

# Independent

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Gwadar

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## President warns of befitting response against terrorists

Attends funeral prayers of Lt Col Kashif, Capt Bader; Underscores unity against scourge of terrorism, Says I promise that the blood of our sons will not go in vain

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari, attended Namaz e Janaza of Shaheed Lt. Colonel Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader who had been martyred in Mir Ali, North Waziristan during a terrorist attack on Saturday.

On the occasion, the president paid tribute to shuhada and reiterated the resolve to respond to terrorist activities with full force, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release, on Sunday.

He said that the people of Pakistan and its armed forces were united and would face terrorism in unison.

He also expressed the resolve to make the terrorists accountable for blood of each martyred jawan, adding their brave brothers, sons and friends had been protecting the borders.

President Zardari promised that the blood of the sons of the soil would not go in vain.

In the early hours of 16 March, a group of six terrorists attacked a security forces' post in the general area of Mir Ali of North Waziristan District.

According to the details, the troops foiled the initial attempt of the attack, the terrorists rammed an explo-

sive-laden vehicle into the post, followed by multiple suicide bombing attacks, which led to the collapse of a portion of a building, resulting in the Shahadat of five soldiers.

APP add: The funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed, age 39 years and resident of Karachi and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader Shaheed, age 23 years and resident of District Talagang who embraced martyrdom while defending their motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan District, were offered at Chaklala Garrison Rawalpindi.

President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of Army Staff, senior serving military and civil officers, relatives of Shuhada and locals of the area attended the funeral, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said on Sunday. "Pakistan Army has consistently upheld the ideals of Faith, Unity and Discipline. Guided by these enduring principles, Pakistan Army has always endeavoured to set higher benchmarks of professionalism and loyalty in its unremitting fight against terrorism."



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamsah Mirza, Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir senior serving military and civil officers, relatives of Shuhada and locals of the area attending funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader Shaheed who embraced martyrdom while defending their motherland against the scourge of terrorism in Mir Ali, North Waziristan District.



ISLAMABAD: Mr Ikramullah, hailing from Qila Saifullah Balochistan, who is currently 9th class student at Lawrence College, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. Mr Ikramullah's house and school were damaged in 2022 floods. On instructions of the Prime Minister, he was facilitated to continue education.

## Country's future links with well educated youth: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that the country's future hinged upon well educated and skilled youth of the country and for the provision of quality education, the federal government would facilitate the high achievers with scholarship schemes to get education in the well reputed global educational institutes.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Ikramullah, a student from Balochistan province, who is now studying in the 9th class at Lawrence College Murree.

Under the prime minister's direction, the student from 2022 flood affected area of Qila Saifullah was provided with a facility to get education at the country's prominent educational institute.

The prime minister recalled that he met the desperate student in the Khasnoob camp in Qila Saifullah when floods had caused destruction in Balochistan province during 2022.

He said that he had assured the student of the provision of quality education, adding that it pleased him a lot that the student was now studying in Lawrence College.

## Afghanistan's soil being used for terrorism in Pakistan: Asif

Lauds counter-terrorism sacrifices of security forces; Accuses PTI of working against national interests

SIALKOT (INP): Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif says entire nation is united against terrorists and security forces are rendering unprecedented sacrifices for peace and stability in the country.

Talking to media in Sialkot on Sunday, he said martyrs are our real heroes who sacrificed their lives to safeguard the motherland.

The Defence Minister strongly condemned cow-

ardly attack by terrorists in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan district.

He also condemned social media campaign by some elements against martyrs and said there is a need for unity in the war against terrorism.

Answering the question, he said Pakistan is passing through an economic crisis and one political party has written a letter to the International Monetary Fund, which is

regrettable.

The Minister said that the government is determined to steer the country out of economic crisis and put it on the path of progress and development.

To a question, he regretted that Afghanistan's soil is being used for terrorism in Pakistan.

He said that some facilitators have been traced, and Pakistan has raised the issue with Afghanistan government.

## Governor calls for preparing comprehensive strategy to prevent mishaps & disasters

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan, Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar has underlined the need to prepare comprehensive strategy for prevention of the mishaps and disasters well in time in the present developed era of science and technology.

The Governor said that forests and wildlife are our national assets, therefore, it is necessary to create sense of their protection besides their importance.

In this regard, the employees of all concerned departments and volunteers deserve appreciation for overcoming the fire broke out in the forests located in mountains of Barkhan district.

