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Govt to come up with solution for inflated electricity bills: PM

Says caretaker Govt trying to resolve electricity bills issue without defiance of IMF agreements

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Anwaar-Haq Kakar Thursday said the government minutely looked into the problem of inflated electricity bills and would come up with a solution within next 48 hours.

Talking to senior journalists and news anchors here on the current challenging economic conditions, he said the government was considering various options to provide relief to the people.

The people had protested against increased electricity bills and the government realized their problems, he added.

To a question, he clarified that the Pakistan army, navy and air force were not using a single free unit of electricity and their bills were paid from the allocated financial budget.

While employees of

WAPDA were using free electricity units and their usage would be rationalized, especially of the higher grade officers some of them were getting huge quantity of free electricity, he added.

He said perception should not be that the government would take any strict measures causing difficulties for the people.

He pointed out that the power sector had been a very challenging issue since the 1990s and the governments of that time signed agreements with independent power producers to overcome loadshedding which proved costly for consumers.

Over the years, he said, the generation and transmission system of electricity was flawed and the government had to deal with serious issues of line losses,

power theft, high circular debt, use of expensive imported fuel and capacity payments to electricity companies.

"These issues cannot be ignored by just closing eyes. We need to diagnose treatment for the disease."

He made it clear that the government would fulfill its agreements with the international financial institutions.

He lamented that the country was faced with economic stagnation and there was less investment in sectors like manufacturing, real estate and stock exchange, and the trend was to only take up profit from certain businesses.

He said the caretaker government was formed for the continuity of constitutional order, and was dealing with economic and security challenges.



QUETTA: Administrator Quetta Metropolitan Corporation Jabbar Baloch and others meeting with Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki

Caretakers jack up petrol price by over Rs. 14 to take it past 300-mark

Monitoring Desk

ISLAMABAD: As the nation grapples with high electricity bills, the caretaker government late Thursday jacked up the petrol and diesel prices by over Rs14.

The Finance Division said the hike was due to the "increasing trend of petroleum prices in the international market and exchange rate variations".

The local currency is at an all-time low following an easing in import restrictions

that has increased the greenback's demand and rising risks associated with financing the country's current account deficit.

The rupee has lost over Rs15 in the interbank market since the formation of the caretaker government which is tasked with overseeing at least one review of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) \$3 billion standby arrangement; and steering the country through to a national election that is in theory due to take place by November.



QUETTA: Caretaker Provincial Information Minister Jan Achakzai meeting with Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar

Caretaker Minister Home visits Levies Directorate: Services of Levies force for restoring peace valuable, maintains Zubair Jamali

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Captain (Retd) Muhammad Zubair Jamali has stated that the services of Levies force for restoring peace in the province are valuable.

He expressed the hope that the Levies force would continue to perform their duties regarding protection of life and property of the masses in the same manner.

The caretaker Minister was speaking on occasion of the visit of Balochistan Levies Force directorate on Thursday.

He maintained that it is top priority of the present government to restore law and order in the province. No stone should be left unturned in protection of life and property of the masses.

He said that the martyrs of Levies force are our heroes, who rendered sacrifice of their lives in the line of duty.

Appreciating performance of the Levies, the Minister said that it is because of the sacrifices of Levies and other law enforcement agencies that law and order situation has been improved in the province.

The Director General Levies force briefed the caretaker Minister about overall performance and functioning of the force besides its strength and other related matters.

He informed that special attention is being given on discipline in the force. He said that the Levies officers and personnel are determined to protect the life and property of the masses.

Health minister calls on President Alvi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Dr Nadeem Jan called on President Dr Arif Alvi here on Thursday and discussed matters relating to national health in the country.

The president emphasized special focus on issues of breast cancer, growing population and mental health in the country.

President Alvi and the minister discussed the proposals regarding nutrition, rehabilitation of differently abled persons, and mental and physical weakness among the children.

The president stressed the need to provide consultation facilities to improve mental health in the country.

He said the basic treatment of mental health could be provided with the help of modern technology, Artificial Intelligence and Chatbot.

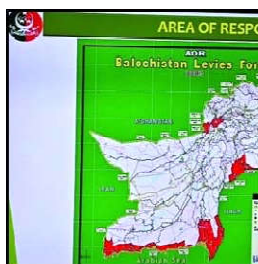
Court allows Imran Khan to talk to his sons

ISLAMABAD (Online): Special court established under secret act has allowed PTI chairman Imran Khan to talk to his sons by telephone.

Chairman PTI filed petition in the court through his counsels Umair Niazi and Shiraz Ahmad seeking permission to talk to his sons Qasim and Suleman.

The petitioner took the plea in the petition that he wants to talk to his sons Qasim and Suleman by telephone or through whatsapp.

Judge Abul Hasnat Zulfarnain of special court accepted the plea besides issuing directives to make arrangements for telephonic talks between chairman PTI and his sons.



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Mir Muhammad Zubair Khan Jamali being briefed by Director Levies Abdul Ghaffor Magsi. DG Levies Naseebullah Kakar is also present



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar talking to Anchors and Journalists in a meeting at the Prime Minister's House.

Govt of Balochistan disappointed over "making politics on issue of missing persons"

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan has expressed strong disappointment over what he termed making politics constantly on the issue of missing persons.

In a statement issued here on Thursday night, the government strictly advises against using the sensitive issue of missing persons for political benefit.

This very statement of the government has come in response to some political parties which have raised the issue of missing persons during their election campaign and blamed that government is responsible for these disappearances.

In the statement, the government strongly contradicted these allegations and expresses its firm resolve to trace all the missing persons and recover them.

Moreover, the govern-

ment emphasizes on its zero tolerance policy for making the matter political. It was also stated that the issue of missing persons is mostly used as vote gaining method by the political parties, which otherwise become a controversial topic during the election periods.

However, the government made it clear that it has not received any substantial complaint about the missing persons.

Moreover, the government exposes the propaganda regarding missing persons for India, human rights industry, leftist groups and racial nationalists are responsible.

It was stated that the objective behind this propaganda is nothing but to exert pressure on the incumbent caretaker government and law enforcement agencies.

According to the last

report of Balochistan Missing Persons Commission, a total of 9,231 complaints have been received to the commission. Out of them, 5,574 cases have been solved and 3,743 missing persons have been recovered.

It was also told by the BMPC that bodies of 241 missing persons have been recovered while 974 persons are in custody. 616 missing who have been declared as missing are also imprisoned, the statement mentioned.

