

**ZAB awarded
F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari conferring the award of Nishan-i-Pakistan (posthumous) upon Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in recognition of his services in the field of public service, at the investiture ceremony to confer the insignias of Civil Awards, held at Aiwan-e-Sadr on 23-03-2025. His award is being received by Ms Sanam Bhutto.



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Security forces kill 16 Khwarij

Terrorists were trying to infiltrate from Afghan border

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed sixteen Khwarij trying to infiltrate through the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the general area of Ghulam Khan Kallay, North Waziristan District.

“On night 22/ 23 March, movement of a group of khwarij, trying to infiltrate through Pakistan-Afghanistan border, was picked up by the security forces in general area Ghulam Khan Kallay, North Waziristan District” said an ISPR news release.

“Own troops effectively engaged and thwarted their attempt to infiltrate. After an intense fire exchange, all sixteen Khwarij were sent to hell”

the release said.

Pakistan has consistently been asking the Interim Afghan Government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border. The interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by Khwarij for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan.

The security forces of Pakistan are determined and remain committed to securing its borders and eliminating the menace of terrorism from the country.

President appreciates security forces for stopping intrusion at Pak-Afghan border

President Asif Ali Zardari Sunday appreciat-

ed the security forces for stopping the attempt of intrusion at Pakistan-Afghanistan border in district of North Waziristan.

He appreciated the security forces for killing 16 Khwarij in a timely operation.

He said the brave armed forces of Pakistan were determined to defend borders of the country around the clock. The operations against terrorists would continue till the complete eradication of the menace of terrorism.

He said the whole nation stood with the security forces in the war against terrorism.

PM appreciates security forces for foiling attempt of intrusion in Pakistan

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Sunday appreciated officers and personnel of security forces for foiling an attempt of intrusion into Pakistan from Afghanistan by Fitna Al-Khawarij in Ghulam Khan Kalay, district North Waziristan.

He lauded the officers and personnel of security forces for killing 16 Khawarij who tried to intrude into Pakistan.

He said terrorists would not be allowed to succeed in their nefarious designs.

He said he and the whole Pakistani nation stood with the brave armed forces which were defending the country with unwavering determination.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari addressing the Pakistan Day parade ceremony, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir also present.

Gandapur for best Eid arrangements

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has directed all concerned authorities to ensure comprehensive arrangements for the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

The Chief Minister's Secretariat has issued a letter comprising 20 key points to administrative secretaries, divisional commissioners, deputy commissioners, police, and other relevant entities for implementation.

The letter instructs all the Deputy Commissioners to hold pre-Eid meetings with relevant departments, police, and law enforcement agencies in their respective districts to devise security plans for Eid congregations at Eidgahs, mosques, and imambargahs.

It also emphasizes that no administrative officer is allowed to leave their duty station during Eid holidays without prior approval; officers must seek express approval from their Deputy Commissioners, while Deputy Commissioners from their respective commissioners, and commissioners from the Chief Secretary—and ensure that a substitute officer is present in their absence.

Regarding aerial firing, authorities have been directed to impose ban on aerial firing and fireworks on Chand Raat with police instructed to take stern legal action against violators. Public transport fares will also be closely monitored, and action will be taken against anyone charging above the official rates. The letter further directs special deployment of traffic police squads to curb one-wheeling, over-speeding, and riding motorcycles without helmets during the Eid holidays. A special cleanliness campaign is to be launched in public spaces, particularly markets and Eidgahs.

In areas where large numbers of women are expected to shop, female police personnel are to be deployed.

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Traffic management at tourist spots and on access roads to these destinations must be improved, with the

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No change in govt's policy about solar energy, says PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday ruling out any change in the government's policy and priorities regarding solar energy, instructed the authorities concerned to clear all ambiguities among the people regarding the solarization policy through facts and figures.

The prime minister, chairing a review meeting on the matters related to the Power Division, directed the swift settlement of all legal and other matters related to the privatisation of generation companies, besides expediting the privatization process of power distribution companies, according to a PM Office press release.

He said that a package was being formulated to reduce the electricity tariffs, which would be announced

soon to provide further relief to the public.

Prime Minister Shehbaz directed the Power Division, Water Resources Division, and Petroleum Division to improve their coordination for a comprehensive strategy in the energy sector.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Power Division Sardar Awas Leghari, Advisor to PM Dr. Taqeer Shah, and other senior government officials. Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, and the Advisor to PM Muhammad Ali joined the meeting via video link.

PM urges dedicated efforts to make Pakistan a prosperous, welfare-oriented state

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday urged the countrymen to make dedi-

cated efforts in line with Quaid-e-Azam's principles of Unity, Faith and Discipline to achieve the dream of making Pakistan a prosperous and a welfare state.

The prime minister, in his televised video message on Pakistan Day being observed today, thanked Allah Almighty and expressed his gratitude to the forefathers including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Iqbal and others, whose foresight- edness and wise leadership led to the creation of Pakistan as a separate homeland.

He said that the Pakistan Resolution, which was passed on March 23, 1940 stood as a testament to the unwavering commitment of the forefathers to the cause of independence.



All parties have to join hands against terrorism: Murad

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh's Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah on Sunday said that all political parties have to join hands to fight terrorism. Murad Ali Shah was talking to media during his visit of Mazar-e-Quaid to pay respects to the father of the nation on the Pakistan Day.

He called the PTI's boycott of the session of the

parliamentary committee on national security as regretful.

The PTI's founder used to remain absent in the session during his government, Sindh's chief minister observed.

He said it is not a secret who is behind the terrorism.

Talking on the issue of building canals from Indus River, Murad Ali Shah said the People's Party will not

allow canals from the river.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah had earlier in a media talk also vowed, not to compromise over Sindh's water rights, in a message on the international water day.

“We are protectors of the Indus River, how the new canals being built when the water has not been available for Sindh's fertile land,” Sindh CM said.

Saif accuses PML-N leaders for fueling terrorism

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Advisor, Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, has strongly reacted to the statements of Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry and Senator Irfan Siddiqui, accusing the federal government representatives of fueling terrorism instead of working towards national peace.

In his statement, Barrister Dr. Saif criticized the federal leadership, stat-

ing that individuals who once received financial support from Osama bin Laden for political gains—referring to Nawaz Sharif's affiliates—cannot hide their past by blaming the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government.

He further pointed out the irony of the Shehbaz Sharif government's approach to counterterrorism, highlighting that a person openly caught in illegal and unethical activities was appointed as the Minister of State for Interior, while

Irfan Siddiqui, previously known for his support of Taliban-backed “jihad,” has now conveniently rebranded himself as a liberal.

Dr. Saif remarked that the political maneuvering orchestrated by Irfan Siddiqui—first facilitating the appointment of General Bajwa as Army Chief to remove Nawaz Sharif and later lobbying for his return—demonstrates the inconsistencies in federal leadership.

The Information Advisor strongly condemned the

federal government's response to terrorism, stating that those who panic over minor fireworks on Shah-e-Barat are now masquerading as counterterrorism experts, mocking the sacrifices of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police and Frontier Corps (FC) personnel who have been on the front lines against terrorism. He called it disgraceful and shameful that federal government officials are using the blood of martyrs for political point-scoring.

Palestinian death toll in Gaza's war passes 50,000 as Israel expands airstrikes

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP): More than 50,000 Palestinians have now been killed in the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the territory's Health Ministry said Sunday, as new Israeli airstrikes killed at least 26 Palestinians overnight, including a Hamas political leader and several women and children.

Israel's military also sent ground troops into part of the southern city of Rafah as thousands of Palestinians fled after new evacuation orders.

Israel ended the latest ceasefire last week with a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds, and it has launched ground incursions in northern Gaza. The military claimed to have “eliminated” dozens of militants in recent days.

Israel's Cabinet late

Saturday approved a proposal to set up a new directorate for advancing the “voluntary departure” of Palestinians in line with U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to depopulate Gaza and rebuild it for others. Palestinians say they do not want to leave their homeland, and rights groups say the plan could amount to expulsion in violation of international law.

The military ordered people to leave Rafah's already heavily destroyed Tel al-Sultan neighborhood on foot along a single route to Muwasi, a sprawling area of squalid tent camps. The war has forced most of Gaza's population of over 2 million to flee within the territory, often multiple times.

“It's displacement under

fire,” said Mustafa Gaber, a journalist who left with his family. He said tank and drone fire echoed nearby.

“The shells are falling among us and the bullets are (flying) above us,” said Amal Nassar, also displaced from Rafah. “The elderly have been thrown into the streets. An old woman was telling her son, ‘Go and leave me to die.’ Where will we go?”

“Enough is enough. We are exhausted,” said a fleeing Ayda Abu Shaer, as black smoke rose in the distance.

The Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service said it lost contact with a team of medics responding to the strikes. Spokesperson Nebal Farsakh said some were wounded.

There was no immediate

comment from Israel's military, which says it only targets militants. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas.

Hamas said Salah Bardawil, a well-known member of its political bureau, was killed in a strike in Muwasi that also killed his wife. Israel's military confirmed that.

Hospitals in southern Gaza said they received a further 24 bodies from strikes overnight, including several women and children.

Gaza's Health Ministry said 50,021 Palestinians have been killed in the war and over 113,000 have been wounded. That includes 673 people killed since Israel's bombardment on Tuesday shattered the ceasefire.

Dr. Munir al-Boursh,

the ministry's general director, said the dead include 15,613 children, with 872 of them under 1 year old. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up over half the dead. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

The ceasefire that took hold in January paused more than a year of fighting ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack into Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 251 hostage. Most captives have been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

In the latest ceasefire's first phase, 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others were released

in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces pulled back, allowing hundreds of thousands of people to return to what remains of their homes. There was a surge in humanitarian aid until Israel cut off all supplies to Gaza earlier this month to pressure Hamas to change the ceasefire agreement.

The sides were supposed to begin negotiations in early February on the ceasefire's next phase, in which Hamas was to release the remaining 59 hostages — 35 of them believed to be dead — in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. Those talks never began.

Hundreds of Israelis gathered outside Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu's office in Jerusalem on Sunday to protest his handling of the war and his attempt to dismiss the head of the Shin Bet internal security service. “I'm worried for the future of this country. And I think it has to stop. We have to change direction,” said one protester, Avital Halperin.

Israel's cabinet passed a measure Sunday creating 13 new settlements in the occupied West Bank by rezoning existing ones, according to Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's far-right finance minister, who is in charge of settlement construction.

This brings the number of settlements, considered illegal by the majority of the international community, to 140, said anti-settlement watchdog group Peace Now. They will now

receive independent budgets from Israel and can elect their own local governments, the group said.

In a separate development, Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are allied with Hamas, launched another missile at Israel overnight. The Israeli military said it was intercepted, and there were no reports of casualties or damage.

The Houthis resumed attacks on Israel after it ended the Gaza ceasefire, portraying them as an act of solidarity with the Palestinians. Trump ordered the renewal of U.S. strikes on the rebels last week over its previous attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea.

Most of the ships the rebels have targeted have no connection to the conflict.



LAHORE: Air Vice Marshal Akhtar Imran Sadozai, Air officer Commanding, PAF Airmen Academy Korangi Creek, laying floral wreath at Mazar e Iqbal.

Pakistan will continue to thrive despite challenges: CM

KARACHI (APP):Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday said that Pakistan will continue to thrive and progress despite the challenges it faces.

Speaking to media persons on the occasion of Pakistan Day at Mazar e Quaid, Chief Minister Shah reflected on the significance of March 23, 1940, when the All-India Muslim League adopted the Pakistan Resolution in Lahore, which laid the foundation for an independent homeland. He was flanked by Sindh Governor Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori and cabinet members.

He emphasised that this year, marks the 85th anniversary of the resolution. On this historic occasion, he prayed for Pakistan's progress in line with the vision of its founder and expressed hope that the country would continue to thrive as an Islamic democratic state.

The chief minister highlighted Sindh's crucial role in creating Pakistan, recalling that on March 3, 1943, the Sindh Assembly was the first to approve the Pakistan Resolution. He stated that the struggle for independence culminated on August 14, 1947, when Pakistan emerged as a sovereign nation founded on Islamic principles.

Reflecting on the challenges facing the country today, Murad Ali Shah stressed the necessity of national unity against terrorism and the need for collective efforts toward economic development. He urged all citizens to contemplate the forces that threaten Pakistan's stability and reinforced that everyone must stand united against any threat to the nation.

The chief minister also mentioned the tragic events of 1971 and how former prime minister Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto played a pivotal role in rebuilding and uniting Pakistan.

He noted that the democratic process was disrupted in 1977 when a military dictator overthrew an elected government, leading to what many regard as the darkest period in the

country's history. Commenting on recent terrorist incidents in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, including the attack on the Jaffer Express and incidents in Noshki, Kalat, and Bannu, Murad Ali Shah underscored the importance of national security.

He criticized political elements, who had previously neglected to attend National Security Committee meetings and reiterated that terrorism must be addressed collectively.

The Sindh CM urged the nation to reaffirm its pledge on Pakistan Day to strive for the country's prosperity. He called on all political forces to unite and contribute to Pakistan's development, just as Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did in making Pakistan a nuclear power, and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto did in advancing missile technology for national defence.

He accused external adversaries of supporting terrorist groups to destabilize Pakistan and stressed the need for a united front to counter these threats. Under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Sindh government remains dedicated to national progress and security, he added.

Murad Ali Shah also discussed the challenges facing the Muslim world, including oppression in Palestine, Kashmir, and Yemen. He called for unity among Islamic nations to confront anti-Islamic forces, drawing inspiration from the leadership of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who hosted the historic Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore.

To a question, the chief minister categorically stated that no canals are being constructed. Addressing the concerns of the public, he emphasised that PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will personally visit various areas to reassure citizens that no such canals will be built.

He reiterated that the PPP will never permit the construction of these canals and that any misinformation regarding the matter will be clarified.

Murad Shah further asserted that no canals have ever been planned for construction in Sindh, and even the allotted lands for corporate farming will not receive water from any canal. Additionally, no settlements will be displaced. If, after conserving the existing water, any population expansion is deemed feasible, the Sindh government will cooperate to facilitate it.

CM Shah highlighted that his government is already progressing towards cooperative farming, with specific plans in place under Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's leadership. The agriculture minister and the cooperative department are actively working on these initiatives.

Expressing his concerns, the chief minister also pointed out the delay in the construction of the Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway. Despite multiple attempts to advance the project, it has not been initiated. He stressed that this motorway is not solely intended for Sindh, but for the entire country, as it will significantly enhance trade.

He indicated that funds for this motorway have been allocated under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), but this prioritisation is unwarranted. He recalled that when the issue was previously raised in the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC), Sindh objected - not to the construction of a road, but to the absence of equitable development, which is mandated by the Constitution.

The CM contended that the Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway should be constructed first rather than focusing on linking other districts elsewhere. He also stated that although the Sindh government should not be required to contribute, it is willing to do so to expedite the project. The Chief Minister prayed for Pakistan's continued progress and urged all citizens to be prepared to defend the country. He reaffirmed that the Sindh government, under its leadership, would continue to work toward national development and stability.

Ramesh announces restoration of 46 Gurdwaras

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs, Ramesh Singh Arora, stated that under the guidance of Chief Minister Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the restoration project for 46 historic gurdwaras, which were closed after the creation of Pakistan, has officially begun.

He made these remarks during his participation in the ongoing Bhog Sahib Ardas at the 12th Annual Sammagam at Baba Di Berri Sahib Gurdwara.

He mentioned that after reopening of the 70-year-closed Baba Di Berri Sahib Gurdwara, the land of the Baba's Pond was retrieved from the land mafia and handed over to the local Sikh

community. Sangat. This gesture was part of the provincial government's broader efforts to restore and preserve sacred religious sites for the Sikh community.

The provincial minister thanked Federal Minister for Defense, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, and Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Zulqarnain Langrial for their support in retrieving the sacred Baba Di Berri Sahib Pond from illegal encroachment. He emphasized that the government aimed to make Gurdwara Baba Di Berri Sahib, an international Sikh site, enabling Sikhs from around the world to visit this sacred site in Sialkot,

along with other prominent gurdwaras in Lahore, Narowal, Punjab Sahib, and Nankana Sahib.

This initiative will promote religious tourism in Sialkot and contribute to the local economy. Arora affirmed that in line with the vision of Mian Nawaz Sharif, there is no distinction between minorities and majorities in Pakistan. "All religious communities living here are fellow Pakistanis,". He concluded by saying that a prayer would be offered after the Ardas for the security and stability of the country.

Later, the minister Ramesh Arora distributed Langar among the Sangat.



LAHORE: A PHA worker is preparing Pakistan flag with fresh flowers on Pakistan Day celebrations at Cherang Cross. —APP Photo

Change of guard ceremony held at Allama Iqbal's mausoleum on Pakistan Day

LAHORE (APP): The nation is celebrating Pakistan Day with traditional zeal and enthusiasm, marking the historic resolution passed on March 23, 1940, which laid the foundation for an independent homeland for Muslims of the sub-continent.

The day began with a 21-gun salute in the provincial capital, paying tribute to the sacrifices of the country's forefathers. A solemn change of guard ceremony was held at the mausoleum of Poet of the East,

Hazrat Allama Muhammad Iqbal (RA), in Lahore where a Pakistan Air Force (PAF) contingent took over the guard duties, showcasing discipline and dedication.

Air Vice Marshal Akhtar Imran Sadozai, the chief guest at the ceremony, offered Fateha, prayed for the country's prosperity and security, and laid a wreath at the mausoleum. He also recorded his sentiments in the guest book, honoring the vision of Allama Iqbal.

Earlier, special prayers for the country were offered in the mosques after Fajar prayer, seeking peace and progress for the nation.

Pakistan Day commemorates the momentous the Lahore Resolution at Minar-e-Pakistan on March 23, 1940, which paved the way for the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The day was being marked with various events and ceremonies across the country, reflecting the spirit of unity, patriotism, and national pride.

Dr Waqaruddin Syed honored with Sitara-e-Imtiaz

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Additional Director General of Cyber Crimes at the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Dr. Waqaruddin Syed, has been awarded the prestigious Sitara-e-Imtiaz in recognition of his exceptional national services.

Dr. Syed has played a pivotal role in strengthening digital security, focusing on critical areas such as child exploitation, terrorism, financial fraud, and violations of digital infrastructure. Additionally, he has implemented policies that address the evolving nature of organized cyber-crimes, boosting public and investor confidence in the digital sphere.

In acknowledgment of his outstanding contributions to public service, the President of Pakistan honored Dr. Waqaruddin Syed with the prestigious civil award at a ceremony held at Aiwan-e-Sadr in Islamabad on Pakistan Day.

Bituminous patch repair work completed

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The repair work on taxiways M, N, and T at Islamabad International Airport has been successfully completed. The project, initiated on August 2, 2024, was carried out in phases to ensure uninterrupted flight operations.

Despite temporary unavailability of some aerobridges due to maintenance, flight operations remained unaffected. Additional parking stands were configured to accommodate wide-body and narrow-body aircraft, ensuring smooth passenger handling, including for British Airways flights requiring special security measures.

Final minor patch repairs on the secondary and main runways will be completed soon. The project was executed with seamless coordination between airport management, engineering, airside operations, ATC, and headquarters support, reaffirming Islamabad International Airport's commitment to safety and operational efficiency.

PML-F Sindh pays homage to Jinnah

KARACHI (APP):The General Secretary of Pakistan Muslim League Functional (PML-F) Sindh and Grand Democratic Alliance (DGA) Information Secretary Sardar Abdul Rahim on Sunday paid tremendous tributes to father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah on the occasion of Pakistan Day (23 March).

He said that under the leadership of Pir Pagara, the people were united and Hur Force was still standing alert to protect Pakistan and her people, a communicate said.

He said that today reminded us of the determination and courage of Muslims to get a separate homeland.

Today was also a day to pay tribute to the immortal sacrifice of Shaheed Surahia Badshah, he said adding that there was a need to follow principles of unity, faith, and discipline of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Govt should tame price hike: Altaf Shakoor

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Government should check the rising price hike urgently to facilitate masses in the holy month of Ramzan, said Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor here Sunday.

He said prices of all daily use commodities including sugar are rising constantly but the government is not taking any action against them. He said that poor people are suffering a lot due to inaction by the government. He said recently the parliament members have increased their salaries and perks.

However, the government says that it has no budget to increase salaries and pensions of govern-

ment servants. He said the rulers should cut their royal expenses and give some breathing space to the poor masses.

He said the government is bent on closing Utility Stores as it doesn't want poor people to get kitchen commodities on subsidized rates.

However, the government gives lavish subsidies to private companies that make electricity, urea and other products. He said the rulers only talk about the problems of people at the time of elections and then forget them for the whole next term.

Altaf Shakoor asked that all basic kitchen cheaper rates should be provided to poor and low income people on ration cards at

cheaper rates. He said that the old ration card system should be reintroduced.

He said that Utility Stores should not be closed but made further functional to facilitate the poor masses. He said the government should adopt a welfare-based approach and take action against price hike and hoarding mafias including the powerful sugar miller mafia.

He said that it is high time that the poor people get some relief now in the holy month of Ramzan. He asked the federal and provincial governments to devise mechanisms to check price hike, stabilise rates of kitchen commodities and tame powerful mafias that are looting people with both hands.

Pakistan shining like a bright star: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has said that the separate homeland pledged on March 23, 1940, is now shining like a bright star on the world map.

In her message on the occasion of the 85th Pakistan Day, observed on Sunday, she emphasised that the Muslim League created Pakistan, and it is the Muslim League that is shaping it. Under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, she said, the Pakistan envisioned by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal is achieving milestones in development.

"Pakistan Day represents a new vision, new determination, and renewed passion. March 23 reminds us of our identity as a unique and great nation," she added.

Highlighting Pakistan's strength, she stated that Pakistan is the only nuclear power in the Islamic world, holding a distinct and unparalleled identity.

