jirga Ibrahim Khan and others lauded the efforts of the local community. They said the project was completed in a record period of 52 days with a cost of Rs 10.8 million.



LOWER DIR: Children standing on a newly constructed bridge built by local community in Talash area. — F.P. photo

Hina assures support to rape victim

Hafiz M. Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Chairperson, Women Protection Authority, Punjab, Hina Parvaiz Butt visited Hafizabad and meet raped victim woman who was raped during dacoity on Sukheki-Marr Balochan Road, on 24 July 2024 at night when she was on its way alongwith her husband and two year and three-month-old daughter to Chiniot from Village Dinggi Juppa after meeting her relatives.

Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad Sundas Irshad, DPO Faisal Gulzar and other offices were also present on this occasion.

Hina Parvaiz Butt assured the victim woman to provide financial and legal

assistance and she directed the Incharge Dar-ul-Aman Hafizabad to ensure provision of all kind of facilities to victim women as well as to provide psychological treatment so that she succeeded to come out from trauma.

DPO Faisal Gulzar gave briefing to Hina Parvaiz Butt regarding this tragic incident and progress of police for tracing and arrest of accused involved in this case.

Meanwhile, police have issued sketch of raped accused which prepared with help of victim family and police appealed the people to inform the police about wanted accused. The name of informer would be kept secret, police spokesman said.

Surging input cost big threat to agriculture: Kissan Ittehad

MULTAN (APP): Chairman Pakistan Kissan Ittehad Khalid Khokhar said on Sunday that increasing cost of inputs was a big threat to agriculture sector.

He said this while holding a press conference at local press club.

He stated that farming had become impossible for the peasants due to rising cost of inputs especially electricity tariff for tubewell and fertilizers. Late year, agriculture sector made growth of 6.5 percent which was higher if compared to other sectors. Industry improved with one

percent growth, he remarked.

He lamented that government announced incentives for industry but ignored agriculture sector. The electricity price of agriculture remained always low, comparing to industry. However, this time the electricity price is high in agriculture sector against the industry.

Khokhar maintained that that Pakistan owned huge resources to excel in all field but it was importing agri products worth 10 to 12 billion dollars annually.

The Chairman Pakistan

Kissan Ittehad stated that per acre production was high in neighbourly if compared the Pakistan. He added that the difference of per acre production was due to cost of inputs. In Pakistan, cost of inputs is increasing with fast pace and the peasants are unable to apply inputs properly.

Khokhar feared that there would be food security issue in future as the farmers would not be able to cultivate wheat. He added that there would be 40 to 50 percent decline in wheat cultivation in upcoming season.



SKARDU: An attractive and eye-catching view of Manthoka Waterfall in Kharmang Valley. This waterfall is 180 feet high from the ground and located almost 80 kilometers away from downtown Skardu. — APP photo

Water contamination – another looming challenge for authorities

FAISALABAD, Jul 28 (APP): Population explosion, vehicular emissions and industrial effluents in urban areas and use of pesticides and insecticides in rural areas are continuously disturbing our natural resources balance particularly polluting our air and groundwater.

As the water provides for our main lifeline, polluting this resource specifically means ruining the health of our people exerting extra financial burden on individuals and national economy. Today, even the groundwater pumped-out from 100 feet depth is contaminated with different chemicals and salts injurious to human health.

Improper industrial waste treatment and throwing industrial effluent into water courses flowing through the cities and to the adjacent agricultural land had further aggravated the situation as except a few major

export-oriented units; there is no in-house treatment plant at industrial units.

Residents of Faisalabad are more prone to this hazard where only source to drain out industrial, domestic and even rain water is sewer system of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA). In rainy season, this sewer system starts over flowing with water moving to low-lying areas and open spaces later on penetrating down to groundwater badly effecting water table and poor and low income groups who commonly use this water for drinking purposes.

“Around 80 percent diseases in Faisalabad are water borne and children are worst hit by contaminants in groundwater,” claimed Dr Muhammad Iqbal, former Head Pediatrics Ward, Ghulam Muhammad Abad hospital. “Water in Faisalabad is hard and contains

potassium, sodium, magnesium more than the prescribed ratio.”

Pakistan Council for Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) in its January-March 2024 conducted survey had also mentioned to continuously deteriorating water quality due to biological contamination from human waste, chemical pollutants and agricultural inputs.

It had also mentioned to contamination of piped water due to their laying close to sewerage lines or open drains that also result in serious water borne diseases.

Another PCRWR study also revealed that 59 percent sources of potable water in Faisalabad were unfit for drinking as its water supply was mostly dependent on surface and groundwater. The main sources of microbial contamination are mentioned as Chloride, Fluoride, Hardness and TDS as the groundwater is also pol-

luted due to prevalence of Sodium-Bicarbonate, Magnesium-Bicarbonate, Sodium-Chloride, Calcium-Bicarbonate and Sodium-Sulphate.

“Arsenic contamination is a serious issue. It increases risk of cancer and other diseases in human beings,” remarked Waqar Hussain, Incharge PCRWR Water Quality Lab Faisalabad. “Main sources of arsenic contamination are disposal of industrial waste, smelting of arsenic bearing minerals, burning of fossil fuels and application of arsenic compounds in products like insecticides, herbicides, phosphate fertilizers, semiconductor industries and timber.”

Health experts also believe that aquatic life in Faisalabad is badly affected by pumping out industrial waste directly into canals or drains that mixes with ground water. As, concerned departments were unable to

provide portable water to 100% population, majority is compelled to use this contaminated groundwater for drinking purpose.

Social activist Abdullah Nisar Khan has urged these departments to adopt a comprehensive strategy to tackle this situation. “There is only one waste water treatment plant in Achkera, a few kilometers away from Paharang Drain. Water treated at this facility is healthy for irrigation, but it is thrown into Paharang drain after treatment, where it once again mixes with polluted water.”

Mentioning to another plant constructed to treat effluents of Maddhona drain, Nisar Khan urged its early completion also stressing ban on plastic bags that choke majority of city drains. “As the government departments fall short of dispensing their duties, the civil society must join hands to demand action against

water contamination.”

He also emphasized to lay separate drainage system for industrial effluent, install treatment plants and use treated water for irrigation. “We can cut down our health budget up to 50 % only by providing potable water to the masses and we should do it urgently.”

According to WASA officials 345 out of 360 water filtration plants are functioning in different parts of the city to provide clean drinking water. These filtration plants were installed by the government and NGOs on public-private partnership basis and are now looked after by Lasani Welfare Trust.

The WASA spokesman claimed that it was catering to need of 70 % city population by supplying 88.5 million gallons per day (mgsd) including 56 mgsd through 29 tube wells from Chiniot Well Field Area, 20 mgsd through 25 tube wells

from Jhang Branch Canal, 8 mgsd through 8 tube wells from Rakh Branch Canal and 4.5 mgsd from Jhall Khannuana and Millat Town water works.

“We do not deal with water filtration plants as it was the project of Municipal Corporation Faisalabad,” he said and informed that work on a water treatment plant near Maddhuana Drain has not yet started and is still in files only.

Talking of rural areas, the statistics show that there are 345 water filtration plants in more than 840 villages of the district that are quite insufficient to meet the residents need of clean drinking water.

Therefore, it is direly needed for the authorities to focus this problem on priority for better health of masses and reducing healthcare expenses incurred every year on patients suffering from water borne diseases.

Aftab inaugurates water supply scheme in Dara Adam Khel

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate along with former MNA Qaiser Jamal Afridi inaugurated the Water Supply Scheme Shireen Mela in Bostikhel of Tribal Tehsil Dara Adam Khel of Kohat District, funded by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The inaugural ceremony was largely attended by the party workers, local elders and common people.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, the Law

Minister said that he is well aware of the backwardness and deprivation of Dara Adam khel because it was remained a part of the former FATA. Therefore, he will try to pay special attention here.

He said that provision of basic needs like drinking water, communication, education and health to the people is at the top of his priorities.

Aftab Alam said that he is preparing a separate development plan for each area keeping in view its needs with active participation of the local leadership so that the real problems faced by the people are solved.

He said, unlike the past rulers, his agenda is the improvement of the oppressed classes instead of his personal interests and likes and dislikes adding that he is trying to achieve this goal accordingly.

Earlier, the local elders and party workers warmly welcomed the Law Minister Aftab Alam Afridi and thanked the minister, Shehryar Afridi MNA and Qaiser Jamal for taking interest in the progress and prosperity of the area.

Later, the minister inaugurated the Water Supply Scheme by cutting the tap along with the elders of the area.



LARKANA: The farmers are busy planting the seedlings of rice crop in their field near the Bypass Road.

Operations against power theft continue

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): The district administration along with Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) staff is continuing to conduct operations against electricity theft across the district.

Following the directions of Deputy Commissioner Sarah Rehman, Assistant Commissioner Dera Muhammad Faseeh Ishaq Abbasi along with PESCO Superintending Engineer

(SE) Fida Muhammad Mehsood visited different areas for the purpose.

Speaking on this occasion, the assistant commissioner said that actions against electricity theft and recovery of pending dues would be continued indiscriminately. The people involved in electricity theft were national criminals and they did not deserve any concession, he emphasized.

He requested the citizens to cooperate with the task force teams to further reduce the load-shedding period.

The assistant commissioner also issued instructions to the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) officials to intensify the operation against direct hooks (Kunda Mafia) and extend the operation to other areas.

AGCA demands establishment of PEC office in Malakand

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The All Government Contractors' Association (AGCA) Malakand division on Sunday demanded the government and the Pakistan engineering council (PEC) to establish the council's office at Chakdara for the whole division and grant the registered contractors the right to vote in the PEC election. The demand was made during an oath taking ceremony held at Chakdara with the PEC chairman and former MNA Muhammad

Najeeb Harron as chief guest. Earlier The PEC chairman administered oath to the newly elected office bearers of the All Government Contractors Association Malakand division, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Malakand, Swat, Bunir and Shangla districts.

The government contractors from the merged districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were also in attendance.

The function was addressed by the AGCA divisional president engineer Ikramullah Khan, gen-

eral secretary Imran Takur, chairman PEC Najeeb Harron, ANP central leader Hussain Shah Yousafzai, Bacha Khan, Jamal Khan and others.

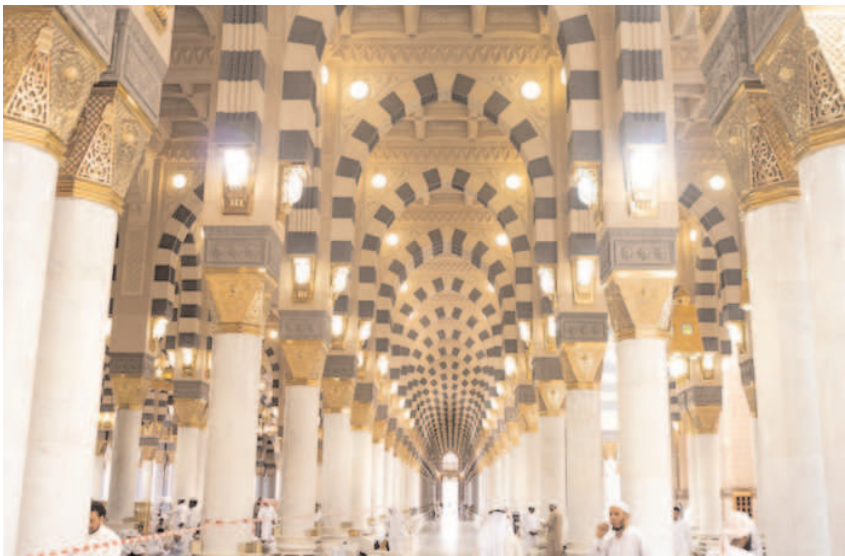
The speakers demanded proper stipend for the young engineers from the government after their graduation like the doctors.

They also demanded the establishment of a council for engineers and contractors like the lawyers' bars with the authority to cancel the registration of engineer and contractor on violation of rules and regulations.

The contractors also demanded the abolishment of taxes in Malakand and merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bidding of projects on registration with the Pakistan Engineering Council, ending of tender form fee in KP and abolishment of post and pre-qualification which according to them created discrimination in the award of projects. The PEC chairman Najeeb Harron said that engineers and contractors occupied a key position in infrastructure development.



Lighting of Prophet’s Mosque represents Islamic architectural art



ISLAMABAD (APP): The lighting of the Prophet’s Mosque constitutes a form of beauty and Islamic architecture, a prominent landmark and a unique art that forms part of the mosque’s identity.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA), it is expressed through light units, chandeliers, and lanterns bearing the name of Allah and inscriptions in Arabic calligraphy inspired by Islamic architectural art,

which enhances the place’s beauty and uniqueness to the point that it appears as a magnificent art masterpiece.

The Prophet’s Mosque contains more than 30 types of lighting units, with a

total number exceeding 138,000 units.

The most notable are the 300 chandeliers of various sizes and more than 10,000 lighting units bearing the name of Allah, placed in the upper corners of the architectural arches inside the mosque and its corridors.

These various lighting units in different shapes, sizes, and electrical capacities throughout the Prophet’s Mosque, its courtyards, and affiliated facilities.

The General Authority for the Care of the Prophet’s Mosque seeks to apply globally approved lighting specifications, stemming from the commitment of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud’s government, to improving the services provided by the Prophet’s Mosque.



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden walks upon arrival at the White House in Washington, DC, on July 28, 2024 as he returns from the Camp David presidential retreat.

Egypt stresses importance of supporting Lebanon

CAIRO (Reuters): Egypt stressed the importance of supporting Lebanon and “sparing it the scourge of war,” the country’s foreign ministry said on Sunday amid escalating tensions between Israel and the Iran-aligned Lebanese Hezbollah group.

Cairo, a mediator in the ongoing Gaza war, also warned of the dangers of opening new war front with Lebanon.

Thousands of mourners

attended funeral ceremonies on Sunday for the 12 children and teenagers killed by a rocket strike in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights as Israel vowed swift retaliation against the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon.

Hezbollah denied any responsibility for the attack on Majdal Shams, the deadliest in Israel or Israeli-annexed territory since Hamas’ Oct. 7 assault sparked the war in Gaza, which has since

spread to several fronts and now risks spilling into a wider regional conflict.

Israeli jets hit targets in southern Lebanon overnight but a stronger response was expected following a meeting of the security cabinet at 6 p.m. (1500 GMT).

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned from a visit to the United States and met security officials ahead of the meeting.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said there was every indication that the rocket that hit a sports field where children were playing football had been fired by Hezbollah and said Washington stood by Israel’s right to defend itself.

But he said the US did not want a further escalation of the conflict, which has seen daily air strikes and exchanges of fire between the Israeli military and Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon.

MPs from 6 countries say Beijing is pressuring them not to attend summit

BEIJING (AP): Lawmakers from at least six countries say Chinese diplomats are pressuring them not to attend a China-focused summit in Taiwan, in what they describe as efforts to isolate the self-governed island.

Politicians in Bolivia, Colombia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and one other Asian country that declined to be named say they are getting texts, calls and urgent requests for meetings that would conflict with their plans to travel to Taipei, the island’s capital. China vehemently defends its claim to Taiwan and views it as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

The summit begins Monday and is being held by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, or IPAC, a group of hundreds of lawmakers from 35 countries concerned about how democracies approach Beijing. IPAC has long faced pressure from the Chinese government: some members have been sanctioned by Beijing, and in 2021 the group was targeted by Chinese state-sponsored hackers, according to a U.S. indictment unsealed earlier this year.

But Luke de Pulford, the alliance’s director, says the pressure from Chinese officials the past few days has been unprecedented. During past IPAC meetings in other locations, lawmakers were approached by Chinese diplomats only after they concluded. This year, the first in which IPAC’s annual summit is taking place in Taiwan, there appears to be a coordinated attempt to stop participants from attending.

The AP spoke to three lawmakers and reviewed texts and emails sent by Chinese diplomats asking whether they were planning to participate in the summit.

“I’m Wu, from Chinese

Embassy,” read a message sent to Antonio Miloshoski, a member of parliament in North Macedonia. “We heard that you got an invitation from IPAC, will you attend the Conference which will be held next week in Taiwan?”

In some cases, lawmakers described vague inquiries about their plans to travel to Taiwan. In other cases, the contact was more menacing: One lawmaker told The AP that Chinese diplomats messaged the head of her party with a demand to stop her from going.

“They contacted president of my political party, they ask him to stop me to travel to Taiwan,” said Sanela Klaric, a member of parliament in Bosnia. “He showed me the message from them. He said, ‘I will advise you not to go, but I cannot stop you, it’s something you have to make a decision.’”