In addition to this, cases of 2,207 missing persons were pending with BMPC till November 30, 2022.

Under the given situation, the Balochistan government urged all the stakeholders to give priority to welfare and safety of the affected persons instead of taking political advantage of the issue.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Interior, Sarfraz Ahmad Bugti chairing meeting regarding anti smuggling measures.

Bugti seeks briefing to cope smuggling of goods

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti on the directions of Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar on Thursday sought a briefing from provincial governments on the stoppage of smuggling of goods.

The minister was chairing a meeting regarding anti-smuggling measures here. Secretary Interior Abdullah Khan

Sumbul, Director General Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Mohsin Hassan Butt and officials from the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), ministries and provincial offices participated in the meeting.

Minister Bugti stressed the need to make a comprehensive plan to curb the smuggling of fertilizers and sugar from the country.

Pakistan's total foreign reserves reach at \$ 13.17 b

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan stood at US\$ 13,171.1 million while reserves held by the central bank reached \$ 7,849.3 million. The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that SBP's reserves decreased by \$ 81 million to \$ 7,849.3 million on account of debt repayments during the week ended on August 25, 2023.

Required amount transferred in QPC bank account: Commitment of caretaker CM about financial assistance of ailing & late journalists fulfilled: Jan Achakzai

Independent Report

QUETTA: The commitment made by caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki about financial assistance for treatment of two ailing media persons and the bereaved family of a deceased media person has been fulfilled.

This was announced by the caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai in an official statement issued here on Thursday.

According to Jan Achakzai, the promise made by the caretaker Chief Minister for financial assistance of two journalists and the family of a late media person has been fulfilled. The caretaker Information Minister recalled that the caretaker Chief Minister had taken notice of the treatment of two media persons and financial assistance being faced by family of a late journalist. Jan Achakzai further told that the required amount has been transferred in bank account of Quetta Press Club.

He said that the amount would be spent on medical treatment of two ailing journalists and financial assistance of the family of late media person.

The caretaker Provincial Minister Information maintained that the provincial government is serious in resolving the issues of media persons besides having firm belief on the freedom of press.



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Mir Muhammad Zubair Khan Jamali being briefed by Director Levies Abdul Ghaffor Magsi. DG Levies Naseebullah Kakar is also present

9 soldiers martyred, 5 injured in suicide attack in Bannu

ISPR says "such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve", vows to eliminate menace of terrorism

RAWALPINDI (APP): Nine soldiers of Pakistan Army on Thursday embraced martyrdom after a motorcycle-borne suicide bomber exploded himself while targeting a military convoy in general area Jani Khel of Bannu District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Among the nine soldiers Naib Subedar Sanobar Ali also embraced shahadat (martyrdom), while five soldiers were injured, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

The area was cordoned by the security forces and sanitation was being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area.

"Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the ISPR said.

Reacting to the terrorist incident, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said that he was "heartbroken" by the loss of nine "valiant soldiers" to a cowardly terrorist act that injured many.

"Such acts are utterly reprehensible. My thoughts are with the families of the martyred and injured. Pakistan stands resolute against such terror," the interim premier added.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Dr Nadeem Jan, calls on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Depletion of water table has turned serious in Balochistan especially in Quetta city, says Governor

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan, Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar has expressed deep concern over the depleting underground water table in the province saying that the situation has turned serious especially in Quetta city.

He said that if we didn't take prompt steps for overcoming the shortage of water in Quetta, then we may face numerous issues in near future.

He said that it should be kept in mind that we would be needing help and guidance of international organizations to grip the depleting water table in the province.

The Governor was speaking to the Managing Director Water and Sanitation Authority (WASA), Hamid Rana, who called on him here on Thursday.

The Governor was equally concerned over use of clean drinking water for the plants and saplings in the developed era even and that we don't have the capability of reuse of used water.

He noted with contentment that WASA is working on several small projects on use of the recycled water, which would surely yield positive results. However, there is a need to expand such projects.

Joint venture under Public-Private Partnership: BMRL and PMC ink Rs. 3 bn agreement for mining and production of fluoride

Independent Report

QUETTA: An agreement of worth Rs. 3 billion was signed between Balochistan Mineral Resource Limited (BMRL), Government of Balochistan and a private company, Platinum Mining Company (Pvt) Limited here on Thursday.

The Rs. 3 billion joint venture has been signed under the Public Private Partnership for mining and production of fluoride in Mekhtar area of Loralai district.



The signing ceremony was held at the office of BMRL in which the Advisor to Chief Minister for Mines and Mineral Development, Umar Muhammad Hassani was also present. The head of BMRL, Saeed Sarparah signed on behalf of BMRL and provincial government while the Chief Executive Officer of PMC Private Limited and President Lasbela Chamber of Commerce signed on behalf of his company.

Speaking on the occasion, the Advisor for Mines and Mineral Development said that the caretaker provincial government is taking all necessary steps for ensuring provision of desired facilities to the foreign investors in the mining and mineral sectors in Balochistan.

Solangi takes notice of alleged torture, arrest of senior journalist from Swat

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi has taken notice of the alleged torture and arrest of Fayyaz Zafar, a senior journalist from Swat.

Discussing the incident with relevant authorities, he emphasized the importance of conducting an impartial

investigation into the incident.

The caretaker federal minister of information has sought a report of the torture and arrest of Fayyaz Zafar, said a press release.

He asserted that the authority of the office must not be employed to stifle the voice of journalists.

President for imparting quality training, problem-solving skills to civil servants

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday underscored the need to impart quality training to civil servants and equipping them with essential skills such as problem-solving, fast decision-making, and efficient management of resources to ensure good governance and improve service delivery. He said that bureaucracy must be more responsive to people's needs and focus on solving problems being faced by the country in different sectors, particularly health, education, and community services. The president expressed these views while chairing 23rd meeting of the Board of Governors (BOG) of the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) here at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary Establishment Division, Inamullah Khan Dharejo, Rector NSPP, Dr Ijaz Munir, and other members of the BOG. During the meeting, the president urged the need for making collaborative efforts with different national and international organizations and educational institutions to conduct research and provide quality training to civil servants. He said that NSPP should consider providing short-term training courses and updating its training modules along modern lines to equip bureaucrats with the latest skills and improve their efficiency and performance. The president further stated that NSPP should deal with cases of inefficiency and misconduct as per rules, besides taking steps to ensure transparency and accountability within NSPP and its subsidiary institutions. The meeting was briefed about the implementation status of the decisions taken in the 22nd meeting of the BOG, besides discussing various administrative and financial matters of NSPP. It was informed that the National Development Internship Program (Policy) had been adopted and the process of hiring the interns would be finalized with the assistance of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. The meeting also agreed to expedite the process of appointment of Dean of the National Institute of Public Policy.