She affirmed that Pakistan was created to progress, and it will continue to do so. Despite internal and external conspiracies, the nation is moving towards prosperity.

Azma Bokhari also paid

tribute to the Pakistan Armed Forces for their invaluable services in ensuring national security and defense. She acknowledged the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the homeland, calling them the pride of the nation.

"Our martyrs and veterans are our true heroes, and the entire nation takes immense pride in their sacrifices," she concluded.

Pakistan Day was marked by ceremonies, parades, and events across the country, celebrating the spirit of the Pakistan Resolution and reaffirming commitment to national unity and progress.

National unity vital for country's stability

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan has said that the country's stability is directly linked to national unity and unwavering resolve, urging the nation to keep the spirit of the Pakistan Movement alive.

He said this while addressing the central ceremony held in connection with Pakistan Day by the District Education Authority at Government Model High School, Kasur here on Sunday.

The event commenced with a flag-hoisting ceremony, where the distinguished guests raised the national flag, followed by a salute presented by a well-disciplined contingent of

police. Students added a patriotic touch to the event by performing national songs and presenting bouquets to the guests.

Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan reaffirming the nation's stance against terrorism, the speaker declared that the malicious intentions of terrorist organizations would be foiled.

He said, "Entire nation stands united with the armed forces to eradicate this menace of terrorism."

He further underscored the importance of adopting the principles of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah for national progress and called on the youth to dedicate their struggle towards ensuring a prosperous future for Pakistan.

Minister of State Malik Rasheed Ahmad Khan said, "Pakistan is the fruit of immense sacrifices and safeguarding it is a collective responsibility."

He stressed that overcoming the challenges faced by the country requires unity and diligence. Meanwhile, MPA Malik Saeed Ahmad Khan paid tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the country's security, emphasizing that their sacrifices should never be forgotten.

Federal Parliamentary Secretary Saad Waseem Sheikh, Deputy Commissioner Imran Ali and DPO Isa Khan Sukharia also graced the occasion.

DC leads flag hoisting, rally to mark Pakistan Day

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Syed Musa Raza led the Pakistan Day celebrations with a grand flag-hoisting ceremony at Town Hall, followed by a rally symbolizing national unity and patriotism. The event witnessed significant participation from government officials, dignitaries, and citizens.

The celebrations began at Town Hall, where DC Lahore, along with Chief Officer Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL) Shahid Abbas Kathia, hoisted the national flag while the national anthem echoed in the background.

A large number of people, including students, government officials, and members of civil society, attended the ceremony, displaying their

love for the country.

Following the flag-hoisting, a rally was taken out from Town Hall to Istanbul Chowk. DC Lahore led the march, accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner (Headquarters) Muhammad Jafar Chaudhry, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Muhammad Shojain Vistro, and other officials. Citizens from various walks of life enthusiastically joined the rally, waving national flags and chanting patriotic slogans.

Speaking on the occasion, DC Syed Musa Raza praised the spirit and enthusiasm of the participants. He highlighted the significance of Pakistan Day as a symbol of national unity and reminded everyone of

the sacrifices made for the country's independence. He urged all citizens to work together for Pakistan's progress and prosperity.

"Pakistan Day is a reminder that our strength lies in unity. We must set aside our differences and contribute to the development of our nation. The participation of people from all backgrounds in today's rally reflects our collective commitment to Pakistan's progress," he said.

The rally concluded peacefully at Istanbul Chowk, with citizens expressing their dedication to building a stronger, prosperous Pakistan. The event successfully reinforced the spirit of nationalism and the importance of working together for a better future.

Governor presents Civil Awards to seven heroes



PESHAWAR (APP): A grand ceremony was held at the Governor's House Peshawar on Sunday to mark Pakistan Day, where seven individuals from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were honored with prestigious civil awards.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, conferred Presidential Civil Awards on behalf of the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The Governor presented the Tamgha-e-Shujaat (Medal of Bravery) to four individuals for their extraordinary courage, and the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (Medal of Excellence) to three individuals for their exceptional contributions in various fields.

Among the recipients, Saeed Khan (posthumously) was awarded the Tamgha-e-Shujaat in recognition of his bravery, Sahib Khan was also honored with the Tamgha-e-Shujaat for his courageous acts. The Governor further awarded the Tamgha-e-Shujaat posthumously to

Major Mahmood Jan and Samiullah Khan for their bravery and sacrifices in the line of duty.

In addition to these awards, Dr. Akifullah Khan was honored with the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz for his outstanding services in the field of medicine. Arshad Aziz Malik received the Tamgha-e-Imtiaz for his contributions to journalism, while Bakhtiar Ahmed Khattak was recognized for his remarkable work in the field of music.

The ceremony was attended by a large number of dignitaries, including Air Vice Marshal, Air Officer Commanding Northern Air Command (Sitara-e-Imtiaz Military) Taimur Iqbal and Secretary of the Administration Department, Shahid Sohail, as well as the family members and relatives of the award recipients.

The event celebrated the contributions and sacrifices made by individuals in various sectors, highlighting their commitment to the nation and its

progress.

Meanwhile, on the occasion of Pakistan Day, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, extended heartfelt congratulations to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the entire nation.

He described March 23 as a "bright chapter" in Pakistan's history, a day that marks the adoption of the Lahore Resolution in 1940, which laid the foundation for the creation of the Islamic State of Pakistan.

In his message, Governor Kundi emphasized the significance of Pakistan Day, saying, "March 23 is a day that reminds us of our commitment to safeguarding our freedom. The Lahore Resolution of 1940 established Pakistan, a moment that continues to shape our national identity."

He also reflected on the importance of unity and national cohesion, asserting that Pakistan Day is a reminder to "value our freedom" and reaffirm the nation's dedication to

progress, peace, and prosperity. "We must channel our collective energies toward the development, peace, and prosperity of our country," he added.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by the nation, including the ongoing threat of terrorism, Kundi urged citizens to maintain hope, courage, and a spirit of sacrifice. "To overcome the challenges facing our nation, we must keep alive the spirit of hope, bravery, and sacrifice," he said.

Governor Kundi also paid tribute to the nation's great leaders and martyrs, stating, "On Pakistan Day, we honor the sacrifices of our great leaders and the countless martyrs who gave their lives for our beloved country."

He highlighted the persistent challenges posed by terrorism, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but reassured the nation that through collaboration with law enforcement agencies, Pakistan would overcome these adversities. "Together, with the state institutions, we will defeat the enemies of the nation," Kundi said.

Finally, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi called for unity in working toward a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan. "We must work together for lasting peace and the overall development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the entire country," he concluded. Later, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and Air Vice Marshal Taimur Iqbal discussed professional matters related to the Pakistan Air Force. Governor Kundi praised the Air Force's vital role and expertise in defending the country's air borders.

Asma Ali successfully defends PhD thesis

F.P. Report



PESHAWAR: Asma Ali, scholar from Qurtuba University of Science and Technology Peshawar, successfully defended her PhD thesis in a public defence held at the university.

Her thesis, "Phonological Variations in the Speech of Native Pashto Speakers: A PRAAT-Assisted Study of 44 English Phonemes," was widely praised by the panel of experts for its originality, methodology, and contribution to the field.

The defence was chaired by Dr. Mujeeb Rahman (COE), with Dr. Ghani Khan serving as external examiner and Prof. Mujeeb Rahman PhD. (Edinburgh) as internal examiner.

A proud moment for her family, Dr. Asma Ali is the daughter of Professor Fayaz Ali Shah, Ex-Principal of GPGC Mardan.

Her achievement is a milestone for her locality, as she becomes the first PhD degree holder from Gaddar Mardan. She credits her achievement to the love and encouragement of her family, particularly her parents and husband.

PEN protests transfer of exam centres from private schools

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Cabinet meeting of the Private Education Network (PEN) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held under the chairmanship of President Muhammad Saleem Khan, where strong reservations were expressed over the government's decision to abolish examination centers in private educational institutions and shift them to public schools.

Provincial General Secretary Arsalan Khan Sadozai and other cabinet members attended the meeting. The PEN leadership unanimously rejected this government decision, terming it unfair to private educational institutions and students.

President Muhammad Saleem Khan stated that abolishing examination centers in private institutions is an anti-education move that will create difficulties for thousands of students and their parents. He said this step would divide the education system and contradict the principles of a uniform education system.

He further added that it was shocking that this decision was made just ten days before the exams, which could lead to chaos. PEN leaders expressed concerns that the lack of adequate facilities for private school students in public schools would negatively impact the educational environment.

Provincial General Secretary Arsalan Sadozai emphasized that a transparent and fair mechanism should be adopted. Highlighting the issues faced by students in the southern districts, he stated that in terrorism-affected areas, forcing students to travel long distances for exams would further endanger their safety.

PEN Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's leadership demanded that the government immediately withdraw its decision to abolish private educational institutions' examination centers and consult all stakeholders to ensure a transparent examination process.

Otherwise, private educational institutions would be compelled to resort to protests, and the government would be held fully responsible for the consequences.

23 March: The path to freedom and sovereignty

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

MARCH 23, 1940, stands as a defining moment in the history of the Sub-Continent. It was a ray of light for the Muslims of British India, who yearned for a homeland where they could live according to their religious, cultural, and social values. This day illuminated the path to Pakistan, which became a reality seven years later. The historic gathering at Minto Park, Lahore, from March 22 to 24, 1940, was not just a routine political assembly but a turning point that shaped the destiny of millions. The resolution presented during this session later came to be known as the Pakistan Resolution, setting the course for the creation of an independent Muslim State.

Interestingly, the name Pakistan was not used in this resolution, and it was called the Lahore Resolution. However, Indian newspapers like Pratap, Bande Mataram, Milap, Tribune, etc. sarcastically accepted it as the Pakistan Resolution. However, Muslims appreciated its name, because today this resolution is more famous than the name Pakistan.

The political environment leading up to this monumental event was extremely tense. The British colonial government had imposed Section 144 in Lahore, restricting public gatherings. Just a few days earlier, on March 19, 1940, a tragic incident occurred when British forces opened fire on the workers of the Khaksar Tehreek, killing a large number of them. The Khaksars, led by Allama Inayatullah Mashriqi, had been advocating for the rights of Muslims and challenging British authority. The bloodshed deeply disturbed the political atmosphere, raising concerns about law and order before the Muslim League's session.

Despite these turbulent circumstances, the All-India Muslim League, under the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, went ahead with its planned session at Minto Park. On March 23, the resolution was formally presented by A.K. Fazlul Haq, the Chief Minister of Bengal, and was seconded by prominent leaders such as Chaudhry Khaliqzaman, Sardar Aurangzeb, and Sir Abdullah Haroon. The resolution clearly stated that the Muslims of India were not a minority but a distinct nation with their own culture, religion, customs, and civilization. It demanded that areas where Muslims formed a majority, particularly in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India, be granted independent sovereign states. It also emphasized that constitutional safeguards should be provided to religious minorities to ensure their rights and protection in the new state structure. Furthermore, the resolution rejected the idea of a unitary form of government imposed by a central authority, advocating instead for autonomy in Muslim-majority regions to allow them to govern according to their social, religious, and cultural values. It underscored the need for economic empowerment, political freedom, and equal opportunities for Muslims, recognizing that without these elements, their survival as a separate nation would be jeopardized.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in his historic address, articulated the two-nation theory with clarity and conviction. He emphasized that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations with different ideologies, traditions, and ways of life. He refuted the idea of a united India, stating that any attempt to impose a single system on both communities would lead to unrest. His speech resonated with the aspirations of millions of Muslims who saw the Pakistan Resolution as the first concrete step towards their dream of a separate homeland.

The significance of this resolution was not immediately realized by many, but it gradually gained momentum. Over the next seven years, the demand for Pakistan became a popular movement, bringing together Muslims from all walks of life under the leadership of the Muslim League. The commitment and determination of leaders like Liaquat Ali Khan, Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad, and others played a crucial role in translating this resolution into reality.

Looking back after almost 85 years, it is essential to examine how far Pakistan has been able to implement the ideals enshrined in the Pakistan Resolution. The resolution emphasized religious, cultural, and economic independence for Muslims. While Pakistan was established as an independent state in 1947, the journey of fulfilling the vision outlined in the resolution has been complex.

On the religious front, Pakistan was created to provide Muslims the freedom to practice their faith without hindrance. However, the country has faced challenges in maintaining interfaith harmony and ensuring the rights of religious minorities. The social and cultural aspects have evolved, but preserving the original vision of unity and inclusivity remains an ongoing struggle. Economically, Pakistan has made progress in various sectors, yet the disparity between different classes and regions indicates that much work remains to be done. Political instability has often hindered development, and the principles of democracy envisioned by Quaid-e-Azam have faced obstacles.

Despite these challenges, the spirit of March 23, 1940, continues to inspire generations. Pakistan has shown resilience in the face of adversity, and its people remain committed to the ideals of justice, equality, and sovereignty. The day serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by countless individuals who envisioned a free and prosperous nation. It is a call to reflect on the past, acknowledge the present, and work towards a future where the true essence of the Pakistan Resolution is realized in its fullest sense.

As the nation commemorates this historic day, it is essential to draw lessons from history and strive for a Pakistan that truly embodies the principles laid out on March 23, 1940. The journey is not yet complete, but with determination, unity, and adherence to the founding ideals, Pakistan can continue to progress towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

PSL Luminara Trophy Tour unveiled in DHA



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The first-ever Luminara Trophy tour in the history of the HBL PSL reached Peshawar on 22 March 2025, for its unveiling at DHA Peshawar.

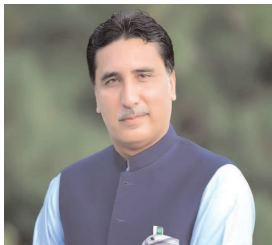
The Secretary of DHA Peshawar, Brig Hanifullah Khan, (Retd), graced the occasion as the chief guest, with PSL officials also in attendance. Residents of DHA Peshawar, along with people from other parts of the city, enthusiastically joined the festivities.

Students from Future World School and College of DHA Peshawar also participated in the event, showcasing their enthusiasm and support for the celebration.

This event marked a significant occasion in Pakistan's cricketing calendar, reflecting DHA Peshawar's commitment to encouraging positive activities and community engagement.

Corruption on the rise in KP, Claims Khizer

F.P. Report



PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Additional Information Secretary Arbab Khizer Hayat on Sunday, challenged the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur and the entire provincial government to a debate the provincial government's corruption on any platform. Arbab Khizer Hayat said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, his ministers, advisors and spokespersons are misleading the public by lying on TV and social media every day.

"The fact is that the market of corruption is hot in the province and prices of all officials ranging from a sec-

the PML-N Additional Information Secretary challenged.

He also held the Chief Minister and his government responsible for the increase in incidents of terrorism in the province while adding that the ruling class so busy with corruption and their own luxuries that they didn't care about the province or its people, who were yet to see any agenda from the PTI government in its 12th year in rule. Khizer also claimed that the Chief Minister's true face was exposed to the nation when he opposed the expulsion of illegal Afghans from Pakistan, and he opposed a military operation against terrorists. "Gandapur does not want the illegal refugees to leave Pakistan because his party use the refugees to fill empty chairs in their rallies," he added.

Peshawar's Beautification Plan: CS chairs high-level meeting

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chaired a high-level meeting to discuss the beautification and development of Peshawar, focusing on enhancing its cultural and historical significance as the face of the province.

The meeting was attended by key stakeholders, including the Director General of the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA), representatives from the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) unit of the Planning and Development (P&D) department, and the Sustainable

Energy and Economic Development (SEED) programmed team.

A detailed feasibility study, to be completed within three months, will assess various aspects of the city's beautification.

This includes landscaping, land-scaping, urban design, and green spaces to enhance Peshawar's physical appearance. The plan also includes developing open spaces, parks, and recreational areas for residents while highlighting the city's historic and cultural attractions to boost tourism.

The study will further examine the beautification of entry and exit points, roads, chowks, and round-

abouts, along with the development of a waterproof canal, outdoor advertising regulations, traffic and transportation improvements, and infrastructure upgrades. Measures to remove encroachments and enhance underpasses and bridges were also discussed.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary was briefed on strategies to utilize the commercial potential of the Peshawar Development Authority.

The initiative aims to transform Peshawar into a vibrant and attractive city, preserving its rich cultural heritage while ensuring sustainable urban development.



PESHAWAR: Worker busy in making Peshawari Chappal as Eidul Fitr draws near. —INP photo

Bilal Javid slams private schools for exploiting parents

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Ghulam Bilal Javid, President of the Peshawar Traders Chamber, has strongly condemned the exploitative practices of private schools, accusing them of financially burdening parents through unjust fines and monopolized book sales. He has called for immediate government intervention to curb these oppressive policies.

Javid specifically criticized Beaconhouse School and other private institutions, alleging that they have transformed education into a profit-driven enterprise. "Imposing heavy fines for

a delay of just two or three days is nothing short of financial extortion! If a fee remains unpaid for three months, a penalty may be justified, but fining parents for minor delays is completely unacceptable," he asserted.

He further accused private schools of colluding with select bookstores to force parents into purchasing books and stationery at exorbitant prices. "This unethical practice has driven up the cost of educational materials to thousands of rupees per child, placing an unbearable financial strain on families already struggling with economic hardships. Every student

should have the right to buy books from any store, as was the case in the past," he demanded.

Highlighting the broader economic and security challenges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Javid criticized the current political administration, which he referred to as the "so-called TikTok government imposed through Form 47." He stated that instead of providing relief to the public, private schools are exacerbating financial woes by exploiting parents under the pretense of education.

Warning of potential protests, Javid declared, "If private schools do not put an end to their mafia-

style extortion, we will not stay silent. We will take to the streets and fight back against this oppression!"

He urged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Minister for Higher Education Meena Khan Afridi to take immediate action. He called for strict regulations to abolish unjust fines on school fees and to dismantle the monopoly on book sales.

"If the government fails to take this matter seriously, we will raise our voices on every platform and take all necessary actions to ensure justice for parents and students," he concluded.



In brief

DBAB elections on 8th April F.P. Report

BUNER: The District Bar Association Buner elections for the term 2025-2026 will be held on 8th April this year, announced by Chairman Elections Board. As per the notification displayed on the notice board Muhammad Ilyas advocate, Gul Bacha advocate and Muhammad Hamza advocate as chairman and members elections board respectively will conduct the elections as scheduled. The Elections Board had fixed 25th March for submission of applications with required documents, 26th March for scrutiny, 27th for withdrawal and 28th for final list of the candidates to be displayed on notice board while on 8th of April elections will be conducted at District Bar Room Buner. The Elections Board has notified mandatory fee for the candidates i.e. rupees 25000 for the slot of president, rupees 20000 for the slot of vice president, rupees 15000 for the slot of general secretary, rupees 10000 for the slot of Joint secretary, rupees 10000 for the slot of finance secretary, rupees 5000 for the slot of librarian secretary respectively.

Three persons commit suicide

DI KHAN (INP): Three persons, including a prison inmate, committed suicide in separate incidents in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank, police reported on Sunday. DPO Tank Aslam Nawaz Khan confirmed that a prisoner held in a drug-related case at Tank Jail committed suicide. The deceased was identified as Mahmood Afridi. According to the jail authorities, on Sunday morning, the inmate attempted to hang himself in the jail bathroom using the waistband of his trousers. Prison officials immediately shifted him to the District Headquarters Hospital Tank, but he could not be revived and succumbed to his injuries. SDPO City Circle in DI Khan Muhammad Adnan reported another incident near Tank Adda Chowk, opposite the former Dera Town Police Station, within the jurisdiction of Cantt Police Station. He said an 18-year-old watchman at Karachi Mobiles, named Faheem son of Abdul Qadir, belonging to the Mehsud tribe and a resident of Kotla Saidan, allegedly shot himself last night, ending his life. He added that the young man was a drug addict and had told his brother before that night that "he would not be alive in the morning." Later, his body was shifted to the Trauma Center at the District Headquarters Hospital.

Shah hail Quaid-e-Azam

SUKKUR (APP): Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah, a senior leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Sunday paying tribute to the country's benefactors who, under the leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, bestowed upon us the blessing of freedom. In his statement issued here, Shah emphasized that Pakistan is our pride and honor, and we will not hesitate to make any sacrifices for its sake. He reiterated the PPP's commitment to Quaid-e-Azam's vision of democracy, peace, progress, and brotherhood, and vowed to continue striving for its realization. Shah also highlighted the PPP's unwavering struggle for the human, democratic, and constitutional rights of the people since its inception. His message served as a testament to the party's dedication to upholding the principles of democracy and the well-being of the Pakistani people.



QUETTA: Members of Kisan Etihad holding rally to celebrated Pakistan Day outside Balochistan Assembly. — INP photo

MPA Daud Shah assures solution to problems

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Member Provincial Assembly Daud Shah has along-with the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram held a special meeting in the office of Deputy Commissioner Kohat regarding the problems faced by the people of Khairatmo and it's other adjacent areas of Kohat Tehsil. The beside others, was also attended by the officers of the MOL

Company and the elders of the area.

The elderd briefed the meeting in detail about the problems being faced by the people of the area.

Daud Afridi MPA and Deputy Commissioner Kohat while addressing the meeting said that provision of basic amenities of life to the people is the top most priority of the government in which any kind of lapse cannot be tolerated. They directed the

authorities concerned to solve the problems of the people as soon as possible.

They on this occasion set a timeline for the completion of water and gas supply and road repair in the area. They assured the remaining issues at the earliest.

The Head of MOL Company assured to resolve all the gas related issues immediately and provide all possible facilities to the people.

Pakistan Day celebrated

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Rallies and functions were held in Lakki Marwat and Bannu districts on Sunday to mark Pakistan Day celebrations with national enthusiasm and fervor.

In Lakki Marwat, Brigadier Imran along with additional DC Habibullah Wazir performed the flag hoisting ceremony at the deputy commissioner's compound. Police, army and district administration officials, area elders, and students were present on the occasion.