Malik Abdul Wali Kakar said that the long term planning is direly needed to extinguish the fire

## Nation stands united with Pak Army in war against terror: Mohsin Naqvi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi said entire nation was strongly condemning terror attack on Mir Ali check post. He assured the nation that terrorists will be given befitting response for this cowardly act.

In a press statement, Interior Minister said all the martyred Jawans including Lt col Syed Kashif Ali were heroes of the nation. Entire nation paid tributes and salutes to the heroes who laid their lives for the security of the country. Mohsin Naqvi said entire nation was united and stood with Pak Army in war against terror. He assured the nation that Pakistan Army will give due response to terrorists.

## Awais Leghari assigned portfolio of Power

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has assigned the portfolio of Power to Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari in place of the portfolio of Railways.

According to the notification of the Cabinet Division, the PM relieved Federal Minister for Petroleum Musadiq Masood Malik of the additional portfolio of Power.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar addressing a press conference at 180 h Model Town.

## Elements behind campaign against martyrs to face stern action: Attaullah Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Sunday the government was fully aware of the challenges facing the country and steps were required to tackle economic problems.

Addressing a press conference here at the PML-N Secretariat, he said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had shared his agenda aimed at stabilizing the country's economy.

He said the Premier had taken up all matters seriously, including reducing government expenses, privatisation of certain state-owned entities. "Restructuring of the Federal Board of Revenue and tax reforms are major initiatives the government is undertaking to increase the tax net. All these measures are being taken to reduce the burden on poor

people and to bring elites in the tax net," he maintained. He said that international economic journals like Bloomberg had termed the appointment of the Finance Minister a good step, adding that international journals had acknowledged that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had a potential to overcome economic challenges through reforms.

He said: "Political stability leads to economic stability and sincere efforts are being made in this regard."

He strongly condemned the terrorist attack in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan, in which seven soldiers, including two officers, were martyred.

He said that Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader was also martyred, who was the only brother of five sisters.

## Barkhan wildfire extinguished

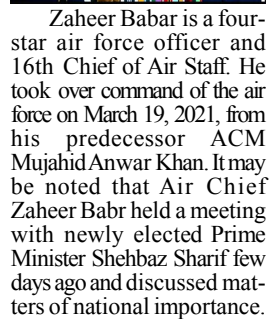
QUETTA (APP): Local administration, Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) and local residents extinguished the wildfire that engulfed the Koh-e-Jandaran in Barkhan district of Balochistan the other day.

Hundreds of trees and precious shrubs have burnt in forest fire at Koh-e-Jandaran on the confluence of Kohlu and Barkhan in Balochistan. A huge forest fire that erupted in the mountainous region on Saturday spread over large area and engulfed the entire areas putting hazards to the hundreds of trees and precious and rare shrubs.

## PM grants extension to Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Babar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday granted a one-year extension to Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Babar Sidhu.

The prime minister has sent the advisory of the Air Chief Marshal's extension to President Asif Ali Zardari and granted him extension after his approval.



Zaheer Babar is a four-star air force officer and 16th Chief of Air Staff. He took over command of the air force on March 19, 2021, from his predecessor ACM Mujahid Anwar Khan. It may be noted that Air Chief Zaheer Babar held a meeting with newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif few days ago and discussed matters of national importance.

## CM appreciates PDMA, FC, Forests, District administration and levies for overcoming Barkhan mountains fire

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has appreciated the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Frontier Corps (FC), district administration and levies force for extinguishing the fire erupted in the forests at mountains located in Barkhan district.

In an official statement issued here on Sunday, the

Chief Minister said that all the concerned overcome the fire through joint efforts, which is appreciable.

He said that we appreciate all employees and jawans who took part in the process of extinguishing fire in Barkhan mountains. However, he directed the concerned authorities to standby by the concerned operational teams in the district headquarter in view of the winds and dry wind grass.



RAWALPINDI: President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir pays condolence to martyrs family after funeral prayers of Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Bader.

## Corruption was rampant in former PTI govt in KP, admits Marwat

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leader and lawmaker Sher Afzal Marwat, who is known for his outspoken demeanour and controversial statements, on Sunday admitted that corruption was rampant in his party's previous government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

During a live session on X Spaces, he alleged: "In the previous government of

the PTI, people became not billionaires but trillionaires [via corruption]."

Responding to a question, the PTI leader said that the narrative of keeping former prime minister Imran Khan at Adiala Jail instead of his residence in Bani Gala was not floated by him. "Former KP chief minister Mahmood Khan earns Rs2.5 million daily from one of his mines now," he added.