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ISLAMABAD: Australian High Commissioner, Neil Hawkins in a meeting with Federal Minister for Law and Justice Ahmad Irfan Aslam.

British High Commissioner gifts state-of-the-art airport security scanners to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): British High Commissioner Jane Marriott CMG OBE Thursday handover two airport security scanners to Pakistan during a ceremony held at Karachi Airport. British High Commissioner Jane Marriott CMG OBE addressing the ceremony said "I'm delighted to handover these state-of-the-art airport security scanners here in Karachi, a demonstration of UK support for Pakistan's security." "We all want travellers to fly safely and securely, this new technology means passengers can fly with greater confidence from Pakistan. Aviation plays a vital role in growing trade between the UK and Pakistan and enabling the diaspora to travel. Making flying safer brings the UK and Pakistan even closer together", she added. "I want to thank the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority for arranging today's ceremony and for the excellent cooperation we have on both aviation security and safety issues."

With over 1.6 million people of Pakistani heritage in the UK making up every part of British society, we have a special and ever-growing special bond, she concluded. It is pertinent to mention here that the Hundreds of thousands of people travel between the UK and Pakistan every year, proof of the hugely significant UK-Pakistan people-to-people relationship. Air links are of vital importance for trade between the UK and Pakistan and the diaspora. UK funding of £164,000 (60 million Rupees) has provided two state-of-the-art screening units for Karachi and Lahore airports to detect illicit items in passenger baggage. This technology will help to protect both British and Pakistani nationals travelling from Pakistan to the UK and elsewhere. This is one small part of the UK's ongoing aviation work with Pakistan, which is helping to raise safety and security standards.

AIOU announces admissions for BA, B.Ed programmes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) on Thursday announced to initiate admissions for the second phase of semester Autumn 2023 from Friday (Sept 1). Programs offered in this phase included Associate degree in Arts (BA General), Associate degree in Commerce (B.Com), Associate degree in Education, BS (ODL) programmes, 1.5, 2.5 and 4-year B.Ed programmes, Postgraduate diploma and certificate courses, said a news release. The admission forms and prospectus of all the programmes are available on the university website. Admission forms for the Associate Degree programs (BA, B.Com) and B.Ed program are now available at the University's Regional Offices and SWIFT Centers throughout the country. All the necessary information is available in the prospectus and the deadline for admissions is October 17. Candidates may call the university helpline at 051-111 112 468 for further information.

Australian High Commissioner calls on Jilani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins Thursday called on Caretaker Foreign Minister Jilani Abbas Jilani and discussed matters relating to mutual interests. During the meeting the high commissioner briefed the foreign minister on Pakistan-Australia ties in multiple domains. The foreign minister emphasized importance of regular dialogue under existing mechanisms & high-level visits to give impetus to bilateral ties.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi chairing the 23rd meeting of the Board of Governors of the National School of Public Policy, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Roadmap to climate-change resilient Pakistan requires joint efforts: Sami Saeed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Muhammad Sami Saeed on Thursday said the roadmap to the climate-change resilient and adaptive future plan for Pakistan required collaboration among all stakeholders, terming it the need of the hour. "We will have to work hand in hand to align efforts of all stakeholders including government departments, private enterprises, civil society, academia and development partners," he said while addressing the inaugural session of projects completion ceremony titled "Optimizing Impact - Investing in Resilient and Adaptive Future of Pakistan".

Following this, the government prepared a 'Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework' (4RF framework) that is being implemented. In January this year, Pakistan successfully managed to secure pledges of US\$10 billion from donors committed during the International Conference on 'Climate Resilient Pakistan' jointly hosted by Pakistan and the UN in Geneva, the Planning Ministry informed. Speaking at the event, the minister linked national development with the ability to embrace change, confrontation due to torrential rains and flooding in most parts of the country, affecting 33 million people and causing economic losses worth \$30 billion.

He was of the view that 'impact investing' offered a framework to create a prosperous society leaving no one behind, protecting the earth's planet and paving way for the coming generations' better future. Sami Saeed stressed the need for investing to build a resilient nation, enhancing its ability to absorb shocks and recover swiftly from challenges. With its rich history and diverse potential, the minister said Pakistan time and again exhibited its capacity to endure and evolve. However, he said, as the nation confronted 21st-century complexities - from climate change to technological disruption - its

approach to development must evolve as well. "We must pursue smart, sustainable growth that considers the long-term well-being of our citizens and the health of our environment." The minister further added that Pakistan had become an epicenter of climate change, ranking among the top ten countries most vulnerable to its devastating effects. Despite being a negligible contributor to global warming, he said the cost of climate change to Pakistan was substantial and continuously increasing as the country faced serious economic challenges. Given the growing and cross-cutting challenges climate change posed, the government had prioritized adaptation and building resilience.

Furthermore, he said a number of interventions were being implemented to incentivize farmers for transition to climate-smart water and land management practices. "We are implementing a long-term agriculture growth strategy with a focus on productivity improvement, climate resilience, and physical expansion," he added. The minister emphasized investing in state-of-the-art early warning systems, gathering and utilizing data-driven insights to analyze climate patterns and potential disasters. He asked for strengthening disaster risk governance by establishing clear policies, institutional frameworks, and coordination mechanisms.



ISLAMABAD: Workers of Capital Development Authority are planting plant sapling on green belt along the Constitution Avenue in Federal Capital.

Malaysia HC organizes flag hosting ceremony to celebrate National Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Malaysia High Commission in Pakistan on Thursday organized a flag hosting ceremony to celebrate Malaysia's 66th National Day. During the event, Malaysia's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, extended his warmest congratulations and felicitations to Malaysians living in Pakistan. "As Malaysians living abroad, we should be proud of our beloved nation taking cognizant of the success stories Malaysia has achieved since independence as a progressive dynamic country" he added. The High Commissioner said, Malaysia values its unity in diversity blessed with a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions. "As we progress into the future, we have forged a strong sense of nationhood which is deeply rooted in our aspiration, shared values, mutual respect among our diverse ethnicities" he added.