Army and police contingents presented a salute to the national flag.

Mr Wazir, an educationist Waseem Sajjad and Haji Abdul Rahim shed light on the importance of the day while the army officials distributed gifts and cash prizes among students.

Later the participants attended a Pakistan day rally.

The education department and boy scouts association also jointly arranged a function at Government Shaheed Muhammad Ghassan Khan Centennial Model High School No. 1, Lakki city.

Col Ahmad along with DEO Shaukat Ali Khan performed the flag hoisting while a contingent of boy scouts presented a salute to the national flag.

Students sang patriotic songs, presented tableaux and delivered speeches on the importance of day.

Trophies and cash prizes were distributed among students. Divisional commissioner Muhammad Ali Shah led a rally in Bannu to mark the day with national zeal and zest.

DC Abdul Hameed Khan, DDAC chairman and MPA Zahidullah Khan Wazir, deputy commander Col Atif Mushtaq, AC Allah Nawaz and heads of line departments were in attendance.

Principals responsible for recovery of cheating materials

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Principal of the concerned educational institution will be responsible for recovery of cheating materials from the students during the examinations. Similarly, the examination staff other than the superintendent will not be allowed to keep mobile phones in the examination hall. Moreover, students will also not be allowed to have any digital devices including mobile phones in the exam.

Decisions to this effect has been made in a high-level meeting held with the Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah in the chair at Commissioner House Kohat, which beside others, was also attended by the DIG Kohat, Deputy Commissioners, DPOs,

DHOs and DEOs of Kohat, Karak, Hangu, Orakzai and Kurram districts through video link.

The meeting, besides reviewing the preparations for the upcoming SSC exam and its security, the arrangements for the Polio in the low performance UCs of all the districts of the division including Kurram district were also discussed and certain important decisions were taken in this respect.

The meeting, also decided to initiate a crackdown against all types of cheating materials including pocket guides in all the districts and strict action against those responsible for it.

During the exams, all officers of the divisional as well as district administrations, including Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners, will monitor and raided the examination halls.

During the exams, there will be a complete ban on the entry of unrelated persons in the educational institutions.

The meeting also approved an immediate crackdown against fire-crackers before Eid-ul-Fitr.

Commissioner Kohat said that the principal of every educational institution will be required to form an examination committee before starting the exam and the principal himself/herself will be present one hour before the start of examination paper.

The Exam Committee will ensure the body search of each student before entering into the hall and in case of recovery of cheating materials, action will be taken against the Head of the concerned institution.

Acting Governor conferr Presidential Awards

QUETTA (APP): Acting Governor of Balochistan, Captain R. Abdul Khaliq Achakzai on Sunday conferred civil awards on 10 individuals on behalf of the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The Acting Governor of Balochistan presented the prestigious Presidential Awards, Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pride of Performance and Tamgha-i-Imtiaz to individuals who have made significant contributions across various fields of life.

The acting governor dis-

tributed awards and medals to 10 personalities including Dr. Rubaba Buledi, Abdul Rashid Kakar, Shafi Mohammad Bizenjo, Dr. Zubair Khan, Dr. Mohammad Aslam Mengal, Dr. Mohammad Hanif Khilji, Zaheer Alam, Dr. Junaid Ahmed Gechki, and Ghulam Ali.

These individuals were recognized for their outstanding services in their respective fields, which have greatly benefited the community and the nation.

The Pakistan Day ceremony was attended by

provincial ministers, members of the assembly, senior government officials, and distinguished representatives from various sectors. Their presence added to the significance of the event, celebrating the contributions of these individuals to the progress and development of Balochistan and Pakistan.

The Presidential Awards serve as recognition of excellence and dedication, honoring those who have shown exemplary service in their professions and to the country.

Bugti extends Pakistan Day greetings to nation

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has extended Pakistan Day greetings to the nation, stating that March 23rd reminds us of resolve, unity, and sacrifices for the protection of the country.

In his message on Pakistan Day, Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti, conveyed his heartfelt congratulations to the nation, emphasizing that March 23rd symbolizes determination, unity, and the sacrifices that led to the creation of Pakistan.

He highlighted that this day serves as a reminder of the nation's journey towards independence and the shared commitment to its future.

The Chief Minister emphasized that the state is taking all possible measures to address the chal-

lenges currently faced by the country.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti also assured that the nation will thwart the malicious intentions of enemies. "We will crush the nefarious designs of hostile elements and safeguard the integrity of our beloved homeland," he added.

Reflecting on the core values of the nation, Bugti noted that Pakistan Day teaches the people of the country the significance of unity, sacrifice, and patriotism. "On this important day, we must renew our pledge to offer every sacrifice necessary for the security and progress of our country," he said.

The Chief Minister firmly declared that there is no place for terrorists and their facilitators in Balochistan. He praised the people of Balochistan for their unwavering support

in the fight against terrorism. "The people of Balochistan have always stood by the state in its war against terrorism, and their sacrifices are invaluable," he stated.

Bugti reassured that the sacrifices made by the security forces and citizens will not go in vain. "The bravery and dedication of our security forces, along with the support of the public, will ensure that peace prevails," he affirmed.

The Chief Minister reminded every citizen of Pakistan that each individual has a crucial role to play in the survival and prosperity of the nation. "For the survival and development of Pakistan, every citizen must contribute towards the collective goal of peace, security, and progress," he concluded.

Seraiki folklore – Telling tales of centuries

MULTAN (APP): Folklore is collective heritage of a community, composed of beliefs, stories, customs, music and oral traditions down through generations as it serves as cultural repository, wisdom, moral values and artistic expressions of a society.

It is not confined to myths and legends but includes proverbs, rituals, songs and even folk remedies that shape the identity of people and Seraiki folklore is less to none in popularity in South Punjab and beyond.

Folklore plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity and social values and strengthens communal bonds, educates younger generations and serves as a historical record of past events and traditions.

"In societies with strong oral traditions, folklore acts as an unwritten history, carrying forward the knowledge and experiences of ancestors," remarked Dr Khalid Iqbal, ex-Station Director Radio Pakistan.

"Folklore also serves as an inspiration for modern literature, music and even governance by reflecting the ethos of a region, said Dr Khalid Iqbal, also a writer of famous book "Seraiki Language and

Literature."

Various forms of folklore found in Seraiki literature include Wai, Kafi, Dohay, folktales, proverbs, idioms, lok geet and folk remedies.

"Wai is a form of devotional and mystical poetry often associated with Sufi saints. It carries themes of divine love, human suffering and spiritual enlightenment," Dr Khalid said. "Kafi is also a well-known poetic form in Seraiki and Sindhi literature that expresses deep philosophical thoughts and reflections." "Works of Khawaja Ghulam Farid are prime examples of Seraiki Kafi."

Commenting on Dohay, he stated these are couplets rich in wisdom and everyday philosophy, offering moral lessons and reflections on life. Besides this, Folk tales in Seraiki literature revolve around legendary figures, heroic deeds and morality. "Stories like Sassi-Punnu, Heer-Ranjha, etc are widely narrated in South Punjab. These tales reflect themes of love, sacrifice and destiny."

Similarly, he said, proverbs are an integral part of Seraiki folklore, encapsulating wisdom in short and impactful phrases. For example "Jihday hath aayan, unhay hathi bhal aay" (One who pos-



sesses something also bears its responsibility).

"These expressions often contain centuries-old experiences and moral lessons," Dr Khalid said, as he also mentioned to traditional Seraiki songs, including Mahiya, Jhummar and Sufi-Kalam that are widely sung at cultural gatherings, weddings and sufi shrines.

Jhummar is a rhythmic folk dance often performed during celebrations while festivals like "Mela Urs Khawaja Fareed, Mela Channan Peer", Urs Sakhi Sarwar and some others are also deeply rooted in folklores. According to Dr Khalid

Iqbal, the Seraiki folklore stands as a vibrant testament to region's rich literary and cultural heritage. Women have played a significant yet often unrecognized role in shaping this poetic legacy. Due to societal constraints, many of them remained anonymous but their contributions continue to resonate through lullabies, folk songs and poetic expressions.

One such mesmerizing lullaby, "Lori" by Dai Phaphal Hafzani, has been cherished as a soothing melody for infants. Similarly, the heart-wrenching folk song "Sammi," often attributed

to a grieving mother, encapsulates the pain of separation (Judai). These compositions are more than mere songs as they embody emotions, struggles and resilience of Seraiki people.

Poetic tributes to trees of shesham and neem mention to respite from scorching heat and depict women weaving thread on charkha, symbolizing both the labor and artistry embedded in their daily lives. Children's songs, in pursuit of birds and rhythmic "Jhoola Lori" cradle songs for infants, highlight delicate blend of innocence and cultural values.

Another noteworthy contribution is Dholra songs, dedicated to beloved figures, often evoking emotions of longing and admiration.

Among them, the most renowned are "Qissa Gamon Suchhar, Qissa Sammi Rawal, Sakhi Badshah and Mai Budhri Tay Phulay Da Qissa" etc. These stories transcend generational divides, offering entertainment for children and philosophical insights for youth.

Literary scholars and poets have meticulously preserved these artistic expressions, with notable figures like Dr. Mehar Abdul Haq, Ibn-e-Qaisar, Aslam Rasoolpuri, Sirajuddin Sanwal, Bushra Rehman and others contributing to this literary tapestry.

Preservation of Seraiki folklore has also been a subject of scholarly attention beyond the region. Sir Richard Temple compiled 59 folk stories in his book "The Legends of the Punjab" while Mian Rasheed documented cultural narratives in Hakayat-e-Punjab.

Dr. Ahmed Nizami Bahawalpuri, in his seminal work "Lughat-e-Seraiki, curated hundreds of popular proverbs, quotes and riddles

(Paheeli), offering a linguistic and cultural encyclopedia of the region.

In 1992, Professor Shoukat Mughal further enriched the field with his book Seraiki Akhhan, cataloging over 5,000 proverbs, reflecting wit, wisdom and worldview of the Seraiki people. Another significant contribution came from Bano Baloch, who published "Bujh Meri Bhujart" a collection of 131 riddles along with answers. Meanwhile, Shoukat Mughal's Alf Bay Batwa captured 74 folk stories in both prose and poetic forms, ensuring their survival for future generations.

Known Media Practitioner Javed Iqbal Amber says that Seraiki Jhumar was getting popular at different functions of educational institute, marriage ceremonies and cultural festival. "Millions of video clips went viral on digital media as a rich form of folklore."

"Documentation and scholarly engagement with Seraiki folklore underscore its significance in understanding cultural identity of the region and it's preservation and academic recognition will continue to inspire our future generations," Javed said.



Six police personnel killed in Kenya by suspected al Shabaab fighters

NAIROBI (Reuters): At least six police personnel were killed in Kenya while four were injured in an attack on a police camp by suspected Islamist militants in Garissa county in the country's east on the border with Somalia, police said.

The assault which occurred early Sunday was

carried out by suspected fighters from Somalia's al Qaeda-allied al Shabaab group, said a police report sent out to the media. Al Shabaab frequently carries out cross-border attacks in the area against both military and civilian targets.

Attackers from the group launched an assault

around dawn on a camp housing police reservists and "used assorted weapons to overrun the camp," the report said. "Six (6) fatalities have been confirmed with four (4) injured and in hospital."

On Tuesday the U.S. embassy issued an advisory, telling Americans not to travel to some places in

Kenya including Garissa and other counties along the border with Somalia due to threats of terrorism. Al Shabaab has been fighting for years to overthrow Somalia's central government and establish its own rule in the Horn of Africa country based on its own strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law.

South African ambassador expelled by Trump receives hero's welcome



CAPE TOWN (Aljazeera): The South African ambassador who was expelled from the United States in a row with US President Donald Trump's administration has arrived home to a raucous welcome and struck a defiant tone over the decision.

Crowds at Cape Town International Airport surrounded Ebrahim Rasool and his wife Rosieda on Sunday as they emerged in the arrivals terminal in their hometown. They needed a police escort to help them navigate their way through the building. "A declaration of per-

sona non grata is meant to humiliate you," Rasool told supporters as he addressed them with a megaphone. "But when you return to crowds like this, and with warmth ... like this, then I will wear my persona non grata as a badge of dignity."

"It was not our choice to come home, but we come home with no regrets."

Rasool also said it was important for South Africa to fix its relationship with the US after Trump punished the country and accused it of taking an anti-American stance even before the

decision to expel Rasool. Trump issued an executive order last month cutting all funding to South Africa, alleging its government is supporting the Palestinian group Hamas and Iran, and pursuing anti-white policies at home.

South Africa filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2023, which accuses Israel of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention in its war on the Gaza Strip. More than 10 countries have since joined South Africa in the genocide case.

"We don't come here to say we are anti-American," Rasool said to the crowd. "We are not here to call on you to throw away our interests with the United States."

They were the ex-ambassador's first public comments since the Trump administration declared him persona non grata over a week ago, removed his diplomatic immunities and privileges, and gave him until Friday to leave the country. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who issued the declaration on X, said Rasool was a "race-baiting politician" who hates the US and Trump.

It is highly unusual for the US to expel a foreign ambassador.

Rubio's post linked to a story by the conservative Breitbart news site that reported on a talk Rasool gave on a webinar organised by a South African think tank.

In his talk, Rasool spoke in academic language of the Trump administration's crack-downs on diversity and equity programmes and immigration and mentioned the possibility of a US where white people soon would no longer be in the majority.



ISTANBUL, TURKEY: Demonstrators chant slogans as they hold posters in support of arrested Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu Sunday.

Pope Francis is discharged from Rome hospital



ROME (BBC): Pope Francis has appeared at his window of the Gemelli hospital in Rome and offered a blessing for the first time since being admitted on 14 February.

The 88-year-old pontiff was discharged minutes later and doctors say he will need at least two months of rest at the Vatican.

During the past five weeks, he presented "two very critical episodes" where his "life was in danger", Dr Sergio Alfieri, one of the doctors treating the Pope, said.

Pope Francis was never intubated and always remained alert and oriented, Dr Alfieri said. Even though the Pope is not completely healed, he no longer has pneumonia and will return to work as soon as possible, if the trend continues, doctors say.

A crowd of people gathered outside the hospital on Sunday, waiting for the Pope to appear.

"When I saw him I felt, to be honest, a little relieved," said Bishop Larry Kulick, from the Diocese of Greensburg in the US state of Pennsylvania. "I felt just overjoyed to see him."

"I cried all the time because the love we breathe in this little square of this hospital was like heaven," said Ilaria Della Bidia, a singer from Rome.

Ana Matos from Brazil said she "just arrived from Brazil today" and arrived outside the hospital "30 seconds before he appeared". She said that "it was an amazing feeling, like when I had my son. I was so happy to see him healthy and I could see him smile".

The Pope had only previously been seen by the public once since he was admitted to hospital, in a photograph released by the Vatican last week, which showed him praying in a hospital chapel.

Earlier this month, an audio recording of Pope Francis was played in St Peter's Square in Vatican City.

His voice was breathless as he thanked the Catholic faithful for their prayers. Pope Francis has spent 12 years as leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

He has suffered a number of health issues throughout his life, including having part of one of his lungs removed at age 21, making him more prone to infections.

Paramilitary shelling kills 3 in Omdurman after Sudan army gains

KHARTOUM (AFP): Three civilians including two children were killed Sunday in an artillery attack by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on Omdurman, part of the Sudanese capital, a medical source told AFP.

Eyewitnesses in the area reported seven rounds of shelling rocking residential neighborhoods controlled by the army, which in recent days regained most of central Khartoum's government district from the RSF.

"Two children and a

woman were killed and eight others injured in the shelling," said the medical source at Al-Nao hospital, one of the city's last functioning health facilities, requesting anonymity for their safety.

Since April 2023, the RSF has battled Sudan's regular army in a war that has killed tens of thousands, uprooted over 12 million and created the world's largest hunger and displacement crises.

The army and allied groups on Friday recaptured the country's presi-

dential palace, launching a clearing operation to push the RSF out of central Khartoum's administrative and financial district.

On Saturday, they claimed several strategic state institutions that had been overrun by paramilitaries, including the central bank, state intelligence headquarters and the national museum.

RSF fighters remain stationed in parts of central Khartoum including the airport, as well as the capital's south and west.

From their positions in western Omdurman, they have regularly launched strikes on civilian areas.

In February, over 50 people were killed in a single RSF artillery attack on a busy Omdurman market.

Despite the army's advances in the capital, Africa's third largest country remains effectively split in two, with the army holding the east and north while the RSF controls nearly all of the western region of Darfur and parts of the south.

The paradise islands that don't want to be Hawaii

THE Cook Islands is proving that sustainable tourism isn't just possible – it's essential. Here's how this South Pacific nation is preserving their paradise for generations for come.

Landing on Rarotonga, the largest of the Cook Islands chain felt like stepping back in time. Gazing out of the taxi from Rarotonga airport to our resort, we were immediately struck by the absence of high-rise hotels, fast-food restaurants and corporate chains. There were no traffic lights, only coconut palms lining the road, the scent of salt and frangipani drifting through the air and the jungle meeting the ocean in a seamless panorama. It felt like Hawaii in the 1960s: uncrowded, laid-back and refreshingly authentic.

Our taxi driver pointed to a low-slung resort along the shoreline. "No building can be higher than a coconut tree," she said. This isn't just a local tradition but a law set in 1965 by the Cook Islands' first premier, Albert Henry, to prevent overdevelopment. She explained that only Cook Islanders can own land, ensuring that large corporations don't dominate the landscape. We looked out onto hotels blending naturally into their surroundings and white-sand beaches ringed with long green parks, all free from litter and crowds.

We soon learned that this preservation of paradise is deeply intentional. Cook Islanders have made a conscious effort to ensure that Rarotonga never follows the path of overdevelopment seen in places like Honolulu. Instead, locals have committed to conservation, low-impact tourism and sustainable practices that benefit both locals and visitors. "People come here because it is a paradise uncluttered by overdevelopment," explained Jeremy Goodwin, regenerative tourism manager for the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC). "Our sacred duty as custodians of the land is to look after our paradise."

The Cook Islands, an archipelago of 15 islands between New Zealand and Hawaii, has been self-governing in free association with New Zealand since 1965. With a total population of 21,000, the islands are divided into two groups: the Southern Cook Islands, which includes the more accessible Rarotonga and Aitutaki, and the remote Northern Cook Islands, made up of low-lying coral atolls. Cook Islanders have their own Maori language, with different dialects across the islands. And while tourism is a key industry, the islanders have ensured that sustainability remains at the nation's core.

"For hundreds of years, the protection of the Cook



Islands relied on the traditional Ra'ui System where access to a particular resource or area is forbidden for a given period," explained Karla Eggleton, CEO of CITC. "The system aims to conserve food resources and protect ecological conditions in lagoons, reefs and other marine resources."

This philosophy persists today – and extends beyond the sea. On the northern island of Pukapuka, for example, locals have practiced sustainable living for centuries, packing up their belongings and sailing by boat to another atoll within the lagoon for seasonal periods to prevent resource

depletion. They fish and farm only what they need, maintaining a delicate balance with nature.

On arrival at The Rarotongan Beach Resort and Lagoonarium, staff welcomed us with a warm "Kia Orana", a greeting that translates to "may you live long". It's a unique gesture of friendship from islanders renowned for their hospitality and warmth. The resort overlooks the Aroa Lagoonarium, a snorkelling haven and a sanctuary for butterflyfish, parrotfish and angelfish. Part natural lagoon and part enclosed habitat, it is designed to support marine conservation, serving both

as a coral nursery and a protected area for marine life to flourish.

As the days passed, we saw how sustainability is woven into everyday life across the islands. At the Muri Night Market, a popular outdoor dinner option, we watched vendors prepare island dishes like ika mata (raw fish marinated in lime and coconut milk) and rukau rukau (taro leaves in coconut cream), all using local ingredients.

We were struck by the market's Rent-a-Plate project, where visitors can borrow reusable plates and cutlery instead of using disposable plastic. Cook Islanders also promote clean water initiatives. We

purchased reusable bottles from the visitor's centre and refilled them at free UV-treated water stations around the island, a project led by the Te Ipukarea Society to minimise plastic waste.

Beyond sustainable dining, Cook Islanders have taken marine conservation to a global scale. In 2017, the country established the Marae Moana Marine Park, making the 15 islands the world's largest multi-use marine protected area, covering 1.9 million square kilometres. The legislation also bans large-scale commercial fishing and seabed mining within 50 nautical miles of each island.

"Marae Moana is the idea of shared space, a new concept of creating a sanctuary and the conservation effort that allows for shared, sustainable activity," said Eggleton.

Also offering opportunities for sustainable tourism is Aitutaki, a bucolic island neighbouring Rarotonga that's known for its snow-white sand beaches, volcanic rock, coconut palms and crystal-clear lagoons. Here the Pacific Resort Aitutaki has launched a coral restoration project where guests can take part by affixing coral fragments to underwater mesh tables, helping regenerate the reef.

"The project is an example of Mana Tiaki or island conservation," explains Goodwin. "Mana Tiaki means guardianship with a sacred purpose." He explained that culturally, for most Polynesians, the ocean is sacrosanct. "The beaches bring tourists to this holiday destination, but they also connect Cook Islanders to the ocean."

As the days passed, we explored the endless powdery white-sand beaches that ring Rarotonga, from Aroa Beach where fiery, colourful sunsets painted the sky with hues of vivid orange and crimson to serene and scenic Titikaveka Beach. They were all pristine and uncrowded, lined by palm trees, parkways and picnic tables. Most were unobstructed, with no commer-

cial buildings to obstruct the view.