China routinely threatens retaliation against politicians and countries that show support for Taiwan, which has only informal relations with most countries due to Chinese diplomatic pressure. Klaric said the pressure was unpleasant but only steered her determination to go on the trip.

“I really am fighting against countries or societies where the tool to manipulate and control peoples is fear,” said Klaric, adding that it reminded her of threats and intimidation she faced while suffering through wars in Bosnia in the 1990s. “I really hate the feeling when somebody is frightening you.”

The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. De Pulford called the Chinese government pressure “gross foreign interference.”

“How would PRC officials would feel if we tried to tell them about their

travel plans, where they could and could not go?” de Pulford said, using the acronym for China’s official name, the People’s Republic of China. “It’s absolutely outrageous that they think that they can interfere in the travel plans of foreign legislators.”

Lawmakers from 25 countries are expected to attend this year’s summit and will feature high-level meetings with Taiwanese officials, according to a press release. The Taiwanese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last week, Beijing criticized Taiwan for its annual Han Kuang military drills, saying that Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party was “carrying out provocations to seek independence.”

“Any attempt to whip up tensions and use force to seek independence or reject reunification is doomed to failure,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters.

China has been peeling off the island’s diplomatic allies, often with promises of development aid, in a long-running competition between the two that has swung in Beijing’s favor in recent years. The Pacific Island nation of Nauru switched recognition to Beijing earlier this year, a move that reduced Taiwan’s dwindling number of diplomatic allies to 12. But China’s at-times heavy-handed approach has also alienated other countries.

In 2021, Beijing downgraded relations and blocked imports from Lithuania, a member of both the EU and NATO, after the Baltic nation broke with diplomatic custom by agreeing that a Taiwanese representative office in its capital of Vilnius would bear the name Taiwan instead of Chinese Taipei, which

other countries use to avoid offending Beijing. The following year, the EU adopted a resolution criticizing Beijing’s behavior toward Taiwan and took action against China at the World Trade Organization over the import restrictions.

This time, Chinese pressure is also triggering backlash.

Bolivian Senator Centa Rek said that she submitted a letter of protest after a Chinese diplomat called her and told not to go to Taiwan, saying the island was run by an “imposter president” and that the summit was hosted by an organization “not accepted within the terms of the policy of mainland China.” When Rek refused, the diplomat said he would report her decision to his embassy, which Rek interpreted as a “veiled threat”.

“I told him that it was an unacceptable intrusion, that I would not accept an order or intrusion from any government,” Rek said. “These were personal decisions and that it seemed to me that he had gone beyond all international political norms.”

Most of the lawmakers targeted appear to be from smaller countries, which de Pulford, the alliance’s director, said was likely because Beijing “feels that they can get away with it.” But he added that the coercive tactics have only made participants more determined to take part in the summit.

Miriam Lexmann, a Slovakian member of the European Parliament whose party head was approached by Chinese diplomats, said the pressure underscored her reason for coming to Taiwan.

We want to “exchange information, ways how to deal with those challenges and threats which China represents to the democratic part of the world, and of course, to support Taiwan,” she said.

CARACAS (Reuters): Venezuelans waited in line at polling stations and cast ballots on Sunday in the most consequential election in a quarter-century of socialist party rule, with President Nicolas Maduro confident of victory even as the opposition has attracted impassioned support and warned of possible irregularities. Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has been the star of the coalition campaign, even after a ban on holding public office forced her to pass the torch to candidate Edmundo Gonzalez, a 74-year-old ex-diplomat known for his calm demeanor.

Gonzalez has won backing even from some former supporters of the ruling party, but the opposition and observers have questioned whether the vote will be fair, saying decisions by electoral authorities and the arrests of opposition staff are meant to create obstacles. Maduro – whose 2018 reelection is considered fraudulent by the United States, among others – has said the country has the world’s most transparent electoral system and has warned of a “bloodbath” if he were to lose.

Reuters journalists located in six cities around the country reported lines outside polling stations, including some that opened late.

“I’ve been here since 5 a.m. I came to vote for change, for a new Venezuela, which will be reborn and because I’m a public worker and we need change to be able to have a dignified salary,” said Tibisay Aguirre, a 57-year-old cook who was waiting in line in Maracay, in the central state of Aragua.

Polls close at 6 p.m. local time (2200 GMT) and results could be published on Sunday night or in the following days.

Maduro’s government has presided over an economic collapse, the migration of about a third of the population, and a sharp deterioration in diplomatic relations, crowned by sanctions imposed by the United States, European Union and others which have crippled an already struggling oil industry.

Maduro has said he will guarantee peace and economic growth, making Venezuela less dependent on oil income.

The minimum wage is equivalent to \$3.50 per month, while basic food for a family of five is estimated to cost about \$500. Many people receive government food baskets or remittances from relatives abroad.

Dozens of voters were casting ballots at the Venezuelan consulate in the Spanish island of Tenerife, with others

gathered outside waving flags and cheering.

Several voters said they had been registered at that consulate for many years. Migrants around the world have reported difficulties registering and only a small percentage of the diaspora is expected to be able to vote.

Maduro voted early in the morning in Caracas and said the result announced by the National Electoral Council will be recognized and “defended” by the armed forces and the police.

People attending Maduro’s closing rally in Caracas on Thursday spoke enthusiastically of his late mentor – long-time socialist President Hugo Chavez – and said Maduro, in power since Chavez’ death in 2013, was continuing his predecessor’s legacy of helping the poor.

“Nicolas Maduro is building up the country and continuing the legacy of Commander Chavez,” said Conde Miranda, 54, who traveled from southern Ciudad Guayana to attend. Others alluded to a more challenging environment.

“Maduro has done both good things and bad things, the problem is the people below him,” said 30-year-old public employee Alejandro Goldteims.

Gonzalez and

Machado, who have promised major changes and said a fresh start may motivate migrants to return, have urged people to hold “vigils” at polling stations. They have said they expect the military to uphold the results of the vote. Venezuela’s military has always supported Maduro, a 61-year-old former bus driver and foreign minister, and there have been no public signs that leaders of the armed forces are breaking from the government.

Twenty-two people have been arrested since Friday “in the context of the electoral process,” Gonzalo Himiob, the vice-president of human rights organization Foro Penal, said on X, adding that at least 15 remain detained.

Venezuela’s attorney general this week denied participating in political persecution and said the election should be peaceful.

Public spending has grown only slightly during the campaign, analysts say, a change from past campaigns when spending was generous.

Maduro says he has opened 70 public works projects during the last several months but many have been renovations of already existing schools, hospitals and roads, according to events broadcast on state television.

Unearthing the transformative potential of Saudi Arabia’s mining sector

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia’s mining sector is on the cusp of a transformative era, with the Kingdom determined to become a global leader in the industry. But have you wondered what treasures lie beneath its sands?

Saudi Arabia is rich in minerals essential for various global industries. The Kingdom is transforming into a leading exporter of diverse energy types, shifting away from its traditional role as an oil producer.

It has strong potential to produce minerals that are essential for energy transition, such as aluminum, copper, and rare earth elements, as well as minerals needed for global agriculture.

The strategic focus on economic diversification has placed the mining sector at the forefront of national development plans, with the Kingdom’s mineral wealth valued at an estimated SR9.4 trillion (\$2.4 trillion).

Open for business

According to the World Risk Report 2023 released by UK-based research and consultancy firm MineHutte, Saudi Arabia’s mining sector reforms have seen it recognized as the fastest-

growing regulatory and investment-friendly environment globally over the past five years.

The report also stated that the Kingdom has been ranked the second-best country for its licensing environment.

This comes as Saudi Arabia saw a 138 percent increase in the number of exploitation licenses issued since implementing the new Mining Investment Law in 2021.

According to Gaute Andreassen, a partner at Bain and Co.’s Advanced Manufacturing and Services and Energy and Natural Resources practices, while some resources are already being mined, there is still a significant amount that has not yet been tapped into.

“The mining sector in Saudi Arabia has for many years been primarily focused on phosphate for fertilizers and bauxite, used in the production of aluminum. These two will also in the future represent a key portion of the sector activities,” Andreassen told Arab News.

He added: “Going forward, there is evidence of additional endowment, e.g. of rare earth elements and also of copper that

can be extracted. The question is whether these resources are commercially viable.”

Rabih Nassar, consulting partner for Resources and Industrial at PwC Middle East, believes that besides phosphate and bauxite, there are other key minerals that are considered particularly promising for development within Saudi Arabia’s mining sector.

“At the FMF (Future Minerals Forum) 2024, it was highlighted that Saudi Arabia is rich in minerals like phosphates, gold, copper, zinc, lithium, and rare earth elements. Each of these minerals serves distinct global markets and industries,” Nassar stated.

According to Nassar, gold continues to be in high demand, not just for jewelry and investment, but also for technological applications in electronics and aerospace industries due to its excellent conductivity and resistance to corrosion.

Copper is essential in electrical engineering, electronics, construction, and new green technologies such as electric vehicles and renewable energy systems.

He also highlighted the importance of zinc, which is mainly used for galvanizing to protect steel from corrosion making it essential in the construction and automotive industries. This metal is also crucial in the production of batteries and alloy materials.

Lithium plays a pivotal role in the battery industry, especially for electric vehicles and renewable energy storage systems.

Moreover, rare earth elements are crucial for the production of permanent magnets used in wind turbines, electric vehicle motors, and various other electronics like smartphones and computers.

Attracting Investment During FMF 2024 held in January in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia outlined its strategy to attract investment in the mining sector through regulatory reforms, competitive tax frameworks, and enhanced transparency.

Nassar told Arab News that the Kingdom is improving its geological databases and conducting extensive surveys to better map its mineral resources, thereby facilitating informed decision-making for investors.

He aligned the importance of

this work with continuing to enhance regulatory frameworks in order to provide a conducive environment for investment.

“These efforts are complemented by strong government support and streamlined processes for mining licenses and operations,” he said, adding: “These initiatives will provide extended expertise and capital, as well as promote knowledge transfer and capacity building, ensuring the sustainable development of the mining industry.”

Chris Braun, a partner at Bain and Co.’s Retail and Energy and Natural Resources practices, also shed light on what the Kingdom will do to attract both domestic and international investment to support the exploration and development of Saudi Arabia’s mining resources.

“The Kingdom is already working on establishing several industries that will be off-takers for significant portions of these minerals. That is a very good start. Beyond that, Saudi firms have shown their ability to work well with international partners in pursuing mining-based opportunities,” Braun said.

He added: “Going forward, a

big requirement for success is validating the country’s mineral endowment and investing in exploration.”

Braun further emphasized the importance of developing infrastructure to support mining operations, which are often located in remote areas. This includes modern transportation, housing, reliable utilities, and digital access. “Finally, Saudi Arabia needs to ensure there is sufficient access to critical capabilities and a qualified labor force. Both non-skilled and skilled labor is critical and making sure the Kingdom educates enough mining engineers should be a key priority,” he stated.

Encouraging Private Sector and Foreign Investments

When it comes to foreign investments in Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom presents an attractive destination for those seeking long-term returns and strategic partnerships.

According to PwC, a range of new opportunities and incentives can be anticipated that the Kingdom will extend to both the private sector and foreign investors. “The government has overhauled its mining laws to

make them more investor-

friendly,” Nassar said. This includes streamlining the application and approval processes for mining licenses, ensuring transparency, and reducing regulatory limitations.

The establishment of a dedicated mining ministry underscores the sector’s importance and provides a direct point of contact for investors.

Investors in the mining sector can also benefit from tax incentives, such as reduced tax rates and exemptions on import duties for mining equipment.

“The Saudi Industrial Development Fund also offers financial support such as loans with competitive interest rates to encourage investments in mining-related technologies and infrastructure,” Nassar said.

Developing state-of-the-art mining infrastructure can generate significant investments, such as the construction of rail networks, ports, and roads designed to support the mining and transport of minerals.

These developments aim to reduce logistical challenges and operational costs for mining activities.

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Federal heat rule could be years away

PRESIDENT Joe Biden’s administration is advancing a first-of-its-kind proposal to safeguard indoor and outdoor workers from the perils of extreme heat as the United States swelters under record-breaking temperatures this summer.

A construction worker drinks water in temperatures that have reached well above triple digits in Palm Springs, California. Reuters

A construction worker drinks water in temperatures that have reached well above triple digits in Palm Springs, California. Reuters

President Joe Biden’s administration is advancing a first-of-its-kind proposal to safeguard indoor and outdoor workers from the perils of extreme heat as the United States swelters under record-breaking temperatures this summer.

But it will still likely take years to enact a federal rule that could be undone with the stroke of a pen should Donald Trump win the White House – or by a US Supreme Court that just dealt a major blow to the federal government’s regulatory authorities. For the moment, workers are left at the mercy of employers, or the handful of states that have taken their own steps on the matter. “Even in ... a wildly optimistic, best-case scenario, it’s still a couple years until this federal heat standard would take effect,” said Terri Gerstein, director of the Labour Initiative at New York University’s Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. In the meantime, a handful of states have moved forward with their own heat protection rules, while other states like Texas and Florida have blocked localities from setting standards on essentials like access to water and rest breaks that the new federal rule would address, according to a Reuters report. Florida’s new law barring local governments from setting their own heat protection kicked in this month, as the heat index was forecast to top 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 degrees Celsius) in some spots in the Sunshine State. The heat index measures what the temperature feels like to the human body. “We have a long road to travel,” said Juanita Constible, an expert in heat and labour at the nonprofit Natural Resources Defence Council. The draft proposal from the Labour Department’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), unveiled this month, would implement control measures when the heat index hits 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26.7 degrees Celsius) that include requirements to provide employees with cool drinking water and paid rest breaks if needed. The proposal provides additional measures at 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32.2 degrees Celsius) like mandatory rest breaks of 15 minutes at least every two hours. “Obviously we’ll see some changes before the final (rule) and then enforcement will be a pretty key part of the picture,” Constible said.

“It’s clear that OSHA has been paying really close attention to what workers have been saying they need.”

In the wake of the deadly “heat dome” that saw crippling record temperatures in the Pacific Northwest in 2021, Biden initially announced his intention to put forward a rule in September 2021. Biden announced this week he would not seek re-election and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to be the Democratic presidential nominee. “Because of climate change, heat has risen to the top of the agenda,” said Jordan Barab, a former senior OSHA official during the Obama administration. Former President Trump has previously questioned the role humans play in rising global temperatures, and the 2024 Republican Party platform calls for ending “market-distorting restrictions on oil, natural gas, and coal.”

Asked about plans for the heat rule should Trump get elected, his campaign did not answer directly, with a spokesperson instead criticising the “failed Harris-Biden economic agenda” while touting Trump’s record of “delivering pro-growth economic policies that put money back in the pockets of working families.”

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) told the Thomson Reuters Foundation this month that the construction industry faces unique challenges because the nature of its jobs changes daily, if not hourly. Another wild card is the Supreme Court, which last month dealt a major blow to the authority federal agencies enjoyed in crafting and developing their own rules. Regulators can monitor and crack down on heat-related issues under a “general duty” clause, which allows OSHA to enforce basic safety in workplaces, but in practice cases can be difficult to prove and enforcement is spotty.

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UK targets reform of ‘Hotel California’ immigration system

Mohamed Chebaro

It is both sad and true that the UK has evolved from being a sanctuary for those in need of protection after fleeing conflicts or persecution to the ultimate place for asylum seekers, economic migrants and victims of organized crime gangs that specialize in human trafficking. There are bogus student visa suppliers and shady companies profiting from skilled and unskilled workers, offloading low-paid workers onto the caving social security system of the UK once they earn their settled status.

So, it is a welcome step to see that the country’s new interior minister, Yvette Cooper, is already showing a drive and a resolve to fix the chaotic immigration and settlement system she inherited after years of less-than-perfect immigration legislation and policies. Cooper, the home secretary since Labour’s landslide election win over the Conservatives earlier this month, deemed the last of these policies, the now-scraped Rwanda plan, to be the “most shocking waste of taxpayer money ever.”

In a stinging speech in Parliament this week, Cooper said the Tory government had created an asylum backlog that meant the system was like “Hotel California,” referring to the famous Eagles song. She said the previous government stopped processing thousands of cases, meaning people that have entered the asylum system since March 2023 would never leave it. She is promising to hire enough officers to process and clear the mounting backlog.

The plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, which was created as a deterrent to prevent migrants using small boats to reach the UK, wasted nearly £700 million (\$902 million) without deporting a single person. Only four people went to the East African country voluntarily before Labour scrapped the relocation program. Cooper said the wasted money included “£290 million payments to Rwanda, chartering flights that never took off, detaining hundreds of people and then releasing them, and paying for more than 1,000 civil servants to work on the scheme.”

This is in addition to the more than £3 billion spent annually on housing and providing for asylum seekers in the UK while their claims are processed. Cooper said the previous Conservative government had planned to spend more than £10 billion on the Rwanda scheme in total.