IHC imposes Rs 25,000 fine on IGP Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad in a case seeking removal of Dr Shireen Mazari's name from the Exit Control List (ECL). Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, in a three-page order, observed that the IGP had been directed on August 2, to file comments within one week but the same were not submitted. Similarly, the IGP did not submit answer to the notices issued on August 10, and then August 29. Therefore, the court was imposing fine worth Rs 25,000 on him, and asked him to pay the said amount to the petitioner before the next hearing. The case was then adjourned till September 6.

DC reviews doorstep services, issues instructions to develop mobile app

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon on Thursday chaired a review meeting which was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner (East) Usman Ashraf, Assistant Commissioners, Facilitation Centre staff, and other stakeholders. The staff of the facilitation centre gave a briefing on their performance, highlighting the challenges and the steps taken to address the issues. The meeting also discussed ways to further improve the services of the facilitation centre, including the development of a mobile application. The Additional Deputy Commissioner East issued necessary instructions to the staff of the Facilitation Centre to develop a mobile application for the convenience of citizens. The app would allow citizens to easily access a variety of services, such as birth and death registration, property tax payment, and issuance of domicile certificates. The Deputy Commissioner also directed the staff to improve the efficiency of the Facilitation Centre by streamlining the processes and reducing the waiting time for citizens. He stressed the importance of providing quality services to the citizens of Islamabad and making their lives easier. The meeting was a productive session that resulted in a number of positive outcomes. The development of a mobile application will make it easier for citizens to access doorstep services, and the streamlining of processes will reduce the waiting time for citizens.



ISLAMABAD: A view of the banners along the Constitution Avenue on the death anniversary of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, in Federal Capital.

Islamabad police to address security issues in markets, parks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad police would address critical security concerns in markets as well as public parks and review the proposal for the installation of surveillance cameras there. In a recent gathering, CPO Safe City/Traffic Shoaib Janbaz met with IT experts from the Islamabad Capital Police and officials from the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to address critical security concerns in public parks and markets. The primary focus was on the efficient identification of stolen or lost mobile phones using IMEI numbers.

According to the police spokesperson, the meeting's objectives encompassed devising robust strategies to trace mobile phones linked to thefts and criminal activities through IMEI numbers, alongside revamping outdated recording systems. Notably, the IT experts emphasized their ability to differentiate between original and altered IMEI numbers, even if an individual attempts to change it and use the device elsewhere. During the meeting, CDA officials underscored the necessity of collaboration with Islamabad Capital Police to modernize public parks. Suggestions included the installation of surveillance cameras in public parks, market areas, and both internal and external roads. Monitoring would be conducted through the Safe City Command and Control Center. Furthermore, there was a proposal to place emergency buttons in poorly lit areas. Additionally, CPO Safe City/Traffic proposed the incorporation of identification card records for individuals visiting public parks into the new system.

The meeting also discussed ways to further improve the services of the facilitation centre, including the development of a mobile application. The Additional Deputy Commissioner East issued necessary instructions to the staff of the Facilitation Centre to develop a mobile application for the convenience of citizens. The app would allow citizens to easily access a variety of services, such as birth and death registration, property tax payment, and issuance of domicile certificates. The Deputy Commissioner also directed the staff to improve the efficiency of the Facilitation Centre by streamlining the processes and reducing the waiting time for citizens. He stressed the importance of providing quality services to the citizens of Islamabad and making their lives easier. The meeting was a productive session that resulted in a number of positive outcomes. The development of a mobile application will make it easier for citizens to access doorstep services, and the streamlining of processes will reduce the waiting time for citizens.

Pakistan Polio Programme launches next phase of female polio worker initiative

ISLAMABAD (APP): Women healthcare workers from the Pakistan Polio Programme met Melinda French Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in a virtual roundtable to share updates and launch the next phase of the 'Female Frontline Worker Co-Design Initiative'. Participants shared their experiences from this initiative, which aims to systematically listen to and learn from female frontline workers to help solve final barriers to ending polio in Pakistan. They also shared their ideas and aspirations for the future, after Pakistan has successfully achieved this national goal, a news release on Thursday said. "My self-confidence

has grown from participating in this initiative because it is so meaningful that the Polio Programme has taken the time to listen to our experiences and ideas, and that some of the solutions we proposed are being adopted to improve campaigns as well as our work experience," said one frontline worker. "I'm so motivated to hear that we'll be supported by the programme in building up other skill sets so we can be ready for other opportunities after polio is gone." Pakistan's National Emergency Operations Centre for Polio Eradication (NEOC) has approved select co-designed solutions from this process and will incorporate them into upcoming

immunity campaigns, community engagement efforts, and other day-to-day operations this year. Examples of approved recommendations include a revitalized training package on key topics requested by frontline workers, improved campaign tools and materials, and communications strategies that highlight the value of female polio workers. In addition to implementing co-designed solutions to accelerate programmatic progress, the Pakistan Polio Programme will begin the next phase of this initiative by "upskilling" female polio workers in other capacities and helping them prepare for potential future opportunities after polio eradication. The Minister of National Health Services Regulation & Coordination, Dr Nadeem Jan, also expressed the Government of Pakistan's commitment to supporting female polio health workers, including in exploring future livelihood pathways for a post-polio world. "Polio health workers have served Pakistan with incomparable dedication. Whether braving extreme weather conditions or navigating volatile security situations, they have remained steadfast in their commitment," Dr. Jan said, adding, "It is our duty to not only appreciate their invaluable services but also ensure that this excellent workforce continues to contribute to the country after polio ends. This is why the new

phase of the Female Frontline Workers Initiative is very important for us to build their capacities in different areas and ensure they have good job opportunities in the future." French Gates praised the initiative's progress and the programme's commitment to supporting female workers through the next phase of this work. "These women are the heart of the polio eradication programme and ensuring their expertise and solutions are at the centre of eradication efforts is critical," she said. "This initiative will not only help ensure that every child can receive life-saving vaccines, but it will also give these women important skills and training to support other health ef-

orts, and to pursue economic opportunities in the future." French Gates also reinforced the foundation's longstanding commitment to ending polio in Pakistan and to working in partnership with the country to improve health and well-being nationwide. The virtual roundtable served as a follow-up to French Gates's first meeting with female health workers in Pakistan last year. It was moderated by Anita Zaidi, President of Gender Equality at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and also included Dr Shumaila Rasool, a member of the programme's National Gender Working Group and the Sindh Emergency Operations Centre core team.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the case filed by Imaan Mazari seeking details of cases registered against her across the country. At the outset of hearing, the officials of Interior Ministry informed the court that one case had been registered against the petitioner in the capital, while the Federal Government could not give directions to the provinces to provide the details in that regard. Justice Miangul Hassan said that the court had only sought the information. The Assistant Attorney General prayed the court to give some time in that regard as they received the order a bit late.