At Muri Beach, we opted for a sea turtle snorkelling tour. Our guide, Eric, explained the importance of turtles to the Cook Islands economically, environmentally and culturally. Daily tour operators earn an income by taking paying passengers to see these graceful, curious creatures. Plus, sea turtles are a key indicator of coastal ecosystem health, so monitoring and preservation are vital. Eric told us about a rescuer who found a turtle caught in a fishing net. Once freed, the Te Aro O Te Onu (Cook Island Sea Turtle Society) rehabilitated the turtle, as they have done dozens of times in the past. In addition to the society's efforts, visitors are encouraged to help track turtle movement through the Citizen Science Project by taking photos and sending them into the programme.

By the time our trip had come to an end, we better understood how Cook Islanders have created a blueprint for preserving paradise by blending ancient conservation methods with modern environmental initiatives. "It's about leaving both the people and the place better off than you found it," said Eggleton. Goodwin echoed the sentiment: This is our little paradise; if we all look after it, she will look after us."

— BBC

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Balloon launches cut worries US weather forecasters

WITH massive job cuts, the National Weather Service is eliminating or reducing vital weather balloon launches in eight northern locations, which meteorologists and former agency leaders said will degrade the accuracy of forecasts just as severe weather season kicks in.

The normally twice-daily launches of weather balloons in about 100 locations provide information that forecasters and computer models use to figure out what the weather will be and how dangerous it can get, so cutting back is a mistake, said eight different scientists, meteorologists and former top officials at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – the weather service's parent agency. The balloons soar 100,000 feet in the air with sensors called radiosondes hanging about 20 feet below them that measure temperature, dew point, humidity, barometric pressure, wind speed and direction, the Associated Press reports.

"The thing about weather balloons is that they give you information you can't get any other way," said D. James Baker, a former NOAA chief during the Clinton administration. He had to cut spending in the agency during his tenure but he said he refused to cut observations such as weather balloons. "It's an absolutely essential piece of the forecasting system."

University of Oklahoma environment professor Renee McPherson said, "This frankly is just dangerous."

"Bad," Ryan Maue, who was NOAA's chief scientist at the end of President Donald Trump's first term, wrote in an email. "We should not degrade our weather system by skipping balloon launches. Not only is this embarrassing for NOAA, the cessation of weather balloon launches will worsen America's weather forecasts."

Launches will be eliminated in Omaha, Nebraska, and Rapid City, South Dakota, "due to a lack of Weather Forecast Office (WFO) staffing," the weather service said in a notice issued late on Thursday. It also is cutting from twice daily to once daily launches in Aberdeen, South Dakota; Grand Junction, Colorado; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Gaylord, Michigan; North Platte, Nebraska and Riverton, Wyoming.

The Trump administration and its Department of Government Efficiency fired hundreds, likely more than 1,000, NOAA workers earlier this year. The government then sent out letters telling probationary employees let go that they will get paid, but should not report to work.

Earlier this month, the agency had announced weather balloon cuts in Albany, New York and Gray, Maine, and in late February, it ended launches in Kotzebue, Alaska. That makes 11 announced sites with reduced or eliminated balloon observations, or about one out of nine launch locations which include part of the Pacific and Caribbean. Meteorologists Jeff Masters and Tomer Burg calculate that 14 of 83 US balloon sites, or 17%, are doing partial or no launches. That includes two stations that aren't launching because of a helium shortage and a third that is hindered because of coastal erosion. "The more data we can feed into our weather models, the more accurate our forecasts, but I can't speculate on the extent of future impacts," weather service spokesperson Susan Buchanan said in an email.

University at Albany meteorology professor Kristen Corbosiero looked at the map of launches on Friday and said "wow, that is an empty area ... That's not great."

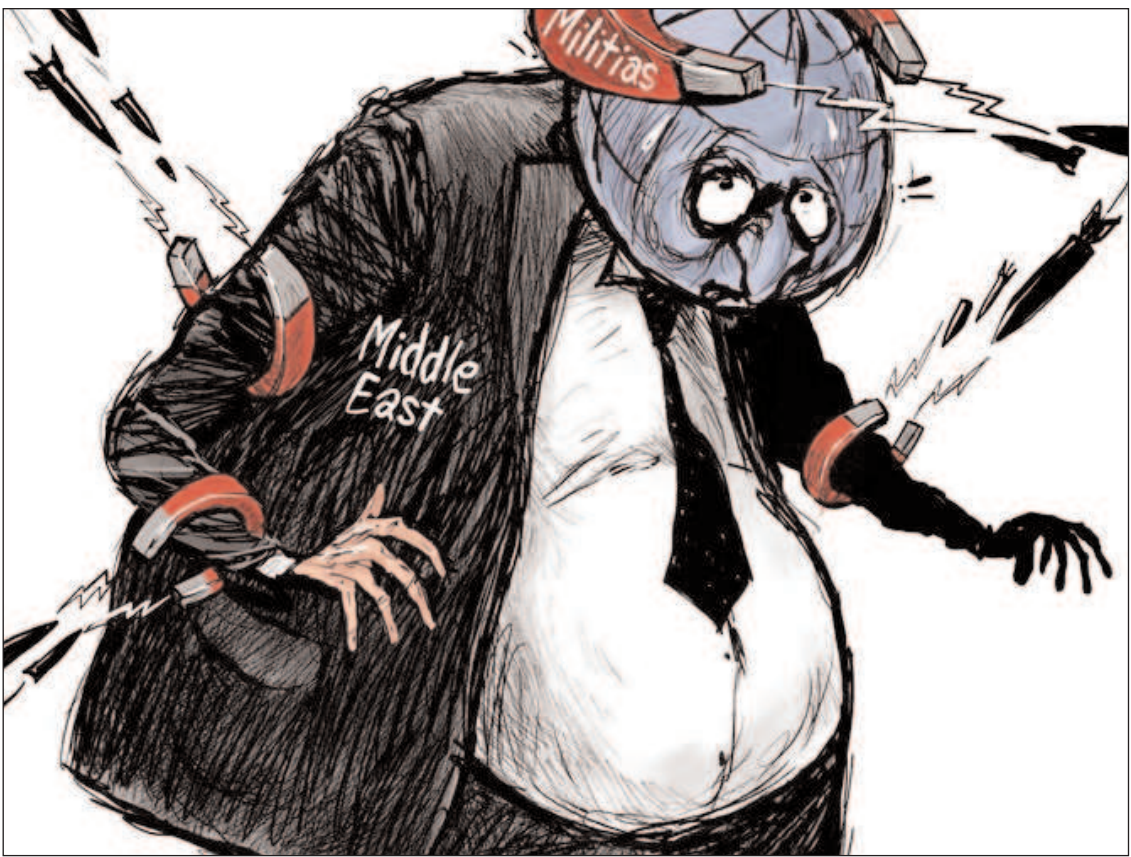
Corbosiero works in the building where the Albany weather service used to go to the roof to launch twice-daily weather balloons. It's now down to one at night, which she said it is worrisome heading into severe weather season.

Former National Weather Service Director Elbert "Joe" Friday said the weather balloons get "the detailed lower atmospheric level of temperature and humidity that can determine whether the atmosphere is going to be hot enough to set off severe storms and how intense they might be." All of the 10 announced reductions are in the northern part of the United States.

Weather balloons are also vital for helping forecast when and where it will rain, said Baker and another former NOAA chief, Rick Spinrad.

Important Notice

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Gaza is being starved and bombed again. Why are we allowing it?

Emina Hod ic

"My family's situation is very difficult, sister. I couldn't afford food. Everything here is expensive." These words were sent to me on March 15 by Ramez, a 17-year-old boy living in Gaza. "I don't have anything to eat tomorrow. I don't know what to do. Hunger has come back again."

Three days later, just before suhoor, the last meal before the daily fast begins during the holy month of Ramadan, Israel unleashed a huge campaign of bombardment, killing more than 430 Palestinians, including more than 180 children.

"Only God knows what we are going through," Ramez messaged me the next day. "We left without taking anything with us, and now we are on the street. The situation is extremely bad. Everything happened suddenly, and we didn't expect it. A massacre occurred right in front of us, and they asked us to evacuate under the shelling."

Last year, Ramez had reached out to me on Instagram, a platform that has become a lifeline for countless people in Gaza calling out to the world for help. I do not know Ramez's family personally nor do I have any historical connection to Gaza. Yet, out of the millions of accounts on Instagram, his message found its way to mine.

In the following months, his messages became a window into the daily suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The ceasefire offered a temporary respite from the bombing and allowed Ramez to return to his home. Then, on the second day of Ramadan, Israel cut off all aid, triggering starvation again. On the 18th day of the holy month, it renewed its mass slaughter.

As I break my fast, here in Berlin, I think of all the Palestinian families that have almost nothing on their iftar tables, who instead of the call to prayer, hear Israeli bombing.

This can't be real life, can it? Humans, just a few thousand kilometres away, are literally starving and dying under bombs. And here I am in the heart of the Western world, which professes values of democracy and freedom and yet, directly contributes to the mass murder of the people of Gaza.

The taxes I pay as a German citizen go directly to a government that fully supports Israel in its genocidal war on the Palestinians. The thought of it makes me feel horrified.

Hunger and genocide in Gaza

Ramez has been writing sporadically. I have hesitated to ask him for more detail, unable to bear the suffering he and his family face daily.

I know there were days when he only ate a few falafel balls and some pita bread.

His dreams are to finish high school and to study accounting. Instead, day after day, he is forced to reach out to Instagram users, asking them to donate and share his fundraising link.

His father got injured before the war and now lives in constant pain,

urgently needing a shoulder replacement. He has left Ramez responsible for the family.

Ramez has two brothers, aged 15 and 14, and three sisters, aged 20, 12, and 8. His father used to work as a water and electrical mechanic, while his mother is a housewife.

"Destruction and hunger remain in Gaza," Ramez posted a few weeks after the ceasefire was announced. His family's situation was still dire. While they received some food donations from humanitarian organisations, it was not enough to meet their needs.

They had returned to their home in southern Gaza, in an area where Israeli bombardment had decimated civilian infra-

Instead of pointing out Western governments' complicity and failure to act and stop a genocide, Western mainstream media has also been ignoring Palestinian suffering or worse – misleading the public about it. Starvation in Gaza did not even make headlines after Israel blocked all aid. The shocking massacre on March 18 did, but it was all neatly packaged with Israel's justification of it. The Western media regularly ignores or downplays Israeli officials' genocidal declarations. Just recently, on March 19, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz addressed the Palestinian people of Gaza, threatening that they will face "complete destruction and devastation" if they do not expel Hamas and return the Israeli captives. This threat of genocide was reported as a "warning" and it evoked no reaction from Israel's Western allies, except a weak condemnation from Lammy.

structure and buildings alike.

Ramez had to travel long distances to reach a humanitarian distribution centre – often, the transportation costs were higher than the value of the aid he received.

Though commercial goods were available in the market, his family couldn't always afford them. They have no source of income apart from the occasional donation they would receive from strangers on Instagram.

After Israel blocked all aid into Gaza, food prices skyrocketed. Humanitarian aid has dwindled, food charities and soup kitchens have closed for the lack of supplies. Ramez's family hasn't received any aid in weeks.

Now there is only canned food and some vegetables in the market, he told me. "I cannot provide anything. I need about \$100 a day for food because of the high prices."

On March 15, almost two weeks into Israel's full blockade on Gaza, UNICEF reported that malnutrition rates of children under the age of 2 in northern Gaza have risen from 15.6 percent in January to 31 percent at present; 23 children had died of malnutrition and dehydration in the span of a few weeks.

The rest of the Strip has also seen a sharp rise, with Catherine Russell, UNICEF executive director, noting that "the speed at which this catastrophic child malnutrition crisis in Gaza has unfolded is shocking."

Experiencing malnutrition during childhood can have lifelong consequences, including a higher likelihood of developing noncommunicable diseases and reduced immune system functionality. Furthermore, malnutrition-induced developmental delays can lead to irreversible deficits in cognitive and motor abilities, an elevated risk of behavioural challenges, and substantially diminished educational outcomes.

In other words, Israel's

blocked aid to Gaza, Germany, France and the UK issued a joint statement saying "a halt on goods and supplies entering Gaza ... would risk violating international humanitarian law."

This response, which refuses to call a crime a crime – was utterly shameful. On March 17, when British Foreign Secretary David Lammy gathered the courage to point out the obvious – that Israel is indeed breaking international law with its blockade of aid to Gaza – he was rebuked by his own government.

If deliberately starving and bombing a civilian population is not breaking international law, then what is? Western governments' attempt to downplay and conceal Israeli crimes before the public is clear evidence of their complicity in these same crimes.

Western governments are obliged under international law to take action to stop grave violations. They should be exerting diplomatic pressure on Israel, imposing arms embargoes, restricting trade and cooperation. But they are not.

Instead of pointing out Western governments' complicity and failure to act and stop a genocide, Western mainstream media has also been ignoring Palestinian suffering or worse – misleading the public about it. Starvation in Gaza did not even make headlines after Israel blocked all aid. The shocking massacre on March 18 did, but it was all neatly packaged with Israel's justification of it.

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Watching this show of empty talk, complicity, betrayal and gaslighting for 17 months now has been exhausting. It is a destructive narcissistic show of manipulation and display of power designed to wear down those of us who resist the normalisation of genocide – to break us.

But I've reached a point where I refuse to feel powerless and exhausted any more in the face of this overwhelming injustice.

Ramadan is a time when the strength of faith is supposed to be renewed. It is a time of sacrifice but also a time of joy, of community and personal growth. I won't allow Israel and its allies to sabotage my belief in justice. The people in Gaza have taught us how to hold on to faith and stand steadfast – no matter what.

I will continue to hold onto the conviction that our voices and actions, no matter how small, can contribute to change. We must not stop raising awareness and pressuring our governments to take action. Our strength lies in standing together and reminding each other to continue believing, to continue fighting for justice.

Europe turns to the Gulf to strengthen energy, security ties

Andrew Hammond

The relationship between the Middle East and Europe has been shaped by centuries of cultural, political, and economic interaction. Today, energy security and geopolitics, in particular, have become even bigger drivers of the important bilateral relationship.

Only last week, Jassem Al-Budaiwi, the Gulf Cooperation Council secretary-general, spoke with EU Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Suica about a proposed new Gulf-European conference on energy security. This happened in a meeting on the sidelines of the Brussels Ninth Conference on Syria, which focused on helping ensure the success of the post-Assad transition.

On the geopolitical front, too, key European nations, including France, Germany, Italy, and the UK, are engaging in the Arab plan to rebuild Gaza. These nations are among the key proponents of a

investors that often take a long-term, multi-decade economic perspective.

The EU is the second-largest trade partner for the GCC countries, generating 170 billion (\$185 billion) in trade in 2023. Much of this exchange is related to natural resources.

In 2023, imports of mineral fuels accounted for over 75 percent of EU imports from GCC countries. Moreover, since 2020, fuel imports have more than tripled, in large part due to a sharp shift in the EU's supply sources caused by Russia's invasion.

According to the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, of more than 180 new energy agreements agreed by the EU since the Ukraine war began, the GCC is the region that has signed the largest number of deals. Well over one-fifth of such agreements have been inked with the UAE (24 deals) leading the way, alongside Qatar (11),

This is a key part of the EU's plans to engage key emerging market powers much more, following the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, and also Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In recent weeks, von der Leyen has agreed a trade deal with the Mercosur bloc, including Brazil and Argentina, in South America; kick-started trade talks in India; and visited South Africa, the host of this year's G20 summit. The GCC, with its headquarters in Riyadh, is another top economic target. The bloc — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait — is a major source of global economic activity with total economic output of around \$2 trillion in 2022. According to the World Bank, if the GCC continues to grow at a "business as usual" rate, combined GDP will grow to a projected \$6 trillion by 2050.

renewed ceasefire leading to a sustainable, fair plan for peace.

Europe is concerned by how much political instability has grown in the Middle East in recent times, with the conflict in Gaza spreading to other areas, including Lebanon. While economic relations with Europe have been largely unaffected so far, this will not inevitably be the case in the future.

These discussions build from recent EU-Arab summits, organized in cooperation with the Arab League and European Parliament, to identify and promote common interests and values collectively — specifically, singling out key priority areas for cooperation, taking into account regional and global challenges.

Yet, it is the GCC economic agenda that is perhaps the most prominent in the Europe-Middle East dialogue at present. Not only is a Gulf-European conference on energy security being explored, there is also new impetus for a GCC-EU trade agreement to be agreed during Ursula von der Leyen's second term as European Commission president in the period till late 2029.

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One of the big prizes for the EU of a GCC deal could be further, open access to investment from Gulf sovereign wealth funds. These tend to be cross-sector

Saudi Arabia (four), Oman (two), and Bahrain (one).

At present, EU-GCC relations are based on a cooperation agreement signed in 1989 that established regular dialogue on topics including economic relations, climate change, energy, and the environment. However, the EU would like a trade deal and, in 2022, Luigi Di Maio, the former Italian foreign affairs minister, was appointed as the first ever EU Special Representative for the Gulf to try to develop a stronger, comprehensive, and more strategic partnership.

In 2023, the EU ramped up efforts to try to revitalize EU-GCC negotiations for a trade agreement. The GCC has signed relatively few such agreements to date, including a pact with South Korea in 2023, more than 15 years after talks began.

The GCC also entered into trade talks with the UK in 2022, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited Saudi Arabia and the UAE last December. Total bilateral trade is worth about €59 billion, making the GCC bloc as a whole equivalent to the UK's fourth-largest non-EU export market behind the US, China, and Switzerland.

It is possible that wider developments could reinforce this dynamic of closer GCC-Europe economic cooperation. This includes potential steps toward implementation of a proposed India-Middle East-Europe corridor to foster connectivity and integration with Asia via a proposed route from India through the UAE, Saudi Arabia and into Greece.

The corridor concept, which would comprise vast road, railroad, and shipping networks, was given new impetus in September 2023 at the G20 summit in New Delhi. A memorandum of understanding was signed to try to develop the project by the governments of India, the US, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Italy, and the 27-member EU bloc.

Taken together, energy security and geopolitics are likely to remain at the heart of current Europe-GCC dialogues. These would be boosted significantly if trade deals are agreed in the second half of the 2020s with the Starmer and von der Leyen administrations.

Netanyahu and the sacking of the Shin Bet chief

There is never a dull moment in Israeli politics, and as much as the announcement by the Israeli government of the dismissal of Ronen Bar, the chief of the Shin Bet (one of Israel's security services), had been expected for some time, the timing of it was still a surprise.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has always, behind the masquerade he has created of being a great strategist and ideologist of the right, been mostly a self-serving and manipulative politician for whom the country and its people are mere tools for fulfilling his own political and personal ambitions.

However, the more he and his close political advisers become embroiled in investigations into law-breaking activities, including allegations of acting against the interests of state security, and because Netanyahu himself feels the pressure while giving evidence in court in his corruption case, the more toxic his attacks on the democratic system's gatekeepers become.

Netanyahu's justification for his attempt (it is still to be deliberated in court) to remove Bar from his post was what he claimed to be "ongoing distrust" in the head of one of the country's most important and powerful security organizations. Had Bar not been a civil servant, he would probably have declared his own mistrust of Netanyahu, to whom he reports. To be sure, the loyalty of the head of Shin Bet is supposed to be to the country and its people, not to his boss.

As head of the organization that failed to avert Oct. 7, with such deadly consequences, Bar had the integrity and honesty to admit, almost immediately and in common with many military commanders, responsibility for his part in this colossal failure. He vowed to leave his post before the end of his tenure,

should the war end and all the hostages be returned before that date.

Bar's conduct stands in stark contrast to that of Netanyahu, who still has not accepted any responsibility for Oct. 7, the most death-dealing onslaught against Israelis in a single day since the country was established. Instead he has put the entire blame on the security forces and, shamefully and grotesquely, on his personal and political opponents.

What irked and angered Netanyahu in particular, causing him to completely lose all sense of judgment and composure, was the

In terms of protecting Israeli democracy, she increasingly resembles the mythical Little Dutch Boy who plugged the leak in the dike with his finger all night long to prevent the waters from bursting through and flooding Haarlem. In her case, Baharav-Miara is preventing a flood of antidemocratic legislation, the firing of people without due process, and appointments to senior government positions of people without the necessary qualifications for the jobs, while she simultaneously attempts to ensure that the government abides by the rule of law.

decision by Shin Bet to launch an investigation, with the Israeli Police, into two of Netanyahu's spokespersons and a former strategic adviser over financial ties to a foreign entity.

One of them, Eli Feldstein, a spokesperson in the prime minister's office who had no security clearance, was arrested on suspicion of leaking stolen, classified intelligence information to be published in the foreign press. It was information he should not have been privy to, and was allegedly leaked with the intention of undermining a ceasefire deal.

These investigations into the activities of some of Netanyahu's closest advisers seem to have rattled the prime minister more than ever, indicating that the allegations may well be

Yossi Mekelberg

true and he himself may also have a few questions to answer.

A few days before the attempt to dismiss Bar, the intelligence chief's immediate predecessor in the job, Nadav Argaman, dropped a bombshell during an interview on Israel's Channel 12 news when he claimed to be in possession of a wealth of information that would compromise Netanyahu, and threatened to make it public should the prime minister be shown to have broken the law. Netanyahu responded with a complaint to the police and by accus-

ing Argaman of blackmailing him. It might be true that Argaman could have expressed himself better and, most importantly, if he indeed knows anything about the prime minister that would be in the interest of the public to know, or which might compromise national security, he should take it to the police rather than announce it on TV. However, Argaman's exasperation with the current government, and especially the person who leads it, reflects similar sentiments held by many people from all walks of life, who are dedicated to serving their country and who feel they can no longer remain silent when faced with a prime minister who cynically and relentlessly polarizes the country for his own

Netanyahu must consult her first before making such consequential decisions that have implications for the country's security.

Alas, the prime minister wants her to go, too. Baharav-Miara is a thorn in his side, for all the right reasons: she is not afraid of him and fears only the collapse of the rule of law.