## Consumers to bear the brunt as SSGC seeks further hike in gas price

Monitoring Desk KARACHI: A month after the caretakers burdened the masses with gas price hike on the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demand, the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) has requested the fuel regulator — the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra) — to further increase gas prices from July 2024. The caretaker government had approved a

67% increase in the natural gas tariff with effect from February 1. The tariff was hiked to meet the deadline of the IMF for hiking the gas prices under structural benchmark criteria till February 15, 2024.

In its fresh plea filed with the Ogra, the SSGC requested the fuel regulator to increase in the gas price by Rs274.40 per Metric Million British Thermal Unit

(mmbtu). Citing an estimated Rs79.63 billion revenue shortfall, the SSGC urged Ogra to set average price of one mmbtu gas at Rs1740.80.

A public hearing on the petition is scheduled on March 18 in Karachi, during which the regulatory authority will determine the gas prices. The Ogra will also hear the petition in Quetta on March 20.

## Preliminary list of candidates issued by ECP: 38 candidates in competition run for 11 seats of Senate from Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: In all 38 candidates are in competition run for 11 seats of Senate from Balochistan province as the preliminary list of candidate was issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) here on Sunday.

According to the preliminary list, in all 17 candidates filed nomination papers for 7 general seats of Senate from the province while 13 candidates filed nominations for two seats allocated for Technocrats from the province.

Similarly, eight nomination papers were filed by

the women for two seats of women in Senate from the province.

The process of scrutiny of the papers of candidates would start on Monday (today), and would remain continued till March 19.

It may be mentioned here that in all 11 seats of Senate including seven general and two each of technocrats and women had fallen vacant on March 12 after retirement of the senators.

The polling on these 11 seats is scheduled to be held on April 2, 2024 in the provincial assembly here.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Air Force (PAF) jet demonstrating different skills during rehearsal ahead of the Pakistan Day parade on 23rd March in the Federal Capital.



## Comprehensive plan formed for restoration of KP's law & order situation: CM

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday said that a comprehensive plan has been prepared for restoration of law and order in the province as it was top priority of his government.

He stated this while talking to media during his first ever visit to Dera Ismail Khan after being elected as Chief Minister.

He said the implementation over that plan would be started soon as better law and order situation was imperative for progress of any area.

He said the steps would also be taken for the safety of police and other forces.

The chief minister said the government has restored 'health-card' facility.

"We have to improve the treatment facilities at public hospitals," he said and hoped that soon the people would not have need to visit private hospitals as provision of all facilities would be ensured at public hospitals.

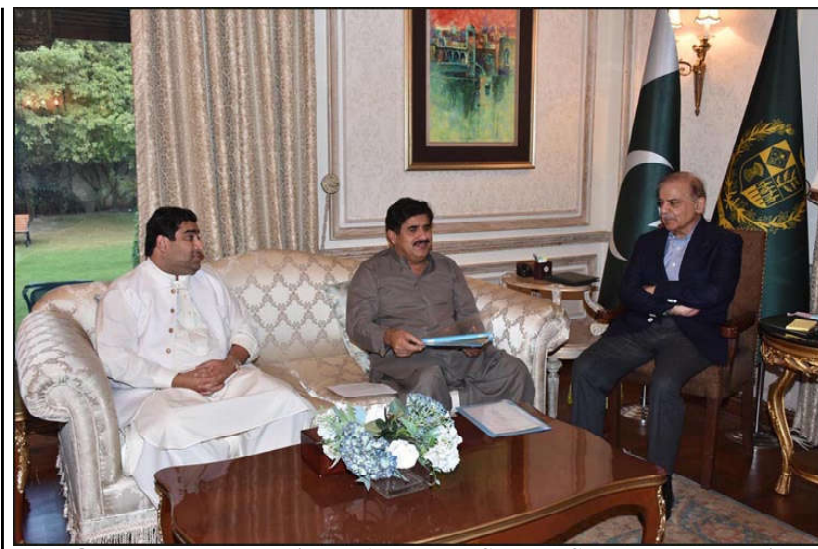
Commenting on the current wave of inflation, he said the provincial government will give Rs 10,000 each to 850,000 deserving families of the province under Ramadan package. It will be handed over to them at their doorstep respectfully, he mentioned.

Moreover, he said the facility of 'Shelter homes' has been reopened by ensuring all facilities for needy people.

However, he said, the government would also take steps for providing business opportunities to people rather only giving them charity or stipend.

He said the women would be provided employment at their homes and youth would be provided with skill trainings.