IHC extends stay order against Imaan Mazari's arrest

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday extended its stay order against the arrest of Advocate Imaan Mazari and shifting her to out of the Federal Capital in any case registered after August 20. Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the case filed by Imaan Mazari seeking details of cases registered against her across the country. At the outset of hearing, the officials of Interior



ISLAMABAD: A view of the closed shops at Aabpara Market during the protest by the Traders Action Committee of Aabpara Market against the unjust hike of the electricity and unbearable inflation.

Dr Umar Saif unveils \$10bln IT exports plan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr Umar Saif on Thursday unveiled the roadmap to achieve the annual target of \$10 billion IT exports through four major dimensions.

Speaking as a chief guest at the 23rd ITCN Asia 2023 "Declaring Pakistan The Regional ICT Hub," he said the annual IT export could be increased to \$3.5 billion from the present level of \$2.6 billion by providing confidence to the IT companies to retain their exports income in special accounts of local banks.

Special forex accounts and online banking platforms were necessary for the IT companies to invest in the core infrastructure for purchasing essential software services and hardware equipment, he added.

The minister said the ministry, through a partnership with the private sector, would train 100,000 software developers to enhance the exports by \$2 billion per annum, which would translate the export values to \$5.5 billion. In that regard, he said, various training programmes and boot camps would be organized to build the capacity of university graduates in accordance with in-demand skills of the IT industry.

The training initiative would even provide jobs to thousands of graduates in the country who would support themselves and their families, he added.

"Presently, our higher educational institutes produce 35,000 to 40,000 graduates every year in different disciplines, and merely 10 percent are employable."

Dr Umar Saif further said that Pakistanis were the second largest online workforce community in the world, however, revenues earned by them were reflected in remittances of overseas Pakistanis because of the unavailability of the international payment gateway, Paypal.

The facilitation of freelancers through a global payment gateway and easy account facility would also enhance exports by another \$2 billion, he added.

The freelancers, he said, were being empowered with training in different skills, but an ecosystem and workstations were equally vital for them to enhance their contribution to exports of IT and IT-enabled services.

He said the government, in collaboration with the private sector, would create space on 5,000 points in different cities for freelancers.

"Besides, the tax rate on the income of freelancers is extremely high, which should be equalized to the tax rate of the IT industry at 0.25%. Hence, the rising trend of the Gig economy can also be facilitated in Pakistan."

Regarding the telecom sector, the minister vowed the launch of 5G technology which would be made possible through the auction of 300 MHz in consultation with all stakeholders. Also, the capacity of the spectrum would also be increased to double from the present level to meet the demand of the customers, he added.

Dr Umar Saif said a special financing facility should be proposed for mobile phone manufacturers to enhance the production of mobile phone handsets with enhanced qualities.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Dr Umar Saif along with others cutting ribbon at the opening of "ITCN Asia 2023", International IT & Telecom Show at Expo Centre.



FAISALABAD: A view of the hustle of bikers at fuel station after the news of the price hike of petroleum products in City.

Rupee sheds Rs1.09 against US Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani rupee on Thursday witnessed a Rs1.09 devaluation against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs305.53 against the previous day's closing of Rs304.44.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs322 and Rs325 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.93 paise to close at Rs 332.70 against the last day's closing of Rs330.77, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen went up by 02 paise and stood at Rs2.09, whereas an increase of Rs3.14 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs387.97 as compared to the last closing of Rs384.83.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 30 paise each to close at Rs83.18 and Rs81.45 respectively.



FAISALABAD: President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Dr. Khurram Tariq addressing a press conference at FCCI Complex.

SECP holds a roundtable on strategic direction of insurance sector of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) organized a roundtable to firm up the strategic direction of the Insurance Sector of Pakistan with the chairpersons of the boards and chief executive officers (CEOs) of all insurance companies.

The session was titled "Journey to an insured Pakistan", said a press release issued here on Thursday.

The roundtable was a single-day event, divided into two sessions i.e. one with the professionals of non-life industry and the other with the professionals of life industry.

The roundtable was aimed at fostering an open and collaborative environment between stakeholders to work together to shape the future of the insurance industry.

SECP Chairman, Akif Saeed in his welcome address highlighted the importance of the strategic plans to improve insurance penetration in Pakistan and cited

APTMA to volve strategies for boosting trade volume

ISLAMABAD (APP): All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) on Thursday deliberated on strategies to enhance trade opportunities for the textile sector.

In a significant move to address the challenges faced by Pakistan's textile industry, the APTA delegation, led by its chairman, held a meeting with Dr Gohar Ejaz, the Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries and Production, said a press release issued here. During the meeting, the delegation engaged in a comprehensive discussion with the minister regarding the critical issues plaguing the textile industry.

One of the major issues highlighted by the delegation was the energy tariff, which they emphasized should be regionally competitive to ensure the sustainable operation of textile mills and to effectively compete in the global market. The discussion also centred on finding viable solutions to propel the textile industry towards its optimal potential.

In response, Dr Gohar Ejaz, the Caretaker Federal Minister, expressed his keen interest in practical solutions that could boost trade volume within the textile sector.

Saqib Rafiq appointed Chairman RWMC

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Caretaker Cabinet of the Punjab Government with the approval of the Election Commission of Pakistan appointed President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) Saqib Rafiq Chairman of Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC).

According to RCCI spokesman, the appointment had been made for three years.

As per the notification, the non-executive board members are Danyal Chaudhry, Raja Abdul Hanif, Zia Ullah Shah, Abdul Basit Javed and Shahram Bin Shahzad.



President & CEO of Mobilink Bank Ghazanfar Azaam and Chief Branch Manager Mobilink Bank Attaur Rehman signing MoUs different departments for provision of special discount to their customers and employees.

Tahir Bhatti takes charge as ZTBL President

ISLAMABAD (APP): Tahir Yaqoob Bhatti on Thursday took over as President/Chief Executive Officer of Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd (ZTBL).

Tahir Bhatti is a high profile banker with experience of over 35 years in almost all major areas of banking with large and mid-tier financial institutions, according to news release.

He has been part of senior management teams of Askari Bank, Allied Bank Ltd and Faysal Bank.

Prior to joining ZTBL, Bhatti served as President/CEO of Punjab Provincial Cooperative Bank Ltd, the oldest financial institution in country dealing in agriculture.

