

# Independent

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## PM reviews five-year roadmap for economic progress

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a high-level review meeting on a five-year roadmap for economic progress of the country.

The five-year roadmap focused on decrease in inflation, poverty alleviation, and provision of employment.

The prime minister said consultation should be held on this plan with all stakeholders of different sectors of the economy.

Without wasting any time, implementation of projects for the economic stability and progress of the country should be ensured, he added.

The prime minister said a schedule of implementation for the projects should be presented, adding steps should be taken on priority basis to speed up progress in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, information technology, foreign investment and small and medium industries.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding Economic Roadmap for next 5 years.

## 61 MPs cast vote in bi-election of Senate in Balochistan Assembly: Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo, Mir Dostain Domki & Abdul Shakoor Ghaibzai elected as Senators in bi-elections

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP)'s Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)'s Mir Dostain Khan Domki and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI)'s Abdul Shakoor Ghaibzai were elected as Senators in the bi-elections of Senate from Balochistan here on Thursday.

According to the Returning Officer and Provincial Election Commissioner, Muhammad Farid Afridi, Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo secured 23 votes while Mir Dostain Domki and Abdul Shakoor Ghaibzai got 17 and 16 votes respectively.

The Balochistan Awami Party (BAP)'s Mobin Khilji got five votes

## CM Balochistan congratulates newly elected Senators

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has congratulated the newly elected Senators from Balochistan as a result of the bi-elections held in the provincial assembly.

In a felicitation message issued here on Thursday, the Chief Minister expressed satisfaction over holding of the bi-elections of Senate in peaceful manner.

He said that the role of all political parties is very appreciable in maintaining Senate elections in peaceful and democratic manner.

Extending congratulations to the newly elected Senators, the Chief Minister hoped that they would raise voice for the rights of people.

He also hoped that the members of Senate would also play their role in making effective legislation for resolving the public issues.

The Provincial Election Commissioner, Muhammad Farid Afridi performed as the Returning Officer for the bi-election on Senate seats.

## State of health and education sectors such a pathetic: CM vows to bring 60 reforms in Balochistan; announces to form reform committee in seven days

Mir Sarfraz Bugti says Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) of Balochistan to be revised

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has vowed to bring at least 60 reforms in different departments of the province, and adding he announced to constitute a reform committee within week time.

While talking informally to the media persons at Balochistan Assembly on occasion of bi-elections of Senate on Thursday, the Chief Minister said that we are going to bring around 60 reforms in the province.

He said that the reform committee would be formed in seven days, which would present its report within two months.

The services of retired bureaucrats are being

sought for the reform committee.

He said that the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) of the province would also be revised afresh.

The Chief Minister said that it is our endeavour to include such development works which may benefit the general public.

He regretfully pointed out that huge amount of Rs. 80 billions has been allocated for the health sector. However, the situation of health sector is such a pathetic despite huge spending, he added.

He said that we are going to work under Public-Private Partnership in the health sector. He said that situation and overall work-

ing of all the public sector hospitals would be improved.

He also said that we would improve the condition of our hospitals under the health sector.

He said that it is just a mockery with the poor people of Balochistan to spend Rs. 80 billion in health sector.

Similarly, billions of rupees are also spent on education sector, however, situation is not better in it, he maintained.

Referring the reform committee, the Chief Minister said that the recommendations of committee would be kept before the cabinet for its perusal. Until then, the cabinet would also be formed, he added.



QUETTA: President National Party Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch meeting with Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti. Mir Sadiq Umrani is also present

## We have to benefit from modern science & technology for fast track development: Governor

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan, Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar has stressed the need to benefit from the modern science and technology for fast track development as our overall performance has been slowed down just because we couldn't benefit from the same.

The Governor said that it takes several months to pass an ordinary file in the government offices, which waste lot of precious time, energy and investment.

This also causes frus-

tration among the common men for long time.

The Governor was speaking to the Vice Chancellor, University Turbat, Professor Dr Jan Muhammad who called on him here on Thursday.

He was appreciative of the initiative taken by University of Turbat about shifting traditional system on solar system and making the communication system digitalized. He said that improvement can be brought about in overall performance by promoting the spirit of teamwork.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Ambassador Jiang Zaidong handed USD 100,000 emergency cash assistance to the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Mohammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi for rains affected areas in KP and Balochistan.

## PHC dismisses petition of SIC seeking reserved seats

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar High Court here Thursday dismissed the Sunni Itehad Council's (SIC) petition challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) ruling that denied reserved seats to the party. The five-member bench of PHC led by Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice Shaiq Ibrahim, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Arshad Ali dismissed the SIC petitions.

Earlier, during his arguments, SIC's lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar said the Constitution does not mention when a party has to submit a list of names for reserved seats to the ECP.

He argued that it is not written anywhere that a person cannot resubmit the list or when it has to be submitted, adding that there is no restriction on providing a second list and that the ECP could have issued a second schedule, as it did for the general elections.

Justice Ijaz Anwar remarked that as per the law, those who participate in elections will get seats.

The court then questioned Barrister Zafar if it was not clearly stated anywhere that the second schedule could not be issued.

"The law does not prevent the Election Commission from issuing another schedule," the lawyer responded.

## Commander Bahrain National Guard called Chief of Naval Staff

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Salman Al Khalifa called on Chief Of The Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest including bilateral collaboration and regional security were discussed. The visiting dignitary appreciated and acknowledged Pakistan Navy's efforts and commitments in support of collaborative maritime security in the region. Both the leaders pledged to further strengthen and diversify the scope of existing bilateral defence relationship.

Pakistan and Bahrain enjoy brotherly relations and Navies of both countries cooperate and collaborate in maritime domain particularly in the field of training.

## China gives 'Emergency Aid' to Pakistan for rain-hit areas

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): The People's Republic of China on Thursday provided "Emergency Aid" to the government of Pakistan for residents of the rain-hit areas in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"On March 14, the donation ceremony for emergency aid provided by the Chinese government to rain-hit areas in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan," said a news release.

On behalf of the Chinese government, Ambassador Jiang Zaidong handed \$100,000 emergency cash assistance over to the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Mohammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi.

"China hopes that this cash donation can provide timely and necessary assistance to the needy people."



ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Salman Al Khalifa called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.

## President vows to work closely with Chinese counterpart to deepen cooperation

Asif Ali Zardari thanks President Xi Jinping for felicitations on re-election

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari Thursday thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for extending him warm congratulations on his re-election as the President of Pakistan.

While replying to President Xi's letter, the president expressed his commitment to working closely with the Chinese President to deepen practical cooperation, strengthen the all-weather partnership, and foster a shared community for the benefit of the two countries.

In his letter, President Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan and China shared a unique bond forged in the crucible of history and nurtured by mutual respect, understanding, and common views on all global issues, according to a statement issued by the President House.