Illegal migration is an issue being grappled with by governments across Europe, as more than 380,000 people are believed to have entered the EU through irregular routes in 2023 — an increase of 17 percent on the previous year. About 41 percent of those arrivals are believed to have come in small boats across the Central Mediterranean, 26 percent on land through the Balkans and 16 percent across the Eastern Mediterranean.

For years, a common

approach to dealing with the migration crisis has remained elusive, fueling the ascendance of populist and far-right parties across Europe, destabilizing nations and causing rifts between allies and neighbors.

The UK’s new Labour government has made a promising start after mak-

gration crime and the people-smuggling gangs trading in human lives, in cooperation with Europol, Frontex and individual member states. He even signaled he would be open to considering offshore processing arrangements similar to the one between Italy and Albania.

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For years, a common approach to dealing with the migration crisis has remained elusive, fueling the ascendance of populist and far-right parties across Europe, destabilizing nations and causing rifts between allies and neighbors. The UK’s new Labour government has made a promising start after making border security one of its top priorities. It has already taken steps to establish a Border Security Command to coordinate the work of all the agencies and departments involved and give them more powers to confront the people smugglers. PM Keir Starmer also made it a government target to help lead the Europe-wide efforts to combat organized immigration crime and the people-smuggling gangs trading in human lives, in cooperation with Europol, Frontex and individual member states. He even signaled he would be open to considering offshore processing arrangements similar to the one between Italy and Albania. Although the government is cautious and is under no illusion that tackling the small boats issue will take time and require hard work, the initial indications show a holistic approach from Cooper, a veteran politician who claimed solving the problem will take “hard graft not sticking plasters.” For a start, thousands of immigration officers will resume processing the asylum and immigration claims that have been on hold since March 2023. In addition, she is reassigning the officers who were working on the Rwanda plan to working on return and enforcement programs, targeting illegal workers at businesses such as nail bars and car washes. All of the above is very welcome, as it shows someone is being responsible and it constitutes a departure from the previous idleness on migration — a topic that has often been used as a political football.

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claims that have been on hold since March 2023. In addition, she is reassigning the officers who were working on the Rwanda plan to working on return and enforcement programs, targeting illegal workers at businesses such as nail bars and car washes.

All of the above is very welcome, as it shows someone is being responsible and it constitutes a departure from the previous idleness on migration — a topic that has often been used as a political football. With no easy fix for an issue that has long plagued the public discourse, the new government should go even further. It should dare to carry out a strategic review of the country’s points-based immigrant visa system and, where necessary, review the post-Brexit cancellation of the freedom of movement of skilled and unskilled workers from the EU. Meanwhile, it should speed up investment in training and mentoring programs to provide many Brits with the opportunity to rejoin the labor market and fill the shortages in the UK economy, which has suffered as a result of Brexit. These measures would help the economy achieve some of the targeted growth that this new government is banking on.

Going after nail bars, car washes, criminal gangs and even unscrupulous businesses trading in work visas — which sell dreams for high fees paid in advance only to offload more low-skilled, language-deficient staff that end up as a burden on social services, the country’s limited social housing and the under-funded education and healthcare sectors — is long overdue. In the UK, it is not difficult to notice the post-Brexit change in the quality of services in businesses up and down the country.

The new government has warned against expecting miracles and that its predecessor had left the country’s coffers extremely stretched and, therefore, the scope for change could be limited. But the power of a new government, as they say, stems not from its ideas but its enthusiasm and its willingness to try. Many governments have failed to solve the visa and immigration conundrum this country has often faced. But this time, there is a new team that is willing and driven to try and solve the problems and bottlenecks.

The migration and asylum issue is multifaceted and complex. It deserves the attention of a serious government, which must try to make sure that, even if stemming the flow of new arrivals — and not just those coming on small boats — is impossible, then hard work can reduce the flow and control it in a way that ensures the UK stops being like “Hotel California,” or an asylum free-for-all. Instead, it should become a place where the majority of newcomers can live and thrive in safety, while contributing to a system that has, for decades, been key to catering for those in the greatest need of refuge.

For North Africa, crisis is actually good

Hafed Al-Ghwell

In an era marked by enduring turmoil, the political elite in North Africa have found the crises that plague the world and strain domestic resilience to be surprisingly beneficial for their governments.

As security threats escalate and irregular migration intensifies amid the spillovers from widening geopolitical rifts, the governments in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco are increasingly leveraging the new opportunities arising from a tide of convergent challenges to entrench themselves and the power and influence they wield.

Algeria’s strategic significance has soared in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The ensuing energy crisis in Europe transformed Algeria from a regional player into a crucial supplier, with Italian and German delegations rushing to Algiers to secure gas deals as an alternative to Russian energy supplies. In 2022 alone, exports of natural gas from Algeria to Italy surged by 20 percent, demonstrating the country’s newfound

aid, Saied is also exploiting widening geopolitical rifts in an attempt to assert his control and gain legitimacy. By pivoting toward Russia, China and Iran, he anticipates the receipt of additional funding and diplomatic cover that is not conditional on striving for or preserving the democratization of Tunisia and the institutions that would safeguard it. These alliances are especially pertinent as the country edges closer to a pivotal presidential election in October.

In Libya, the fragmented landscape of governance is receiving renewed attention amid the global distractions as a result of the self-interests of external actors, most notably Türkiye and Russia. The administration of Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh has strategically leveraged the EU’s need for alternative sources of energy post-Ukraine by promising increased oil production to help shore up European energy security as imports from Russia dwindle. However, this engagement is fraught with allegations of corruption

The EU, in its desperation to curb migrant flows, has offered substantial financial aid to Tunisia, with little oversight. This transactional relationship gives Saied additional financial support, with few or no strings attached, that temporarily eases the acute economic distress in his country, characterized by soaring unemployment rates and severe shortages of fuel and other basic staples. Beyond this financial aid, Saied is also exploiting widening geopolitical rifts in an attempt to assert his control and gain legitimacy.

prominence.

These agreements not only mitigated some of Europe’s energy woes, they also bolstered Abdelmadjid Tebboune’s precarious presidency of the country, providing him with substantial geopolitical leverage. While Algeria’s government faced criticism for clamping down on journalists and activists, the indispensable role it has played in European energy security has resulted in increased Western favor.

Capitalizing on this geopolitical shift Algiers has adopted a more assertive foreign policy, proactively engaging in its long-standing rivalry with Morocco. Beyond the energy exports, Algeria is also channeling its windfall revenues into domestic initiatives to create jobs, improve water security, and lay the foundations for overdue economic diversification.

For instance, the Algerian government has implemented new policies designed to stimulate private sector growth in an attempt to tackle unemployment, which stands at more than 20 percent for women and just under 10 percent for men.

Additionally, recent amendments allowing the deployment of its military forces in other countries signal a broader intention and strategy to play a more pivotal role in regional stability, particularly as part of Arab League and African Union peacekeeping missions. This balanced approach between a strengthening of domestic policies and assertion of influence abroad reveals Algeria’s strategic use of crises to redefine its role both regionally and globally.

In Tunisia, President Kais Saied continues to exploit an escalating migration crisis to increase his political leverage. It is an extension of a similar gambit Saied employed to capitalize on European fears of a heavily indebted Tunisia spiraling into economic collapse, which allowed his regime to extract concessional funding while pushing back against International Monetary Fund demands for austerity and stringent reforms.

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and mismanagement that compromise its credibility.

Meanwhile, the rival government in the east of the country is serving as a gateway for Russia to deeply embed itself in Libya, purportedly aiding Kremlin-backed initiatives such as the circumvention of international sanctions and the facilitation of fuel-smuggling operations.

Furthermore, Libya’s borders have become a conduit for sprawling illicit economies, which are magnifying the ramifications of the migrant crisis. As European border policies focus more on deterrence than resolution, Libyan elites are taking advantage of the country’s porous borders to sustain and expand these underground economies.

Morocco’s adept navigation of global crises exemplifies the ways in which nations can capitalize on turbulent times to further their own strategic objectives. For instance the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations with Israel, enabled Rabat to enhance its international security and intelligence ties, especially with the US. Such alliances have brought with them access to advanced technology and enhanced defense capabilities, tilting regional power dynamics in Morocco’s favor.

While normalization with Israel risked alienating a populace among which pro-Palestinian sentiment is strong, Rabat simply opted to recalibrate its foreign policy in anticipation that the strategic gains would eventually outweigh any domestic disapproval.

Simultaneously, Morocco’s pursuit of an independent migration strategy is helping the country shake up traditional EU-North African dependency dynamics. Its national strategies related to migration contrast heavily with more heavy-handed EU approaches elsewhere in the region, by striking a balance between deterrence of irregular migration and the protection of migrants’ rights. In return, Morocco gains a soft-power boost on the African continent and avoids the stigma of being seen to do the EU’s “dirty work.”

In summary, the turbulent global environment is providing North African countries with substantial geopolitical currency. Whether through energy deals, strategic alliances or migration agreements, governments in the region are fully committed to leveraging the effects of global instability to entrench themselves domestically and project influence abroad.

Now is the time for Britain to be bold about defense spending

Speaking this week at a major defense and security conference in London, the head of the British Army, Gen. Sir Roly Walker, delivered a stark warning: The UK has three years to bolster its defenses if it is to be prepared for a direct conflict with Russia.

The timing of his comments was no coincidence. After 14 years of a Conservative-led government, the Labour Party swept back into office this month with a historically large majority of seats. One of the first defense policy initiatives from the new administration is a review of defense that will be carried out in the coming months.

The announcement of the review was not surprising. In 2010, when the Conservative Party regained power after 13 years of a Labour government, a similar review took place. However, the strategic landscape has changed significantly since then.

In 2010, the UK military had just withdrawn from Iraq and was deeply involved in fighting a deadly insurgency in southern Afghanistan. Now, the threats and challenges arising from low intensity counterinsurgency operations have diminished for the UK, but the era of great power competition has reemerged. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is the starkest reminder of this shift.

Despite the reduction in the size of its armed forces over the years, the UK remains a global power. But this is not always guaranteed to be the case. What the new government decides to do during its upcoming defense review could have a significant impact worldwide. As Britain's top defense and security policy experts hammer out new strategic guidance, four key points will need to be addressed.

Firstly, it is likely the new British government

will prioritize the security and defense of Europe above other regions. Defense Secretary John Healey has already referred to a "NATO first" approach when it comes to the defense review.

The new government can build on considerable progress by its predecessor. The UK was considered one of the global leaders in support and the provision

Luke Coffey

with support for Ukraine, the Labour Party inherits a strong position regarding British involvement and influence in the region. The new government will want to build on the inroads made by its predecessor concerning UK-Japanese defense cooperation.

Expect the UK to leverage existing relationships

to threaten regional stability, it would be wise for the UK to at least maintain, if not bolster, its military presence in the region.

This is especially true in the Gulf, where Britain already has very close relationships going back decades. This region is particularly important for the Royal Navy. As the Houthis in Yemen continue to threaten international

politically contentious issues for the party. However, now that it is back in power, it should follow the example of previous Labour-led governments and ensure that Britain's nuclear deterrent is maintained and modernized. In particular, the Dreadnought-class submarine program, designed to replace existing Vanguard-class submarines by the 2030s, must remain on time and fully funded.

To achieve all these goals and ensure that Britain remains a global power, additional resources and money will be required. As someone who was personally involved in the 2010 defense review after the Conservative Party took office, I know it will be no easy task for the Ministry of Defense to secure additional resources from the Treasury.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has suggested that defense spending will increase to 2.5 percent of gross domestic product by 2030 but his government has not yet outlined a plan to achieve this goal.

Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China all pose challenges to the UK and its closest allies. In recent years, Britain's armed forces have been operating on a shoestring budget. The British Army currently numbers 72,000 soldiers, the fewest since the Napoleonic era. The Royal Navy struggles to meet its global obligations and keep its two aircraft carriers seaworthy. It would be reckless to think this situation can continue.

As the new government settles into office and works on its first major defense review, Britain's allies and adversaries will be watching closely. Russia's invasion of Ukraine shocked the world; it was a reminder of how unpredictable geopolitics can be.

When it comes to defense funding, the time to be bold is now, not when it is too late.

G20 leaders must embrace Lula's efforts to end global hunger and poverty

Ranvir S. Nayar

On July 24, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, in his role as the president of the G20 group of nations, launched a much-needed — and much-delayed — initiative to fight two of the world's most basic but critical problems: hunger and extreme poverty.

These twin projects are among a clutch of initiatives Lula has announced as part of his program for Brazil's year-long presidency of the G20. Others include global reforms of taxation to create a system that is more fair and ensures the wealthy are not able to avoid paying their share through clever accountancy or fudging of figures.

Lula has also initiated a move to preserve forests through efforts to curb logging and deforestation activities in partnership with Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo; the three countries contain the largest combined area of tropical rainforest in the world.

While all of these moves are much needed and important for the entire world, it is his latest initiative, a global war on extreme poverty and hunger, that is the most critical and urgent, as it addresses the pressing issue of the very survival of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

The eradication of hunger and extreme poverty figure high among the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, through the adoption of which the global community has pledged to eliminate both of these scourges by 2030. Between 2015 and 2019, some progress was made toward achieving both goals but since then, unfortunately, the world as a whole has seen a major backslide.

Extremely high food inflation began to grip parts of the world in 2019 and really took hold globally in 2020. Since then it has continued to ravage the world, affecting rich countries as much as poor ones. The situation took a further turn for the worse in 2022 with the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine, and there is little sign that it will ease.

The crisis caused by this double whammy has led to very severe consequences for the most vulnerable people around the world. Already extremely poor, they have been exposed to particularly high levels of food insecurity and face hunger on a regular basis. High food inflation and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused their situation to become even more precarious.

The world as a whole, and some key regions and countries in particular, have experienced big slides in their efforts to tackle the issues and meet their commitments related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2022, according to UN figures, about 9.2 percent of the global population faced chronic hunger, compared with 7.9 percent in 2019. About 29.6 percent, or 2.4 billion people, lack consistent access to food, and as many as 900 million face severe food insecurity, an increase of 134 million compared with 2019.

With barely six years until the deadline for achieving the sustainability goals, the initiatives imple-

mented by Lula could not have come soon enough. Here, the G20 has a key role to play. Its member countries are home to almost 70 percent of the global population. They are the 20 largest economies, accounting for almost 80 percent of global gross domestic product. As such, they have a special responsibility to tackle these and other global issues; there is no other group in such a good position to do so.

There is another reason why the G20 should tackle these issues as a matter of priority. Some member countries have large numbers of people facing one or both the problems; India, for example, and Brazil itself. Despite a sharp drop in 2022 in the numbers of

live in South Asia, with India alone accounting for more than 225 million of them.

Such figures illustrate why the G20 must be at the forefront of efforts to tackle head on these two basic challenges of hunger and extreme poverty, and must ensure that Lula's recent initiatives not only receive the wholehearted support of all members and associated organizations but that all G20 member countries, rich and not-so-rich alike, work together to address this wrong and put things right.

Tackling both these problems would be a less daunting challenge if government leaders really got more serious about doing so. There is adequate food production and enough resources in the world to

In 2022, according to UN figures, about 9.2 percent of the global population faced chronic hunger, compared with 7.9 percent in 2019. About 29.6 percent, or 2.4 billion people, lack consistent access to food, and as many as 900 million face severe food insecurity, an increase of 134 million compared with 2019. With barely six years until the deadline for achieving the sustainability goals, the initiatives implemented by Lula could not have come soon enough. Here, the G20 has a key role to play. Its member countries are home to almost 70 percent of the global population. They are the 20 largest economies, accounting for almost 80 percent of global gross domestic product. As such, they have a special responsibility to tackle these and other global issues; there is no other group in such a good position to do so. There is another reason why the G20 should tackle these issues as a matter of priority. Some member countries have large numbers of people facing one or both the problems; India, for example, and Brazil itself. Despite a sharp drop in 2022 in the numbers of people affected, about 7 percent of Brazilians continue to live in extreme poverty and a similar proportion faces severe food insecurity.

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The situation is much worse in India, which held the presidency of the G20 last year. Not only is it the most-populated country, it also has the largest number of people facing extreme food insecurity.

The Global Hunger Index 2024 found that even though it is the biggest producer of milk, wheat, and numerous fruits and vegetables, India ranks 111 out of 125 nations in the world in terms of hunger and food insecurity.

UN figures reveal the country is home to more than 190 million malnourished people, and as much as 75 percent of the population cannot afford nutritious food.

About 1.1 billion people live in extreme poverty worldwide, mostly in Africa and Asia. More than a third of all the global poor

ensure that no one is forced to live in extreme poverty, and that every human being can enjoy at least three square meals every day that contain the right balance of nutrients.