Bhatti is an MBA from Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Lahore and M.Com from Hailey College of Commerce Lahore. He is also a qualified DCMA (Gold Medalist) and Fellow of Institute of Bankers in Pakistan (IBP). He is certified director from IBA Karachi and remained on Board of Faysal Asset Management Ltd, ABL Asset Management and Board of Studies of Punjab University for Commerce education.

During his illustrious banking career, Bhatti got various professional trainings and courses, both local and international, with top-notch institutions, including 'High Impact Leadership Program' at Columbia Business School, New York, USA.

PFC delegation left for Russia to explore investment opportunities

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level delegation of Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) led by its Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq Thursday left for Russia with the primary objective of exploring investment opportunities, fostering joint ventures and collaboration with the furniture industry.

In a press statement CEO PFC said that the council is a representative body of the country's vibrant furniture sector, and has taken this initiative with the intention of promoting economic collaboration and mutual growth between two great nations.



ISLAMABAD: Vice President FPCCI Aminullah Baigh expressing his views regarding electricity bills, taxes and problems faced by business community and masses.

Experts stress long-term structural reforms for sustainable energy pricing

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's current electricity and energy crisis stems from structural inadequacies, and prioritization of short-term relief blinding remedial measures for the root causes, experts on Thursday agreed at seminar titled "From Conundrum to Catastrophe: Understanding the Dynamics of Electricity Price Increase".

The seminar was organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and Pakistan Renewable Energy Coalition here to deliberate solutions for the energy pricing crisis in the country.

Speaking at the session, Dr Khaqan Najeeb, stressed on addressing immediate challenges and supplementing the core challenges in energy sector with long-term policies, said a press release issued here.

He emphasized that indigenous gas resources could help stabilize energy prices as a medium-term solution.

He further said re-

Pakistan-KSA affirm strong bilateral trade ties, mutual cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Pakistan Nawaf Saeed Al-Maliki met the Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries and Production, Dr. Gohar Ejaz here on Thursday.

Both the dignitaries affirmed strong bilateral trade, ties and mutual cooperation between the two brotherly countries, according to a press release issued here.

During the meeting, Ambassador Nawaf extended congratulations to Dr Gohar on his recent ap-

pointment and conveyed warm regards from Saudi Arabia's Custodian of Two Holy Mosques and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

Dr Gohar discussed the strong historical ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, expressing gratitude for Saudi Arabia's consistent support of Pakistan's economic stability and growth.

The minister commended the Saudi leadership's visionary approach and assured Ambassador Nawaf of Pakistan's unwavering partnership and

reliability. The Ambassador emphasized the fraternal bond between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, characterized by mutual trust and cooperation on various bilateral and regional matters of common concern.

The Ambassador also praised the Minister's efforts to enhance the country's trade prospects. The meeting also saw the Minister welcoming Ambassador Nawaf of Commerce, where a souvenir was presented as a gesture of goodwill.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali addressing during his visit to FPCCI Regional Office.

Gold rates increase by Rs.3,400 to Rs 239,800 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs. 3,400 on Thursday and was sold at Rs. 239,800 as compared to its sale at Rs. 235,400 the previous day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 2,915 to Rs. 205,590 from Rs. 202,675 whereas the rate of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs. 188,457 from Rs. 185,785, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price per tola silver increased by Rs. 50 and was sold at Rs. 2,900 whereas that of ten gram silver went up by Rs. 42.87 to Rs. 2,486.28.

The price of gold in the international market, however, increased by \$7 to \$1,945 from \$1,938, the Association reported.

ICCI calls for focusing on agriculture sector to boost its exports to over USD 10 billion

ISLAMABAD (APP): President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari on Thursday said that despite being an agricultural country, Pakistan had to import agricultural commodities worth over USD 5 billion per annum.

However, by focusing on better development of the sector, Pakistan can increase the exports of the agricultural sector by over USD 10 billion per annum, which will help revive the economy.

He said that the Fruits & Vegetable Market of Islamabad was located at an important place as it supplied fruits & vegetables to twin cities, KPK, Azad Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and many other areas.

The president urged to develop the market on modern lines that would help promote business activities and exports of this sector.

He said this while talk-

ing to a delegation of the Market Committee of I-11/4 Fruits and Vegetables Market that visited ICCI led by its Chairman Sajid Abbasi.

Sajid Siddique Vice Chairman, Naem Azam Khan, Agha Siraj Durrani, Ch. Ilyas, Sohail Chaudhry and others were in the delegation.

Ahsan Bakhtawari briefed the Chairman Market Committee about the key issues of the traders of Fruits & Vegetable Market, I-11/4, Islamabad and stressed for their early solution.

Speaking on the occasion, Sajid Abbasi, Chairman, Market Committee, Fruits & Vegetables Market said that he was a public representative and the Market Committee would be used in the best interests of the people and the traders. He said that all possible efforts would be made for the better development of the fruits & vegetable market.

He further mentioned that energy efficiency and demand side management had been lacking in the policy landscape of Pakistan, which could have provided a short-term relief.

Osama Rizvi urged the government to adopt measures to safeguard against the global energy inflation crisis.

He suggested adoption of hedging against inflationary and external shocks, expanding the country's strategic energy storage capacity, energy import substitution and boosting refinery capacity.

Senior Research Economist PIDE, Afia Malik stressed ensuring transparency in government charges by introducing linear tariffs and taxes, allocating targeted subsidies as social protection, and phasing out cross-sectoral subsidies.

In parallel, she proposed structural reforms advocating for empowering DESCOs via inclusive poli-

cy payment crisis. He further mentioned that energy efficiency and demand side management had been lacking in the policy landscape of Pakistan, which could have provided a short-term relief.

He added that strengthening collaboration between DESCOs and CPPA could ensure affordable energy.

The government must also incentivize of phase-out fossil fuel energy projects and modernizing transmission to resolve current energy pricing crisis.

Ubaid ur Rehman Zia, Lead Energy Unit, SDPI highlighted that one of the reasons behind this hike in electricity prices was conditionality of International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s stand-by arrangement program which called for financial stability of the energy sector through rationalization of tariff and removal of subsidies.

US approves first arms to Taiwan under foreign aid programme

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's administration has for the first time approved direct US military aid to Taiwan under an assistance programme aimed at foreign governments, officials said on Wednesday, as worries grow over China.