## First case of polio reported from Balochistan since last three years

Independent Report

QUETTA: The first case of polio has been reported from Balochistan since January 2021.

The sources of Emergency Operation Center (EOC) for Polio Eradication, the polio virus was detected in the infant aged 2.5 years belonging to Dera Bugti.

The samples were taken from the child had been collected on February 22, 2024.

This is also the first case of polio reported in Pakistan including Balochistan in the year 2024.

The last case of polio had been reported three years back from Kila Abdullah.

The polio virus was found in the environmental sample of the province since August 2023.

In view of the prevalence of polio virus, a special polio immunization is scheduled to be launched in nine districts of the province from March 24, 2024.

## Zardari welcomes interaction between PM, CM KP

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday welcomed the recent interaction between the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur.

"It is high time we start thinking of working towards healing the divisions Pakistan has been going through", he added.

The president said that he had always advocated for prioritizing Pakistan above all else, and it was time we gave people hope in the democratic process by showing them it could work.

## Interior Minister meets Sudi Ambassador in diplomatic enclave

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Interior & Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday arrived in diplomatic enclave to meet Nawaf Bin Saeed Ahmed Al Malki, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia.

The ambassador congratulated Mohsin Naqvi on assuming the post of Minister for Interior. He expressed his best wishes for the minister for his new responsibilities.

## Gillani regains senate's seat from Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani, the joint candidate of the ruling coalition, regained the Senate seat from the federal capital on Thursday by defeating Sunni Itehad Council's candidate Chaudhary Ilyas Mehrban, according to unofficial results.

According to an unofficial tally, out of the total 301 votes polled, Yousuf Gillani bagged 204 votes, while his rival Chaudhary Ilyas Mehrban received 88 votes. Nine votes were rejected.

## IMF sets tough conditions for new loan programme; urges sweeping reforms

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In a bid to secure a new loan programme, Pakistani officials engaged in rigorous negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) review mission.

The talks, held today, witnessed the IMF putting forth a series of stringent demands, underscoring the imperative need for comprehensive reforms within Pakistan's economic landscape.

Key among the demands outlined by the IMF is the freezing of revolving credit for electricity and gas, coupled with an immediate cessation of theft in these sectors.

Furthermore, the IMF insisted on halting the local gas supply to power plants, emphasizing the urgency of complete

digitisation within the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

Additionally, the IMF pressed for the swift transition of Distribution Companies (DISCOs) into private sector administration, highlighting the necessity for a clearly defined timeline.

Expressing deep-seated concern over the persistent surge in commodity prices within Pakistan, the IMF delegation questioned the disparity compared to global trends, urging the Pakistani authorities to take decisive measures to curb inflation.

Of particular contention was the provision of subsidised gas to fertilizer plants, with the IMF adamantly calling for its discontinuation.



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfraz Bugti cast his vote while polling for By-Senate Election at Balochistan Assembly.

## Pakistan takes strong exception to implementation of CAA by India

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan has taken strong exception to the implementation of controversial Citizenship Amendment Act by India. At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad today, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the legislation and the relevant rules are evidently discriminatory in nature as they differentiate amongst the people on the basis of their faith.

The spokesperson said the regulation and laws are premised on a false assumption that minorities are being persecuted in Muslim countries of the region and the facade of India being a safe haven for them.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch pointed out that the rising wave of Hinduva under the BJP government has led to rapid political, economic and social victimization of Muslims and other minorities in India. She said the discriminatory steps further expose the sinister agenda of transforming India into Hindu Rashtra.



QUETTA: MPAs casting votes during Senate bi-election in Balochistan Assembly

## Daily Voice of Masses Independent

### Economic agenda

On Tuesday, at his first formal interaction with reporters after assuming control of Q Block, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb dropped some clear hints about the kind of financial policies he intends to pursue, at least in the short to medium term.

Signalling the continuation of IMF-mandated stabilisation policies under the \$3bn Stand-by Arrangement, the former banker said that Pakistan, a sovereign, nuclear state, could no longer afford to continue with a 'patchwork' approach to deep-rooted economic woes if it wanted to address the challenge posed by low economic growth and inflation.

He was also clear about the Sharif government's plan to kick-start discussions for a new, larger and longer IMF loan during the international lender's visit for the second and final review of the current nine-month facility that ends soon.

"We would at least kick-start the process and get this going. Let us see how they respond," he said. Further negotiations on the fresh programme would be taken forward on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank in April in Washington, it was mentioned.

The finance minister's message was unmistakable: the government is aiming for permanent macroeconomic stabilisation even if it comes at the cost of growth. He said that the country should not expect cash deposits and debt rollovers from friendly countries, and that it was necessary to achieve the structural benchmarks laid out in IMF programmes signed by Pakistan's previous finance ministers, as turning to patchwork measures was no solution. Inflation, he stressed, could only be addressed by achieving macroeconomic stability. Faced with a daunting challenge, the minister's prescription for the interlinked issues of low growth, balance-of-payment troubles, inflation and fiscal deficit afflicting the economy indicate a plan for a consequential overhaul of the government as well as its budget over the next several years. His plan also represents a significant departure from the PML-N's signature economic and financial policies.

The question is: will he get enough room to execute the stabilisation policies for as long as it is required? What is the guarantee that the ruling party will support his attempts to effectively tax its core political constituency of retailers or the powerful real estate mafia? Last but not the least, how long will the government resist the temptation of spurring growth without executing the long-standing structural reforms once forex reserves rise to a comfortable level, as it panders to its vote bank?

Indeed, the new army-backed SIFC created last year to attract investment from the Gulf nations is widely expected to help him. Still, the success of the finance minister's stabilisation agenda will hinge largely on his ability to manage the desires and demands of the party in power, without digressing from the path of reform.

## Will Shahbaz's Hard Work alone Do the Magic?

By Qamar Bashir

Press Secretary to the President(Rtd); Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France; Former MD, SRBC



The current state of Pakistan's economy is alarming, with several key sectors facing significant challenges. The electricity circular debt has ballooned to an alarming Rs. 4000 billion, while the national carrier, PIA, is incurring losses exceeding Rs. 800 billion. Furthermore, the state of electricity plants has deteriorated, contributing to inefficiencies and financial losses. Rampant electricity theft has resulted in losses exceeding Rs. 400 billion, exacerbating the financial strain on the energy sector.

Adding to the financial woes, corruption within government institutions, such as the FBR, has resulted in the embezzlement of over Rs. 300 billion. State-owned enterprises are also struggling, with losses surpassing Rs. 500 billion.

The consequences of these financial mismanagement are dire, disproportionately affecting the majority of the population. While a small percentage of the population benefits from these losses, the burden falls heavily on the remaining 90%, leading to increased taxes, utility charges, and commodity prices. As a result, the vulnerable population is experiencing a decline in living standards, facing challenges such as inflated school fees, transportation costs, and housing expenses, pushing them further into poverty.