In terms of protecting Israeli democracy, she increasingly resembles the mythical Little Dutch Boy who plugged the leak in the dike with his finger all night long to prevent the waters from bursting through and flooding Haarlem. In her case, Baharav-Miara is preventing a flood of antidemocratic legislation, the firing of people without due process, and appointments to senior government positions of

people without the necessary qualifications for the jobs, while she simultaneously attempts to ensure that the government abides by the rule of law.

The hope is that by fighting these battles there will still be democracy in Israel come the next election, and even if it is battered and bruised it will still be capable of resuscitation.

Populist authoritarianism has always been part and parcel of the methods of Netanyahu and certain elements in Likud, but now it is entirely what characterizes them and dominates their behavior. However, it is also a sign of panic, as is, to a large extent, the resumption of the war in Gaza.

Netanyahu is increasingly losing his cool and composure when he gives evidence in his corruption trial. He presents himself as a victim of a "deep state" that exists only in his mind, and the mere suggestion that he appoint a state commission of inquiry into the failures of Oct. 7 visibly angers him. He refuses to meet the Israeli press, communicating with the public through social media and recorded statements.

It all makes him look weaker and more vulnerable than ever — albeit also more dangerous, especially if the opposition is foolish enough not to take advantage of this.

Netanyahu's behavior increasingly reminds many of us of those authoritarian leaders who, in the winter of their political lives, lose touch with reality and, in their paranoia, eliminate (not necessarily physically) those they believe to be standing in their way — mainly because, deep down, they know that their days in power are numbered.

The move to dismiss Ronen Bar is further evidence of this from Netanyahu but nevertheless, he should not be allowed to fiddle while everything around him burns.

Water scarcity and the fracturing of North Africa's future

Hafed Al-Ghwell

example, key reservoirs have plummeted to a fraction of their normal levels, forcing farmers to halve the land area used for irrigated crops.

Besides the acute scarcity, aging water infrastructure is ill-prepared for such stresses. In Libya, years of conflict and neglect have left facilities acutely vulnerable. Coastal desalination plants and the centralized Great Man-Made River network of pipelines and aqueducts have suffered chronic power outages, disrepair, and even deliberate sabotage, causing entire cities to lose reliable supplies.

Paradoxically, when intense rainfall does occur, the lack of maintenance and repairs to infrastructure can result in disaster. This reality tragically played out in Derma, Libya, in September 2023, when two dams collapsed as a result of decades of infrastructural decay fueled by political chaos, causing deadly floods.

These converging climate extremes and infrastructure failures serve as ominous warnings of a future in which water insecurity becomes even more acute.

But the economic and

resistant communities. In Mali, extremists seized control of boreholes to extract concessions from villagers.

Such actions, ongoing and in the future, are part of a broader pattern in which nonstate actors and governments alike are exploiting scarcity to consolidate power, often triggering cycles of displacement and radicalization.

The resultant humanitarian crises — including malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and mass migration — are exacerbated by institutional paralysis. Unfortunately, regional bodies such as the Arab League and the African Union lack enforceable mechanisms to mediate disputes, while international donors tend to focus on emergency aid rather than systemic overhauls.

Yet the consequences of inaction extend beyond North Africa. Europe, which is already grappling with migration from Sub-Saharan Africa, could face new waves of displaced populations as North African states buckle under compounding crises.

Unfortunately, the sense of urgency in efforts to address these interlocking threats remains muted.

National governments, pre-

Such actions, ongoing and in the future, are part of a broader pattern in which nonstate actors and governments alike are exploiting scarcity to consolidate power, often triggering cycles of displacement and radicalization. The resultant humanitarian crises — including malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and mass migration — are exacerbated by institutional paralysis. Unfortunately, regional bodies such as the Arab League and the African Union lack enforceable mechanisms to mediate disputes, while international donors tend to focus on emergency aid rather than systemic overhauls.

social ramifications of intense water insecurity are already being felt. As noted, agriculture consumes the vast majority of water in North Africa, and so is bearing the brunt of scarcity.

In Morocco, the agricultural sector accounts for 85 percent of national water use. There, and in Algeria and Tunisia, the sector provides up to a fifth of GDP and export earnings, and offers employment for a sizable share of the workforce.

Drought and dwindling water supplies have therefore resulted in smaller harvests, job losses in farming communities, and rising grocery prices that are contributing to food insecurity. Water shortages are also adversely affecting hydropower and industrial output, creating knock-on effects for the availability of electricity and economic growth.

These stresses are translating into real political pressure. Communities facing dry taps, power blackouts, and failing crops have grown more restive; protests over water access and high prices have flared in several countries as citizens vent their frustration at ineffective governance.

Worse still, the role of water as both an instrument and casualty of conflict has become very apparent in Sudan.

Water stations have been deliberately targeted during the ongoing civil war between rival military and paramilitary factions, cutting off supplies to millions of people in Darfur and Khartoum.

Such tactics are not new. During the conflict in Libya, militias weaponized access to water to punish

occupied with immediate economic and security-related challenges, often deprioritize water policy. International powers, wary of becoming entangled in complex regional politics, default to technical fixes, such as desalination projects or drip-irrigation schemes that ignore underlying failures of governance.

The absence of a cohesive strategy to manage shared water basins, modernize infrastructure or regulate consumption perpetuates a dangerous status quo. Without coordinated investment in water diplomacy and climate adaptation, the transition of nations in North Africa to sustainable economies will remain illusory, replaced by a future in which water scarcity fuels instability faster than diplomacy can contain it.

The path forward demands a reimaging of water as a cornerstone of regional security. This requires the updating of outdated treaties, efforts to foster joint management of transboundary resources, and the integration of climate resilience into economic planning.

It also necessitates that we confront uncomfortable truths: Agricultural subsidies that promote water intensive crops are unsustainable and urban growth must be decoupled from the reckless extraction of groundwater.

Above all, it calls for recognition of the fact that water scarcity is not a far-distant threat but a present-day battleground. The stakes are nothing less than the long-term stability of North Africa and, by extension, that of its neighbors across the Mediterranean and beyond.

Peace in the Caucasus

Luke Coffey

In recent weeks, much international attention has focused on the war between Russia and Ukraine, and US President Donald Trump's efforts to bring the fighting to an end.

However, another long-standing conflict, just a few hundred kilometers south-east of Ukraine, might also be approaching a peaceful resolution: the more than 30-year struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus.

This week brought promising news from both Yerevan and Baku regarding the potential signing of a lasting peace deal between the two nations. After years of intense negotiations, both sides have publicly confirmed that a draft agreement is in place and awaiting formal signatures from the respective leaders.

If a peace deal can be finalized, it would mark the end of a bloody conflict that began in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Amid the ensuing chaos, ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region sought to secede. This sparked a brutal war between Armenian-backed separatists and Azerbaijani forces attempting to reassert Baku's control.

The initial fighting ended in 1994 with a ceasefire monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, but not before both sides suffered severe atrocities. By the time the hostilities paused, Armenia had taken control of Karabakh and large portions of seven surrounding Azerbaijani dis-

tricts, amounting to nearly 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory. Hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis were forcibly displaced from these areas, creating a refugee crisis that has persisted for decades.

Between 1994 and 2020 the front lines remained largely static. While skirmishes and ceasefire violations periodically occurred, serious fighting was rare except for a brief, but significant, four-day flare-up in 2016. During this time Armenia, with the backing of Russia and Iran, continued to maintain the upper hand.

Meanwhile Azerbaijan, newly independent and struggling economically, endured a sense of national humiliation over its territorial losses.

Azerbaijan's fortunes shifted as its economy rebounded, however, fueled by substantial oil and gas revenues. As its military capabilities grew, the balance of power began to tilt. By 2020, frustrated by decades of diplomatic deadlock, authorities in the country took decisive action.

In September of that year, following an Armenian shelling incident along the border, Baku launched a full-scale military operation to reclaim its lost territory. In just 44 days, Azerbaijani forces regained control over most of the occupied lands, with only a portion of Karabakh remaining under Armenian-backed control. On Nov. 8, 2020, a Russian-brokered ceasefire deal took effect.

But rather than resolving

the conflict, the ceasefire agreement laid the groundwork for further tension. Russia, either unwilling or unable to enforce the terms of the deal, watched as Azerbaijan grew impatient with Armenia's reluctance to comply. With Moscow distracted by its war in Ukraine, and Armenian resistance to key aspects of the deal mounting, Azerbaijan took decisive action in September 2023, swiftly completing its military objectives in less than 24 hours.

Since then, both sides have engaged in intense diplomacy in an attempt to secure a lasting peace agreement. The process has not been easy; contentious issues, such as delineating the state border, remain unresolved, though progress has been made. Armenia has been hesitant to open transport links that would connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan, despite committing to this in the 2020 agreement.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has demonstrated a genuine willingness to normalize relations with Azerbaijan but faces strong domestic opposition from nationalist hardliners who reject peace with Baku.

Additionally, Armenia has criticized Azerbaijan for the detention of former officials from the self-proclaimed Karabakh government, who were captured following Baku's final military operation in 2023.

Despite these challenges, recent statements

from both capitals suggest that the major obstacles have been overcome. This is welcome news not only for Armenia and Azerbaijan but for the broader region as well. A genuine and lasting peace would end one of the most prolonged and destructive conflicts of the post-Soviet era while unlocking significant economic opportunities.

Armenia, in particular, stands to benefit from normalization of relations. One of the poorest countries in the region, it is landlocked and has been excluded from major energy and transport infrastructure projects due to its conflict with Azerbaijan. A peace agreement could change that, improving Armenia's economic prospects and integrating it into regional trade networks.

Additionally, a diplomatic breakthrough with Azerbaijan could pave the way for the restoration of Armenia's relations with Turkey, which were severed in the 1990s due to Armenia's actions in the conflict. Renewed ties with Ankara could further stimulate Armenia's economy and enhance regional stability.

Azerbaijan, too, stands to gain from peace. While it has emerged militarily victorious, long-term stability would allow it to focus on economic development and regional partnerships, rather than maintaining a state of perpetual readiness for war. Infrastructure projects that stalled as a result of geopolitical tensions could be revived, including key transportation corridors linking Central Asia with

Europe. These projects would provide significant economic benefits, not only to Azerbaijan but also to the entire South Caucasus.

Moreover, peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan could reduce foreign influence in the South Caucasus. Historically, external powers — including Russia, Iran, and at times, France — have exploited the conflict to advance their own interests. The current peace talks, however, have been characterized by direct negotiations between Yerevan and Baku, with less reliance on external mediation. A successful peace agreement would deny foreign actors the ability to manipulate regional tensions for geopolitical leverage.

Despite these encouraging developments, the peace process is not yet complete. A final agreement must still be signed and both sides must work diligently to ensure it is fully implemented. The true test will be whether Armenia and Azerbaijan can move beyond decades of animosity and build a foundation for lasting stability.

Trust will not be established overnight but concrete steps, such as people-to-people exchanges, economic cooperation and cross-border trade, could help foster reconciliation.

That said, the two countries have never been closer to achieving peace. For the sake of their people, their region, and global stability, one can only hope this deal crosses the finish line sooner rather than later.

How Netanyahu got his Gaza war back

Osama Al-Sharif

ground: essentially a resumption of the war. The US sided with Israel and few Western countries offered any meaningful objections other than weasel words.

So Netanyahu got his war back, but this time he has wider plans: a final solution, the permanent displacement of Palestinians to other countries. Netanyahu — in a shameless act of defiance and arrogance — ordered a complete block on humanitarian aid into Gaza, followed by a wave of deadly airstrikes and further military operations on the

ground: essentially a resumption of the war. The US sided with Israel and few Western countries offered any meaningful objections other than weasel words.

So Netanyahu got his war back, but this time he has wider plans: a final solution, the permanent displacement of Palestinians to other countries. Netanyahu — in a shameless act of defiance and arrogance — ordered a complete block on humanitarian aid into Gaza, followed by a wave of deadly airstrikes and further military operations on the

nocrats, and deploy observers — all without the forced displacement of Palestinians.

The plan was adopted at an emergency Arab summit in Cairo and backed by key Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia.

The Arab proposal is a riposte to Trump's absurd plan to turn Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East" while forcibly displacing two million Palestinians to other countries. Netanyahu now sees an opportunity to scuttle the Arab plan, which has gained widespread international backing, while pay-

ing lip service to Trump's scenario.

This is not about ending the war but killing as many Palestinians as possible to trigger displacement, and there are no limits to how far Netanyahu and his handpicked generals will go to achieve that end.

Ironically, the only hope now for Gaza could come from inside Israel itself. The families of the captives know that Netanyahu could have freed their loved ones months ago, but he didn't. They know that Hamas was willing to stick to its part of the deal — it had no other option — but that was not

The Gaza ceasefire that Israel has now so devastatingly shattered was only ever a political convenience for Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu: the incoming US president wanted it before taking office, and the Israeli prime minister obliged.

The fragile truce that began in January had nothing to do with halting the carnage in Gaza and little to do with bringing home Israeli captives held by Hamas, and Netanyahu was never going to honor it: as most Israelis now know, his sole concern has only ever



Economic stability vital for country’s future: Ahsan

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Prof. Ahsan Iqbal has said that addressing Pakistan’s dual challenges of economic stability and climate change requires a strategic, coordinated, and results-oriented approach aligned with “URAAN” Pakistan – National Economic Transformation Plan 2024-2029.

In a telephonic conversation with senior trade leader Iftikhar Ali Malik on Sunday, Prof. Ahsan Iqbal

emphasized the plan’s focus on strengthening industry-academia linkages, modernizing the economy, and promoting environmental sustainability to ensure long-term national prosperity. He stressed that bridging the gap between academia and the private sector was essential for fostering innovation, technological advancement, and skill development, which were key to industrial productivity and global competitiveness.

The planning minister

reiterated his ministry’s commitment to policy reforms, research incentives, and institutional partnerships to facilitate this collaboration. He also praised Iftikhar Ali Malik’s contributions to the business community, acknowledging his pivotal role in driving industrialization and supporting Pakistan’s economic and environmental resilience.

He expressed his appreciation for Iftikhar Ali Malik’s thoughtful proposals, acknowledging his

leadership in the business and industrial sectors as a driving force behind Pakistan’s journey toward self-reliance. He added that he looked forward to collaborating closely with him and other stakeholders to implement progressive policies that foster national growth and sustainability.

Iftikhar Ali Malik thanked Prof. Ahsan Iqbal for his recognition and assured his full support in advancing Pakistan’s economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development.



RAWALPINDI: A large number of people visiting Bank Road Sadar for Eidul Fitr shopping.

PIAF for enhancing institutional frameworks, ease of doing business

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol has underscored the need for enhancing institutional frameworks and improving ease of doing business, as the government must address gaps in service provision, regulatory enforcement, and financial inclusion to ensure sustainable economic growth.

In a ceremony held here today, PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol, Senior Vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and Vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhry said that the business community in Pakistan has a crucial role to play in advocating for policy consistency, transparency, and regulatory streamlining. Bold and sustained policy interventions are necessary to overcome the economic challenges Pakistan faces.

Referring to the Business Ready 2024 report of the World Bank, Faheem Saigol said that adopting best practices like leading economies could help drive economic resurgence.

The PIAF chairman said that the recently released report by the World Bank highlights Pakistan’s low global ranking in business

climate, emphasizing deficiencies in regulatory framework, public services, and operational efficiency.

Without significant reforms, the country risks deepening financial vulnerabilities, increasing its debt burden, and weakening its fiscal management. This could further complicate its ongoing engagement with the IMF, making economic stability even more difficult to achieve.

The report said that unchecked fiscal deficits will make it challenging for the government to meet debt obligations, exacerbating economic instability and increasing reliance on foreign assistance. The urgency for structural economic reforms cannot be overstated. Delayed action will only worsen financial conditions, threatening long-term economic resilience and growth prospects. Addressing these structural issues through well-implemented policies is crucial to setting Pakistan on a path toward economic stability and sustainable development.

Nasrullah Mughal and Tahir Manzoor Chaudhry said that government is facing an urgent need for economic reforms as the country grapples with persistent fiscal deficits, rising inflation, and weak institutional frameworks. The economy

remains under immense pressure due to heavy reliance on internal and external debts, a depreciating rupee, and increasing import costs, all of which have led to financial instability. Structural reforms in taxation and industrial development are critical for sustainable economic growth, yet progress remains sluggish.

Despite being the world’s fifth-most populous country, Pakistan lags behind smaller economies such as Singapore, Estonia, and Georgia in global business readiness. These nations have successfully implemented policies that facilitate business growth, while Pakistan struggles with bureaucratic inefficiencies, high costs of doing business, and inconsistent policy measures. Governance issues, including red tape and poor policy implementation, continue to obstruct economic progress. Political instability further hampers long-term economic planning, deterring both domestic and foreign investments.

Although the law-and-order situation has improved in recent years, sporadic security threats persist, particularly in border regions. The judicial system also faces significant challenges, with an overwhelming backlog of cases

delaying justice for both individuals and businesses. Pakistan’s taxation system remains another major hurdle, characterized by a narrow tax base, high tax rates, and an overreliance on indirect taxes, discouraging compliance and investment. In contrast, Estonia has successfully digitized tax collection, leading to improved revenue generation, a model that Pakistan could adopt for better financial governance.

The recently released Business Ready 2024 report by the World Bank highlights Pakistan’s low global ranking in business climate, emphasizing deficiencies in regulatory framework, public services, and operational efficiency. The country’s regulatory framework scored 59.10, indicating only moderate adherence to international business standards, while public services, including infrastructure and digital services, received a score of 44.97, reflecting significant inefficiencies. Operational efficiency fared slightly better at 65.90 but still falls short of global benchmarks.

Countries such as Portugal and New Zealand have fostered business-friendly environments through policy consistency, transparency, and efficient service delivery, setting examples for Pakistan to follow.

Shahid calls for setup warehouses abroad

LAHORE (APP): The Convener Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Regional Committee on Food Shahid Imran stressed the urgent need to establish warehouses in other countries to enhance global trade, optimize supply chains, streamline cross-border logistics, and mitigate risks.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists from South Punjab, led by Zia-ur-Rehman from Multan, here on Sunday, he highlighted the crucial role of warehouses in international trade. He noted that strategically placed warehouses reduce transportation costs, improve order fulfillment times, and enhance competitiveness in local markets by bringing products closer to consumers.

Shahid Imran further explained that international and domestic warehouses facilitate cross-border trade by ensuring smooth customs processes, including inspections, documentation, and regulatory compliance.

Warehouses near ports and border crossings help simplify logistics operations, ensuring uninterrupted trade flows.

He also underscored their importance in mitigating supply chain disruptions, stating that multiple warehouse locations help businesses minimize the impact of unforeseen events such as natural disasters, political instability, or transportation issues.

These facilities also provide value-added services like packaging, labeling, and product customization, enabling businesses to adapt to market-specific requirements and improve customer experience.

Peace, stability vital for economic growth

LAHORE (APP): Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif-ur-Rehman emphasized that peace and stability are essential pillars for economic growth and national prosperity.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that the entire business community stands united with the armed forces in their efforts to combat the wave of terrorism with an iron hand.

The business community fully supports all measures taken by security forces to eliminate terrorism and ensure a safe environment for investment and trade.

The coordinator expressed confidence in the capability of Pakistan’s valiant armed forces and law enforcement agencies to counter any threat to national security.

Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif-ur-Rehman urged all segments of society to play their role in promoting harmony and resisting elements that seek to destabilize the country.

He also highlighted the economic losses caused by terrorism and stressed the need for collective efforts to restore investor confidence.

Saif-ur-Rehman reiterated that the business community has always supported national security institutions and will continue to do so, ensuring that Pakistan moves forward on the path of progress.

He called for unity and resilience in the face of challenges, reaffirming unwavering support for the country’s defenders.

He warned that terrorism not only endangers lives of unarmed innocent citizens but also undermines South Asia’s economic potential, urging regional stakeholders to adopt a cohesive approach against militancy.

Mango bloom marks start of season, ACS visits MRI

MULTAN (APP): With the arrival of spring, the mango orchards of South Punjab — known for their unmatched sweetness — have begun to bloom with the fragrant scent of budding fruit. To review progress on mango production, exports, and research, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) South Punjab, Fuad Hashim Rabbani, paid a visit to the Mango Research Institute (MRI) in Multan.

During the visit, the ACS inspected the high-density experimental farm, mango nursery, and the post-harvest laboratory. He was accompanied by Special Secretary Agriculture South Punjab Sarfraz Khan Magsi, Principal Scientist Dr. Asif-ur-Rehman, Director Cotton Research Center Dr. Ghulam Sarwar, and Director Agriculture Extension Shehzad Sabir.

Speaking on the occa-

sion, Mr. Rabbani remarked that South Punjab’s mangoes have become Pakistan’s identity in international markets. “Mangoes from this region are unmatched in flavor and sweetness globally,” he said. “They are more than just a fruit — they are a symbol of culture, tradition, and love.”

He stressed the need to enhance mango exports to ensure economic prosperity for orchard owners. “Value addition in mango production must be a priority to access high-end markets,” he emphasized.

Briefing the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) South Punjab, Fuad Hashim Rabbani, officials noted that Pakistan boasts over 100 mango varieties, with five of these enjoying significant popularity worldwide.

Despite a decrease in the total area under mango cul-

tivation, advances in modern farming techniques have led to increased yields.

It was also highlighted that the largest contiguous cluster of mango orchards in the world is located along the River Chenab in South Punjab.

The Additional Chief Secretary South Punjab, Fuad Hashim Rabbani also visited the Cotton Research Center, where he personally sowed early-season cotton seeds as part of a demonstration of the region’s cotton advancement efforts. Later, he toured the Agri Mall, an initiative aimed at promoting agricultural innovation and services.

The visit underscored the government’s commitment to supporting South Punjab’s agriculture sector by combining traditional strengths with modern technology.