The State Department informed Congress on Tuesday of the \$80 million package, which is small compared with recent sales to Taiwan but marks the first assistance to Taipei under the Foreign Military Financing programme, which generally involves grants or loans to sovereign countries.

The move is sure to anger China. For five decades, the United States has officially recognised only Beijing although Congress, under the Taiwan Relations Act, re-

quires the supply of weapons to the self-governing democracy for its defense.

Successive US administrations have done so through sales rather than direct aid to Taiwan, with formal statements speaking in the tone of business transactions with the island's de-facto embassy in Washington. The State Department insisted that the first-ever aid under the programme did not imply any recognition of the sovereignty of Taiwan.

"Consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act and our longstanding One China policy, which has not changed, the United States makes available to Taiwan defense articles and services necessary to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability," a State Department spokesperson said. "The United States has



North Korean leader Kim Jong visits the training center of the General Staff Department of the Korean People's Army (KPA) in an undisclosed location in North Korea in this picture released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

North Korea simulates invasion in 'scorched earth' nuclear strike drill

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: North Korea said it had conducted a simulated "scorched-earth" nuclear strike on South Korea and rehearsed invading its neighbour as it accused Seoul and Washington of planning their own preemptive nuclear attack.

The North's missile unit fired two ballistic missiles while conducting a "nuclear strike mission", the General Staff of the Korean People's Army (KPA) said in a statement published on Thursday by state news wire KCNA.

Assessments by South Korean and Japanese authorities said the two short-range missiles traveled a distance of about 360-400 kilometres (225-250 miles) at a maximum altitude of 50 kilometres (30 miles) before landing in the water between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The reports contained unusual detail about Pyongyang's war strategy, revealing that the drill simulated repelling a sudden invasion, then launching a nuclear counterattack against key targets in the South including military headquarters before sweep-

Iran's oil output, exports rise as Washington, Tehran talk

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Iran's oil output and exports jumped in August despite U.S. sanctions, according to consultants and companies that track tanker shipments, as Tehran sells to buyers including China.

Analysts said the higher exports appear to be the result of Iran's success in evading U.S. sanctions and Washington's discretion in enforcing them as the two countries seek better relations.

The United States has sought to limit Iran's oil exports since Donald Trump exited a 2015 nuclear accord in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions aimed at curbing revenues to Iran's government. But the exports have risen during President Joe Biden's term, with China a top buyer,

France, US compromise to renew UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council voted on Thursday to extend a long-running peacekeeping mission in Lebanon for another year after a compromise was reached between France and the United States on language about the freedom of movement of U.N. troops.

The U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) - established in 1978 - patrols Lebanon's southern border with Israel. The mandate for the operation is renewed annually, and its current authorization was due to expire on Thursday.

The French-drafted text was adopted with 13 votes in favor and abstentions by Russia and China. A planned Wednesday vote was delayed as France, the United States and the United Arab Emirates argued over language on U.N. freedom of movement.

France kept language in the resolution that spells out that peacekeepers should coordinate with the Lebanese government.

But in a compromise with the U.S. and the UAE, France added back in text from last year's council resolution - which it had deleted - that demands all parties allow "announced and unannounced patrols" by U.N. troops.

"The ability of the UNIFIL mission to carry out their responsibilities, independent of any restrictions, is essential," U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, told the council.

"And we've had longstanding concerns regarding the actions by some actors to obstruct the mission's freedom of movement," she said.



Group of Chinese nationals arrested on suspicion of running an online love scam syndicate that ensnared hundreds of victims in China, in Indonesia's Riau Islands province.

Military topples Gabon president after disputed polls

Monitoring Desk
LIBREVILLE: Rebel officers in the oil-rich central African state of Gabon announced on Wednesday they had seized power following disputed elections in which President Ali Bongo Ondimba, in power since 2009, had been declared victor.

Bongo, 64, whose family has ruled Gabon for over 55 years, was placed under house arrest and one of his sons arrested for treason, the coup leaders said.

A worried-looking Bongo, in a video from an unidentified location, appealed to "all friends that we have all over the world... to make noise" on his behalf. In a dramatic pre-dawn address, a group of officers declared "all the institutions of the republic" had been dissolved, the election results cancelled and the borders closed.

Ukraine has developed a long-range weapon, claims Zelenskyy

Monitoring Desk
KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday his country has developed a weapon that hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away, in an apparent reference to the previous day's strike on an airport in western Russia.

Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel the weapon was produced by Ukraine's Ministry of Strategic Industries but gave no other details. On Wednesday, a four-hour wave of drones that Moscow blamed on Ukraine hit an airport near Russia's border with Estonia and Latvia, damaging four Il-76 military transport planes, according to local reports. The airport is in Russia's Pskov region, about 700 kilometers (400 miles) north of the Ukrainian.

UN says number of people killed, injured or kidnapped in Haiti rose 14% in recent months

Monitoring Desk
SAN JUAN: The U.N. said Thursday that 1,860 people were reported killed, injured or kidnapped in Haiti from April to June, a 14% increase compared with the first three months of the year.

The surge in gang violence remains centered in the capital of Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas, with nearly 300 people alone killed or injured by snipers in the slum of Cite Soleil, according to a human rights report released by the U.N. Integrated Office in Haiti, known as BINUH.

The report was released a day after the U.S. Embassy in Haiti urged U.S. citizens to leave the Caribbean country "as soon as possible" given the ongoing insecurity and infrastructure challenges.

Among those killed from April to June were 13 police officers and more

Indonesia arrests 88 Chinese nationals over love scams

Monitoring Desk
BATAM: Dozens of Chinese nationals were arrested in Indonesia on suspicion of running an online love scam syndicate that ensnared hundreds of victims in China, police said on Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off from their Chinese counterparts, Indonesian police arrested 83 men and five women at an industrial park in Batam city in Riau Islands province on Tuesday.

Police said the syndicate blackmailed hundreds of victims in China, many of whom were public officials.

"We are investigating if there are any Indonesians among the victims. If there are, none, the scammers will be deported immediately," Riau Islands police spokesman Zahwani Pandra Arsyad said on Wednesday.

The alleged scammers pretended to have romantic feelings for their victims during video calls.

Over 1,000 flights cancelled as hurricane makes landfall in Florida

Monitoring Desk
TAMPA: Airlines in the United States cancelled more than 1,000 flights on Wednesday as Hurricane Idalia slammed into the Big Bend region of Florida, but the storm's power ebbed as it headed toward Georgia.