Certainly, it would call for slight tweaks to government policies and international cooperation. But it would be relatively easy to achieve if the global leaders who will gather in November at the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro made the decision to take effective action to rid the planet of these two scourges.

Lula has taken the lead and set out a road map for doing so. The other leaders simply need to sign on and resolve to fulfill their parts of the bargain in a fair and sincere manner.

Achieving these two goals by 2030 might not solve all the problems the world faces but it would at least show that through sincerity and humanity it is possible to overcome these basic challenges the world continues to face.

Turkiye's view on NATO's ME expansion

NATO has decided to open its first liaison office in the Middle East in Jordan, reflecting the alliance's strategy to increase its influence in the region. Although the decision was discussed during the NATO Summit in 2023, it is significant when considering the broader regional context.

Opening a representative office in Jordan underscores the country's geopolitical importance, as it is situated at the heart of the Middle East and shares borders with Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia. This decision signals to the wider region that NATO's interests extend beyond Europe. However, at the same time, it should not be overstated, as NATO's engagement with Middle Eastern states is not a new strategy.

Since the 1990s, NATO has engaged closely with states like Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia through its Mediterranean Dialogue. Established in 1994, the dialogue aims to facilitate political dialogue with Middle Eastern countries.

In the early 2000s, NATO launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to strengthen its political and military relations with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Türkiye, a key NATO member with the second-

largest army in the alliance after the US, played a pivotal role in initiating a strategic dialogue between NATO and four of the six GCC states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. The goal was to foster cooperation in the field of security within the Middle East, a move Türkiye actively supported.

Through the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, NATO has engaged with 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region to broaden the scope of political discussions on various regional issues. In this context, the alliance opened the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait in 2017, the first of its kind. This center aims to support and enhance practical cooperation between NATO and its Gulf partners, focusing on strategic analysis, military cooperation and public diplomacy.

For decades, NATO's image in the Middle East has been contentious, especially among the public, partly due to its intervention in Libya, which exacerbated negative perceptions. However, as regional states face increasing threats of different natures and from multiple sources, NATO aims to contribute to the region's stability through military expertise and cooperation. In this regard, NATO has trained

Sinem Cengiz

Iraqi officers in Jordan to improve their counterterrorism skills and this training has now extended to Baghdad.

When considering the new office in Jordan, three significant points arise. First, Jordan's military has collaborated closely with NATO forces for years and has participated in UN peacekeeping missions.

Secondly, NATO's choice of Jordan could be attributed to the fact that the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative-member GCC states are relatively small and may not be ready to align themselves openly with NATO, often preferring hedging policies in the region.

Thirdly, in April, Jordan played a crucial role in intercepting Iranian missiles targeting Israel as they traversed Jordanian airspace, despite Amman's opposition to Israel's actions in Gaza. However, as the decision to open the office predates the Gaza conflict, it seems unlikely that it is directly related to the conflict. Yet, the potential geopolitical implications of this decision remain to be seen.

NATO appears to have an urgent strategic necessity to expand in the region; but how is this perceived by Ankara? Türkiye has been a crucial member of NATO

since joining in 1952. Its Incirlik Air Base serves as a vital launching point for Western operations in the Middle East, including flights over Syria and Iraq during counterterrorism campaigns. Türkiye aims to play an active role in NATO's outreach efforts in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean and Gulf. From the outset, it has supported initiatives such as the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

However, although Türkiye supports NATO's efforts to develop cooperation with regional states, doubts remain about the alliance's true ambitions in the Middle East, partly due to its stance on recent regional crises. Türkiye prefers to see NATO establishing bilateral partnerships with regional countries with the aim of helping to ease the tensions that threaten these states through effective security and political collaborations. For instance, Türkiye would prefer NATO's involvement in the region to include efforts to end the Israeli war on Gaza.

While Türkiye's NATO allies express a desire for increased engagement with regional states, they have largely remained distant from the Gaza war, which poses threats to the stability of the wider region. NATO has so far only called for a

humanitarian pause, not a ceasefire. Given its previous involvement in several crises, this negligence raises questions about NATO's approach to developing relations with regional states while seemingly ignoring opportunities to exert pressure on Israel. Türkiye has pledged to block any cooperation between the alliance and Israel until a permanent ceasefire is in place in Gaza.

NATO's decision to expand by opening its first Middle East liaison office is a significant step. Yet, for Türkiye, this expansion presents both opportunities and challenges. From one perspective, the opening of the office is seen as an attempt to curb Russian and Iranian influence in the region, particularly through Syria. This move raises the potential for escalating rivalry between NATO and Russia, which could certainly have adverse implications for regional states, including Türkiye. The last thing the region's states need is more tension.

As a member of the alliance, Türkiye aims to play a crucial role in NATO's Middle Eastern strategy, with the priority being to enhance the security of regional states, rather than risking their security, through a more active involvement in resolving ongoing conflicts.

Iran's nuclear advances raising serious concerns

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

Iran's nuclear program has always been a significant concern for the international community. However, developments over the past few weeks have escalated these concerns to unprecedented levels, signaling a critical juncture in Iran's nuclear ambitions and the global response to them.

According to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Iran is now on the brink of producing the material necessary for a nuclear weapon, potentially within "one or two weeks." This stark warning underscores the rapid advancement of Iran's nuclear capabilities. The Biden administration often attributes this alarming progression to Donald Trump's withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal. Blinken noted: "What

we've seen in the last weeks and months is an Iran that's actually moving forward." He added: "Where we are now is not in a good place ... Now, they haven't produced a weapon itself, but... you put those things together — the fissile material, an explosive device — and you have a nuclear weapon."

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency has also issued a stark warning regarding developments in Iran's nuclear program. For the first time, IAEA inspectors last month confirmed that Iran has begun feeding uranium gas into advanced IR-4 and IR-6 centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment facility. These centrifuges, working in cascades, significantly enhance the efficiency of uranium enrichment by spinning uranium gas at extremely high speeds. This allows Iran to

enrich uranium at a much faster rate, drastically reducing the time required to produce nuclear weapons. The IAEA's findings highlight a critical acceleration in Iran's nuclear capabilities, emphasizing the urgent need for international attention and a response.

It is worth noting that the Iranian government is already enriching uranium to 84 percent, which is perilously close to the 90 percent enrichment level required for weapons-grade uranium. This proximity to weapons-grade material means that Iran could soon possess the necessary components for nuclear bombs. Such a development would mark a significant escalation in the nuclear threat posed by Iran and could potentially destabilize the region and beyond.

The Biden administra-

tion came into office with a commitment to revive the nuclear deal, but so far these efforts have not succeeded. In Iran, there is a noticeable lack of motivation and incentive to reach a new nuclear agreement, particularly in light of escalating tensions with Israel. Recent tit-for-tat hostilities between Iran and Israel have only heightened suspicions that Tehran is determined to acquire nuclear weapons. Proponents of this view argue that the ongoing conflict has strengthened the resolve of Iran's leaders to become a nuclear state, despite the potential consequences.

Despite these alarming developments, there are compelling reasons for Iran to curb its nuclear program and halt its advancement. One of the most significant

concerns is the potential for a regional arms race. If Iran continues on its current trajectory, neighboring countries might feel threatened and compelled to develop their own nuclear capabilities in response. This scenario would drastically increase the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, a region already fraught with tension and conflict.

A regional arms race would not only heighten the risk of nuclear confrontation but also divert critical resources away from economic development and social welfare, further destabilizing the region. In addition, by demonstrating a genuine commitment to peace and nonproliferation, the Iranian government could significantly improve its relationships with

regional powers. The Middle East has long been a hotspot for geopolitical strife, with historical rivalries often exacerbating conflicts.

A decision by Iran's leaders to halt the country's nuclear program could serve as a powerful gesture of goodwill, signaling its readiness to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation. This move could also help reduce existing hostilities and pave the way for collaborative efforts in addressing common challenges such as terrorism, economic instability and environmental issues. It is important to point out that a more stable and secure Middle East would benefit not only the countries within the region but also the global community, which has a vested interest in the region's stability due to its strategic

importance and vast energy resources.

Finally, economically speaking, de-escalating its nuclear ambitions and halting its nuclear program advancements could pave the way for Iran to improve its relations with the West, particularly the EU. Some relationships have been strained for decades, primarily due to concerns over Iran's nuclear program and its involvement in regional conflicts. By taking concrete steps to halt its nuclear advancement, Tehran could alleviate these concerns and open the door to renewed diplomatic engagement.

Improved relations with Western powers could lead to the lifting of economic sanctions, which have severely impacted Iran's economy. This, in turn, would facilitate trade and investment, providing a

much-needed boost to the Iranian economy. Enhanced economic opportunities could lead to greater prosperity for the Iranian people, fostering a more positive and cooperative international environment. The benefits of such a shift would be manifold, contributing to global peace, security and economic stability.

In conclusion, Iran's nuclear program has reached a critical and concerning level. It is in the best interests of Iran, as well as regional and global security, for the country to halt its nuclear advancements. Doing so would send a strong message of peace, stability and cooperation and could significantly improve Tehran's ties with regional and international powers. The path forward must prioritize diplomatic solutions and collective



Mills seek permission to export surplus sugar

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA-Punjab Zone) has urged the government to allow export of 1.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of surplus sugar worth one billion dollars for the country.

A spokesman told the media on Sunday that the PSMA had also reiterated its request in a recent meeting of Sugar Advisory Board (SAB), adding that sugar industry had long been appealing to the government to consider export of surplus sugar as it was facing huge losses due to increased costs of produc-

tion and by incurring carrying costs on surplus stocks of crushing seasons of 2022-23 and 2023-24. Continuous production of surplus sugar every year without its appropriate exports and domestic sale of sugar below its costs of production has increasingly become unsustainable and unviable for the sugar industry.

The spokesman said that sugarcane farmers had greatly suffered due to detrimental conditions of their wheat, cotton and maize crops and now are relying solely on sugarcane crop for their sustenance

and survival. Previously cane payments to the growers have been made regularly and timely crushing was started but the current cash flow constraints confronted by the sugar industry due to huge inventory have increasingly become uncontainable.

The PSMA requests the federal government to allow export of surplus sugar to enable the sugar mills to complete cane payments to sugarcane farmers. International sugar prices are continuously sliding downwards and already US\$300 million in foreign exchange earnings

of the country have been lost due to delay in decision making in this regard.

The PSMA appeals to the government to urgently grant permission of export of verified surplus stocks of 1.2MMT on 15-07-2024, expected to rise to 1.5 million tons by end November, as little time is left in forthcoming crushing season which again is going to be a surplus season and formulate a permanent and inclusive policy on export of surplus sugar so that sugar industry keep contributing foreign exchange to the country's agricultural and national economy.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb addressing media persons at PTV Headquarters.

Tackling inflation most serious challenge for govt, says FRIA

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) senior vice chairman Shabbaz Aslam has said that the most serious challenge to the economy for the government in the current fiscal year would be inflation, because it is already hitting economy due to continuous raise in oil prices and depreciation of local currency.

Shabbaz Aslam warned the high cost of doing business has been hurting the economic growth, as the inflation rate bounced back in concluding month, hurting the trade and industry the most, who faced the brunt of a staggering 520% increase in gas prices.

Quoting the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, he said that the Consumer Price Index surged to 21.2% last

month compared to a year ago. The increase was more than market expectations and has lessened the prospects for a cut in the interest rates.

This reading, the first announced by the PBS after the recently concluded International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks, in which the global lender also cut the inflation forecast for Pakistan to 22.8%, may strengthen the IMF's view of keeping the policy rate unchanged until core inflation starts easing out when the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meets.

The FRIA SVC predicted that inflation would remain high and may even increase further due to market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gap of essential items, exchange rate depreciation and recent upward adjust-

ment of administered prices of petrol and diesel.

The trader leader called for keeping check on government expenditure and high cost of debt servicing to contain budget deficit, as the Pakistan's federal budget deficit projection has been revised to history's highest to over Rs6 trillion, highlighting the unending fiscal woes that have pushed the country into a debt trap despite putting additional burden of billions of rupees on industry in the current fiscal year.

Expressing serious concern over the high jump in country's budget deficit, Shabbaz Aslam said the revision has been made in light of agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which exposed the massive underreporting of expenditures at the time of budget presentation by the

finance ministry.

This is a highly unsustainable level and has already pushed the country into a situation where debt restructuring seems to be the only viable option. He maintained that the failure to reform the tax system and increase revenue collection is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government.

In view of the low level of available FX reserves, the debt management strategy of Pakistan may have to be revisited, to ensure the stability of Pakistani rupee and restoration of international capital markets' confidence in the economy of Pakistan.

Shabbaz Aslam expressed surprise at the impact of the gas price hike, stating that it has surpassed market expectations.

Call for renegotiating agreements of IPPs

LAHORE (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) former vice president Chaudhry Zahid Iqbal Arain has called upon the government to review and restructure the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) contracts to align their payments more closely with actual electricity production and demand.

Speaking at a roundtable conference on 'Impact of high power tariffs and huge payments to IPPs on economy' here on Sunday, he said revisiting and renegotiating these capacity payment agreements with the IPPs could provide a solution to the problem of high power tariff, which was a major impediment to economic growth.

He added that even for domestic consumers, the high electricity tariffs exacerbate financial hardships, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and social unrest. Ch Zahid said that implementing more efficient energy policies, promoting renewable energy sources, and investing in energy infrastructure can help reduce reliance on costly IPPs.

Addressing this issue is crucial for fostering a business-friendly environment, ensuring affordable electricity for all, and promoting sustainable economic development, he added. The senior leader of United Business Group said capacity charges had led to excessive financial burdens on the country that not only strains public finances but also inflates the cost of electricity, making it difficult for people and businesses to afford.

SNGPL intensifies gas theft crackdown:

79 connections disconnected

F.P. Report

LAHORE: In an ongoing effort to curb gas theft, Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has conducted multiple raids across Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad, resulting in the disconnection of 79 illegal gas connections and the imposition of Rs 1.6 million in fines.

In Lahore, SNGPL teams disconnected two connections due to illegal gas usage and another for the use of a compressor. In Multan, five connections

were cut off for illegal gas usage. Faisalabad's regional team disconnected 16 connections, booking Rs 0.02 million in fines. Bahawalpur saw five disconnections due to compressor use. In Gujranwala, four connections were terminated for illegal use, with fines totaling Rs 0.13 million. Sheikhupura had one disconnection, accompanied by a Rs 0.19 million fine.

In Rawalpindi and Islamabad, two and one connections, respectively, were disconnected for illegal usage. Sialkot's team

cut off three connections, including two for compressor use, imposing Rs 0.02 million in fines.

In Sargodha, three connections were disconnected for illegal gas use, and in Sahiwal, two for compressor use.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mardan's team disconnected eight connections for illegal use and fined offenders Rs 0.66 million. Peshawar recorded 26 disconnections, including one for compressor use, with fines amounting to Rs 0.64 million.

Reduction in production cost to make industry competitive

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) has asked the government to take prompt measures to bring down the production costs for trade and industries to enable them to compete in the international market.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that trade and industry is currently having difficulty to compete the global market because of rapid increase in production costs. He said that the high cost of production is not good for our exports.

"The cost of production is a major factor, which makes an industry stand out among competitors in the world market," he explained.

Faheem said that high energy tariffs, shortage of fuel for machines, high rate of taxes, and lack of skilled labor are the main reasons behind the increase in the cost of production. He expressed concern that the reduction in industries' contribution to Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) is a worrying trend.

"Manufacturing and production industries have the potential to significantly

impact economic growth by reducing unemployment in the country. The government needs to take solid steps to make doing business easier," he added. He said lack of research and development (R&D) is one of the major reasons behind the increase in the cost of production in any industry.

"Sometimes we have the resources, but we make poor decisions. A poor decision means poor practices of work execution," he added. He said that R&D could help in the provision of valuable technologies, business models, and designs for the industry.

"Implementation of modern techniques or work practices can increase production and also reduce its costs," he added.

The PIAF Chairman said that both external and internal issues lead to an increase in cost of production. He said Pakistan's industry is struggling in the international market due to challenges such as high inflation, political instability, increased power tariff, rising fuel costs, energy shortages, and lack of R&D.

"An effective strategy is needed to improve the performance of the industrial sector. The government

should facilitate exporters by providing a level playing field to them in terms of business costs, particularly in utility pricing," he suggested. Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol said Pakistan's economy, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), is struggling to cope with the current economic crunch, and needs support.

"Rather than providing subsidies or waivers, the industries are being burdened through rising production cost. The burden of surging oil prices in the international market is immediately transferred to consumers by the government, but the process of reducing prices is always very slow," he noted.