The Prime Minister

Shahbaz Sharif painted a bleak picture during his address at the inaugural meeting of the newly sworn-in cabinet. It echoed a similar sentiment to the speech he delivered upon assuming the premiership in April 2022. However, this time, there was a noticeable departure from scapegoating, as he refrained from attributing the country's economic woes to the PFI.

Reflecting on our collective memory, we can recall countless instances where newly sworn-in leaders, be they prime ministers, military dictators, or technocrats, have delivered similar speeches promising to address the nation's dire economic and financial circumstances. They vow to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to uplift the country. However, history bears witness to the rapid fading of these promises as they become immersed in the trappings of power and privilege.

Once in office, these leaders often prioritize the perks and prestige of their positions, neglecting their initial pledges. They soon confront the reality of entrenched systemic issues, perpetuated by powerful vested interests within the government, civil service, and military bureaucracy. These individuals benefit from the status quo and resist any attempts at meaningful reform that might threaten their own positions or privileges.

Should a government dare to challenge these entrenched interests and pursue genuine reform efforts, they are met with polite warnings to desist from disrupting the established order. If they persist in their efforts, they face the threat of being swiftly removed

from power.

This cycle of promising change but ultimately succumbing to the pressures of the status quo perpetuates a vicious cycle of stagnation and decline, leaving the nation's progress at the mercy of those who prioritize self-interest over the common good.

In his extensive address, Sharif reiterated his steadfast belief in the power of "hard work" to surmount the nation's challenges. However, he also acknowledged the limitations of hard work alone, recognizing the imperative for innovative and creative solutions. He emphasized the importance of learning from past mistakes and, above all, addressing the underlying systemic issues plaguing the country.

In addition to the challenges highlighted by the Prime Minister, several other pressing issues confront the new government, casting a shadow over its ability to steer the country towards stability and growth.

The contraction of the real GDP, plunging to -0.2% in 2023, paints a grim economic picture, with projected modest growth of only 2% in 2024 offering little solace. The surge in the unemployment rate to 8.5% in 2023 signals deep-seated economic distress, with scant prospects for improvement in the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, the relentless escalation of the Consumer Price Index, which reached a staggering 29.2% in 2023, threatens to exacerbate the plight of ordinary citizens, with projections indicating little respite in 2024.

Compounding these challenges is the dwindling foreign investment, which trickled to a mere

\$2.7 billion in 2023. Meanwhile, the country grapples with a mounting external debt burden, soaring to approximately \$126.3 billion by 2023. This fiscal strain is further compounded by a persistent fiscal deficit, oscillating between -7.6% and -7.8% of GDP from 2022 to 2024.

To add to the woes, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have plummeted to critically low levels, hovering around \$8 billion, posing severe constraints on the government's ability to manage its economic affairs effectively. These daunting challenges underscore the urgent need for decisive and strategic action to stabilize the economy and foster sustainable growth.

Overcoming these challenges is undoubtedly formidable, yet not insurmountable. Numerous nations, grappling with severe economic and financial predicaments, have successfully resolved their underlying issues, confronted the proverbial "elephants in the room," and propelled themselves toward accelerated growth and development.

However, in the context of Pakistan, these metaphorical elephants wield considerable power. They not only influence the selection of members in provincial and national assemblies, the Senate, the president, and the prime minister, but also dictate the composition of the cabinet. Any form of resistance or disobedience is met with swift and unforgiving consequences, as punishment is meted out promptly. The entrenched influence of these powerful entities poses a significant hurdle to meaningful reform and underscores

the complexity of navigating the political landscape in Pakistan.

Furthermore, allegations surfaced suggesting that the electoral process was orchestrated to prevent Nawaz Sharif from potentially assuming the prime ministership for the fourth time. Subsequently, upon the formation of the government, key ministries were entrusted to unelected individuals. This composition sends a clear message: interference in the country's internal affairs, financial and economic sectors, or the Special Investment Facilitation Council will not be tolerated. The strategic allocation of ministerial portfolios underscores the establishment's intent to maintain control over critical areas and deter any attempts to challenge its authority.

With unelected technocrats, handling the economy and the finance of the country, the nation is bracing itself for another round of economic strain. The government has initiated a media campaign to manage expectations regarding imminent hikes in taxes, utility costs, and petroleum prices. This effort is packaged as a Ramzan Package, purportedly worth Rs. 12 billion, aimed at showcasing the government's purported commitment to shielding the most vulnerable segments of society from the impending financial strain.

However, this move is a familiar tactic employed before the implementation of stringent economic measures. The provision of free ration, though ostensibly a gesture of support, is woefully inadequate to sustain vulnerable families for more than 15 days. It fails to address the systemic challenges faced by these families, leaving them vulnerable to hunger, deprivation of basic necessities, lack of livelihood opportunities, inadequate education, and even insufficient clothing and footwear. Thousands of employees of State-Owned Enterprises are anxiously anticipating the potential privatization and sale of their employers, which could lead to retrenchments, golden handshakes, or terminations, exacerbating the already high levels of unemployment. The looming decisions have deterred the PPP from securing cabinet positions, as they seek to avoid public backlash and preserve their political capital.

Regrettably, the current government assumed power under a cloud of controversy, with allegations of electoral rigging and manipulation casting doubt on the legitimacy of its mandate. The opaque and unfair conduct of the election process has raised serious concerns about the transparency and fairness of the government's foundation. Given these circumstances, there are legitimate questions about the ability of a government that ascended to power through questionable means to instill transparency and fairness in the system. The lack of trust in the electoral process undermines the government's credibility and raises doubts about its commitment to upholding democratic principles and governance. These lingering doubts present a significant challenge for the government in its efforts to enact meaningful reforms and gain the trust of the populace.

## Commerce News

### PM made strategy for Rural, Urban centers: Musadiq Malik

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal minister for Petroleum Musadiq Malik on Thursday said that Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has made a strategy for development in Urban and Rural Centers across the country.

He said as for development in rural centers, farmers were needing water, seeds and fertilizer, therefore the PM has decided to ensure to provide fertilizer on subsidized rates to the farmer.

Secondly, the

government will provide imported seeds to the farmers so they can increase production. To resolve the issue of water, the government provide solar tube wells to the farmers meet the requirements of cultivation. He said if all these three ingredients are provided to the farmers, his growth will largely increase.

He said the government will also encourage the farmers to make small agricultural industrial farms and this

would be a start of green revolution in the country.

For urban centers, the prime minister has directed that the banks must be asked to provide small loans to youth and Small medium enterprises (SMS) for their businesses.

He said the government has decided to organizes "Boot Camps" to train the fresh students from the universities so they can compete at international level in the field of artificial intelligence.

The government if

required will invite master trainers from abroad to train the children, said Malik adding the PM has strictly asked to make a sustainable programme.

He said the government has decided to open schools following the model of Danish School to provide free of cost education to the intelligent students from poor segment of society.