Southwest Airlines cancelled more than 220 flights, while Delta Air Lines cancelled 157 flights, as of 12pm ET, according to flight-tracking website Flightaware.com. About 2,000 flights were also delayed. Airports at Tampa, Clearwater and Tallahassee shut down operations and were monitoring the status of the storm.

Drawing strength from the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters, Idalia unleashed destructive winds and torrential downpours that were forecast to cause coastal flooding up to 16 feet (5 m) deep along the state's Gulf Coast.

Idalia grew from a tropical storm into a hurricane early on Tuesday, a day after passing west of Cuba, where it damaged homes, knocked out power, flooded villages and prompted mass evacuations.

"With Tampa Airport closing at midnight on Tuesday, we cancelled everything there through at least afternoon today and we're awaiting a decision from the airport as to when it will re-open to commercial service."

China's Xi likely to skip G20 summit in India

Monitoring Desk
NEW DELHI: Chinese President Xi Jinping is likely to skip a summit of G20 leaders in India next week, sources familiar with the matter in India and China told Reuters.

Two Indian officials, one diplomat based in China and one official working for the government of another G20 country said Premier Li Qiang is expected to represent Beijing at the Sept. 9-10 meeting in New Delhi. Spokespersons for the Indian and Chinese foreign ministries did not respond to requests for comment. Li is also likely to attend a summit of East and Southeast Asian leaders in Jakarta, Indonesia on Sept 5-7.



A girl and her mother waded through floodwaters after evacuating their home in Tarpon Springs, Florida, when Hurricane Idalia made landfall.

Japan PM tells fisheries minister to apologise for calling Fukushima wastewater 'contaminated'

Monitoring Desk
TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ordered his fisheries minister to apologise on Thursday for referring to treated radioactive water being released from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant as "contaminated" and told him to retract his remark.

Fisheries minister Tetsuro Nomura was heard calling the treated radioactive water "contaminated" when speaking to reporters earlier in the day following a meeting with Kishida.

He said his discussions with the premier involved "the evaluation of the contaminated water" after its release into the Pacific. Nomura later apologised and retracted the comment but said he would not resign over it, the Jiji news service reported.

Japan is calling the water it is releasing into the ocean "ALPS treated water" to differentiate it from the contaminated water held in tanks around the wrecked plant site. ALPS stands for "Advanced Liquid Processing System", a system aimed at removing most radioactive elements from the water except for tritium before it is released into the ocean as "treated" water.

US ambassador to Japan visits Fukushima

Monitoring Desk
SOMA: The U.S. ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, visited the Fukushima region on Thursday and told reporters he expected the U.S. to support Japan should China's ban on Japanese seafood develop into a dispute at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Japan started releasing treated radioactive water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean last Thursday, prompting China, Japan's biggest trade partner, to impose a ban on Japanese aquatic products.

Japanese officials have signalled the possibility of diplomatic action to urge China to lift its ban.

Switzerland drafts tighter rules to combat money laundering

Monitoring Desk
ZURICH: Switzerland said on Wednesday it had drafted new rules to tighten perceived cracks in its money laundering regulations, holding lawyers and consultants accountable for reporting risks and stepping up oversight of legal entities, such as trusts.

The new rules, drafted by the Swiss government, will be presented to parliament in 2024 following consultation. Switzerland, whose banks make it the world's biggest manager of offshore wealth, has long sought to fight its old im-

Norway will close its embassy in Mali, citing the security situation

Monitoring Desk
COPENHAGEN: Norway announced Thursday that it will close its embassy in Mali, saying the withdrawal of a U.N. peacekeeping force from the West African nation "will have consequences for the security of Norwegian and other diplomatic missions and international organizations." In June, Mali Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop demanded that U.N. peacekeepers who have been grappling with an Islamic insurgency.



People pose with soldiers as they celebrate in support of the putschists in a street of Libreville, Gabon.

Kremlin says Prigozhin plane may have been downed on purpose

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: The Kremlin said on Wednesday that investigators were considering the possibility that the plane carrying mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was downed on purpose, the first explicit acknowledgement that he may have been assassinated.

"It is obvious that different versions are being considered, including the version - you know what we are talking about let's say, a deliberate atrocity," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about the investigation.

Asked if the International Civil Aviation Organisation would investigate the crash, Peskov said that the circumstances made it different, though he cautioned that investigators had made no formal conclusions yet about what exactly took place.

"Let's wait for the results of our Russian investigation," Peskov said.

The private Embraer jet on which Prigozhin was travelling to St Petersburg from Moscow crashed north of Moscow killing 10 people on board on Aug 23, including two other top Wagner figures, Prigozhin's four bodyguards and a crew of three.

The cause is still unclear, but villagers near the scene said they heard a bang and then saw the jet plummet to the ground.

The plane crashed exactly two months since Prigozhin took control of the southern city of Rostov in late June, the opening salvo of a mutiny which shook the foundations of President Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Russia has informed Brazil's aircraft investigation authority that it will not probe the crash of the Brazilian-made Embraer jet under international rules "at the moment", the Brazilian agency said.

Asked about that report, Peskov said: "First of all, the investigation is under way, the Investigative Committee is engaged in this." "In this case there can be no talk of any international aspect," Peskov said.

US, Indonesia and 5 other nations hold war drills amid China concerns

Monitoring Desk
JAKARTA: Soldiers from the U.S., Indonesia and five other nations began annual training exercises Thursday on Indonesia's main island of Java while China's increasing aggression is raising concern.

American and Indonesian soldiers have held the live-fire Super Garuda Shield drills since 2009, and Australia, Japan and Singapore joined last year. The United Kingdom and French forces are participating in this year's exercises, with a total of about 5,000 personnel. China sees the expanded drills as a threat, accusing the U.S. of building an Indo-Pacific alliance similar to NATO to limit China's growing military and diplomatic influence in the region.

Brunei, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, South Korea, and East Timor also sent observers to the two-week exercises in Baluran,

a coastal town in East Java province.

The commanding general of U.S. Army Pacific, Gen. Charles Flynn, said the 19 nations involved in the training are a powerful demonstration of multilateral solidarity to safeguard a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

"Super Garuda Shield 2023 builds on last year's tremendous success," Flynn said in a statement released by the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta on Tuesday. "This joint, multinational training exercise displays our collective commitment and like-minded unity, allowing for a stable, secure, and more peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific."

The statement said at least 2,100 U.S. and 1,900 Indonesian forces will enhance interoperability capabilities through training and cultural exchanges that includes a command and control simulation, an amphibious exercise, airborne operations.