He informed that the consultation was underway with other countries regarding provision of employment to people by giving them skills training. After the training, the skilled people of the province would be sent abroad for employment.



LAHORE: Member National Assembly Sardar Shamsheer Mazari and Member of the Punjab Assembly Khizer Mazari call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## Food minister's inspections lead to disposal of 2,500kg of spoiled meat

Independent Report LAHORE: Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin led a comprehensive inspection drive with Punjab Food Authority (PFA) teams in markets in the provincial capital here on Sunday.

The vigorous scrutiny resulted in the disposal of a staggering 2,500 kilograms of spoiled, substandard, and expired meat, bringing a sense of relief to Lahore's residents.

## Governor attends funeral prayer of Nisar Shakir

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali and Peshawar Mayor Haji Zubair Ali Sunday attended the funeral prayers of late senior journalist Nisar Ahmad Shakir at Asia Gate Peshawar.

## Punjab police sign MoU with private hospital

Independent Report LAHORE: On the direction of Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, measures are being taken to provide best medical facilities to Punjab Constabulary personnel, in continuation of which an MoU has been signed between the Punjab Police and a private hospital group (Farooq Group).

Commander Battalion-V, PC, Abbas Lines, SSP Mian Afnan Ameen said that Punjab Constabulary officials will be provided special discount on laboratory tests and bed expenses at Farooq Hospital. A 100% free treatment facility will be available at Akhtar Saeed Teaching Hospital for the families of police martyrs. Free treatment facilities will be provided to PC Lahore personnel as per hospital policy. This MoU will be applicable to DHA, Iqbal Town, Westwood Colony and Rawalpindi branches of Farooq Hospital.



LAHORE: A large number of women in a queue to get flour bag on subsidies rate.

Under the vigilant eye of the provincial minister, the PFA teams descended upon Moghulpura Market, meticulously inspecting meat shops in the vicinity. In addition to swiftly disposing of unfit meat, strict warnings were issued to violators of food safety regulations.

Talking to media, Food Minister Bilal Yasin revealed that immediate action was taken to seize substandard and expired meat from the shelves of meat shops. He lamented the discovery of foul-smelling meat in unhygienic freezers, underscoring the urgency of situation.

During the inspections, Bilal Yasin noted deficiencies in cleanliness and the presence of pests, urging for swift rectification.

The food minister directed the PFA teams to ensure the comprehensive traceability of meat supplied across Punjab, including Lahore.

He condoled the death of Asif Nisar's father and prayed for patience for the family. The governor said that the services of late Nisar Ahmad Shakir will be remembered.

## All tourist sites to open for world soon to enhance country's GDP, says Zahid

PESHAWAR (APP): Zahid Chanzab, Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism, Culture, Museums and Archeology, Sunday revealed that the tourism industry generates 30 billion dollars in revenue to the national economy, which is 6% of the country's GDP.

"Nature has generously blessed our province with the world's best hill stations and tourist destinations and only focusing on this sector can revolutionize the economy of the province that can ameliorate the quality of life of the poor over here and the present PTI-led KP govt is quite serious to exploit all such vital sectors on crash grounds," he added.

Trillion of rupees in income can be obtained from the tourism sector to spend on ameliorating a lot of the poor and contributing in restoration of the economy and infrastructure of the province, he maintained. He expressed this during his visit to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) headquarters in Peshawar cantt wherein he went around various sections.



PESHAWAR: PESCO workers are busy repairing the transformer in the Tehsil area.

## Competition in KP tough for Senate poll

PESHAWAR (APP): The competition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is also tough in the Senate elections with a total of 42 candidates having submitted nomination papers for eleven seats of the Senate, an official of the Provincial Election Commission said here Sunday. He said that there will be a contest between 10 candidates for two posts of Technocrat, 25 candidates for 7 general seats submitted their nomination papers, and 7 candidates have submitted their nomination papers for two reserved seats for women.

The official of the Provincial Election Commission disclosed that Azam Khan Swati, Qazi Muhammad Anwar Advocate, Waqar Ahmed Qazi, Dr. Hamad Mahmood Cheema, Khalid Masood, Fazal Hanan, Dilawar Khan, Kaiser Khan, Noorul Haque Qadri and Syed Irshad Hussain are candidates for the Technocrat seat. Irfan Saleem, Muhammad Talha Mahmood, Dilawar Khan, Faisal Khan, Mirza Muhammad Afridi, Azhar Qazi Mashwani, Niaz Ahmed, Waqas Orkazai, Fazal Hanan, Asif Iqbal, Azam Khan Swati, Murad Saeed,

## De-siltation of 171 canals of DG Khan zone to start today

DG KHAN (APP): The de-siltation of 171 small and big canals of Dera Ghazi Khan zone will start on Monday, March 18.