FRIA asks govt to establish long-term policies

E.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has asked the government to establish long-term and sustainable policies in consultation with the real stakeholders to enhance production growth. Presently, the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for the industry, as the ever-increasing energy, gas and power tariffs are the real threat to the economy amidst high markup rate and continuous fluctuations exchange rate. This was stated in a meeting organized by FRIA with its chairman Shahbaz Aslam in the chair. The participants of the meeting asked the government to take prompt measures to bring down the production costs for the export industry to enable them to compete in the international market. The FRIA Chairman said that the 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.

Shahbaz Aslam said that high energy tariffs, growing

rates of taxes, and lack of skilled labor are the main reasons behind the increase in the cost of production. Manufacturing and production industries have the potential to significantly impact economic growth by reducing unemployment in the country.

“We are the biggest employment generators as our sector has an immense potential to create jobs with comparatively low investment and less energy needs, as it generates employment at low energy consumption compared to other sectors.”

The chairman said that 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. He 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 govern-

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

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

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund and five of its regional counterparts are on track to control \$18 trillion in assets by 2030, marking a 50 percent surge from the end of 2024, according to an analysis.

In its latest report, Deloitte Middle East noted that the region, home to six of the world’s 10 largest sovereign funds, now holds approximately 40 percent of global SWF assets — solidifying its position as a dominant force in the market.

The study aligns with the

latest report from the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, which ranks Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund sixth globally, managing \$925 billion. The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority leads the Gulf with \$1.05 trillion, followed by the Kuwait Investment Authority at \$1.02 trillion and the Qatar Investment Authority with \$526 billion.

Julie Kassab, sovereign wealth fund leader at Deloitte Middle East, said: “The Gulf region continues to be the epicenter of sovereign wealth fund activity, with its major players driv-

ing innovation in investment strategies and operational excellence.”

She added: “We are witnessing these funds not only expand their geographical footprint but also significantly enhance their internal capabilities, setting new standards for the industry in terms of performance and governance.”

The report also highlighted that Gulf SWFs maintained an “aggressive investment pace,” deploying \$82 billion in 2023 and an additional \$55 billion in the first nine months of 2024.

Saudia’s PIF at forefront as Gulf SWFs approach \$18tn

Deloitte listed five major players shaping the region’s investment landscape: Saudi Arabia’s PIF, ADIA, Abu Dhabi’s Mubadala, Abu Dhabi Developmental Holding Co., and QIA.

Globally, the total number of sovereign wealth funds has nearly tripled since 2000, reaching approximately 160-170 funds, with 13 new ones established between 2020 and 2023.

Asia takes center stage. Deloitte’s analysis highlights key trends reshaping the regional SWF landscape, with funds increas-

ingly focusing on fast-growing countries outside traditional Western markets.

The report revealed that Gulf SWFs strategically prioritize Asia, with many establishing new offices throughout the Asia-Pacific region and significantly increasing allocations to high-growth economies, including China and India.

Wealth funds in the Gulf region were particularly active in China, investing approximately \$9.5 billion in the Asian giant during the first nine months of 2024.

Abu Dhabi Investment

Authority and Kuwait Investment Authority ranked among the top 10 shareholders in Chinese A-share listed firms.

“This represents a strategic opportunity as Western investors reduce their exposure, allowing Middle Eastern funds to leverage their strong political and trade relationships with Beijing,” Deloitte noted.

The report added that Gulf wealth funds are also eyeing Africa, particularly the mining industry, for new opportunities.

BMP concerned over IMF-backed Customs tariff cut to hit industry

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry’s Businessmen Panel (BMP) has expressed serious concern over the government agreement with the IMF to completely abolish additional customs duties, cut regulatory duties by 80%, and withdraw concessions for the local industry.

FPCCI former president and BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar observed that the IMF had long been raising concerns over the protection available to local industries, but Pakistani authorities were reluctant to open these areas.

Pakistan’s agreement with the IMF on trade liberalisation comes at a time

when the world is closing its borders to foreign companies.

Anjum Nisar said that government agreement with the International Monetary Fund to make further adjustments to the economic liberalisation plan and to cut weighted average applied tariffs cut by over 40% in five years, would create troubles for the local industry.

The BMP Chairman observed that after the implementation of the full liberalisation plan, it will have the lowest weighted average tariffs in the region.

Referring to the reports, he said that it has been agreed that the weighted average applied tariffs will be reduced from the current 10.6% to just around 6%

over five years, starting in July this year, they added. This 43% reduction in tariffs will completely open the economy to foreign competition while local industry is not ready for it due to high cost of production.

According to reports, the reduction will be achieved under two different policies. Under the new National Tariff Policy, the weighted average tariffs will be reduced to 7.4% by 2030. To cut these further to around 6%, the government will lower tariff protection available to the automobile sector through the Auto Industry Development and Export Policy (AIDEP) 2026-30 from July next year, according to the sources.

The Ministry of

Commerce deals with the National Tariff Policy, while the Ministry of Industries is responsible for the AIDEP Policy.

They added that excluding the tariff reduction plan for the automobile sector, the weighted average applied tariffs will now be 7.4% compared to the earlier understanding of 7.1%. The difference between the 7.4% and the earlier agreed 7.1% was due to the status of the import tariffs for Customs Chapter 27, which deals with the duty structure of imported energy products.

The plan states that the 7% additional customs duty on specific goods will be abolished from July this year. Likewise, the 2% additional customs duty on the

zero-tariff slab will also be abolished in July. The 2% duty on the 3% tariff slab will be cut to 1% in the next fiscal year and to nil from the year 2027.

The 4% additional customs duty on the 16% tariff slab will remain unchanged for the next fiscal year but will be reduced to 3% the following year and completely abolished in 2030.

The 6% additional customs duty on the 20% tariff slab will be reduced starting in 2026-27 and abolished in 2030.

According to reports, the IMF demanded the government reduce the weighted average tariffs to around 5%, but the authorities committed to cutting it to around 6%.

Pakistan has assured the

IMF that it will seek approval of the new tariff policy from the federal cabinet before the end of June. The tariff reduction will be implemented in the fiscal year 2025-26 budget, to be presented in Parliament in June.

Pakistan has also assured the IMF that in the future, it will not introduce any new regulatory duties except where essential, and a sunset clause will be introduced for their elimination.

Pakistan has committed to addressing vehicle affordability by setting out a path to reduce protection by 2030, including eliminating all additional customs duties and regulatory duties in the auto sector and rationalising customs duties with the highest slab of 20%.

When added to the duty reductions envisaged under the new tariff policy, this will bring the weighted average tariff to 6% by 2030, according to the understanding reached on Thursday.

The maximum duty on all imports in the auto sector will be 20% by 2030, sources said.

In the case of regulatory duty, duties currently ranging from 55% to 90% will be cut to 48.5% and 80% in the first year and will be brought down to 26.5% to 44% in the last year. Regulatory duty currently falling in the range of 45-50% will also be cut by up to 10% in July. Goods carrying relatively lower duties will see a smaller reduction in the first year.

COURT NOTICE

In The Court Of Dua Mehreen Civil Judge VI Kohat Suit no.06/1 Date of hearing-15-04-2025 Titled:- Muhammad Ijaz Asif (etc) Vs Abdul Sabour Khan(etc) Notice against:- (14) Talah (15) Saif Ullah Sons of Aman Ullah R/o Ashiq Colony Bannu Road Tehsil and District Kohat Presently R/o (now.in.Abroad Dubai UAE) (Defendants) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendants in which date of hearing 15-04-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendants is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 15-04-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on.07-03-2025 (Court of C.J VI Kohat)



In brief

Archer hammered

HYDERABAD (AFP): England fast bowler Jofra Archer returned the most expensive bowling figures in the Indian Premier League on Sunday when he was hammered for 76 runs in his four overs as Rajasthan Royals were put to the sword by the Sunrisers Hyderabad batsmen. Hyderabad were invited to bat first and posted a mammoth 286-6, falling one short of their best of 287, which remains the T20 tournament's highest ever total. Archer's analysis eclipsed that of Gujarat Titans' seam bowler Mohit Sharma who went for 73 in a match last year. Archer had a bad start when he gave away 23 runs in his first over as Hyderabad's Travis Head smashed him for four fours and a six. Head went on to make 67 from 31 balls, setting the stage for Ishan Kishan who clubbed an unbeaten 106 off 47 balls with 11 fours and six sixes. The Hyderabad total included a remarkable 34 fours and 12 sixes. Last year, Hyderabad, led by Pat Cummins and runners-up in the previous edition, posted the highest-ever innings total of 287-3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2024.

Trump beats Higgins

TELFORD (Agencies): World number one Judd Trump held off John Higgins to set up a final against world champion Kyren Wilson at the Players Championship. Trump, 35, made two century breaks on his way to a 3-1 lead in the best-of-11 semi-final before Scotland's Higgins cut the deficit with a break of 107. The pair exchanged frames before four-time world champion Higgins, 49, won two in a row to level at 4-4. But 2019 world champion Trump compiled runs of 61 and 53 to beat the Scot 6-4 and set up a final against fellow Englishman Wilson in Telford on Sunday. Trump has won three events and earned the most prize money in a single campaign this term. Wilson, 33, is on a successful run too as he chases a fourth ranking title this season.

'No problem with Hojlund'

LISBON (Agencies): Cristiano Ronaldo says he has "no problem" with Denmark striker Rasmus Hojlund copying his "siu" celebration after scoring the winner against Portugal on Thursday. Manchester United's Hojlund said he was not mocking his "idol" Ronaldo after the 1-0 victory in the first leg of their Nations League quarter-final. Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo said he does not think Hojlund was being disrespectful. "For me, it is not a problem," the Portugal captain, 40, said before Sunday's second leg in Lisbon. "This is not because he doesn't have respect for me. I'm smart enough to understand that not only him, but around the world, other sportspeople do it, my celebration. For me, it's an honour. But I hope that tomorrow you can see my celebration, not [that] I still see his celebration." The Al-Nassr forward says the "air is more tense" around the Portugal team after a poor performance in the first leg and defended coach Roberto Martinez. "I think it's unfair to criticise the coach, because we're all in the same boat," said the former Real Madrid and United player. "We lost the game and played badly, but we have the second leg tomorrow. Calm down. Think positive and think that things will go well."

New Zealand thrash Pakistan to clinch T20 series

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (AFP): New Zealand's ruthless pace attack carved up Pakistan to deliver a crushing 115-run win in the fourth Twenty20 on Sunday and clinch the five-match series. The home side moved 3-1 ahead after defending 220-6 in Mount Maunganui and then dismissing a ragged Pakistan for just 105 in the 17th over. Jacob Duffy claimed 4-20 and fellow seamer Zak Foulkes 3-25 as Pakistan suffered their biggest T20 loss by runs against all nations, eclipsing a 95-run defeat against New Zealand in Wellington nine years ago. The tourists were reduced to 9-3 after two overs with Duffy bagging two scalps in his first over, both caught by wicket-keeper Mitch Hay. Duffy's first victim was Hasan Nawaz for one, two days after the Pakistan opener blasted a maiden century in game three in

Auckland to keep the series alive. Teetering at 56-8, Pakistan's innings had some credibility restored thanks to 44 off 30 balls from all-rounder Abdul Samad. The only other batsman to score in double figures was Irfan Khan with 24. Pakistan captain Salman Agha said New Zealand's bowlers exploited some helpful conditions under lights. "They bowled really well and they outplayed us," Salman said. "I mean, the ball talked. It was swinging and it was turning as well. But we are international cricketers, so we have to adapt that and we have to be better. We need to regroup and we need to win the last game." It was New Zealand's second biggest T20 win by runs, nearly surpassing their 119-run drubbing of the West Indies in 2018 at the same Bay Oval venue. Earlier, Finn Allen raced to 50 off just 20 balls, putting on 59 for New Zealand's opening stand with Tim Seifert, whose 44 took 22 deliveries. Seifert was the first of three batsmen dismissed by seamer Haris Rauf, who claimed 3-27. Allen struck six fours and three sixes while captain Michael Bracewell was nearly as effective at the death, blasting 46 not out off 26 balls. Bracewell was delighted with his team's all-round response to the loss at Auckland. "Bouncing back only a day or so after the performance at Eden Park was outstanding," he said. "It shows the benefit of those guys batting so well at the top, they got us well ahead of the game. All the seamers bowled brilliantly tonight. It's nice when you give bowlers a go, like Zak Foulkes coming into the match. Three wickets for him was a brilliant performance." Game five is in Wellington on Wednesday.



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Hasan Nawaz walks away as New Zealand celebrate the early wicket.

Real beat rivals Barcelona for first time ever

BARCELONA (Agencies): Real Madrid beat rivals Barcelona for the first time on Sunday, ending a run of 18 straight defeats in the 'Women's Clasico'. Real won 3-1 at Barcelona, with Scotland international Caroline Weir coming off the bench to score a late match-winning double. Norway forward Caroline Graham Hansen had cancelled out Alba Redondo's first-half header for the visitors on 67 minutes and Barca thought they had gone ahead with nine minutes left, but Jana Fernandez's goal was ruled out for offside. Substitute Weir then put Real 2-1 up with three minutes left, slotting home a left-footed shot after being picked out in the box by Linda Caicedo, and she sealed the shock victory with a header in the sixth minute of injury time at Estadio Olimpic Luis Companys. Real's win is a surprise given that Liga F leaders Barcelona had had already beaten them four times in all competitions this season, most recently an 8-1 aggregate victory in the Copa de la Reina semi-finals. The result sees Real close the gap at the top of Liga F to just four points, with seven matches remaining. It is only the second time that Barca have dropped points in the league this season after suffering a surprise 2-1 defeat at home to Levante on 1 February - a result which ended a 46-match unbeaten streak in Liga F. Real's next match sees them take on Arsenal in their Champions League quarter-final at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday with a 2-0 lead from the first leg.

'We were outplayed', Agha calls for improvement

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha acknowledged that New Zealand's bowlers capitalised on favourable conditions under lights, leading to a crushing defeat against New Zealand in the fourth T20I at Bay Oval on Sunday. With this loss, Pakistan conceded the five-match T20I series 3-1 after being bowled out for 115 while chasing a formidable 221-run target. "They [New Zealand] bowled really well and they outplayed us," the skipper said while addressing a post-match press conference. "I mean, the ball talked. It was swinging and it was turning as well. But we are international cricketers, so we have to adapt that and we have to be better," he added. With the series already lost, Agha emphasised the need for his team to regroup and put in a strong performance in the final match. "We need to regroup and we need to win the last game."

Pakistan will now look to salvage pride in the fifth and final T20I, hoping to end the series on a positive note. Green Shirts suffered an early collapse as opener Mohammad Haris was dismissed for just two runs in the first over by Will O'Rourke. The situation worsened in the next over when Jacob Duffy struck twice, removing Hasan Nawaz and captain Salman Ali Agha for single-digit scores, leaving Pakistan struggling at 9-3. The downfall continued with Shadab Khan departing for just one run, dismissed by Zakary Foulkes, reducing Pakistan to 26-4 in 4.1 overs. Irfan Khan Niazi showed some resistance with a quick 24 off 16 balls, but Duffy's brilliance saw him dismissed at 42-5. Khushdil Shah and Abbas Afridi failed to provide stability, while Shaheen Afridi's departure at 56-8 signaled Pakistan's impending defeat. Duffy claimed his fourth wicket, dismissing Haris Rauf at 80-9 in 13.5 overs. Abdul Samad fought hard but fell short of his fifty as Pakistan's innings ended in disappointment. New Zealand's openers got off to a flying start, racing to 59 in just 4.1 overs. Shaheen Afridi struggled with the new ball, but Haris Rauf provided a breakthrough by dismissing Tim Seifert for 44. Finn Allen's explosive fifty off just 19 balls maintained the momentum before he was removed by Abbas Afridi for 50. Despite a minor middle-order stumble, a counter-attacking 68-run stand between Michael Bracewell and Mitchell Santner powered New Zealand past the 200-run mark. Haris Rauf finished with three wickets, while Abrar Ahmed and Abbas Afridi contributed with crucial breakthroughs. However, New Zealand posted a daunting total, leaving Pakistan with a tough chase that ultimately ended in a comprehensive defeat.

Lakers well beaten by Bulls on James return

LAS VEGAS (Agencies): The returns of LeBron James and Rui Hachimura could not save the Los Angeles Lakers from a sixth defeat in nine NBA games as they were well beaten by the Chicago Bulls on Saturday. James made his Lakers comeback after seven games out with a groin injury while Hachimura had missed 12 matches with a knee problem. But they could not prevent the Lakers losing 146-115 - with Chicago running up their highest score of the season to improve their record to 31-40. Coby White had 36 points for the Bulls and rookie Matas Buzelis added 31, while 22-year-old Australian Josh Giddey claimed his 15th triple-double - 15 points, 17 assists and 10 rebounds. Luka Doncic led Los Angeles (43-27) with 34 points - 29 in the first half - while James scored 17, and they cut the score to 65-64 at the start of the third quarter, but the Bulls had racked up a 104-89 lead going into the fourth. Antetokounmpo inspires Bucks fightback. Elsewhere, in Saturday's match-ups, Giannis Antetokounmpo notched 32 points and 17 rebounds as the Milwaukee Bucks rallied from a 14-point deficit to win 114-108 at the Sacramento Kings. The Golden State Warriors remained without leading scorer Stephen Curry, because of a pelvis injury, as they lost 124-115 at the Atlanta Hawks, with Trae Young scoring 25 points in his 41st double-double of the season. Tyrese Haliburton returned from a three-game absence to help the Indiana Pacers beat the Brooklyn Nets 108-103, with teammate Pascal Siakam scoring a game-high 26 points. Karl-Anthony Towns claimed 31 points and 11 rebounds to help the New York Knicks win 122-103 at home to the Washington Wizards.



Hamilton disqualified from Chinese GP



SHANGHAI (Agencies): Lewis Hamilton has been disqualified from the Chinese Grand Prix for a technical infringement on his Ferrari. One of the skid blocks on Hamilton's car was found to be less than the required thickness after the race. His team-mate Charles Leclerc and Alpine's Pierre Gasly have also been disqualified, after their cars were both deemed underweight in post-race checks. Hamilton loses his sixth-place finish in the main grand prix, following victory in the sprint race in Shanghai on Saturday, his first win for his new team. In a statement, the Italian team said there was "no intention to gain any advantage". Explaining the disqualifications, Ferrari said

Leclerc's high tyre wear due to his one-stop race strategy had caused the weight breach, while they had "misjudged the consumption by a small margin" in regard to Hamilton's skid wear. "We will learn from what happened today and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again," the statement added. Monegasque Leclerc was fifth, while Frenchman Gasly was 11th. Formula 1 cars have skid blocks in the floor that are meant to ensure that the car maintains a certain ride height and does not run too low. The skids are situated in the underfloor wooden plank, which also has a minimum depth for the same reason. If one is worn too much, it confers a potential per-

formance advantage caused by the car being able to run lower than would otherwise have been possible. Hamilton was disqualified from the 2023 United States Grand Prix for a similar issue when he was driving for Mercedes. Revised Chinese GP top 10: 1. Oscar Piastri (McLaren), 2. Lando Norris (McLaren), 3. George Russell (Mercedes), 4. Max Verstappen (Red Bull), 5. Esteban Ocon (Haas), 6. Kimi Antonelli (Mercedes), 7. Alex Albon (Williams), 8. Oliver Bearman (Haas), 9. Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), 10. Carlos Sainz (Williams).

Ingebrigtsen banishes 1,500m demons for rare world double

NANJING (AFP): Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen won the 1,500m in Nanjing on Sunday to claim not only a first global gold in his favoured distance, but also a rare world indoor track distance double. Ingebrigtsen, who had won the 3,000m on Saturday for his first world indoor title, clocked 3min 38.79sec to emulate the double claimed by Ethiopian legend Haile Gebrselassie in Maebashi in 1999. Britain's Neil Gourley took silver in 3:39.07 while American Luke Houser rounded out the podium (3:39.17). "Of course this is something special," said Ingebrigtsen, before adding: "A lot of things have changed and I'm not doing this because anyone else has done it before. So that's purely a coincidence. It's very difficult to compare yourself against history and what others are doing. I'm only focusing on myself and I feel good to have done a lot of preparations, and that was always the main goal. It's not to do with something somebody else did before. I think I can do more, so I'll try to maximise that and grab the opportunity given to me." Ingebrigtsen's victory also banished some of the



Norwegian's 1,500m demons. In his last outing at a world indoors, Ingebrigtsen finished second in the 1,500m to Ethiopian Samuel Tefera in Belgrade in 2022. That was sandwiched between two world outdoor 1,500m silvers as Ingebrigtsen was twice outstripped by Britons -- Jake Wightman in 2022 and Josh Kerr a year later -- for victory. Ingebrigtsen was then surprisingly beaten by Cole Hocker in the 1,500m Olympic final last year, finishing outside the medals, but bouncing back to win the 5,000m gold.

"The main goal is obviously to win both distances, but I would say so far a pretty good indoor season, getting out and succeeding with the things that I wanted to accomplish, so it's been good," he said. Ingebrigtsen, as his wont, was happy to sit at the back of the nine-strong pack as American Samuel Prkel took up the running in Nanjing, splitting the pack into single file. The Norwegian moved to the front with four laps to run, Britain's Gourley on his shoulder and Mariano Garcia of Spain also in the running.

Ingebrigtsen surged again, shouldering off Austrian veteran Raphael Pallitsch's clumsy attempt at a pass. Next to try their luck was Portugal's Isaac Nader, but at the bell it was Ingebrigtsen in charge. Gourley raced down the inside line of the far straight, but there was to be no Briton to spoil the party at the line, as there has been twice at the world outdoors. The Norwegian kept not only his speed but also his nerve to see off his rivals, crossing the finish line with a brief look over his shoulder and a wagging index finger.