He asked the government to work on a fast track plan to address expansive energy issue and priority should be given to the value-added industry in this regard.

The Chairman said that Pakistan's core issue is the high cost of doing business, which the government needed to bring down to bring the local as well as the export industry at par with global competitors.

Pakistan needs sound economic management amidst instability

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum has warned that a bailout from the IMF alone was unlikely to speed up economic growth, as the political instability and lack of reforms would further deteriorate the financial situation in the country.

The APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed that amidst continuous of hike in cost of production in the country, what the Pakistan's economy really needs is persistent and sound economic management. He asked the authorities for undertaking economic reforms and improving the regulatory environment to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be achieved in the long-run.

The APBF President stressed the need for reducing cost of doing business, besides evolving a new price control mechanism, as huge taxation, rising oil

prices and constant jump in electricity and gas tariffs have lifted the inflation to high level.

APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi warned the authorities that inflation above 6 percent can hurt economic growth and a careful policy is required to keep it in control. He said that the pace of inflation is skyrocketing at a time when the economic activity is slowing down.

As the oil prices have been increased and power tariff has gone up further the APBF chairman stated that the government has dropped a fuel bomb on the businessmen after it suffered an electric shock to meet the conditions of IMF to ensure loan program-a recipe to shake the trade and industry.

Ibrahim Qureshi said that the decision would prove detrimental to the industries due to high cost of doing business and will also open the floodgates of inflation.

In addition to making the electricity bills costlier and unaffordable for the consumers, the hike in base tariff would escalate prices of all household goods being widely used in every household, he added.

Syed Maaz Mahmood termed the increase in tariff unlawful and a violation of NEPRA's own rules and regulations, as any increase in tariff has to be determined and implemented only after holding public hearings but unfortunately they have solely decided to raise the tariff without holding public hearings, he argued.

He condemned the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's decision to increase electricity tariffs, stating that the burden of power theft, mismanagement, and inefficiencies cannot be shifted to consumers on the pretext of fuel adjustment. The APBF President said that Pakistan's industry had been harmed by the high

cost of doing business, which discouraged investment in capacity and capability and called for easing the burden of heavy taxes on the power sector.

Syed Maaz stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry.

Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electricity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers.

He urged the power ministry to identify system constraints and communicate targets to all concerned departments in order to launch a wartime effort to upgrade the transmission system. He urged the completion of all ongoing power projects well ahead of schedule.

Call for prioritising 'caring economy'

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former president Iftekhar Ali Malik has said prioritising a 'caring economy' in Pakistan is essential for economic growth, gender equality, social well-being in the country.

Talking to a trade delegation, led by Muslim Khan Buneri here on Sunday, he said by investing in care services and infrastructure, the country could harness the full potential of its population, ensuring a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Malik said a caring economy fosters social cohesion and well-being. Accessible and high-quality care services can reduce inequality, improve health services, and enhance the quality of life for all strata of society. In a country like Pakistan, where social safety nets are often inadequate, building a caring economy is vital for ensuring a more inclusive and resilient society, he maintained.

Malik said the caring economy approach can help address Pakistan's demographic challenges. With a growing population and increasing life expectancy, the demand for care services is set to rise. Developing a robust care infrastructure can not only provide essential services to the elderly and children but also create millions of jobs, thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment.

Alcatraz prison is closed now

Zeenat Iqbal Hussain

He had been caught red handed, holding the weapon that had killed Brown. Brown was a cruel arms dealer. He had many enemies. They were all out to get him. He sold inferior arms and a couple of times they had backfired causing deaths. It so happened that Joseph visited the arms shop on the day that the dealer was killed. He was lying dead on the floor when Joseph entered the shop. As he picked the gun that had killed the dealer, somebody entered the shop and thought that he had caught the murderer red handed.

And here he was in the cell serving punishment for a crime that he had not committed.

Again his thoughts went back to his son. Well, he did every now and then. But this time a tear rolled down his cheek. So he was still capable of crying. Like all fathers, he had been full of ideas of what he would do with his son's life, when he was born. Another tear and another, they just would not stop.

Not long after, news spread in the prison about a team of producers arriving from Hollywood. They

were looking for a stuntman. One day Joseph found himself facing a producer. Joseph was a well-built man. The producer looked closely at him. "You are the perfect choice". Then the producer briefed him. "I shall come with my unit". The film had a shot of a plunge from a bridge into a rapid flowing beneath the bridge. The rapids were also full of rocks the producer told him, "If you live after the final plunge, you are free. What do you stand to lose?" He further added, "You are serving a death sentence, so even if you die from your plunge, it should not make much of a difference".

The above arrangement had been made between the film folk and the prison authorities.

Wearing the costume that had been given to him by the clothes designer for the film he stood on the bridge from where he was required to dive. The film unit took many takes and finally the day drew close, when he was to take the final plunge from Alcatraz. He would either live or die.

He stood on the bridge, poised to dive, his eyes scanning the rocks and the empty spaces in between. He knew the empty spaces,

so well. He knew them with his eyes closed. He had studied them thoroughly. He saw his son waiting for him on the bank with an outstretched arm beckoning Joseph to come to him.

The signal for the dive was given, and with the cameras in position, Joseph leapt into mid-air and the outstretched arm met him as his head touched the water. He had made it. The rock was at a short distance, but he had made it.

He did not surface for quite some time. He was underwater and he would not surface now. Not till he could hold his breath. He was free and he did not want even the slightest obstacle to come in his way. Maybe if he were to surface soon, an obstacle would come in his way. He was disillusioned with the human race and he had grounds for this. He had just held the gun that had killed the arms dealer and they had locked him up for eternity till this producer came along. And it seemed like his son's arm was beckoning him. He could not wait to be reunited with his family and now it seemed like the time to be with his family was near. Hope against hope of meeting them now seemed possible.

BMP suggests soft financing for SMEs to attain high economic growth

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has asked the government to announce soft financing with very low interest rate and without any collateral for SMEs with a view to spur the economic growth in the country.

The FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, in a meeting of trade and industry representatives, stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry. Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electricity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers.

The meeting forwarded several recommendations so that the small industry could deal with the challenges posed by the present economic crisis, saying mere statements would not work unless solid measures

are taken by the government, including a sizable reduction in fuel prices, bringing down key policy rate to single digit, regionally competitive energy rates and substantial cut in duties and taxes.

It is unfortunate that the State Bank has several times introduced a financing scheme for Small and Medium Enterprises, enabling them to get loans without collateral but it was never implemented in its true spirit.

The scheme was launched to improve the SMEs' access to finances in collaboration with the government and aimed at enabling businesses that cannot offer security or collateral to access bank finance.

The BMP and PIAF meeting was held here to deliberate the government economic policies and called for concrete steps to keep industrial wheels running, especially for SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small and medium industries.

The BMP Chairman urged the central bank to announce a soft loan with a minimum markup rate, especially for SMEs to bail

out their struggling businesses. The Businessmen Panel called for significant cuts in import duties and waiver of sales tax, income tax, and additional income taxes, which are still being charged in this time of grave crisis.

Mian Anjum Nisar asked the government to take concrete steps to keep the industrial wheels running especially for SMEs, to save the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries.

He said that to save the economy from the impacts of the slow growth, the government should announce special incentives for a cash-strapped small and medium industry, which represents more than 90% of around 3.2 million businesses enterprises in Pakistan, contributing 40% to GDP, employing more than 80% of non-agricultural workforce, and generating 25% of export earnings.

The BMP Chairman Anjum Nisar stated that providing affordable electricity would assist in lowering production costs, thereby benefiting the public. He stated that rising imports and a widening trade deficit posed a serious

threat to economic growth and must be addressed urgently. He said that with continuous hike in cost of production in the country, what the Pakistan's economy really needs is persistent and sound economic management, asking the authorities for undertaking economic reforms and improving the regulatory environment for better Ease of Doing Business level to boost foreign investment so that financial stability can be achieved in the long-run.

The BMP chief urged the power ministry to identify system constraints and communicate targets to all concerned departments in order to launch a wartime effort to upgrade the transmission system.

The FPCCI former president said that we should keep our focus on support for cash flow management for the SME sector and the government may prioritize its incentive preferences under the growth and importance for the economy. He suggested that the authorities should reduce sales tax to at least 10% to improve demand generation, besides announcing interest-free loans to pay employees' salaries.



DAMBULLA: Sri Lanka players celebrate with the Asia Cup trophy.

Pak Street Child Football team secures first victory

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Street Child Football team of Pakistan has achieved its first victory in the Norway Cup, defeating the Norwegian Club, Astor, by a convincing score of 6-1.

According to details, Norway took an early lead with a goal against the Pakistani team in the first half. However, the national team quickly equalized, setting the stage for a thrilling match.

In the second half, the Pakistani team dominated the game, scoring five goals against Norway. For Pakistan Abdul Ghani scored two goals while Essa, Junaid, Awais, and Muhammad Khan hit one goal each, respectively.

This victory marks a significant milestone for the National Street Child Football team, who will play their second match against the Verdanset Football Club on July 29.

Hamilton given win in Belgium as Russell disqualified

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (Agencies): Lewis Hamilton inherited victory in the Belgian Grand Prix after Mercedes team-mate George Russell was disqualified two and a half hours after taking an unlikely win on the track.

Russell pulled off an unusual one-stop strategy and held off Hamilton's attack in the closing laps. But after the race his car was found to be 1.5kg underweight, with his team admitting to "a genuine error". That saw Hamilton promoted to a victory that had looked likely for much of the race - after he took the lead from Ferrari's Charles Leclerc on the second lap.

Oscar Piastri is moved up to second, with Leclerc third and Max Verstappen fourth. Russell's car was initially weighed at 798kg, which is exactly on the minimum weight limit for car and driver combined.

Sri Lanka thump India to clinch maiden Women's Asia Cup title

DAMBULLA (Agencies): Chamari Athapaththu and Harshitha Samarawickrama showcased their exceptional batting prowess, guiding Sri Lanka to a resounding eight-wicket triumph over India in the final of the ACC Women's Asia Cup 2024.

India posted 165-6 while batting first courtesy of Smriti Mandhana's half-century, however, Athapaththu and Samarawickrama's half-centuries helped Sri Lanka to lift their maiden Women's Asia Cup title.

After opting to bat first, Shafali Verma and Mandhana gave a decent start with a 44-run opening stand before Kavisha Dilhari removed Verma.

Mandhana remained firm on her end while India lost two more wick-

ets on the other end before Jemimah Rodrigues joined the settled batter.

Jemimah Rodrigues scored a quick 29 off 16 during the 41-run partnership with Mandhana, however, both batters fell in the same over, leaving their team reeling at 133-5.

Mandhana top-scored with a 47-ball 60, which featured ten boundaries.

Richa Ghosh then struck a brilliant 30 from 14 balls with the help of four boundaries and one six to give a late push to India's total as they scored 165-6 in 20 overs. For Sri Lanka, Dilhari took two wickets while Athapaththu, Udesika Prabodhani and Sachini Nisansala bagged one each.

While chasing, Sri

Lanka lost Vishmi Gunaratne in the second over courtesy of a mix-up with Athapaththu.

However, the early blow did not matter much as Athapaththu and Samarawickrama raised a partnership of 87 for the second wicket.

Athapaththu played a 61-run knock from 43 balls with the help of nine boundaries and two sixes before Deepti Sharma castled her with 94 runs on the board. Dilhari joined Samarawickrama and together they steered Sri Lanka to a comfortable victory with an unbeaten stand of 73 runs from 40 balls.

Samarawickrama top-scored with a 51-ball 69, which included six boundaries and two sixes, while Dilhari struck 30 off 16.

Nadal says Djokovic 'clear favourite' in Olympics blockbuster

PARIS (AFP): Rafael Nadal insists Novak Djokovic will be the favourite when they clash at the Paris Olympics, after the Spaniard battled to victory over Marton Fucsovics in the first round on Sunday.

Nadal had left his participation in the singles in doubt until the last minute because of a thigh injury, and was made to work hard for his 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 victory. The 38-year-old -- who has won 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles on the clay of Roland Garros -- believes old rival Djokovic will be favourite when they meet for the 60th time.

"Situations are completely different for him, for me. He's being very competitive. I was not being very competitive for the last two years, so in that case, I think probably he is the clear favourite," said Nadal, who holds an 8-2 head-to-head advantage over the Serb at Roland Garros.

"I'm going to try my best to bring the best to the court and then let's see how far I can go and how many problems I can create for him," Nadal looked to be cruising after racing through the first set on Court Philippe Chatrier before Fucsovics dug his heels in. The Hungarian world number 83 raised his level after a poor start and forced Nadal to a third set.

Fucsovics held three break points for a 3-1 lead in the decider but Nadal withstood the threat, breaking in the following game to wrest the momentum back. A gritty hold of serve edged Nadal closer to victory, with the Spaniard eventually seeing off a dogged Fucsovics after two hours and 30 minutes.

Nadal, a singles gold medallist at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and doubles champion at Rio four years later, is playing just his seventh tournament of 2024.

Disappointing end for Pakistan swimmers at Paris Olympics



PARIS (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan athletes continued their disappointing performance at the Paris Olympics 2024, as swimmers Ahmed Durrani and Jehanara Nabi failed to qualify for the next round in their respective events.

Ahmed Durrani participated in the men's 200-meter freestyle swimming event and unfortunately finished last in his heat.

In the initial 200-meter heat, he ranked fourth out of four swimmers, completing the race in 1 minute and 58.67 seconds. He was unable to match his previous best time of 1 minute and 55 seconds.

Later, he ended up in 25th place out of 25 swimmers. His time was 11 sec-

onds slower than the swimmer who secured the final spot for the semifinals.

In the women's 200-meter freestyle swimming competition, Jehanara Nabi finished in 26th place out of 30 swimmers. Despite putting up a strong effort, she was unable to break into the top 16.

Prior to swimmers, Pakistan's shooters Gulfam Joseph and Kishmala Talat also failed to qualify for the 10m air pistol finals of the Paris Olympics 2024.

Joseph, one of seven Pakistan athletes competing in the games, had to finish in the top eight to make it into the next round.

But he was left far behind the other competing shooters and could finish

22nd out of 33 with 571 points out of 600.

Meanwhile, Serbia's Damir Mikec topped the leaderboard of the Paris Olympics' Men's 10m air pistol competition with 584 points while Italy's Federico Nilo Maldini and Christian Reitz were the other shooters in the top three.

Notably, Indian shooters Sarabjot Singh and Arjun Singh Cheema also failed to qualify for the next round.

Meanwhile, Kishmala Talat also suffered the same fate as she failed to qualify for the 10m women's air pistol final after finishing 31st out of the 44 shooters. She scored a total of 567 points out of across six series.

Belal becomes first fighter of Palestinian origin to win UFC title



PARIS (Agencies): Belal Muhammad has made history by becoming the first mixed martial arts fighter of Palestinian background to win a UFC title, snatching the welterweight crown from Englishman champion Leon Edwards.

The 36-year-old, an American fighter born in Chicago and the child of two Palestinian immigrants, scored a five-round unanimous decision victory (48-47, 48-47, 49-46) at the UFC 304 bout on Saturday.

His face bloodied, Muhammad (24-3) dropped to his knees moments after he remained unbeaten in his 11th straight fight and had the championship belt wrapped around his waist. He has not lost since 2019.

"It's not just about myself, it's about them [Palestinians and the people

in Gaza]" that he is fighting for, Muhammad was quoted as saying before his fight in Manchester, England.

He has also proudly waved the Palestinian flag while promoting Saturday's match while criticising the Israeli war on Gaza.

Muhammad and Edwards fought to a no-contest in 2021, an unsatisfying result that sparked winning streaks for both fighters.

Edwards reeled off four consecutive wins, while Muhammad won five straight.

In 2022, Edwards (22-4) defeated Kamaru Usman to win the belt and had two successful title defences, before facing off with Muhammad on Saturday.

"We do exist" Muhammad has consistently highlighted his Palestinian background,

using Dammi Palesteeni (My Blood is Palestine) by Arab Idol winner Mohammed Assaf as his walkout song.

In 2021, Muhammad was quoted by news reports as saying that, as a world-renowned fighter, he had "a voice for the voiceless".

"There aren't a lot of Palestinian athletes that have a stage or platform where they can carry the flag. And now, especially during these times, I need to carry that flag higher than ever. To show the world that we do exist, that we are a country, and there are real people there."

"Now I have a voice for people that don't have a voice, for people that the world wants you to forget about. So, if I keep shining a light on that, raising their morale, raising their hearts, I'm going to do whatever I can."