The government will send those bright students to the world's top class universities for education at government's expense.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Privatisation, Abdul Aleem Khan chairing a meeting with the financial advisors for divestment of PIACL.



ISLAMABAD: Federal secretary Ministry of National Food security and Research, Capt. (R) Muhammad Asif chairs 4th Steering Committee of Project Olive Culture.

### Steering Committee meeting held to enhance country's olive sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 4th Steering Committee meeting for the "OliveCulture - Holistic and Multi-professional Mechanism for a Pakistani Olive Oil Value Chain" Project convened here on Thursday, marking another significant step towards enhancing the country's olive sector.

The meeting was chaired by Federal Secretary of the Ministry of National Food Security & Research, Capt. @ Muhammad Asif and co-chaired by Ambassador of Italy in Pakistan Marilina

Armellini, the meeting served as a platform for strategic discussions and collaborative efforts, said a press release.

Marilina Armellini expressed her appreciation towards the work done so far by the OliveCulture Project with the close cooperation of the Ministry and the provinces.

She said the notable and commendable pace maintained throughout the project was acknowledged and valued. The partnership between Italian and Pakistani experts is deemed

essential for nurturing olive cultivation and enhancing olive oil production.

Without this fruitful collaboration, the objectives of the project would be unattainable. Capt. @ Muhammad Asif expressed that the project's significant success in Pakistan owes much to Italian collaboration. While Pakistan's environment is inherently conducive to olive cultivation, prior government engagements at provincial and federal levels were limited in their impact.

### Surplus wheat available in market: Minister Bilal

LAHORE: There is surplus wheat available in the market and the administration should keep a close watch on the supply of good quality wheat at fixed price.

The cabinet committee will soon finalize the policy regarding the distribution of 'bardana' per acre after which the applications for the distribution of bardana will be received. Wheat procurement campaign will be fully transparent and merit will be ensured.

These views were expressed by Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin while presiding over a meeting at

the Darbar Hall of Civil Secretariat here on Thursday. Secretary Food Moazzam Iqbal Sipra, Director Food Lt @ Muhammad Shoaib Khan, DG Food Authority Asim Javed, Cane Commissioner Punjab Abdul Rauf were present on this occasion while all Deputy Director Foods from across Punjab participated in the meeting through video link.

Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin in his address directed that a policy regarding the wheat procurement for the year 2024 should be finalized soon, which will be approved by the Cabinet Committee.

### Pakistan's seafood exports to China up 13% in 2023

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan's seafood exports to China increased by 13% in 2023 compared to the previous year.

The rise is due to the growing demand for seafood products in China, a trend that has been steadily increasing over the past few years, said Ghulam Qadir, Investment and Trade Counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing.

Qadir noted that Pakistan's seafood exports to China reached \$247.3 million, marking a 13% increase for the January-December period in 2023 year-on-year. In 2022, exports were valued at \$219.3 million, while in 2021, they stood at \$139.29 million, as per data from the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC).

### President of Iran's visit could seal free trade agreement: Envoy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam on Thursday said that there is a strong possibility that the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be finalized in the upcoming visit of the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi to Pakistan.

He said that from the upcoming visit of the Iranian president to Pakistan, there will be several bilateral economic and trade agreements between the two countries. He said that the agreements

will further strengthen the mutual economic and trade relations along with promoting the bilateral business between the two countries. Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam made these remarks during his visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) at the invitation of President ICCI, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawri here on Thursday.

The Iranian ambassador said that the current bilateral trade volume between Pakistan and Iran is \$2.5 billion, which has increased by 11

percent in the last 11 months. He said that after the FTA and bilateral agreements between the two governments for the promotion of mutual trade, there is a strong possibility of doubling the mutual trade between Pakistan and Iran to reach \$5 billion in the next few years.

He said that the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline is a huge facility for the people of Pakistan on behalf of the government of Iran, which will benefit both the domestic and industrial sectors of Pakistan.

### Kyrgyz honorary consul felicitated

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former president Iftikhar Ali Malik Thursday greeted leading businessman Meher Kashif Younis on his appointment as the honorary consul of Kyrgyzstan in Lahore including the territory of Punjab province.

Malik said that it is recognition of Younis' remarkable achievements and dedication to fostering international relations and praised his commitment to serving as a bridge between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan.

### CCP authorizes acquisition of 'Pakistani Microfinance Bank by Dutch Company'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has approved the acquisition of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited by a Dutch-based holding company, MNT-Halan Pak B.V. This transaction marks a significant development in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan.

MNT - Halan Pak B.V. is a holding company incorporated in the Netherlands, with a presence

in Pakistan through its subsidiaries, Halan Wallet (Private) Limited and Halan Finance Limited. On the other hand, Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited is a public limited company operating in the microfinance banking sector of Pakistan, said a press release issued here on Thursday. The acquisition involves the purchase of 100% shareholding of Advans Pakistan Microfinance Bank Limited from Advans S.A SICAR.

## Governor inaugurates foreign faculty hostel in Islamia College

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali here Thursday visited Islamia College Peshawar and inaugurated foreign faculty hostel.

Vice Chancellor Islamia College, Professor Gul Majeed and faculty members were also present on the occasion. The governor was told that hostel was constructed with the financial assistance of higher education commission with an estimated cost of Rs. 50 million.

He was told that

hostel has 16 rooms having all the needed facilities.

KP Governor also directed to construct the entrance gate of the college keeping in view its historic importance and announced support to beautify garden of foreign faculty hostel.

Vice Chancellor Islamia College also presented annual report of the institution and a souvenir to the governor.

Governor also chaired 136<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting of University of Peshawar (UoP) in Governor House. The meeting was also

attended by Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Meena Khan, Vice Chancellor, Professor Muhammad Salim and concerned officials of finance, higher education and establishment department.

The meeting approved development budget of varsity, new candidates of planning committee, statutes for management solutions, upgrading of zoology department to Institute of Zoological Sciences and experience relaxation to appoint four professors.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali presiding over 136<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting of University of Peshawar.

## KPCM for relaunching of billion tree project

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has directed the concerned authorities to relaunch Billion Tree Plus project in the province. Presiding over a meeting of the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife at Chief Minister House Peshawar, he said that it was as an important initiative to increase the forest area in the province, said a press release issued here Thursday.

The CM directed the concerned authorities to prepare a concrete and workable action plan to stop deforestation and increase the revenue of the department. He also directed the wildlife department to prepare proposals and action plans for the promotion of fisheries. In order to prevent illegal cutting of trees and deforestation in the province, the CM directed to revise the existing rate of fines and increase to such an extent that the amount of fines should be higher than the value of the timber axed illegal.

He directed installation of CCTV cameras at check posts to keep a close watch on timber smuggling.