Sabalenka, Osaka & Gauff reach last 16 in Miami

MIAMI (Agencies): World number one Aryna Sabalenka moved into the Miami Open last 16 after opponent Elena-Gabriela Ruse retired injured, while there were wins for Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff. Sabalenka had taken the first set 6-1 before Romanian Ruse retired with a thigh problem in the first game of the second. Japan's Osaka survived a scare to eventually overcome American wild card Hailey Baptiste in a match lasting nearly three hours. World number 98 Baptiste was a break up and serving at 4-3 in the decisive third set, but Osaka came back well. The four-time Grand Slam champion held serve before

breaking Baptiste again to take the match 7-6 (8-6) 3-6 6-4 in two hours, 59 minutes and 57 seconds - the longest women's match of the tournament so far. There were no such problems for third seed Gauff, who continued her fine tournament with a comfortable straight-set win over Greece's Maria Sakkari. The 21-year-old world number three, who needed just 47 minutes to beat Sofia Kenin 6-0 6-0 in the previous round, won 6-2 6-4 to reach the last 16 in Miami for the third time in her career. Italian sixth seed Jasmine Paolini also went through after Tunisian opponent Ons Jabeur retired injured when trailing 4-3 in the first set.

Staging comeback for Pakistan feels good: Wasim Jr

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fast bowler Muhammad Wasim Jr said on Sunday that it feels good to stage a comeback for the national cricket team after seven months. Expressing his thoughts ahead of leaving for New Zealand for the ODI series, Wasim said: "I got rid of an injury that prolonged. The green pitches were prepared for practice in Pakistan, which will reap benefits in New Zealand." "The senior bowlers will be missed in the ODI series, but we will be accompanied by Naseem Shah, Akif Javed and Faheem Ashraf," he said. He vowed to perform well if given any opportunity.



In brief

Pakistan Day celebrated

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Sunday said that Pakistan Day reminds us of the historic decision made on March 23, 1940, when Muslims resolved to establish an independent homeland. In his message on Pakistan Day, the minister stated that this day brings to mind the sacrifices and struggles of our forefathers, which have allowed us to live with freedom, dignity, and prosperity today. Dr. Tariq emphasized that we must strive to fulfil the dream of Allama Iqbal and follow the vision of Quaid-e-Azam by upholding the principles of unity, faith, and discipline. He stressed that political stability, policy continuity, and national consensus are essential for the country's progress. Without peace, brotherhood, and tolerance, national development is not possible. The minister further urged everyone to pledge on this day to work tirelessly for Pakistan's development, transforming it into a modern, prosperous, and advanced state, moving beyond mere words and slogans.

2 drug peddlers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Naseerabad Police in major operation against drug peddlers on Sunday arrested two drug suppliers supplying ice to youth, especially students. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the arrested accused included Naveed and Ishfaq. About 3.1 kilograms of ice was recovered from accused Naveed while accused Ishfaq was nabbed with 1.8 kg of the contraband item. During initial investigations, the accused revealed that they supplied ice to the students of educational institutions. The police were working on the chain of drugs supply in the light of accused's revelations, the spokesman said. City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani lauded the Naseerabad Police team for the recovery of a huge quantity of ice.

5 gamblers nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police in actions against criminals Sunday nabbed five accused gambling on cards and six others for possessing illegal weapons. According to the police spokesman, the Waris Khan Police caught the accused Qasim, Adnan, Yasin, Faizan and Rafiq red-handed while playing cards with the bet amount of Rs 18,100. Five mobile phones were also recovered from the accused. Meanwhile, six suspects were held for possessing illegal arms and ammunition from different areas. The New Town, R A Bazaar and Jati Police recovered a 30-bore pistol each from accused Majeed, Abdul Basit and Tauseef respectively. Similarly, the Naseerabad Police arrested three accused Hassan, Bilal and Zeeshan respectively, recovering a 30-bore pistol each from them.

2 gangs of criminals busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Sunday busted two three-member gangs of criminals involved in street crimes in the areas of Taxila and Wah Saddar. The Saddar Baroni Police also held a car thief recovering a Suzuki car stolen by him a few days ago. The arrested accused was identified as Faizan. According to the police spokesman, the Taxila Police nabbed the three-member Hamza gang of street criminals. The arrested accused included gang leader Hamza, Habib and Bahadur. A motorcycle, a mobile phone, stolen money of Rs 51,000 and weapons were seized from the suspects.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari conferring award of Nishan-i-Pakistan (posthumous) upon Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His award is being received by Ms Sanam Bhutto. —APP Photo

Pakistan Day symbolizes unity, resolve for progress: Gilani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani on Sunday said that March 23 holds immense significance in Pakistan's national history, marking the day when the Muslims of the subcontinent united with a resolute pledge to establish an independent and sovereign state.

In his message on Pakistan Day, he said the Pakistan Resolution, passed on March 23, 1940, galvanized the Muslims of the subcontinent toward a common goal.

"This historic day serves as a reminder of our collective commit-

ment to make every possible effort for the development, prosperity, and stability of our beloved country," he remarked.

Chairman Senate said that the vision of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the philosophy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal should continue to guide the nation's journey toward building a modern, democratic, and welfare-oriented state.

He underscored the importance of strengthening democracy, upholding the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, promoting national unity, and reinforcing insti-

tutions as fundamental pillars for a stable and prosperous Pakistan.

"In today's era, it is imperative to foster mutual harmony and unity by setting aside all differences, making national development and stability our foremost priority," Gilani urged. He further stressed the need for collective efforts to position Pakistan among the world's developed nations.

"May Allah Almighty bless our beloved homeland with enduring peace and stability and lead it to new heights of progress," Chairman added.

Punjab Governor visits Pindi food street

RAWALPINDI (APP): Governor of Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan visited the famous food street at Chandni Chowk on Sunday and surprised the locals by having a Sehri meal along with them.

Seeing him among them at earliest morning hours, the people felt much amazed. He mingled with ordinary visitors and took his fasting meal with them. The governor enjoyed Sehri

with chicken chana, pai (mutton trotters) nihari, lassi and hot naan (bread).

His presence as an ordinary citizen turned the food street environment into more rejoicing for the people. They enjoyed taking selfies with the governor.

Sardar Saleem distributed Eid gifts among the children, which furthered their entertainment.

"The people of Rawalpindi are also fond of

food like the people of Lahore", he said.

He informed them that he loved to visit the streets and neighbourhoods to enjoy sitting among the people. He said that as governor he would go to every district of Punjab to meet the people and try to solve their problems.

The governor thanked the people of Rawalpindi for extending him great honour.

ICT admin conducts 11,329 inspections

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a sweeping effort to curb overpricing during Ramadan, the Islamabad's district administration has reported detaining over 1,678 shopkeepers and sealing 42 stores across the Federal Capital between March 1 and 20.

The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration's officials carried out 11,329 inspections, issuing fines totaling Rs 2.74 million for violations related to substandard goods and inflated prices.

Meanwhile, six Ramadan bazaars and 20 fair-price shops were established to stabilize costs for essentials like cooking oil, sugar, and poultry, with direct subsidies and discounted produce.

The spokesman of ICT administration said that the authority intensified market checks in the first 20 days of Ramadan, targeting shops accused of overcharging or selling low-

quality items. To counter price hikes, the administration launched six Ramadan bazaars offering subsidized essentials such as ghee, sugar, chicken, and eggs.

Twenty fair-price shops provided discounts of up to 15% on over 15 types of fruits and vegetables. These markets operate under strict monitoring, with daily visits by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon and field teams to ensure compliance, he added. On the occasion, DC Memon emphasized a zero-tolerance policy toward compromises on quality or pricing. "Our teams are on the ground daily. No exceptions will be made for violations," he stated. The district's helpline resolved 95% of consumer complaints within 24 hours, according to officials.

While praising the majority of vendors for adhering to guidelines, Memon urged residents to report overpricing via the helpline. "Public input is

critical to identifying violations," he added. Open markets remain under surveillance, with inspections continuing post-Iftar to deter illegal price surges. He said that the administration plans to sustain inspections until Eid, focusing on wholesalers and retailers in high-traffic areas.

Over 50% of fines were linked to poultry and dairy products, sectors prone to sudden price jumps. Subsidies in Ramadan bazaars are funded by local authorities, with no middlemen involved in supply chains to reduce costs.

"Our goal is accessibility, not profit," Memon reiterated. "The fair-price initiatives will continue post-Ramadan if proven effective." Residents have welcomed the measures, though some call for stricter penalties against repeat offenders. With Eid approaching, officials remain on high alert to prevent last-minute price spikes.



RAWALPINDI: Parliamentary Secretary for Information & Broadcasting celebrated Pakistan's 85th National Day with students at Govt. Associate College for Women, Rawalpindi.

March 23 a milestone in nation's history: Dy Chairman Senate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate Syedaal Khan on Sunday said that March 23 holds immense significance in the country's history as a landmark in the struggle for independence.

In his special message on Pakistan Day, he recalled that it was on this day in 1940 when the Muslims of the subcontinent, with firm resolve and unity, demanded a separate and sovereign state.

"The Pakistan Resolution was not merely a demand but the first decisive step towards the realization of a dream that materialized under the

leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on August 14, 1947," he added.

Syedaal Khan said that Pakistan Day reminds the nation of the unparalleled sacrifices, unwavering struggle, and unity of the forefathers who secured a free and independent homeland for future generations.

"Today, it is our collective responsibility not only to honor those sacrifices but also to contribute to Pakistan's progress, prosperity, and stability," he added.

He underscored the need to foster national unity, brotherhood, and

tolerance to overcome the challenges facing the country.

"We must strengthen our institutions, uphold the rule of law, and advance in education and research to transform Pakistan into a modern and prosperous state," he stressed.

Syedaal Khan extended heartfelt felicitations to the nation on Pakistan Day and prayed for the country's lasting peace and development.

"May Allah Almighty protect our beloved homeland and grant us the strength to work tirelessly for its continued progress," he concluded.

Science, technology must for progress: Magsi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Khalid Hussain Magsi, has highlighted the significance of innovation, education, and research in shaping Pakistan's future, reaffirming the government's commitment to technological advancement and national progress.

In his Pakistan Day message, Minister Magsi paid tribute to the sacrifices of the nation's forefathers, who laid the foundation of Pakistan with the passage of the historic Lahore Resolution on March 23, 1940.

"It was their unwavering determination and

unity that turned the dream of Pakistan into reality.

Their struggle reminds us that great nations are built on resilience, hard work, and an unshakable belief in a better future," he said.

The minister underscored the importance of equipping the youth with modern skills to compete in the global arena.

"A strong, self-reliant nation is built on education, research, and scientific advancement. In line with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's vision of a progressive Pakistan, we are committed to uplifting underdeveloped areas by ensuring access to techno-

logical and other opportunities," he added.

He urged the nation to reaffirm its commitment to unity and progress, emphasizing that Pakistan's strength lies in collective efforts toward prosperity. "On this Pakistan Day, let us pledge to work together for a prosperous, united, and progressive Pakistan. Our future depends on the choices we make today," he concluded.

Pakistan Day commemorates the resolution that paved the way for the country's independence, serving as a reminder of the nation's enduring commitment to growth and development.



ISLAMABAD: People watch the skill of Pakistan Air Force (PAF)'s jets over the president's House during the Pakistan Day Parade. —INP Photo

Motorway police crackdown on speeding

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) have intensified their campaign against overspeeding, registering 112 FIRs against drivers caught exceeding the speed limit of 150 km/h on major motorways.

According to the NH&MP spokesperson, 112 FIRs have been registered in the different zones of the motorways so far.

The crackdown has been enforced on key motorways, including the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway (M2), Lahore-Multan Motorway (M3), and Motorways M4 and M5. As part of the operation, the Motorway Police have taken drivers into custody along with their vehicles and handed them over to the local police.

The registered FIRs include charges of negligence and reckless driving. According to official data, 8 cases were registered on the Lahore-Sialkot Motorway, 43 FIRs were filed on the Lahore-Islamabad

Motorway (M-2), 8 cases were registered on the Lahore-Abdul Hakeem Motorway (M-3), 12 FIRs were filed on the Multan-Pindi Bhattian Motorway (M-4), and 41 drivers were arrested on the Sukkur-Multan Motorway (M-5).

The NH&MP reiterated that the speed limit for three-lane motorways is 120 km/h for private vehicles and 110 km/h for public transport. Violations of these limits pose a severe risk to public safety. The department's spokesperson stressed that ensuring the safety of travellers remains their top priority, and they are firmly committed to enforcing traffic laws. Inspector General of Motorway Police Riffat Mukhtar Raja has instructed officials to intensify efforts against overspeeding. The Motorway Police reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring safe travel on national highways, urging motorists to abide by speed limits to prevent accidents.

Mania for eid shopping reaches new heights

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the countdown to Eid-ul-Fitr begins, Pakistanis are busy making last-minute preparations to ensure a joyous and memorable celebration where markets are flooded with people of all ages, from children to adults, eagerly shopping for new clothes, shoes and accessories.

As the Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations approach, the mania for Eid shopping has reached new heights across Pakistan, a report aired by PTV News noted. The report stated that major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad are experiencing a shopping frenzy, with many markets remaining open till late at night to cater to the huge demand.

Parents are spoiling their kids with fancy outfits, glittering jewelry and trendy

shoes, while youngsters are picking out stylish attire to wear on the big day, said group of citizens.

From traditional shalwar kameez to modern-day designer wear, the options are endless and the excitement is palpable, said a woman from Lahore. Women are also busy selecting elegant outfits, adorned with intricate embroidery and sparkling sequins to wear on Eid day, she added.

Meanwhile, shopkeepers are working overtime to restock shelves, replenish supplies and cater to the overwhelming demand for Eid essentials. "We have never seen such a huge rush of customers before," said a shopkeeper at Lahore's famous Anarkali Bazaar.

"Our sales have increased by at least 50%

compared to last year, and we're struggling to keep up with the demand."

Another shopkeeper from Karachi's Tariq Road, added, "People are buying everything from clothes to shoes to jewelry. We are doing our best to restock our shelves, but it is getting difficult to keep up with the demand." The shopkeepers also expressed their gratitude to the customers for their enthusiastic response, saying that it was a welcome boost to their business after a slow year.

Local boutiques and high-end fashion stores also reported a significant surge in sales, with many of their Eid collections selling out quickly. Tailors are also working around the clock to deliver orders on time. "We are working day and

night to ensure that all our customers receive their stitched clothes on time," said a tailor from a Islamabad market.

"It is a challenging task, but we are determined to deliver." With just a few days left before Eid, tailors are racing against time to complete their orders and make the festive season special for their customers.

In addition to the shopping frenzy, mehndi and bangle stalls are being set up in markets and shopping centers, adding to the festive atmosphere.

Women and girls are flocking to these stalls to get intricate mehndi designs applied to their hands and feet, while also buying colorful bangles and other accessories to complete their Eid look, said customers from Rawalpindi.

688,000 Afghans provided potable water last year

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund says it provided potable water to 688,000 people in Afghanistan last year. UNICEF wrote on its X handle: “Every child deserves safe drinking water to grow and stay healthy. In 2024, @UNICEFAfg provided 688,000 people with enough safe water for drinking and personal hygiene at home, schools and hospitals in Afghanistan. #WorldWaterDay”

Afghanistan’s exports hit \$1.7b mark in 1403: MoCI

KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghanistan exported goods worth more than one billion and 700 million US dollars and imported goods worth over 11 billion in 1403 solar year. Afghanistan made trade transactions worth \$12.949 billion with a number of countries in the past one year. Afghanistan made exports to Pakistan, India, UAE, Uzbekistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Turkey, Iraq and Tajikistan countries.

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

Ghor orchards burgeon with free saplings

FEROZKOH (Pajhwok): With the advent of spring, nurseries in Ferozkoh, the capital of western Ghor province, have brought thousands of ornamental, fruit-bearing and other saplings for sale.

The Agriculture Department has announced its support for fruit growers to help orchards in the area thrive. To this end, thousands of saplings have been provided to growers free of cost.

In a busy corner of the Ferozkoh market, the nursery business remains vibrant. People are purchasing saplings in groups and fruit growers, hopeful of a greener future, carry plants that will one day provide shade and fruit.

Inayatullah, a nursery owner, his hands covered in soil but a broad grin playing across his visage, speaks as he pulls saplings one by one from large bags.

Having come from Maidan Wardak province with over 2,500 fruit-bearing and non-

fruit-bearing saplings to sell, he says: “It’s a blessing!”

He adds: “This year, our sales have been very good. People are showing a greater interest in buying saplings. I sell up to 200 saplings a day, with prices ranging from 100 to 350 afghanis each.”

Abdul Saboor, another seller negotiating the price of an ornamental sapling, is also pleased with the market situation.

“The market is better this year,” he says. “People are buying more saplings and prices are more reasonable. Previously, we sold a sapling for 150 afghanis, but now prices have dropped and customers are happy.”

Orchards growing again
Abdul Rauf Ibrahim, a grower from Ghor, purchased 300 saplings, carefully placing them in his vehicle. His gaze is fixed on the future — on reviving the orchard devastated by last year’s floods.

Pointing to the saplings, he

says, “It was a tough year when floods wreaked havoc on our orchards. But this year, good saplings have come to Ghor and the prices are rational. I need to rebuild my orchard.”

Supporting growers
The Agriculture Department is taking steps to assist fruit growers.

Qari Abdul Naseer Munib, an official from the department, said they were trying to ensure the revival of orchards and the growth of the agricultural sector.

He said more than 25,000 fruit-bearing and non-fruit saplings had been distributed free of charge to growers so far.

Over the past three years, he added, hundreds of farmers in the province had received technical training in orchard management and had been provided with standard orchards. This initiative will continue to support the future growth of the sector.

28m afs canal constructed

FAIZABAD (Pajhwok): A canal has been constructed at a cost of 28 million afghanis in the Kiran Wa Manjan district of north-eastern Badakhshan province, an official said on Sunday.

Hafiz Maulvi Naqibullah Furqani, director of the engineering department at the Panjsher Brigade, said the canal, 5.2 kilometres long, 20 metres wide and three metres deep, had been executed in Eskazar village.

He said approximately 7,000 acres of land, previously barren and threatened by a river in the area, would be protected and converted into agriculture land with the execution of the canal.

He added the canal would also protect at least 1,000 residential houses in the area from flooding.

He explained a vast area was under constant threat from the river, forcing multiple families to share a single home near the mountains due to lack of proper residential houses.

Rahimullah, an official from the engineering department responsible for the canal design and planning, said the project took one and half months to complete.

Abdul Yasin, a resident of the Eskazar village of the district, said previously, no canal existed in the area and large tracts of land were under constant threat from river water and floods.

He urged the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to construct retaining walls in the village.

‘Our children ask for bread, but we have no money’

KABUL (TOLONews): A group of retirees in Kabul once again held a protest, demanding the Islamic Emirate pay their overdue pensions. The retirees say they are grappling with severe economic hardships, and the non-payment of their pensions has made life increasingly difficult.

The IE has not yet provided a specific timeline for when the retirees’ payments will be issued. Abdul Hakim, a retiree, said: “It’s been four years of promises, but nothing has been paid. Every week we come here hoping to find someone who will listen, but no one pays attention.”

Mukhtar, another retiree, said: “Since the beginning of the year, we’ve been told to come today or tomorrow. Even a decree was issued



ordering our payments, but the promises remain unfulfilled.” The retirees consistently express their frustration with worsening financial conditions, stating they have no source of income and are barely surviving.

Habibullah, another retiree, said: “Eid is here. My children want clothes, shoes, and food—but I can’t even afford bread. I don’t

know where to turn.”
Sayed Sahib Shah also noted: “It’s now the fifth year our pensions haven’t been paid, and still, there’s no sign of resolution.”

Although the leadership of the Islamic Emirate previously issued a directive for the payment of pensions, no timeline has yet been announced for its implementation.

Free health camps launched in Khost



KHOST (TOLONews): The Khost Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the private sector, has launched a series of free health camps. Each camp provides free medical treatment to approximately three to five thousand patients.

One such one-day camp was set up at a school in Alisher District, where both male and female specialists provided medical services

implementing this plan during the holy month of Ramadan. Our goal is to expand the program to all districts, and we may visit some after Eid.”

Residents of remote areas in Khost praised the initiative and urged authorities to address healthcare challenges in these regions more fundamentally.

Mazmil Afghan, a resident of Alisher District, said: “It’s great that people can benefit from the basic services this camp provides.”

Rasool Hasan Hosseini, another resident of Alisher District, said: “Organizing such camps is very beneficial for those in need and for people living in remote areas.” Officials from the Khost Public Health Department noted that previously, dozens of patients were treated at a similar health camp in Zazi Maidan District.

to patients.

Shirgul Zadrar, deputy director of public health in Khost, said: “Initially, we selected areas where patients cannot easily access the provincial center. Our team includes pediatricians, gynecologists, surgeons, and other specialists.”

Abdul Hakim Zadrar, head of the Khost Medical Association, stated: “This is the second time we are

Tirinkot bridge on verge of collapse

TIRINKOT (Pajhwok): Residents have raised concerns about the deteriorating condition of a key bridge in the capital of central of Uruzgan province.

They warn if immediate measures are not taken, the the Mashinaab bridge on Trinkot River in Parangyan area could collapse.

The bridge, built serves as a crucial link for inhabitants of nearly 200 villages, as well as travellers from Charchino and Gizab districts — and even Daikundi province. Locals say recent floods have severely damaged the southern part of the bridge, weakening its protective structures.

Bari Dad, an inhabitant of the Charmgar area of the provincial capital, recalled: “Recent floods have heavily damaged the southern side of link and with rising water levels, its protective structures are deteriorating.”

Similarly, Mohammad Wali, a driver from Charchino district, emphasised the bridge’s importance: “This is our only link to Trinkot city. If it collapses, we will be cut off.”

Last year, he pointed out, the main bridge in Chora district faced a similar fate. Due to delayed repairs, it eventually caved in.