Ali's six-fer, Sahibzada's brisk half-century headline

DARWIN (APP): Fast bowler Mohammad Ali had a field day against Bangladesh 'A' as he bagged a six-fer restricting them to 216 in second innings as Pakistan Shaheens were set a 296-run target on day three of the second four-day match at the DXC Arena in Darwin.

Shaheens require 160 more runs to win after they finished the day three with 136-4 in 37 overs. Skipper Sahibzada Farhan chipped in with a brisk 70-ball 68 hitting 10 fours and two sixes before getting out. He also shared a 96-run opening partnership with Haseebullah (44 not out, 98b, 6x4s).

Bangladesh 'A' bowlers further removed Kamran Ghulam and Umar Amin for ducks to reduce Shaheens to 100-3. Mohammad Irfan Khan (15, 31b, 3x4s) was the last wicket to fall on the day before Tayyab Tahir (4 not out, 14b) joined Haseeb on the crease. The duo will resume the batting for Shaheens on last day with an uphill task of chasing 295 runs.

Rejaur Rehman Raja



picked up two wickets while Hasan Murad and Mahmudul Hasan Joy dismissed one batter each.

Earlier, Bangladesh 'A' could only muster 132 more runs in 43.1 overs after continuing from their overnight total of 84-3 as they were bundled out for 216 in 70.1 overs with a 295-run lead. Mahmudul (65, 118b, 11x4s) and Aich Mollah (58, 123b, 9x4s) registered half-centuries.

Mahmudul was cleaned up by Ali in 37th over breaking a 39-run fourth-wicket stand while Shadman Islam too fell prey to the Test fast bowler for eight-ball duck three overs

later. With half the side back in the hut, Mollah and Shahadat Hossain (33, 55b, 6x4s) put on a vital 63-run sixth-wicket stand to help their team extend the lead.

Khurram Shahzad struck to remove Shahadat reducing Bangladesh 'A' to 180-6 in 59.2 overs. The remaining four wickets were poached by Ali in a marathon seven-over spell which began in the 59th over and culminated with his figures reading 6-63 in 24.1 overs.

The assault included double strike in 64th over claiming, Rejaur Rehman Raja (4, 4b, 1x4) and Mahidul Islam (13, 26b, 2x4s) followed by the dis-

missal of well-set Mollah in 69th over and Ripon Mondol in 71st. Among other bowlers, Khurram bagged three wickets while Faisal Akram had a solitary scalp to his name.

Scores in brief: Pakistan Shaheens require 160 runs to win. Bangladesh A 258 all out, 67.3 overs (Mahmudul Hasan Joy 69, Aich Mollah 55, Mahidul Islam Ankon 31, Parvez Hossain Emon 30; Khurram Shahzad 3-69, Kamran Ghulam 2-6, Kashif Ali 2-21, Faisal Akram 2-87) and 216 all out, 70.1 overs (Mahmudul Hasan Joy 65, Aich Mollah 58, Shahadat Hossain 33; Mohammad Ali 6-63, Khurram Shahzad 3-67, Faisal Akram 1-51).

Pakistan Shaheens 179 all out, 67.2 overs (Kamran Ghulam 48, Tayyab Tahir 30, Umar Amin 25; Ripon Mondol 4-71, Rejaur Rehman Raja 3-33, Hasan Murad 2-32) and 136-4, 37 overs (Sahibzada Farhan 68, Haseebullah 44 not out, Muhammad Irfan Khan 15; Rejaur Rehman Raja 2-47, Mahmudul Hasan Joy 1-4, Hasan Murad 1-25).



England captain Ben Stokes hammered a 24-ball half-century to take his team to a 3-0 series sweep against the West Indies

BIRMINGHAM (AFP): Ben Stokes hit the fastest Test fifty by an England batsman as the hosts hammered the West Indies by 10 wickets to win the third Test at Edgbaston on Sunday.

Set 82 to win, England finished on 87-0 in a mere 7.2 overs as they completed a 3-0 series whitewash of the West Indies in spectacular style and with more than two days to spare. England captain Stokes, opening in place of the injured Zak Crawley, needed just 24 balls to go to a fifty featuring nine fours and a six.

He bettered the previous record quickest Test-match fifty by an England batsman of 28 balls set by Ian Botham against India at Delhi back in 1981. Stokes ended the match by pulling West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite's part-time spin for six to finish 57 not out. "Everyone in the changing room said they'd do it (open the innings), but I said I would," explained Stokes. "A couple hit the middle of the bat, I was seeing it quite well."

'Unbelievable Wood'

Earlier, express fast bowler Mark Wood polished off the tail with a superb spell of 5-9 in six

overs to finish with 5-40 in 14 overs as the West Indies were dismissed for 175 in their second innings. "Wood was unbelievable this afternoon," said Stokes. "To see him bowling not just fast but with extreme skill, and when the ball's swinging he's very difficult to face. That's why you want express pace in your team."

Wood, the player of the match, said he had been in a "bad fettle" at lunch before England great James Anderson, now the squad's fast-bowling mentor following his Test retirement, revived his spirits. "I had a great conversation with Jimmy," said Wood. "He just said, rather than thinking about the outcome, to start thinking about the skill element."

"So, after the lunch break, all I tried to do was focus on running hard again and that skill element of moving the ball."

Brathwaite accepted a largely youthful West Indies team had been outplayed throughout the three Tests. "It was a tough series, for sure," he said. "We let them (England) off the hook

a lot of times and they were scoring way too fast.

"Batting-wise, I think we didn't get enough second innings runs in the last two Test matches." West Indies opener Mikyle Louis, whose 57 was his maiden Test fifty, and Kavem Hodge (55) offered some resistance on Sunday but the next highest score in the innings was 12.

The tourists resumed on 33-2, still 61 runs behind an England first-innings 376, where Jamie Smith fell agonisingly short of a maiden Test century in making 95 while further fifties from Joe Root (87), Chris Woakes (62) and Stokes (54) helped the hosts recover from a collapse to 54-5. Louis was 18 not out overnight, after being dropped by Stokes on nine, and Athanaze five not out. Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir and Wood opened the bowling after the pair had teamed up to good effect during England's 241-run win in the second Test at Trent Bridge. Athanaze was lbw for 12 to the 20-year-old Bashir after missing a sweep.

But the West Indies did avoid the embarrassment of a second

innings defeat in three Tests following an innings and 114-run loss at Lord's. Louis completed a maiden Test fifty in style when he slog-swept Bashir for six. But the 23-year-old fell soon afterwards when he edged Stokes to second slip. Hodge, who made his maiden Test century at Trent Bridge, went to fifty in just 56 balls, including seven fours.

But the West Indies, 151-5 at lunch, folded tamely as Wood ripped through the lower order with a potent combination of speed, movement and well-directed bouncers. The 34-year-old ended the innings when he had Shamar Joseph well caught at second slip by Harry Brook.

Crawley's finger injury, suffered while dropping a slip catch earlier Sunday, was the cue for left-handed batsman's Stokes blistering assault that delighted a capacity, sun-drenched crowd. He set the tone by thumping Alzarri Joseph for two fours off successive balls and drove Jason Holder, whose two overs cost an expensive 31 runs, back over the towering all-rounder's head.



In brief

ANF seizes 574 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 574 kg drugs and arrested six accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman. He informed that 1.6 kg ice was recovered from two parcels booked for France and Saudi Arabia at a courier office in Lahore. 56 heroin filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a Jeddah-bound passenger arrested at Peshawar Airport. 273.6 kg hashish, 85 kg heroin, 68.4 kg opium and 1.5 kg ice were recovered from a vehicle intercepted at Chungi No 26, Islamabad and two suspects were arrested. 64 kg hashish and 19.2 kg opium were recovered from a vehicle near Ring Road Peshawar and an accused was arrested during the operation. The spokesman further informed that 60 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted on Khanewal Road Multan while two accused were arrested. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process.

WASA on high alert

RAWALPINDI (APP): Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi was on high alert to cope with urban flooding, said Managing Director (MD) WASA, Muhammad Saleem Ashraf. He informed that rain emergency was declared in Rawalpindi and all arrangements were finalized to cope with flooding. Heavy machinery and personnel were deployed in different areas particularly in low-lying areas to ensure drainage of stagnant rain water, he added. Nullah Lai was being monitored, he said and informed that, today, 15 feet water level was recorded at Katarian and 11 feet at Gawalmandi Bridge. Traffic flow was also normal at Committee Chowk underpass, he said. According to the Meteorological Department, 84 mm of rain was recorded in Saidpur Village, 33 mm at Bokra, 37 mm at PMD, and 32 mm at Katcheri. WASA spokesman informed.

327,100 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 327,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 359,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1517.78 feet and was 119.78 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 222,000 cusecs and 200,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1199.55 feet, which was 151.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 22,600 cusecs and 12,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 220,200, 196,600, 144,000 and 73,900 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 49,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 38,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Hanif Abbasi appeals to respect the 'National Flag'

ISLAMABAD (APP): PML-N leader Hanif Abbasi Sunday made a fervent appeal to the nation and all political parties to come together in reverence for the national flag and stressed that this call to unity is a timely reminder of the importance of honoring the flag, which represents Pakistan's sovereignty, identity, and freedom.

Talking to a private news channel, Abbasi said that this call to action is part of the 'Hurmat-e-Parcham' campaign, which aims to promote national unity and patriotism.

The campaign encourages Pakistanis to raise the national flag in their homes, schools, and workplaces throughout the month of August, he added.

"By respecting our national flag, we are not only showing love and loyalty for our country, but also reaffirming our com-

mitment to its progress and prosperity," Abbasi added.

"I appeal to all Pakistanis, particularly the youth, to join hands in this noble cause and make our country proud," he stressed.

The 'Hurmat-e-Parcham' campaign has already gained momentum on social media, with many Pakistanis sharing pictures of themselves with the national flag.

Abbasi's initiative has been praised by many, who see it as a much-needed effort to promote national unity and patriotism in these challenging times.

Replying to a question, PML-N leader Hanif Abbasi stressed that loving one's country and showing unity is crucial to discouraging both internal and external enemies.

"When we stand united under the banner of our national flag, we send a strong message to those

who seek to harm our country," he said.

"Our unity and love for Pakistan is the greatest deterrent to internal chaos and external aggression," he highlighted. Abbasi emphasized that by embracing the values of patriotism and national unity, Pakistanis can overcome the challenges facing the country and build a brighter future for themselves and future generations.

Responding another question, he said that the current time necessitates a collective focus on ensuring the country's stability and economic revival.

He urged all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and the government, to join hands in this effort and make a concerted push towards stabilizing the economy and putting the country back on the path to progress and prosperity.

PRs accelerates efforts to retrieve its land

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Railways is making all out efforts to retrieve its 13,792 acres land worth billions of rupees illegally occupied by private individuals and different government departments across the country.

According to an official of Ministry of Pakistan Railways, around 5,809 acres of railway land was occupied in Punjab, 1,181 acres are under encroachment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 5,948 acres in Sindh and 1,034 acres land occupied in Balochistan.

He further stated that the category of land under illegal occupations included commercial, residential, agricultural and various persons or departments. Giving details of the land, the official said that around

769 acres were commercial in all the provinces, 3,309 residential, 5,512 acres agricultural and 4382 were under encroachment of various persons or departments.

The official said that the department had also decided to accelerate its ongoing anti-encroachment operation against land grabbers across the country to recoup its land from different individuals, groups and even business organizations which were using it for residential, commercial and agriculture purposes for decades.

"The joint procedure orders have been issued to all Divisional Superintendents of Pakistan Railways to retrieve the railway land from encroachers," the official added. Accordingly, he

said the anti-encroachment operations for retrieval of encroached Railway land all over the Railway network are being initiated by the concerned divisions and notices are issued to encroachers under the Possession Ordinance 1965 for vacation of Railway land/structure within 14 days.

The official said that Pakistan Railway Police, District Administration and law enforcement agencies are informed of necessary assistance in anti-encroachment operations.

He Pakistan Railways owned 167,690 acres of land across the country, of which 90,326-acre was in Punjab, 39,428-acre in Sindh, 28,228-acre in Balochistan, and 9,708-acre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

PHA kicks off Monsoon plantation drive 2024

RAWALPINDI (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Rawalpindi has kicked off the Monsoon plantation drive 2024, said Director General (DG) PHA Ahmed Hasan Ranjha.

He informed that the plantation campaign has been started by PHA Rawalpindi in collaboration with Punjab Forest Department.

The DG said PHA was striving to make Rawalpindi city clean and green. Despite financial constraints, PHA was working hard to make the city green, he added.

He said that the authority had set up a grand nursery to provide different plants to the citizens at affordable rates and generate more revenue for the department.

The grand nursery was set up on an area of 1000 kanals in Gorakhpur Town with objectives to promote plantation and to contain the consequences of global climate change. Punjab government had provided

the land for nurseries to promote plantation in the country, he said.

The DG said that Gorakhpur Nursery would prove to be very important in the ongoing initiatives of the Punjab government regarding Green Pakistan from where large-scale planting of trees would be done.

The plants and saplings would be supplied in the coming months from the Gorakhpur Nursery as a variety of plants and grasses were produced there.

He said that less than five percent of Pakistan's total land area consists of forests, which is a matter of concern and the growth of forests in Pakistan could be ensured only by measures like continuous plantation.

He informed that a large number of saplings were planted at 'Takhtpari' to restore the historic forest.

The employees of PHA Rawalpindi and the Forest Department Rawalpindi Division participated in the campaign. He said, "Green Punjab is the destination of all of us and civil society,

students and youngsters should actively participate in this plantation drive and make it successful."

The DG said that severe weather effects could be controlled only with the help of the forests. Due to rapidly expanding housing societies, the natural forests and trees are being lost and that is why a sharp temperature rise was recorded during the last few years.

He further said that PHA Rawalpindi is well aware of its responsibilities and playing its due role in providing a green environment to the citizens.

Monsoon tree plantation campaign organized by PHA Rawalpindi would continue for two months and saplings would also be distributed among the citizens to make the tree plantation campaign a success, he added.

PHA would plant more ornamental plants in Murree to enhance the beauty of the hill station, he said and informed that colorful plants would also be planted in Murree.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people visiting famous Faisal Masjid to spend their holiday during cloudy weather in Federal Capital. —APP Photo

PIMS incinerator continues spewing smoke

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) Hospital incinerator established to get away with hazardous hospital waste through incineration and safe management of its remains has become a nuisance for the residents of F-8, G-7 and G-8 sectors facing dark smoke with an increased ratio of pollutants being spewed since last quarter of the year.

An incinerator is a highly capital-intensive infrastructure developed to convert solid or liquid waste of both hazardous and non-hazardous nature into gas or ash, reducing to less bulky, less toxic or less harmful material. The major products, of incineration of waste, are carbon dioxide (CO₂), water, and ash, whereas the items of serious concern are compounds containing sulfur, nitrogen, and halogens that are highly detrimental to health and the environment.

The incinerator is operated at a high temperature ranging from 850°C to 1200°C that helps convert waste into flue gas CO₂ and water as end products.

When contacted, by the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA), the official informed that the matter was already in the notice of the Agency and the matter was being taken as per the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997.

Suleman Bilal, a local area resident told APP that it is a usual practice during morning and evening durations when the incinerator starts working and emits thick dark smoke, making the air unbreathable for all. "The incinerator is next to the hospital where the Paeds ward, burn centre, and cafeteria are in its closest proximity where massive visitors are present.

They are at risk of contracting serious health complications and respiratory diseases that are evident from the pungent dark smoke directly affecting nostrils and lungs of an individual," he added.

Commonwealth SG in Islamabad on a maiden visit

ISLAMABAD (APP): Secretary-General of Commonwealth Patricia Scotland KC arrived here in the early hours of Sunday on her first official visit to Pakistan, at the invitation of the Government of Pakistan.

On her arrival at Islamabad Airport, she was received by Additional Foreign Secretary (Europe) Ambassador Shafqat Ali Khan. During her five-day visit from July 28 to August 2, 2024, Secretary-General

Scotland will meet with Pakistan's leadership, members of the cabinet, youth leaders, civil society representatives and other stakeholders.

The Commonwealth secretary-general will reaffirm her solidarity with Pakistan on the second anniversary of the catastrophic 2022 floods that submerged a third of the country and caused more than \$30 billion in damage. She is also likely to tour some of the areas that were affected by the floods.

During the Secretary-General's visit, the two sides would also discuss avenues to enhance cooperation between Pakistan and the Commonwealth in other areas of shared interest, including supporting Pakistan's national development plan, empowering youth, and boosting trade and investment. As one of the organisation's founding members, Pakistan values the Commonwealth as an important forum for forging consensus on global issues and challenges.

Minister for swift drainage of rainwater

ISLAMABAD (APP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized the need for self monitoring of drainage works in low-lying areas after torrential rains hit Islamabad on Sunday morning.