## Injured ASI of Machni Gate firing attack died in hospital

PESHAWAR (APP): The injured ASI Mazhar Khan who was undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Peshawar lost his life due to critical injuries he received during the firing attack over Machni Gate by the terrorist two-day earlier.

According to details, the incident of terrorist attack on police over Machni Gate Peshawar wherein two Policemen were martyred and one ASI was injured critically in the attack. The injured ASI Mazhar Khan was undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Peshawar, the Police official said. Two days ago, terrorists attacked the police team in Machni Gate, two policemen were martyred and one other injured in the attack, the Police official said.

## Health Minister hosts E-Kacheri to address public concerns

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister of Health, Syed Qasim Ali Shah presided over the first E-Kachehri live session on Thursday alongside Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir through social media website.

While addressing the session, the minister said that engaging with the public through social media platforms is a sign of good governance and it bridges the gap between the government and its public.

During the session, Minister Shah personally responded to queries and concerns raised by the public.

Several key officials including Director General Health Dr. Shaukat Ali, Chief HSRU Dr. Khalil, Director General Drugs Dr. Abbas, Director General IMU Dr. Ijaz, Director Public Health Dr. Arshad Roghani, CEO Sehat Sahulat Program Initiative Dr. Riaz Tanoli, and other relevant stakeholders were also present on the occasion.

The session received around fifteen questions regarding health services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Teaching Institutions (KP MTI), most of which were addressed directly by Minister Qasim Ali Shah, while inquiries regarding specific matters were directed to the relevant authorities.

Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir highlighted at the onset of the session that addressing public complaints through social media platforms is an integral part of their professional responsibilities.

Queries received regarding the Directorate General Health Services amounted to 20, with comprehensive responses provided by Dr. Shaukat Ali during the session.



RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz former Senator Chaudhry Muhammad Tanveer Khan, MNA Barrister Daniyal Chaudhry, MNA Muhammad Hanif Abbasi and others holding a press conference in connection with the murder of Chaudhry Adnan.

## Minister calls for collective efforts to address climate change challenges

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Environment, Climate Change, Forests and Wildlife Fazal Hakeem Khan Yousafzai has said that climate change emerged a global challenge and, in this regard, strengthening the environment department and improving the system are among the top priorities of the incumbent government.

He was addressing the introductory meeting of the Environment Department at his office, Civil Secretariat, here on Thursday. On this

occasion, Provincial Environment Secretary Syed Nazir Hussain Shah and sectional heads of the department gave detailed briefings to the provincial minister regarding the performance.

At the meeting, details were also given to the provincial minister about the ongoing and new annual development program and Accelerated Implementation Programme (AIP) schemes of the department. There was also a discussion on the development projects of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's settled and merged districts.

## Nine dead, 1,180 injured in Punjab road accidents

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: At least nine people were killed and 1,180 others injured in 1,123 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours. As many as 558 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 622 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams. The analysis showed that 668 drivers, 34 underage drivers, 153 pedestrians, and 368 passengers were among the victims of road crashes.

## ANF recovers 46 kg drugs in 3 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting three operations managed to recover 46 kg drugs and arrested four accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that 460 grams heroin was recovered from a passenger going to Bahrain at Karachi Airport, 20.4 kg of opium and 21.6 kg of hashish were recovered from Faisalabad while 4 kg weed was recovered from two suspects arrested from Zarghon Road area in Quetta.

## Deputy Speaker asks officials to provide ration bags at doorsteps

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Deputy Speaker of the Punjab Assembly Malik Zaheer Iqbal Chanar has stated that under the Nigehban Ramadan Package, all necessary measures will be taken to provide ration bags to deserving individuals at their doorsteps throughout the district as per the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif. He expressed these views in a meeting held at the Circuit House. MPA Malik Khalid Mahmood Waran, MPA Dr. Rana Muhammad Tariq Khan, Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Zaheer Anwar Jappa, Assistant Commissioners, and officials from relevant departments were also present at the occasion.

Deputy Speaker of the Punjab Assembly, Malik Zaheer Iqbal Chanar, while overseeing the provision of food hampers to deserving individuals under the Ramadan Package, emphasized the need to expedite the delivery of the Ramadan Package.

MPA Dr. Rana Muhammad Tariq stated that while considering the dignity of deserving individuals, the provision of ration bags at their doorstep should be ensured. MPA Malik Khalid Mahmood Waran emphasized the need to achieve the objectives of the Ramadan Package swiftly.

## PHC orders removal of Qadri's name from ECL

PESHAWAR (APP): The Peshawar High Court on Thursday issued an order to remove the name of former Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Noor ul Haq Qadri from the Exit Control List (ECL).

A two-member bench comprising Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmed conducting the hearing on the petition filed by Noor ul Haq Qadri for the removal of his name from ECL.



HYDERABAD: MS Shah Bhitai Hospital Dr Dileep Kumar, Urologist Dr Naveed Akbar and others participate in an awareness walk on World Kidney Day at Shah Bhitai Hospital Latifabad.

# International News

## Kremlin says Putin didn't threaten to use nuclear weapons, US took him out of context

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: The Kremlin said on Thursday that comments on nuclear weapons that Russian President Vladimir Putin made in an interview with state media did not constitute a threat to use them and accused the US of deliberately taking the remarks out of context. Putin said in the interview published on Wednesday that Russia was technically ready for nuclear war and that if the US sent troops to Ukraine, it would be considered a significant escalation of the conflict.

Commenting on Putin's words, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters that Washington understood that the Russian leader was restating Moscow's nuclear doctrine, but accused Russia of deploying "reckless and irresponsible" nuclear rhetoric throughout the Ukraine conflict.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday that Putin had merely been answering a journalist's questions on the subject and restating the already well-known circumstances in which Russia would theoretically be forced to use nuclear weapons.

Peskov also drew attention to the fact that Putin had said in the same interview that the idea of using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine had never crossed his mind.

Asked about the White House comments, Peskov said: "This was deliberately taking something out of context. Putin made no threats about the use of nuclear weapons in this interview. The president was just talking about the reasons that could make the use of nuclear weapons inevitable."

"These are the reasons that are stated in our relevant documents, which are well known throughout the world. Moreover, everyone in the West deliberately failed to notice his words that it had never occurred to him to use tactical nuclear weapons [in Ukraine], despite the various situations that have developed in the course of the fighting."

"This is a deliberate distortion of the context and an unwillingness to hear President Putin."



GAZASTRIP: A man salvages items from the rubble of the Al-Atrash family home, after it was destroyed in an Israeli strike in Deir el-Balah.

## Israel strikes UN's aid centre in Rafah

**Monitoring Desk**  
GAZASTRIP: Amid mounting efforts to bring food to the besieged Palestinian territory, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said one of its aid warehouses in the war-ravaged Gaza was "hit" on Wednesday, wounding scores of people.