Meanwhile, local officials confirmed recent floods had harmed several infrastructure projects in Uruzgan, including the Mashinaab and other bridges in Dehrawood district.

Governor’s spokesperson Hafiz Samiullah Akram said the Department of Public Works had been directed to assess and repair damaged sections of the bridge.

He assured residents all flood-damaged infrastructure projects would be rehabilitated soon.

Dozens of needy families in Kabul receive essential food aid

KABUL (Ariana News): Families in Kabul received much needed food aid from Bayat Foundation as part of the organization’s annual Ramadan campaign.

Bayat officials said aid will also be distributed to families in other provinces in the country before the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

On Thursday, dozens of needy families in Bamiyan province also received aid packages.

The packages includes

rice, flour and oil.

Bayat Foundation officials meanwhile said that recipients of the aid are identified following a strict assessment process and only those in need benefit.

Kabul recipients welcomed the assistance, and many said they are unable to afford food due to the economic hardships in the country.

Bamiyan residents also welcomed the initiative and thanked the foundation for their much-needed assistance last week.

“As part of the Bayat Foundation’s ongoing assistance, today we are distributing Ramadan aid packages in Bamiyan province. These packages contain flour, rice, and oil,” said Sayed Hakim, a representative of the Bayat Foundation in Bamiyan.

“Thanks to the Bayat Foundation for considering help for people like us,” said one grateful recipient, while another added: “Thank you to the Bayat

Foundation for helping us, and we hope that in the future, more aid will be provided to the poor people of Bamiyan.”

In addition to supporting public welfare projects, healthcare, and those affected by natural disasters, the Bayat Foundation has been providing food and non-food aid to thousands of needy families in Kabul and provinces of Afghanistan during Ramadan for nearly two decades.

Completion of gabion wall project for Minaret of Jam protection

GHOR (Khaama Press): The gabion wall project to protect the Minaret of Jam in Ghor province, Afghanistan, from floods has been successfully completed and inaugurated.

The Ministry of Information and Culture of the Taliban administration announced the successful completion and operation of the Gabion Wall project for the protection of Jam Minaret, one of the most important historical sites in the Ghor province of central Afghanistan.

The project was completed to safeguard the minaret from damage caused by seasonal floods. According to the report, the Gabion Wall project at the Jam Minaret site included the construction of gabion walls, which are 267 meters long, 1.5 meters wide, and 1 meter high.

These walls were built around Lake Jam, near the historic minaret, using stone and metal mesh to create resistance against the

force of floods. The project was funded by the Asia Development Community Institute and coordinated with the Ministry of Information and Culture.

The total cost of the project was approximately 2.24 million Afghanis, and the construction was completed within 50 working days. Mawlawi Abdulhai Zaim the Head of the Information and Culture Department of Ghor province, emphasized during the opening ceremony that this project ensures the protection of Jam Minaret from the upcoming flood risks.

He mentioned that floods in past years had caused damage to this historic structure, and this preventive action would help avoid further destruction.

Some experts, however, argue that additional measures are necessary for the long-term protection of Jam Minaret, such as constructing higher retaining walls and altering the course of the Jam River.

These actions are particularly important due to the potential increase in flood



intensity during the spring season.

Jam Minaret, which stands at a height of 64 meters and dates back over 800 years, is considered one of the architectural masterpieces of the Ghurid dynasty and is the tallest brick minaret in the world, second only to Qutb Minar in Delhi.

The site was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2002. However, due to its geographical location between the Herat and Jam rivers, it has long been vulnerable to flooding and natural erosion. The minaret’s

brickwork and tile decorations, which feature Kufic script and verses from Surah Maryam, make it one of Afghanistan’s most valuable cultural treasures.

In recent decades, the lack of proper restoration and preservation efforts raised concerns among archaeologists and cultural activists.

Devastating floods in Ghor, particularly in 2019 and 2021, had threatened parts of the minaret’s base and caused sediment buildup around it, highlighting the urgent need for protective measures.

Panjshir–Badakhshan road reopens after one month

PANJSHIR (TOLONews): The Panjshir Special Brigade has announced that the Panjshir–Badakhshan road has reopened to travelers and cargo vehicles after being closed for nearly a month due to heavy snowfall and avalanches.

This road connects several districts of Badakhshan Province—including Yamgan, Kuran wa Munjan—with Panjshir Province.

Naqibullah Farqani, the brigade’s engineering director, said: “This area was hit by strong winds and heavy avalanches, and a lot of snow had piled up. But

over the past week, our workers have been continuously clearing the route.”

Residents of Badakhshan and Panjshir expressed relief at the improved road conditions compared to previous years.

Sayed Abdullah, a resident of Badakhshan, said: “There are many challenges on this route. Avalanches block the way, and when the snow melts, the water damages parts of the road.”

Murtaza, a resident of Panjshir, said: “This is the shortest route between us and Badakhshan. When someone is sick or exhaust-

ed, it allows for quicker travel. Previously, we had a patient with appendicitis who had to be taken through Faizabad, but he didn’t survive.”

Emanullah, a driver, said: “This route was closed for about a month, but thank God it is now open. Before, even Corollas couldn’t pass through, but now I’ve come through myself.”

Officials from the Panjshir Special Brigade said they aim to extend the road in the coming months to areas near the hypothetical Durand Line to enhance regional transit connectivity.

A barrier-breaking woman’s success story



S H I B E R G H A N (Pajhwok): Zeb-ul-Nisa Majidi, a young woman from the capital of northern Jawzjan province, has navigated a new path for herself and other women with her unwavering determination and hard work.

At 26, the woman from Shibergan, previously studied engineering at the Jawzjan University. Despite her passion for

learning, social conditions and limitations prevented her from pursuing her education.

However, she has since established a tailoring workshop, providing training to 10 women in her community.

Through perseverance, Zeb-ul-Nisa acquired sufficient sewing skills in less than six months from an instructor. She initially sewed clothes for her fam-

ily and friends but soon began receiving orders from others.

She explains: “I’ve always wanted to learn something that would allow me to earn an income for myself and my family. With the support of friends and family, I was able to establish this workshop, where girls and women who have been deprived of education can become self-sufficient and contribute to their families’ economy.”

Zeb-ul-Nisa acknowledges that the road to success was not always easy. She faces several challenges, including a lack of sufficient capital to purchase necessary tools and raw materials, as well as the absence of support from aid organisations.

She says: “I started my workshop with minimal capital. We sew children’s clothes, kitchen sets and traditional garments. I earn around 10,000 afghanis per month, and I am

very happy with this.”

She urges the government and aid NGOs to support her initiative by providing raw materials and equipment, such as sewing machines, so she can expand her work and create more opportunities for women’s education.

To other women in similar situations, she says: “Nothing is impossible. If we believe in ourselves, we can progress even in the toughest of circumstances. The key is to never give up and continue striving for a better future.”

Yaldez Alchi, an instructor at the Faculty of Economics at Jawzjan University, comments: “In the current situation, supporting women entrepreneurs, especially in small-scale production sectors like sewing, can significantly contribute to their economic empowerment.”

“If the government and aid organisations invest, women will not only

become self-sufficient but will also create job opportunities for others,” Alchi believed.

Latifa Sarwarzada, head of the Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Jawzjan, emphasised the importance of such workshops and advocated for support them.

She added: “The Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Jawzjan is fully committed to supporting women entrepreneurs, both materially and motivationally.”

She also pointed out that there were 200 workshops in Jawzjan, 100 of which were registered with the Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry. At least 3,500 women are actively working at these workshops.

Recently, an increasing number of women have started leaving at home to work and collaborate with families in various professions.

KABUL (Pajhwok): The prices of flour and fuel declined, but the rates of cooking oil and gold surged this year compared to their prices last year, in Kabul, market sources said.

Food items
Zmarai Safi, head of the Food Traders’ Association, said the price of a 49-kilogram sack of Kazakh flour fell from 1,580afs last year to 1,330afs this year, but a 16-litre bottle of Malaysian cooking oil went up from 1,430afs to 1,700afs.

Abdul Nasir Rashdia, an economic expert, told Pajhwok Afghan News the prices of goods were determined based on supply and demand in the market. “If demand surges, prices also increase, and when demand for goods decreases, their rates decline.”

He said the increasing price of flour and sugar had various reasons and the main reason was supply and demand and another factor could be that Afghanistan was an import-

ing country.

He said Afghanistan’s trade relations with some countries were improving and explained: “Previously, Afghanistan was dependent on one route, and when it was blocked, transit and border problems arose, and prices increased sharply. We had this experience every year, but fortunately, Afghanistan is connected to many countries and imports basic materials and raw materials from different countries recently.”

However, the prices of food items stayed stable as the price of a 49-kilogram bag of Indian sugar cost 2,600afs, a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice stayed stable at 2,600afs, a kilogram of African black tea at 400afs and the same amount of Indonesian green tea at 350afs.

Fuel prices
A worker at the Ahmadyar pump station told Pajhwok the price of one litre of petrol edged down from 63afs to 62afs

and diesel from 62afs to 57afs.

He also said the rate of one kilogram liquefied gas decreased from 58afs to 50afs during the year.

Gold prices up
Mohammad Fawad, a jeweller in Timor Shahi area, said the price of one gram of Arabian gold went up from 4,150afs to 5,600afs and the same amount of the Russian variety from 3,100afs to 4,450afs.

Haji Mohammad Hussain, owner of the Sadaqat Money Exchange Service, said the local currency strengthened during the week as one US dollar traded at 70.80afs and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 250afs.

During the previous week, one US dollar accounted for 71.30afs and 1,000 Pakistani rupees for 250afs. The spike in the afghani value is essentially linked to periodic dollar auctions by the central bank.



Gaza: Mourners pray next to the bodies of their Palestinians killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip as they are brought for burial at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, SundaY.

Sharjeel calls for unity and progress

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has said that on this historic occasion of Pakistan Day, he extends his heartfelt congratulations to the people of Pakistan.

This is the day when Quaid-e-Azam and other great leaders laid the foundation for turning the dream of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent into reality.

In his message on Pakistan Day, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that Pakistan is the result of the countless sacrifices made by our ancestors for the establishment of an independent and democratic state.

Today, we must remember those great martyrs who laid down their lives for the freedom and sovereignty of

our country.

He emphasized that today is a day to renew our commitment to unity and to confront the challenges facing Pakistan. For a strong, stable, and prosperous nation, it is essential for all of us to rise above our differences and stand together. Sharjeel Inam Memon urged everyone to contribute to the country's development by following the principles of Quaid-e-Azam.

Aliyev greets PM on Pakistan Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has congratulated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and people of Pakistan on the occasion of Pakistan Day.

In a letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the President of Azerbaijan said, "On behalf of myself and the people of Azerbaijan, I sincerely congratulate you and your brotherly people on the occasion of the national holiday of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan – Pakistan Day, extending my best wishes."

He said, "The current level of the Azerbaijan-Pakistan strategic partnership and our cooperation, which is enriched with new content day by day, is a source of great satisfaction."

"Our successful joint activities in the economy, transport, logistics, energy, investment, defense industry, and several other areas of mutual interest are among the key factors determining our ties," he added.

He said, "At the same time, the alignment of our positions on international issues and our mutual support serve as a clear expression of the Azerbaijan-Pakistan brotherhood, contributing to the fundamental interests of our countries and peoples."

"We attach exceptional importance to the comprehensive development of our relations, which are built on strong foundations such as common cultural values and solidarity, stemming from the deep affection, respect, and trust between our brotherly peoples. The intensity of high-level visits, meetings, and contacts is a clear indication of the dynamic growth of our cooperation," he continued.

Ukraine drone attacks kill one in Rostov

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian air defence units destroyed 59 Ukrainian drones that targeted Russia's southwestern regions and killed one person in Rostov, Russian authorities said on Sunday.

Twenty-nine of the drones were downed overnight over the Rostov region in Russia's south, the Russian defence ministry said on the Telegram messaging app. Another 20 were downed over the Astrakhan region on the Caspian Sea.

The rest of the drones were downed over the Voronezh, Volgograd, Kursk and Saratov regions, as well as over Crimea, the ministry said.

Yuri Slyusar, the acting governor of the Rostov region that borders Ukraine, said that the attack killed one person.

"A car caught fire due to a drone attack," Slyusar said on Telegram messaging. "A person in the car was killed."

Igor Babushkin, the governor of the Astrakhan region, said debris from a destroyed drone fell on a house and damaged a car but that there were no injuries.

Reuters could not independently verify the reports.

There was no immediate comment from Ukraine. Both sides deny targeting civilians in the three-year-old war that Russia started with its full-scale invasion on Ukraine.

Pro-Trump senator meets Chinese Premier Li with US company executives

BEIJING (Reuters): U.S. Republican Senator Steve Daines met Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Beijing with a group of executives from U.S. companies on Sunday, following an annual business summit in the capital attended by CEOs from big foreign firms.

Daines was accompanied by seven senior executives including Qualcomm (QCOM.O), opens new tab CEO Cristiano Amon, Pfizer (PFE.N), opens new tab CEO Albert Bourla, Cargill CEO Brian Sikes and Boeing (BA.N), opens new tab Global Senior Vice President Brendan Nelson in the talks at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, a foreign media pool report said.

Daines' trip marks the first time an American politician has visited China since U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January. Beijing is seeking high-level dialogue with the Trump administration, hoping to reach a deal to avert further pressure on tariffs from Washington.

Daines, a staunch supporter of Trump and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was heavily involved in negotiations over U.S.-China trade during Trump's first term as president, and has made multiple trips to China as a

senator.

He lived in Guangzhou and Hong Kong in the 1990s while working as an executive for Procter & Gamble (PG.N), opens new tab, which he referenced in his opening speech.

"Collectively, these seven companies have over 275 years of experience of doing business in China," Daines said as he introduced the CEOs, according to a pool transcript.

Beijing has been trying to attract foreign investment to offset U.S. tariff pressure and its slowing domestic economy. The U.S. executives were granted an audience with Li Qiang, who will not meet separately with other foreign CEOs at the China Development Forum for the second year in a row.

The annual closed-door meeting with the premier was traditionally viewed as a summit highlight by foreign firms' CEOs, who have long complained of an unequal playing field, regulatory hurdles and restricted market access in China.

Relations between China and the U.S. have come under new strain after Trump slapped additional tariffs on Chinese goods, accusing Beijing of not doing enough to stem the flow of fentanyl into the United States. In early April, Trump is expected to unleash a round of tariffs

on all countries that tax U.S. imports, potentially including China. A U.S. review of whether China has fulfilled promises made during the "phase one" trade deal from Trump's first administration is set to conclude on April 1.

In his opening remarks, Daines pitched Sunday's meeting as a chance for them to air their views on the business environment in China directly to Li.

"There are no winners in a trade war," Li told Daines in their meeting, stressing the importance of economic and trade ties in overall U.S.-China relations.

"China ... will actively promote solutions to the legitimate demands of enterprises, treat domestic and foreign enterprises equally," Li said, according to a Xinhua report.

Other Chinese officials at the meeting included Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, Executive Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, and the director of China's state planner, Zheng Shanjie.

Daines met Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Beijing on Saturday, and discussed with him the need for China to stop the flow of fentanyl precursors, according to a post by Daines on the X social media platform.

Turkish court orders key Erdogan rival jailed pending trial on corruption charges

ISTANBUL (AP): A court formally arrested the mayor of Istanbul, a key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Sunday and ordered him jailed pending the outcome of a trial on corruption charges.

Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was detained following a raid on his residence earlier this week, sparking the largest wave of street demonstrations in Turkey in more than a decade. It also deepened concerns over democracy and rule of law in Turkey.

His imprisonment is widely regarded as a political move to remove a major contender from the next presidential race, currently scheduled for 2028. Government officials reject the accusations and insist that Turkey's courts operate independently.

The prosecutor's office said the court decided to jail Imamoglu on suspicion of running a criminal organization, accepting bribes, extortion, illegally recording personal data and bid-rigging. A request for him to be imprisoned on terror-related charges was rejected although he still faces prosecution.

Following the court's ruling, Imamoglu was transferred to Silivri prison, west of Istanbul.

The Interior Ministry later announced that Imamoglu had been suspended from duty as a "temporary measure." The municipality had previously appointed an acting mayor from its governing council.

Alongside Imamoglu, 47 other people were also jailed pending trial, including a key aide and two district mayors from Istanbul, one of whom was replaced with a government appointee. A further 44 suspects were released under judicial control.

Interior Minister Ali

Yerlikaya said Sunday that 323 people were detained the previous evening over disturbances at protests.

Largely peaceful protests across Turkey have seen hundreds of thousands come out in support of Imamoglu. However, there has been some violence, with police deploying water cannons, tear gas, pepper spray and firing plastic pellets at protesters in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, some of whom hurled stones, fireworks and other missiles at riot police.

The formal arrest came as more than 1.5 million members of the opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, began holding a primary presidential election to endorse Imamoglu, the sole candidate.

The party has also set up symbolic ballot boxes nationwide to allow people who are not party members to express their support for the mayor. Large crowds

gathered early Sunday to cast a "solidarity ballot."

"This is no longer just a problem of the Republican People's Party, but a problem of Turkish democracy," Fusun Erben, 69, said at a polling station in Istanbul's Kadikoy district. "We do not accept our rights being so easily usurped. We will fight until the end."

Speaking at a polling station in Bodrum, western Turkey, engineer Mehmet Dayanc, 38, said he feared that "in a end we'll be like Russia, a country without an opposition, where only a single man participates in elections."

In a message posted on social media, Imamoglu called on people to show "their struggle for democracy and justice to the entire world" at the ballot box. He warned Erdogan that he would be defeated by "our righteousness, our courage, our humility, our smiling face."

PAF's majestic flypast marks Pakistan Day celebrations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Air Force's fighter jets presented a spectacular aerial display during the Pakistan Day parade held at Aiwan-e-Sadar, Islamabad. The President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, Services chiefs and Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber

Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff Pakistan Air Force, were also in attendance on the occasion. As a tribute to the historic Lahore Resolution of 23 March, 1940 PAF's combat aircraft roared through the skies, demonstrating unmatched precision, professionalism and air superiority. The flypast began with

the awe-inspiring performance of Team Sherdils, which executed stunning aerial maneuvers and aerobatics, showcasing the rigorous training and exceptional skill of PAF aircrew. The formation soared above Aiwan-e-Sadar, spreading the vibrant colours of the Pakistani flag and reaffirming PAF's unwavering commitment

to defend the country's airspace.

A diverse fleet of Pakistan Air Force jets, including JF-17 Thunders, F-16 Fighting Falcons, Mirages and state-of-the-art J-10C aircraft - executed a series of breathtaking aerial maneuvers. The audience was enthralled as the aircraft performed precision formations, high-speed passes and synchronized flight patterns, reinforcing PAF's operational readiness and combat capability.

This year's Pakistan Day celebrations were held on a limited scale in respect of the holy month of Ramadan. However, PAF's flypast remained the highlight of the event, reflecting the Air Force's unwavering dedication to safeguard national sovereignty.

As the guardian of skies, PAF continues to evolve with cutting-edge technology, modernized aerial platforms and relentless training to ensure air superiority. Pakistan Air Force remains steadfast in its mission to defend the nation and inspire the next generation with its legacy of excellence and bravery.



Ukraine, US teams begin talks in Saudi Arabia

KYIV/RIYADH (Reuters): Ukrainian and U.S. officials began talks on Sunday on proposals to safeguard energy facilities and critical infrastructure, Ukraine's defence minister said, part of a diplomatic push by U.S. President Donald Trump to end three years of war.

The meeting in Saudi Arabia, which precedes talks on Monday between the U.S. and Russian delegations, came as U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff expressed optimism about the chances for ending

Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two.

"I feel that (Russian President Vladimir Putin) wants peace," Witkoff told Fox News on Sunday.

"I think that you're going to see in Saudi Arabia on Monday some real progress, particularly as it affects a Black Sea ceasefire on ships between both countries. And from that, you'll naturally gravitate into a full-on shooting ceasefire."

Separately, White House National Security Adviser Mike Waltz said

on Sunday the United States was talking through a range of confidence-building measures aimed at ending the war, including on the future of Ukrainian children taken into Russia. Announcing the start of the Riyadh talks, Ukraine's Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, who is heading his country's delegation, said on Facebook: "We are implementing the President of Ukraine's directive to bring a just peace closer and to strengthen. Putin agreed last week to Trump's pro-

posal for Russia and Ukraine to stop attacks on each other's energy infrastructure for 30 days, but that narrowly defined ceasefire was soon cast into doubt, with both sides reporting continued strikes.

A large-scale Russian drone attack on Kyiv overnight killed at least three people, including a 5-year-old child, causing fires in high-rise apartment buildings and damage throughout the capital, Ukrainian officials said on Sunday.

Gandapur for best Eid arrangements

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deployment of tourism police and Civil Defence personnel. The administration has further been directed to impose a complete ban on swimming in fast-flowing rivers during the holidays, stressing the enforcement of existing SOPs at rivers and dams. Boating without life jackets or overloading boats beyond their capacity is strictly prohibited. To deal effectively with emergencies, Rescue 1122 will remain on high alert near rivers and other crowded locations. Additionally, the Communication &

Works Department and Urban Development Authorities are instructed to be on standby, keeping essential machinery ready to ensure roads remain open and accessible at all times.

Tourism authorities have been ordered to keep tourist facilitation centers and helpines operational round the clock during Eid. Special attention will be given to recreational parks, where management will be instructed to prevent overloading on rides. Furthermore, all cable car operators must submit valid fitness certificates.

Healthcare centers across

the province will remain operational 24/7, with adequate stocks of emergency medicines and staff availability ensured. Authorities will also make arrangements to guarantee an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products at petrol stations, particularly in tourist areas and high-traffic locations. Traffic management plans and cleanliness arrangements for Eid congregations and festivals must be finalized in a timely manner. Deputy commissioners are also directed to visit jails, hospitals, and orphanages during the Eid holidays.