The minister has stressed that these works should be completed as soon as possible to prevent water accu-

mulation. Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) teams are working around the clock to ensure swift drainage and mitigate potential flooding, said a news release.

To ensure smooth water flow, teams were instructed to monitor drains and

waterways 24/7. Additional staff and machinery were deployed as needed to facilitate the process.

A comprehensive response was mobilized, with Assistant Commissioners, CDA officers, MCI teams, and emergency responders from 1122 working together to address the situation.

Authorities directed to complete feasibility

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak has directed the authorities concerned to complete a new feasibility study of the Metro Bus Service in the first week of August.

The Commissioner said that Metro Bus Service was providing world-class travel facilities to the citizens. According to a Commissioner Office spokesman, the Commissioner while chairing a high-level meeting regarding a new feasibility study of the Metro Bus Service said that in proportion to the population of the

city, it has become necessary to increase the frequency of buses and routes.

The Commissioner in a briefing was informed that Metro Bus Service was providing travel facilities on six routes. NESPAK representatives briefed the Commissioner regarding the new feasibility study of metro bus service. Work is in progress regarding the new feasibility study of the Metro Bus Service in proportion to the growing population.

Work is being done to increase the number of buses from 100 to 150. Increasing the number of metro bus service routes

from 6 to 10 is being considered, the meeting was briefed. The Commissioner directed NESPAK representatives to complete a new feasibility study of the Metro Bus Service in the first week of August.

Metro Bus Service was providing quality travel facilities to the citizens, the Commissioner said. After the new feasibility report comes out, the public would have better-traveling facilities through the Metro Bus Service, Aamir Khattak said adding, that the fixed fare of the Metro bus service is a great convenience for the citizens.

Experts emphasizes safe practices, awareness on 'World Hepatitis Day'

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the world marks World Hepatitis Day today, health experts are emphasizing the importance of safe practices and awareness in preventing the spread of hepatitis, a silent killer disease that claims thousands of lives every year.

Talking to PTV news channel, Executive Director and spokesperson Dr Abdul Jabbar Bhutto in Polyclinic explained that World Hepatitis Day aims to focus on taking concrete steps towards eliminating this silent killer.

On World Hepatitis Day, we are reminded that hepatitis is a preventable and treatable disease. By raising awareness, improving access to testing and treatment, and supporting those affected, we can break the cycle of suffering. Let us unite to combat this silent killer, prioritize liver health, and create a world where no one dies from hepatitis-related illnesses, he added.

The theme for this year's campaign is "It's Time for Action," emphasizing the need for immediate and collective efforts to combat hepatitis, he added.

World Hepatitis Day is observed annually on July 28 to raise awareness about hepatitis, including the infectious diseases hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E, adding, people should avoid sharing needles. Using new,

sterile needles for injections. It prevents transmission of blood-borne hepatitis viruses (B and C).

He said every person should ensure screening of blood to patients, do not share razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers as personal items can carry blood. It prevents transmission through small amounts of blood.

Dr Ikram Tirmizi - Gastroenterologist at Polyclinic added that more awareness drives for public can help in informing the public about hepatitis and how it spreads, adding, this encourages behavior changes that reduce the risk of transmission.

WHO also continues to support countries in monitoring their progress and validating hepatitis elimination through the newly established Regional Validation Advisories, he added. Individuals with chronic liver disease or liver conditions can have existing liver disease or conditions, getting tested for hepatitis is crucial to manage your overall liver health effectively. Regular testing and monitoring enable healthcare professionals to assess liver function, track any changes, and make informed decisions regarding further interventions or treatments.

Early detection and monitoring of

hepatitis can significantly impact treatment outcomes, quality of life, and long-term liver health, he added.

In remote areas, limited access to healthcare and education makes communities more vulnerable to hepatitis. By expanding awareness and promoting healthy habits, we can control this disease, he added. By working together, we can bring hepatitis awareness and prevention efforts to remote areas, saving lives and building healthier communities, he further mentioned.

We need to promote healthy eating habits, proper food handling, and hygiene practices to prevent hepatitis A and E, he added. Encouraging safe drinking habits, proper waste disposal, and improved sanitation infrastructure to prevent hepatitis A and E, he said.

In addition, Pakistan's healthcare system faces challenges in providing adequate testing and treatment for hepatitis, said Dr Enshah Ikram at Polyclinic that many people cannot afford the high costs of treatment, and healthcare facilities in rural areas often lack the necessary resources and expertise. By supporting healthcare initiatives and advocating for policy changes, we can improve access to care and treatment for those affected by hepatitis, she added.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor displaying and selling fresh dates at his road side setup. —APP Photo

Factories boost production

KABUL(BNA): The NDC's concerted efforts have significantly increased the production capacity of the Ghor Cement Factories in Baghlan to 700 tons per day, ensuring improved quality standards. Engineer Shafiullah Wahidi, Director Ghor Cement Factory, stated in an interview with BNA that the factories now produce 700 tons of cement per 24 hours, equivalent to 14,000 bags. This is a significant increase from the previous production capacity of 350 tons per 24 hours under the former government.

Electronic scanners installed

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Finance has signed a contract with the private sector to install 33 electronic scanners at 12 customs points in Afghanistan. The Ministry announced that the private sector will invest 8 billion Afghanis in this project. The agreement was signed in the presence of the Deputy Economic Head of the Taliban's Council of Ministers. The Taliban has stated that these scanners will be installed to prevent the smuggling of goods.

Flood victims in Ghor plead for emergency aid

GHOR (TOLOnews): Hundreds of flood-affected families who have been displaced from Murghab district of Ghor province to Ferozkoh city, the center of this province, are living in difficult conditions.

These flood victims told TOLOnews reporters that they have not yet received any assistance from aid organizations or the government and they do not even have bread and water for sustenance.

The flood-affected families who have lost everything are pleading for help. "We have nothing and have not received any help yet. We want assistance," Ahmad, a resident of Ghor, told TOLOnews.

"We are living here with great difficulty and hard-

ship. The sun burns us during the day and we cannot sleep at night due to the cold. We ask the government to build us shelters. How long will we remain homeless like this?" said Mukhtar, a resident of Herat who has been affected by the floods in Ghor.

Many of these flood victims said they have no food to eat and are in dire need of help from aid organizations and the government.

"Our request from the Islamic Emirate and humanitarian organizations is to help us. We have neither tents nor food, nor a place to live," said Juma Bay, a resident of Ghor.

"Everything we had is under the flood. We have been displaced here and have not received any help

yet. We have many problems, and there is no water or bread," said Bilal, another flood victim.

Flood victims in Ferozkoh city, the center of Ghor province, also live in difficult conditions.

"The flood that occurred in Ghor province took my home and livelihood from me, and I have no means of living. The house, dishes, and carpets that I had acquired over years of effort were swept away by the flood," said Najibullah Nazari, who lost his home.

About two and a half months ago, devastating floods hit several districts of Ghor along with Ferozkoh city, destroying thousands of houses and thousands of acres of agricultural land.

China pledges to restore Afghan historical sites

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism of China has pledged it will pursue the registration of Afghanistan's historical sites with the Asian Alliance for Cultural Heritage Conservation (ACHA).

Khabib Ghufuran, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture, said that Li Qun, China Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism, pledged that China will restore Afghanistan's ancient artifacts and sites.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture said: "They visited important historical sites of the country, including the National Museum, the Mes Aynak site, Shewaki Stupa, Babur's Garden, and Bala

Hissar. The purpose of this visit was to strengthen relations between the two countries."

Some cultural experts are urging China to make efforts to register Afghanistan's historical artifacts with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"China is interested in the economic sector in Afghanistan and also in the restoration of a series of historical sites they have seen. Our request is that China register these historical artifacts with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)," said Shir Mohammad Noori, a cultural affairs expert.

"If China takes action to

protect ancient sites and historical places according to national and international standards, it will be a positive step," said Mohammad Anwar Faiz, an academic member of the Archaeological Research Center at the Academy of Sciences.

Earlier, China's Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism and the country's ambassador in Kabul, in separate meetings with the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Administrative Deputy of the Prime Minister, emphasized the preservation of ancient artifacts in the Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar province, stating that their country has extensive experience in mining with ancient artifacts.

Hairatan Port: Minister inspects border trade operations



KABUL (BNA): During his recent visit to Balkh province, Mawlawi Ataullah Omari, the Acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, reviewed the import and export operations at Hairatan port.

According to the Ministry's statement, Mawlawi Omari inspected the border areas between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, assessing the import and export processes. He emphasized the need for streamlined facilities to support exporters and importers, particularly those dealing with agricultural products.

Notably, the Acting Minister led a high-level delegation from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to Balkh for discussions with an Uzbek delegation.

The primary focus of their talks was on fortifying the banks of the Amu Darya River, highlighting the importance of cooperative efforts in enhancing infrastructure and trade relations between the two countries.

An old mortar shell explosion in Kunar province killed a child and injured three others. One child was killed in a similar incident in Ghazni and a woman was found dead in Kandahar.

Officials said unidentified gunmen killed three individuals and injured a fourth in Faryab province. Two persons were stabbed to death in Uruzgan and Faryab and a child was shot dead mistakenly with a shot gun in Ghazni.

At least eight people were killed and 15 more wounded in Afghanistan in the previous week.

Interaction with IEA

Last week, Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov said Moscow would focus on its own interests in recognising the current caretaker government in Afghanistan and removing the "Taliban" from the list of banned groups. The ambassador also suggested Russia could open more consulates in Afghanistan.

Moscow did not rule out opening more consulates in Afghanistan in the future, Zhirnov said in an interview with TASS news agency.

Deputy Prime Minister Maulvi Abdul Kabir welcomed China and Russia's position on interaction with Kabul, hoping positive

Reconstruction of Salang roads priority of IEA: Kabir

KABUL (Ariana News): The Political Deputy of the Prime Minister's Office, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, said in a meeting with ethnic elders of Salang Parwan district that the reconstruction of Salang roads is one of the priorities of the government.

In a post on X, the prime minister's office said mujahideen and elders from the district also assured Kabir that attention will be paid to the construction of the Grand Mosque in their district.

Kabir meanwhile said that the reconstruction of Salang roads is one of the priorities of the Islamic Emirate, and once complete many transport problems will be resolved.

The elders and mujahideen also shared proposals in different fields with Kabir, who in turn promised to cooperate with them.

15,000 cases of black jaundice reported

KABUL (Ariana News): Officials from the ministry of health said Sunday they had recorded 15,000 cases of black jaundice (Heidan disease) in Afghanistan in the past year.

Marking World Anti-Jaundice Day the Ministry of Public Health said records show that in the past 10 years, over 100,000 people have contracted the disease. They say they need international agencies to cooperate with them on dealing with the disease.

World Health Organization meanwhile reported that 300 million people worldwide are infected with this virus, and that two million are infected with this virus every year.

They say that they are collaborating with Afghanistan to fight, diagnose and treat, and they have plans to raise the level of public awareness.

Officials in the National AIDS and Hepatitis Control Program say that there are black jaundice diagnosis centers in fourteen provinces of the country, health services are available in eight provinces, and patients are treated in six provinces.

In 2010, the World Health Organization named the 28th of July as the World Anti-Jaundice Day. This organization stated that the purpose of naming this day is to fight black jaundice disease and control it.

WHO to help expand health services in Afghanistan



KABUL (Pajhwok): The World Health Organisation (WHO) head in Afghanistan Dr Edwin Ceniza Salvador has pledged cooperation in expanding health services in the country.

He held out the promise at a meeting with Acting Minister of Public Health Maulvi Noor Jalal Jalali, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) said in a statement.

A comprehensive system, expanding health services to remote areas, combating infectious diseases and how to framing an effective policy came up for discussion.

The new head of WHO emphasised on coordination with MoPH and promised cooperation in expanding health services in Afghanistan.

Afghan Ministry urges shift from humanitarian aid to uplift assistance

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Economy, in a recently released document, has requested that UN agencies, the European Union, and other non-governmental donor organizations in Afghanistan shift their focus from humanitarian aid to development assistance.

This document which was issued last month (June 4), urged donor organizations to consider balance, transparency, public satisfaction, and the laws of the Islamic Emirate when planning and implementing projects.

Abdul Latif Nazari, the Deputy Minister of Economy, said: "We ask related UN agencies, the European Union, and other organizations to focus on shifting projects from humanitarian to developmental and to implement these projects in less-developed areas."

The document attributed the delay in signing some agreements to high administrative costs and asked all NGO workers to obtain work permits.

Some analysts view the implementation of infrastructural projects instead of humanitarian aid as effective because it creates job opportunities in the country.

"Every country acts based on its national interests and formulates procedures. Over the past 20 years, and even today, aid organizations have not been able to help people transparently," said Abdul Nasir Reshtia, an economic analyst.

"Humanitarian aid can be a temporary relief but not a solution. Alongside

focusing on a consumer economy that increases people's purchasing power, we should also emphasize a productive economy and develop infrastructures for long-term results," said Abdul Zuhoor Mudaber, another economic activist.

The Ministry of Economy has always stressed the continuation of UN humanitarian aid to eliminate poverty in the country and has called for the release of Afghanistan's frozen funds by the United States.

Afghan fefugees in Germany face residency challenges

KABUL (TOLOnews): A number of Afghan refugees in Germany criticized the challenges they are currently facing and urged the caretaker government to seriously address their issues.

Germany is one of the countries where thousands of Afghan citizens currently reside. "The problems that Afghan migrants in Germany face include the issue of permanent residency. Those whose residency applications are rejected

not only lack the right to stay but also the right to work and study," said Ali Wahdat, an Afghan refugee in Germany.

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock criticized statements made by Chancellor Olaf Scholz regarding the deportation of Afghan refugees from Germany.

Annalena Baerbock, without naming anyone in particular, said that unfulfilled commitments cannot contribute to ensuring security.

Annalena Baerbock said: "I believe, especially in these uncertain times, if you make commitments that you can't understand how to implement the next day, it can't help ensure security."

"The deportation of Afghan refugees from Germany is a controversial issue because Afghan refugees are concerned about their future in Afghanistan and are calling

for the cessation of this process. They are also seeking fair examination of their cases and more support from Germany to build a better life for themselves and their families," said Ali Reza Karimi, an immigration rights activist.

Earlier, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had said that Berlin is deciding on the deportation of Afghan refugees from the country and preparations for this process are underway.

Satellite images show dramatic drop in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khamma Press): Satellite imagery analysis indicates that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by nearly 50%, and the ongoing efforts to combat this crop are leading to unprecedented reductions this year.

According to a recent report by the British organization Alcis, Afghanistan is experiencing its second consecutive year of unprecedented poppy prohibition under the Taliban in 2024.

The report highlights that, as of July 22, 2024, agricultural mapping of 14 out of 34 provinces—accounting for 92% of the country's opium poppy cultivation in 2022—shows that the area under poppy cultivation has decreased to less than 4,000 hectares, compared to approximately 16,000 hectares in 2023.

For many years, Afghanistan was a major source of drug production, but since 2022, efforts to eradicate poppy cultivation

have been initiated. However, these efforts have frequently faced resistance from local farmers.

The British organization Alcis notes in its report that the process of clearing farmland of opium poppy will not be straightforward for the Taliban.

Despite the significant reduction in cultivation, challenges remain in implementing and maintaining this prohibition effectively.

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July 22, 2024, agricultural mapping of 14 out of 34 provinces—accounting for 92% of the country's opium poppy cultivation in 2022—shows that the area under poppy cultivation has decreased to less than 4,000 hectares.

Meanwhile, the substantial decrease in opium poppy cultivation marks a significant step in the anti-drug campaign, yet it underscores the complex challenges that remain in eradicating this illicit

crop.

The long-term success of this effort will depend on overcoming resistance from local communities and political wills, ensuring that alternative livelihoods are provided to farmers affected by these restrictions.

The international community's support and monitoring will be crucial in sustaining these gains and addressing the root causes of drug production in Afghanistan.

12 killed, 11 injured in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, Canberra pledged to compensate the families of those unlawfully killed or harmed by Australian forces in Afghanistan, while Human Rights Watch called for the lifting of restrictions on Afghan women.

Government officials, addressing the National Labour Conference in Kabul, vowed to create job opportunities for 1.4 million people across the country.

Casualties

Last week, 12 people were killed and 11 others wounded in various incidents of violence across the country.

According to local officials, two people were killed and six others injured

in an explosion in an old iron warehouse in Parwan province.

An old mortar shell explosion in Kunar province killed a child and injured three others. One child was killed in a similar incident in Ghazni and a woman was found dead in Kandahar.

Officials said unidentified gunmen killed three individuals and injured a fourth in Faryab province. Two persons were stabbed to death in Uruzgan and Faryab and a child was shot dead mistakenly with a shot gun in Ghazni.