"At least one UNRWA staff member was killed and another 22 were injured when Israeli forces hit a food distribution centre in eastern part of Rafah," the UN agency said. The agency's chief Philippe Lazzarini said the attack on one of the very few remaining UNRWA distribution centres in the Gaza Strip comes as food supplies are running out, hunger is widespread and in some areas turning into famine.

The health ministry in Gaza said four people were killed in the "bombing of the warehouse", as Israeli strikes for past five months has caused mass civilian deaths, reduced vast areas to a rubble-strewn wasteland and sparked warnings of looming famine in the Palestinian territory of 2.4 million people.

## Second ship loaded with Gaza aid from Cyprus, says charity

**Monitoring Desk**  
NICOSIA: A second ship with food aid to Gaza was being loaded in Cyprus, a charity arranging the mission said on Thursday, as the first ship in a pilot trial of maritime deliveries near the besieged Palestinian enclave.

World Central Kitchen (WCK) said it was loading a vessel at Larnaca port with 300 tonnes of food aid - including legumes, canned tuna, vegetables, rice and flour.

## Iran, Russia and China show off their ships in a joint naval drill in the Gulf of Oman

**Monitoring Desk**  
DUBAI: China, Iran and Russia have begun a joint naval drill in the Gulf of Oman, a crucial waterway near the mouth of the Persian Gulf, officials said Tuesday.

Footage aired by Chinese state television and a video released by the Russian navy showed the ongoing drill, known as "Marine Security Belt 2024."

China sent the guided-missile destroyer Urumqi and the guided-missile frigate Linyi to the exercise. Russia's forces are being led by the Varyag, a Slava-class cruiser.

More than 20 ships, support vessels and combat boats from the three countries, as well as naval helicopters, are involved in the exercise.

A report by Iranian state television quoted the drill's spokesperson, Adm. Mostafa Tajadini, as saying the drill will take place in 17,000 square kilometers (6,600 square miles) of water.

Tajadini added that the three nations' drill — their fourth since 2019 — was also meant to improve trade, confront "piracy and terrorism, support to humanitarian activities and the exchange of information in the field of rescue," among other goals.

Iran has stepped up its military cooperation with Beijing and Moscow in response to regional tensions with the United States, including due to supplying military drones to Russia now being used in Moscow's war on Ukraine.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan and South Africa are observers of the drill.



People wait for a bus next to electronic screens on the facade of a building showing an image of Russian President Vladimir Putin and a quote from his address to the Federal Assembly, in Moscow, Russia.

## Biden and Trump clinch nominations, setting election rematch

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump clinched their parties' presidential nominations on Tuesday with decisive victories in a slate of low-profile primaries, setting up a general election rematch that many voters do not want.

The outcome of contests across Georgia, Mississippi and Washington state was never in doubt. Neither Biden, a Democrat, nor Trump, a Republican, faced major opposition. But the magnitude of their wins gave each man the delegate majority he needed to claim his party's nomination at the summertime national conventions. Not even halfway through the presidential primary calendar.

## Russian military cargo plane crashes with 15 people on board

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: Russia said one of its Ilyushin Il-76 military cargo planes crashed shortly after take-off on Tuesday with 15 people on board due to a fire in one of its engines.

Russia's defence ministry said the crash took place in the Ivanovo region. Russian online news services said there were no survivors.

Unverified videos on Russian social media networks showed a plane with one engine on fire heading downwards. A dark plume of smoke was shown rising into the sky as a helicopter circled.

Russian media broadcast a video showing the aircraft heading down with at least one of its engines ablaze. The four-engine Il-76 is a heavy-lift transport plane that has been in service since the 1970s with the Soviet and then Russian air force.

## Biden govt bypasses Congress to approve weapons for Ukraine

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: The United States will send a new military aid package for Ukraine worth \$300 million, President Joe Biden's administration said on Tuesday, the first such move in months as additional funds for Kyiv remain blocked by Republican leaders in Congress.

The White House has been scrambling to find ways to send more military assistance given the situation on the battlefield and resistance to the funding from Republican hardliners.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the funding was coming from unanticipated cost savings from Pentagon contracts and would be used for artillery rounds and munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems. "This ammunition will keep Ukraine's guns firing for a period, but only a short period," Sullivan told reporters.

## US, UN voice concern about India's law on citizenship

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: The US government and the United Nations expressed concerns on Tuesday about a contentious religion-based citizenship law in India, with the UN calling the legislation "fundamentally discriminatory in nature".

Rights advocates have criticised the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act, which the Indian government moved to implement on Monday. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said it discriminates against Muslims.

## North Korea's Kim test drives a new tank and orders troops to prepare for war

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un joined troops training on a new model of tank and drove one himself, state media reported Thursday, as his rivals South Korea and the U.S. wrapped up their annual military exercises. It's the third time Kim was reported to have observed military exercises since the start of the 11-day South Korean-U.S. exercises, which he views as rehearsals for an invasion. That's a less provocative option than missile tests. North Korea has intensified launches since 2022 and ramped up belligerent rhetoric this year.

At the tank drills Wednesday, Kim praised the country's latest tank as "the world's most powerful" and told his troops to bolster their "fighting spirits" and complete "preparations for war," according to the official Korean Central News Agency. The other two drills he inspected recently were dedicated to artillery firing and maneuvering exercises.

The tank was first unveiled during a military parade in 2020, and its rolling during Wednesday's drill indicates that it's ready to be deployed, South Korean experts say. Photos of the tank released by North Korea shows it has a launch tube for missiles, a weapons systems the former Soviet Union already operated in the 1970s. The new tank could pose a threat to South Korea, said Yang Uk, an analyst at Asan Institute for Policy Studies, but it remains to be seen whether it can be mass produced. The North's Defense Ministry last week threatened "responsible military activities" in reaction to the South Korea-U.S. military training, which involved a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last spring.

## PUC spearheads nationwide observance of 'Intl Day to Combat Islamophobia' today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) is set to lead the charge in commemorating the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on Friday with a nationwide campaign in a bid to raise awareness and foster solidarity against discrimination targeting Muslims.

This day, designated by the United Nations in 2022, is commemorated in 140 countries on March 15, worldwide, coinciding with the anniversary of the Christchurch mosque shootings, where 51 individuals lost their lives during Friday prayers.

Talking to Arab media, PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi underscored the alarming rise of Islamophobia as a global threat to Muslims. He urged world powers to accelerate their efforts in eradicating Islamophobia, emphasizing the urgent need for swift action.

Ashrafi stressed the collective responsibility of the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other international entities to spearhead initiatives aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination. He emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of love, tolerance, and coexistence as fundamental pillars of a harmonious global society.

Ashrafi underscored the gravity of the situation and urged concerted efforts at both the national and international levels to address the scourge of Islamophobia and uphold the principles of equality and mutual respect among diverse religious communities.

Ashrafi said the day holds significant importance, particularly for the PUC, which has long been at the forefront of advocating for religious tolerance and understanding.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif casts his vote in the Senate by-elections at the Parliament House.

## Commander Bahrain National Guard calls on Air Chief

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, called on Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu here at Air Headquarters on Thursday and praised the exceptional professionalism of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) personnel and the remarkable progress achieved by the PAF.

During the meeting, various areas of shared interest aimed at bolstering government-to-government cooperation in the realm of emerging technologies and collaboration within the Cyber and Networking do-

mains were discussed, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

The Air Chief stressed the deep-rooted brotherly relations between both nations.

The Commander Bahrain National Guard also visited PAF Cyber Command where he was briefed about the operational capabilities of Pakistan Air Force. Expressing profound interest in the strides made by PAF in the Cyber domain, the visiting dignitary conveyed his intention to dispatch a specialized team to PAF to assess and address any existing gaps within the emerging technologies architecture of the Bahrain Armed Forces.

## PML-N clinches NA-81 after vote recount

GUJRANWALA (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), by a margin of 3197 votes. After the recounting, Azhar Qayyum secured 110,057 votes while Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independent candidate Bilal Aijaz bagged 106,860 votes.

It is pertinent to mention here that earlier Bilal Aijaz was declared the winner with 117,717 votes while the PML-N candidate finished as runner-up with 109,926 votes. Aggrieved with the results,



ISLAMABAD: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Salman Al Khalifa called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar Sidhu Chief of the Air Staff Pakistan Air Force at Air Headquarters.

## EC issues election schedule for 48 vacant seats of Senate

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission (EC) has issued election schedule of 48 seats of Senate.

EC will start receiving nomination papers from today (March 15) Voting till take place on April 2.

The nomination papers can be filed on March 15 and 16. The initial list of candidates will be put to display on March 17. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on March 19 and voting will take place on April 02.

As per election schedule the appeals against acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be filed till March 21. Decision on appeal will be announced on March 25.

The revised list of the candidates will be published on March 26. The nomination papers can be withdrawn till March 27.

Polling for Senate seats will be held at 5 sites.



QUETTA: Former Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, Mir Hiyarbiyar Domki and other greet newly elected Senator of PML-N Mir Dostain Domki.



ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, delivers a speech to the senior management at the Ministry of Planning.

## Pakistan ranks 161st on UN's Human Development Index, as rich-poor nations' gap widens

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Pakistan was ranked at 161st position among 191 countries on UN's 2022/23 Human Development Index (HDI) annual rankings—three steps up from the 2021/22 ranking, according to a new UN Development Programme (UNDP) report. The HDI is a composite of statistics measuring such factors as per capita income, educational attainment and life expectancy.

The first UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) was prepared and launched in 1990 under the leadership of the late Dr. Mahbubul Haq, a former Pakistan finance minister.

The latest report, 'Breaking the gridlock', revealed widening disparities between the haves and the have-nots, despite record high global human development scores in 2023.

The 2023 HDI stands at a new high following steep decline during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the report said. Rich countries experienced unprecedented development, the Human Development Report de-

tails, yet half of the world's poorest nations continue to languish below their pre-COVID crisis levels.

India ranked at 132nd on the HDI index; Sri Lanka: 73rd; Bangladesh: 129th; Maldives: 90; Nepal: 143; Bhutan 127 and Afghanistan 180. Switzerland tops this year's rankings, followed by Norway and Iceland, while Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Somalia lagged the furthest behind. "The widening human development gap revealed by the report shows that the two-decade trend of steadily reducing inequalities between wealthy and poor nations is now in reverse," said UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner.

## Tarar felicitates Gilani on becoming Senator

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday congratulated former prime minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on becoming Senator.

The minister, in a news statement, welcomed the victory of Yusuf Raza Gilani as a Senator and called him a senior and seasoned politician.

He said Yousuf Raza Gilani's experience and knowledge would bring positive changes in the political and economic landscape of the country.

## Crackdown against profiteers continues; 38 shopkeepers arrested

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The Quetta district administration is continuing its crackdown against the profiteers in the metropolis. According to the official sources, at least 38 shopkeepers were arrested during the crackdown carried out in different parts of the metropolis.

Similarly, 19 shops were sealed while a shopkeeper was charged fine on violation of the official price list.

The price control committees comprising Assistant Commissioners and magistrates conducted raids on airport road, Satellite Town, Nawab Kili, Bacha Khan Chowk, Kasi road, Sariab road and Kuchlak.

It may be mentioned here that the Commissioner Quetta, Muhammad Hamza Shafiq and Deputy Commissioner Quetta, Saad bin Asad had issued special directives to the price control teams to take stern action against the profiteers.

The Commissioner said that different teams have been formed to take action against those involved in profiteering.



QUETTA: Newly elected Senator of PPP Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo in a group photo with PPP Provincial President Mir Changez Jamali, MPAs Mir Ali Madad Jattak, Mir Asim Kurd Gailo, Mir Umar Bangulzai and others.

## AJK President calls for EU's role to help resolve Kashmir conflict

MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu Kashmir State President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has said that the European Union can play an important role as a mediator between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. He expressed these views while talking to the Ambassador Dr Riina Kionka and Political Consul Rukiye Komuru, who called on him at the Presidency in Jammu Kashmir House in the federal metropolis on Thursday, the AJK President's office later said Thursday evening. Speaking on the occasion, the AJK president said that the long-running dispute posed a serious threat to peace and security in South Asia.

Stressing the need for early settlement of the dispute, Barrister Chaudhry said that the Kashmir conflict could lead to a nuclear war between the two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India. "Any mishap, no matter how small or big, can be a precursor to a nuclear war.

## Cancel arrest warrants Court ends proclaimed offender status of Hassan, Hussain Nawaz

ISLAMABAD (Online): Accountability Court (AC) Islamabad while ending proclaimed offender status of Hussain and Hassan Nawaz sons of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in three references of Avenfield, Alazizia and flag ship has cancelled their arrest warrants and approved their bail against surety bonds in the sum of Rs 50000.

Hussain Nawaz and Hassan Nawaz who had absconded in these references appeared in the court Thursday and surrendered them before judge Nasir Javed Rana of the court.

Judge Nasir Javed Rana said court has given relief to Hassan and Hussain Nawaz till today. They should surrender them before the court.

On resumption of hearing Hassan and Hussain Nawaz appeared in the court along with their lawyer Qazi Misbah.

Qazi Misbah said during previous hearing request was made to cancel permanent arrest warrants.

Judge Nasir Javed inquired how many cases are.

Qazi Misbah said there are three references and we have filed petition in all the three cases. Two decisions regarding acquittal in two among three references have come from high court.

In one case AC No 2 had given the decision of acquittal. NAB challenged acquittal decision and later withdrew the appeal. Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Capt Saifdar have been acquitted in Even field reference. Islamabad high court had acquitted her father in Alazizia reference. Trial court had acquitted Nawaz Sharif in flagship.