At least eight people were killed and 15 more wounded in Afghanistan in the previous week.

Interaction with IEA

Last week, Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Dmitry Zhirnov said Moscow would focus on its own interests in recognising the current caretaker government in Afghanistan and removing the "Taliban" from the list of banned groups. The ambassador also suggested Russia could open more consulates in Afghanistan.

Moscow did not rule out opening more consulates in Afghanistan in the future, Zhirnov said in an interview with TASS news agency.

Deputy Prime Minister Maulvi Abdul Kabir welcomed China and Russia's position on interaction with Kabul, hoping positive

engagement with Afghanistan would lead to stability and security in the region and the world.

Turkmenistan accepted Fazal Mohammad Saber as the ambassador of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in Ashgabat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in Kabul announced on Saturday.

HRW call & Afghan Week

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to lift restrictions on women and girls.

In a post on X, HRW said: "As the Paris Olympics begin, millions of women and girls in Afghanistan are being

denied the right to education and sports."

Speaking at the "Islamic Finance Week" launched by UNDP Afghanistan, the UNAMA head reiterated they were promoting meaningful participation of women in all aspects of financial and economic sectors.

The United Nations Development Program wrote they had launched a project called "Afghanistan's access to finance" in 2024, whose goals were to support Islamic banking and women's access to finance.

This project is being launched at a time when Afghanistan is still facing banking sanctions and an asset freeze, which is believed to have prevented the

implementation of development schemes in the country.

Islamabad claim, Kabul reaction

Asif Ali Durrani, Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan, has called on the Islamic Emirate to take effective measures against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) at a gathering at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) in Islamabad.

Durrani claimed terrorism originated from Afghanistan, which was a grave concern for all states, especially neighbouring countries.

However, IEA deputy spokesman Hamidullah Fitrat responded: "Afghanistan is currently safe and there is no threat to any

country from Afghanistan. Also, no group is allowed to operate in Afghanistan."

Australia promises compensation

Australia is looking for ways of compensating the families who were unlawfully killed or abused by Australian forces in Afghanistan.

Compensation was one of the recommendations from the damning 2020 Brereton report, which found "credible information" that Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel were involved in serious crimes.

The crimes included the "murder" of 39 prisoners and civilians between 2005 and 2016, the Australian

Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported.

The regulations, quietly published on Thursday, shows a new Afghanistan Inquiry Compensation Advocate will assess a claim if the chief of the Defence Force, Admiral David Johnston, referred it to them based on a series of criteria.

National Labour Conference

Last week, at the end of the National Labour Conference, agreements were signed between 15 government agencies in various fields and promises made that in the next five years, more than 1.4 million people will be provided direct and indirect job opportunities.

Harris campaign raises \$200 million in a week

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US Vice President Kamala Harris's election campaign said on Sunday it has raised \$200 million and signed up 170,000 new volunteers in the week since she became the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

President Joe Biden ended his reelection bid on Sunday last week and endorsed Harris for the Nov. 5 vote against Republican former President Donald Trump.

"In the week since we got started, @KamalaHarris has raised \$200 million dollars. 66 percent of that is from new donors. We've signed up 170,000 new volunteers," Harris' deputy campaign manager, Rob Flaherty, posted on X.

Polls over the past week, including one by Reuters/Ipsos, show Harris and Trump essentially tied, setting the stage for a close-fought campaign over the 100 days left until the election.

Trump's campaign said in early July that it raised \$331 million in the second quarter, topping the \$264 million that Biden's campaign

and its Democratic allies raised in the same period. Trump's campaign had \$284.9 million in cash on hand at the end of June while the Democratic campaign had \$240 million in cash on hand at the time.

Harris has secured support from a majority of delegates to the Democratic National Convention, likely ensuring she will become the party's nominee for president next month.

"So our vice president is the presumptive nominee. We will have the official vote on August 1," Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison told MSNBC on Sunday.

Biden withdrew from the race amid questions about his age and health following a faltering debate performance against Trump in late June. Biden pledged to remain in office as president until his term ends on Jan. 20, 2025.

Harris' takeover has reenergized a campaign that had faltered badly amid Democrats' doubts about Biden's chances of defeating Trump or his ability to continue to

govern had he won.

Polls showed that Trump had built a lead over Biden, including in battleground states, after Biden's disastrous debate performance.

A New York Times/Siena College national poll published Thursday found Harris has narrowed what had been a sizable Trump lead while Trump had a two percentage point lead over her in a Wall Street Journal poll published on Friday. A Reuters/Ipsos poll published on July 23 showed a two point lead for Harris.

Mitch Landrieu, a campaign co-chair, said on MSNBC that Harris "had one of the best weeks that we've seen in politics in the last 50 years."

"This is going to be a very close race," he said.

Trump's fundraising surged when he was convicted in late May on felony charges related to a hush-money payment to a porn star ahead of the 2016 election. An assassination attempt against him this month was also expected to spur campaign contributions.



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin witnessing Navy Day parade in Saint Petersburg on Sunday.

Ad-hoc judges to take oath today

ISLAMABAD (INP): Retired Justice Sardar Tariq Masood and Retired Justice Mazhar Alam Miankhal are set to take the oath as ad-hoc judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan today (Monday).

Chief Justice of Supreme Court Qazi Faez Isa will administer the oath to the ad-hoc judges.

As per the report, the oath-taking ceremony of ad-hoc judges will take place in the Judges Block Committee Room of the Supreme Court building at 11 am.

The federal law ministry has issued a notification confirming the appointment of two ad hoc judges to the Supreme Court (SC) for a one-year term.

The notification comes a day after President Asif Ali Zardari approved the appointment of two former Supreme Court judges, Justice (Retd) Tariq Masood and Justice (Retd) Mazhar Alam Mian Khel, as ad hoc judges for a period of one year.

This decision, made under Article 182 of the Constitution, is aimed at enhancing the court's capacity to deliver justice efficiently.

Justice Tariq Masood and Justice Mazhar Alam Mian Khel, both with extensive experience from their previous tenures in the Supreme Court, are expected to significantly bolster the court's ability to manage its caseload.

Both have had distinguished careers in the judiciary, with Justice Masood known for his extensive work in constitutional and civil law, and Justice Mian Khel recognized for his contributions to criminal law and human rights.

The ad-hoc appointment of judges is a mechanism provided for in the Constitution of Pakistan, allowing for the temporary addition of judges to the Supreme Court to manage caseloads effectively.

The strength of the Supreme Court of Pakistan is now 19, with 17 permanent and 2 ad hoc judges.

Putin warns US of Cold War-style missile crisis

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday warned the United States that if Washington deployed long-range missiles in Germany then Russia would station similar missiles in striking distance of the West.

The United States said on July 10 that it would start deploying long-range missiles, opens new tab in Germany from 2026 in preparation for a longer-term deployment that will include SM-6, Tomahawk cruise missiles and developmental hypersonic weapons.

In a speech to sailors from Russia, China, Algeria and India to mark Russian navy day in the former imperial capital of St Petersburg, Putin warned the United States that it risked triggering a Cold War-style missile crisis with the move.

"The flight time to targets on our territory of such missiles, which in the future may be equipped with nuclear warheads, will be about 10 minutes," Putin said.

"We will take mirror measures to deploy, taking into account the actions of the United States, its satellites in Europe and in other

regions of the world."

Putin, who sent his army into Ukraine in 2022, casts the war as part of a historic struggle with the West, which he says humiliated Russia after Soviet Union fell in 1991 by encroaching on what he considers Moscow's sphere of influence.

Ukraine and the West say Putin is engaged in an imperial-style land grab. They have vowed to defeat Russia, which currently controls about 18% of Ukraine, including Crimea, and parts of four regions in eastern Ukraine.

Russia says the lands, once part of the Russian empire, are now again part of Russia and that they will never be given back.

Russian and U.S. diplomats say their diplomatic relations are worse even than that during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and both Moscow and Washington have urged de-escalation while both have made steps towards escalation.

Putin said that the United States was stoking tensions and had transferred Typhon missile systems to Denmark and the Philippines, and compared the U.S. plans to the NATO decision to deploy Pershing II launchers in

Western Europe in 1979.

The Soviet leadership, including General Secretary Yuri Andropov, feared Pershing II deployments were part of an elaborate U.S.-led plan to decapitate the Soviet Union by taking out its political and military leadership.

"This situation is reminiscent of the events of the Cold War related to the deployment of American medium-range Pershing missiles in Europe," Putin said.

The Pershing II, designed to deliver a variable yield nuclear warhead, was deployed to West Germany in 1983.

In 1983, the ailing Andropov and the KGB interpreted a series of U.S. moves including the Pershing II deployment and a major NATO exercise as signs the West was about to launch a pre-emptive strike on the Soviet Union, opens new tab.

Putin repeated an earlier warning that Russia could resume production of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles and then consider where to deploy them after the United States brought similar missiles to Europe and Asia.

KP requests PHC CJ to form judicial commission for May 9 probe

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhunkhwa government, led by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), on Sunday wrote a letter to Peshawar High Court's (PHC) Chief Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim for the constitution of a judicial commission to investigate the May 9 incident.

KP Law Minister Aftab Alam Afridi, while speaking to private Tv news channel said: "The letter

requesting the establishment of a judicial commission was sent to the chief justice by the administration department."

Afridi said that the chief justice will announce the names for the commission, adding that the judicial commission will be headed by a PHC judge.

A day earlier, the KP cabinet approved the establishment of a judicial commission to probe the

May 9 events during the meeting presided by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur.

The PTI had been demanding to hold a judicial inquiry into the May 9 protests which broke out in the country last year over party founder Imran Khan's arrest in the Al-Qadir Trust case.

During the protests, alleged PTI supporters damaged public and pri-

vate properties and also attacked military installations in different parts of the country.

In May this year, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan reiterated his party's demand to hold a judicial inquiry into the violence.

KP CM Gandapur had also demanded to form a judicial commission to probe the violence on that day.

Khamenei endorses Masoud as President of Iran

TEHRAN, Iran (AP): Iran's supreme leader on Sunday formally endorsed Masoud Pezeshkian as president, allowing the reformist politician and heart surgeon to take charge of a country weakened by economic sanctions over its nuclear program.

During an endorsement ceremony, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged Pezeshkian to prioritize neighbors, African and Asian nations as well as countries that have "supported and helped" Iran in Tehran's foreign relations policies.

Khamenei criticized European nations for "behaving badly to us" by adopting sanctions, an oil embargo and for calling out alleged human rights abuses.

He also condemned Israel for its actions in Gaza in the deaths of chil-

dren, women and hospitalized people "who did not shoot a single bullet" against Israeli forces.

"The Zionist regime is showing its ugliest face as a war criminal," said Khamenei, accusing Israel of setting a "new record in assassinations" and cruelty. He also denounced the U.S. Congress for allowing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address the legislative body.

In his first official act in office, Pezeshkian appointed Mohammad Reza Aref, 72, as his first vice-president. Aref, who's considered a moderate reformist, held the post between 2001-2005 under former president Mohammad Khatami. Aref holds a doctorate in engineering from Stanford University.

Pezeshkian takes over from his predecessor Ebrahim Raisi whose death

in a May helicopter crash that sparked the early election. He will take the oath of office in parliament Tuesday and will have two weeks to form his own cabinet for a vote of confidence in parliament.

The new Iranian president pledged in his election campaign that he would make no radical changes to Iran's Shiite theocracy, embracing Khamenei as the final arbiter in all matters of state. Pezeshkian could bend Iran's foreign policy toward either confrontation or collaboration with the West and faces the constant challenge of hard-liners still pulling the strings in government.

Pezeshkian has tried to walk the line between hard-liners and reformists with whom he has identified. He has repeatedly criticized the U.S. while praising Iran's powerful paramilitary Revolutionary

Guard for shooting down a U.S. drone in 2019 which he called a "strong punch in the mount of the Americans."

Among the pressing challenges Pezeshkian faces is the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and Western fears over enriching uranium to near-weapons-grade levels with enough of a stockpile to produce several nuclear weapons if it chose.

In April, Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel over the war in Gaza, while militia groups armed by Tehran — including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Yemen's Houthi rebels — have stepped up their own attacks. Iran has held indirect talks with U.S. President Joe Biden's administration over its nuclear program but there's been no progress in lifting tough economic sanctions against Tehran.

China to support Pakistan

Continued from Front Page

He said that China, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates have always extended their supports for Pakistan for its economic growth and development.

Meanwhile, the minister said that the incumbent government was also taking several measures in domestic front for turning around the local economy, adding that special emphasis was paid on the taxation side by bringing the non-taxed sectors into the tax net for broadening the tax base.

He said that to realize the 13 percent tax to GDP

ratio, it was prerequisite to take measures for the simplification of tax returns and facilitating the tax pairs to achieve full compliance, adding that the government has launched Tajir Dost Scheme for voluntary tax compliance that offers benefits to unregistered businesses.

He said that the government was determined to introduce the same facilities for other sectors to simplify the tax return process.

He said that the expansion of the tax to other sectors like retailers, real estate, builders and devel-

opers and agriculture would help to create a space to provide relief and reduce the burden from the existing tax pairs, adding that the government was fully determined to bring the un-taxed and under-taxed sectors into the tax net.

He said that the Prime Minister himself was monitoring the tax sector reforms and digitization of the tax collecting system to plug the leakages as well as identifying the under-taxed or un-taxed to enhance revenue collection in the country. Through digital data analytics, the

Federal Board of Revenue has identified about 4.9 million income tax non-filers, adding that those were pointed out on the basis of basic data regarding traveling abroad, a number of vehicles and others, he added. The minister said that the government was also focusing on right-sizing the different ministries and divisions to minimize its expenditure and create more fiscal space for social sector development, adding that in the first phase work on the right-sizing of five ministries was in progress.

Canadian Sikhs confront India's transnational repression

CALGARY (Canada), July 28 (APP): : Thousands of Sikhs on Sunday queued up at the Calgary's iconic Municipal Plaza – opposite the local United States diplomatic mission – and took part in the Khalistan Referendum voting for the creation of an independent state of Khalistan for the Sikh nation.

Organised by the pro-Khalistan Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) group, the voting was held in Calgary to seek opinion of Sikhs of Canada's Alberta province on the creation of an independent state for Sikhs.

An estimated one million Sikhs reside in Canada and nearly 100,000 live in Calgary.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar's family was the first to cast their votes, surrounded by prominent Khalistan figures.

The SFJ leader announced that Calgary voting is dedicated to the nine Canadian national Sikhs assassinated by India for their supports for Khalistan. Those Canadian Sikhs are

Lakhbir Singh Rode, Bhupinder Singh Kooner, Harjinder Singh Para, Talwinder Singh Parmar, Surinder Singh Shinder Commando, Balbir Singh Khaira, Jathedar Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Mohinder Singh Kooner and Surinder Singh Ravi.

At the start of the voting with Sikh prayers led by the local Sikh religious figures from Gurdawara Dashmesh Culture Centre, thousands formed long queues to cast their votes for the process that will last for the full day.

Men, women, youth, children and elderly gathered in the town from across the province to cast their votes for the non-binding referendum, which was aimed at seeking opinion of Sikhs from around the world, before presenting the final results to the United Nations.

Sikhs who gathered outside the city hall carried flags of Khalistan. The road was decorated with large posters of Sikhs who sacrificed their lives for the Sikh cause and are revered by

the Sikhs across the world.

At the start of the voting, veteran Khalistani leader and President of the Council of Khalistan Dr Bakhshish Singh Sandhu said that Sikhs in Calgary set a new record by exercising their democratic right for Khalistan and sent a message to the world that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign to assassinate Sikhs in the western countries was unacceptable.

He termed it as India's transnational terrorism and oppression which warranted global sanctions against the state of India.

All the phases of voting in Khalistan Referendum were held under the guidance and supervision of panel of non-aligned direct democracy experts from the Punjab Referendum Commission (PRC).

The whole voting process from registration to supervision of ballot boxes and sealing of the ballots at the end of voting

day was conducted by Commission's approved third party staff to maintain the highest level of transparency.

The PRC conducted the voting on the question of "Should Indian Governed Punjab Be An Independent Country?" with two options of "Yes" and "No".

The Khalistan Referendum voting campaign is organised under the supervision of the independent Punjab Referendum Commission (PRC) which announces results when all phases are completed.

The voting started on October 31, 2021 from London UK and has so far been held in several countries and cities across the UK; Geneva Switzerland; Rome and Milan (Italy); Australian cities of Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney; American city of San Francisco and Sacramento; Canadian cities of Brampton, Mississauga, Malton (Ontario), Surrey Vancouver (British Columbia) and now Calgary.