Counsel Qazi Misbah said his client is given exemption regarding Friday hearing.

The court while cancelling arrest warrants of Hassan and Hussain Nawaz approved bail against surety bonds worth Rs 50000.

## Ahsan Iqbal says: Govt to start work on five new economic corridors

ISLAMABAD (Online): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal has directed to expedite the implementation of CPEC project as no further hindrance will be tolerated.

He was chairing a meeting to initiate work on the five new corridors in the second phase of CPEC.

During the meeting, a comprehensive briefing was given to the minister on the progress of CPEC projects.

Planning Minister added that Gwadar is the best tourist destination, emphasizing the need for a solid and effective strategy to promote investment in Gwadar. He also directed stakeholders to devise a strategy for increasing Pakistani exports in Chinese markets.

INP adds: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday chaired a meeting to expedite the implementation of the 5 Es Framework.

Decision to organize one day workshop was made during the meeting with top officials of the ministry, to gather recommendations from experts including from academia and the private sector, said press statement issued by the ministry.

Additionally, future agenda would also be devised for the implementation of the 5 Es (Export Energy, Equity, E-Pakistan, and Environment) Framework so that long-term policies can be formulated for implementation in these sectors.

The Ministry of Planning, under the leadership of Ahsan Iqbal had formulated 5 Es Framework during the tenure of previous government which was also approved by the National Economic Council (NEC).

Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Iqbal said that it was top responsibility of the Planning Commission to determine the economic and developmental priorities accurately.

He said that in order to move forward, there was need to increase revenues and boost exports. Additionally, he emphasized that traditional methods needed to be transcended for achieving progress on sustainable grounds.

He said, the entire Ministry of Planning will be shifted to a digital system in next six months adding it would fully activate the e-governance system.

Citing examples of Indian and Bangladesh, he reiterated that continuation of policies were prerequisites to lead the country towards stability and development. He said, Pakistan was currently facing economic challenges and highlighted the need to increase revenues and exports.

He said the principles of development have drastically changed worldwide as artificial intelligence, big data, and automation are taking the entire system towards new stability.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Khawaja Muhammed Asif presided over meeting wherein he was given detailed briefing on role of Ministry of Aviation and its attached entities.

## PHC directs to remove of Noor Qadri from ECL

PESHAWAR (INP): Peshawar High Court has issued directives to remove the name of former minister religious affairs Noor ul Haq Qadri from Exit Control List (ECL).

According to details, Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Waqar Ahmed of PHC heard the petition filed against inclusion of name of PTI leader Noor ul Haq Qadri in ECL.

The petitioner's lawyer Sikander Hayat Shah Advocate said that the name of Noorul Haq Qadri has been included in the ECL.

The lawyer said that his client has been invited by Saudi Arabia and he was set to leave for KSA at 6 pm today but due to inclusion of his name in ECL, he could not leave for abroad.

## Khawaja Asif chairs meeting on ministry of aviation

ISLAMABAD (APP): While being briefed on PIACL, the minister remarked that the privatization of PIACL would be the priority of this government. He also commended the joint venture for mix use re-development of Roosevelt Hotel. Khawaja Asif showed his resolve to grow the aviation industry of Pakistan in terms of enhancing its contribution to country's GDP. International Finance Corporation (IFC) apprised the minister about latest development of outsourcing of three major airports including Islamabad International Airport, Jinnah International Airport Karachi and Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore in first phase.

Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation Khawaja Muhammed Asif on Thursday chaired a meeting and detailed briefing was given by the secretary aviation on role of aviation ministry, National Aviation Policy 2023, the challenges faced by Pakistan Aviation industry.

The minister was also briefed on the entities working under the ministry including Pakistan Airlines corporation Ltd, Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, Pakistan Airport Authority, Bureau of Air Safety Investigation, Air Port Security Forces and Pakistan meteorological department, said a press release.

## EU denies PTI contact regarding Pakistan's GSP plus status

ISLAMABAD (INP): The European Union Mission in Pakistan has refuted claims that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) contacted them regarding the country's GSP Plus status. Samar Saeed Akhtar, a spokesperson for the EU Mission, clarified their position, stating that they haven't received any official communication from PTI on the matter. This comes after a press conference by Pakistan's Federal Information Minister, Attaullah Tarar, where he accused PTI of attempting to get

Pakistan's GSP Plus status revoked by contacting the EU. He further claimed these actions were part of a "false campaign" to harm the economy. Responding to these accusations, PTI spokesperson Raouf Hassan categorically denied them, calling them "false allegations." He emphasized that PTI neither wrote nor intended to write any letter to the EU. Hassan further criticized the government, specifically veteran Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, blaming his "incompetence and stubbornness" for causing delays.

## India using children as human shield during CASOs in IIOJK: Wani

GENEVA (INP): India is using Kashmiri children as human shield during cordon and search operations (CASOs) in occupied Jammu and Kashmir, said Altaf Hussain Wani, Kashmiri representative.

Altaf Hussain Wani was speaking on behalf of World Muslim Congress during 55th session of United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva during debate under agenda item 3 on the report of Secretary General's special representative on children in armed conflict. He said that India was still involved in grave violations against Kashmiri children. "I wonder what obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law were met by India which is still using children as human shield during search and cordon operations.



JAMAICA: Ambassador Masood Khan presenting Letter of Credence as Non-Resident High Commissioner to the Most Honorable Sir Patrick Linton Allen, Governor General of Jamaica.

## Pervez to contest by-polls; family signs nomination papers

GUJRAT (INP): Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Chaudhry Pervez Elahi has announced his participation in the upcoming by-elections, as confirmed by sources. Elahi's family members reportedly visited him in jail and formally endorsed his candidacy by signing the nomination papers for the by-election.

The decision comes as the seat of PP 32 became vacant following the elevation of Chaudhry Salik Hussain, leader of the Muslim League (Q) and Federal Minister for Overseas, to the position of MNA. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has scheduled by-elections nationwide for April 21, encompassing vacant seats across the country.

## US Navy ship arrives Pakistan to conduct sea exercise with Pak Navy

KARACHI (APP): US Navy Ship USS INDIANAPOLIS, Freedom Class Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) here on Thursday visited Karachi Port and conducted a sea drill with the Pakistan Navy. According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), upon arrival at Karachi, US Navy Ship was received by senior officials of Pakistan Navy.

During the stay at Karachi, activities included professional interaction with PN officials and Ship's crew in the form of table top discussions on contemporary issues besides planning and coordination meeting for conduct of joint sea exercise. At sea Pakistan Navy Ship ALAMGIR with embarked helicopter carried out sea exercise with visiting US Navy ship to enhance interoperability between both navies.

The sea exercise was aimed to strengthen mutual professional skills through cooperation and learning from each other experience.

Pakistan Navy, in line with government policy, has always contributed significantly towards safety, security and freedom of navigation at high seas.