The task has been given to remove silt from 1625 kilometers long canals by April 20.

Superintending Engineer Irrigation Department Khan Shaukat Hayat said that provincial, divisional, and district-level committees have been formed to monitor the proper de-siltation of canals.

He said that the monitoring land information management system has also been made functional by the provincial government.

There will be no wastage of water by the de-siltation and the canal water will reach the tail-end farmers in abundance.

He said that if anyone has any objection or suggestion related to the de-siltation, it could be submitted in writing to his office and the Canal division.

## 14 dead, 1122 injured in 1063 road accidents in Punjab

Independent Report LAHORE: At least fourteen persons were killed and 1122 injured in 1063 road accidents in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours.

Out of these, 533 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 589 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by rescue medical teams thus reducing the burden of hospitals. Furthermore, the analysis showed those 626 drivers, 44 underage drivers, 133 pedestrians,

## FIA arrests two outlaws for work visa fraud

MULTAN (APP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) claimed to have arrested two alleged outlaws in a fraud case related to work visas.

According to official sources, the arrested outlaws are identified as Tariq Hussain and Anwar ul Hassan residents of Burewala.

The alleged outlaws took money from a citizen on the promise of sending him to Bahrain on a work visa. However, the outlaws neither returned the money nor sent him a work visa. The aggrieved citizen approached the FIA Multan.

# International News

## Russia election to tighten Putin's grip, opponents stage noon protest

Monitoring Desk MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin is poised to tighten his grip on power on Sunday in a Russian election that is certain to deliver him a landslide victory, though some opponents staged a symbolic noon protest at polling stations against his rule.

Putin, who rose to power in 1999, is poised to win a new six-year term that, if he completes it, would enable him to overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years.

The election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. He casts it as a "special military operation".

War has hung over the three-day election: Ukraine has repeatedly attacked oil refineries in Russia, shelled Russian regions and sought to pierce Russian borders with proxy forces - a move Putin said would not be left unpunished.

While Putin's re-election is not in doubt given his control over Russia and the absence of any real challengers, the former KGB spy wants to show that he has the overwhelming support of Russians. Voting ends at 1800 GMT on Sunday.

The Kremlin has sought a high turnout, and as polls opened for a third day in western Russia, officials said the turnout in the first two days had already reached 63% nationwide.

An exit poll will be published shortly after voting ends at 1800 GMT.

Supporters of Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last month, had called on Russians to come out at a "Noon against Putin" protest to show their dissent against a leader they cast as a corrupt autocrat.

"Alexei was fighting for very simple things: for freedom of speech, for fair elections, for democracy and our right to live without corruption and war," Navalny's widow, Yulia, said in a message to a rally in Budapest on March 15.

"Putin is not Russia. Russia is not Putin."

There was no independent tally of how many of Russia's 114 million voters turned out at noon to show opposition to Putin.



GAZA CITY: Palestinians inspect the rubble of a building after it was destroyed in an Israeli strike the night before in the Rimal neighbourhood. The head of Israeli intelligence is expected to lead ceasefire talks in Qatar in response to a new proposal from Hamas.

## No more 'normal-sized babies' in Gaza, says UN

Monitoring Desk UNITED NATIONS: The humanitarian situation in Gaza is a "nightmare" for mothers and babies, with doctors reporting small and sickly newborns, stillbirths and women forced to undergo C-sections without adequate anesthesia, a UN official said.

"I'm personally leaving Gaza this week terrified for the one million women and girls of Gaza... and most especially for the 180 women who are giving birth every single day," Dominic Allen, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) representative for the state of Palestine, said in a video news conference from Jerusalem.

"Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies," Allen said after visiting hospitals still providing maternity services in the north of Gaza, where need is especially great.

"What they do see though, tragically, is more stillborn births... and more neonatal deaths, caused in part by malnutrition, dehydration and complications." The numbers of complicated deliveries are roughly twice what they were before the crisis with Israel bressed — with mothers stressed, fearful, underfed and exhausted — and caregivers often lacking necessary supplies.

"We have had reports of insufficient anesthetic being available" for Caesarean sections, "which again is unthinkable." "Those mothers should be wrapping their arms around their children," he said. "Those children should not be wrapped in a body bag."

Israel has defended its policies as it pursues its stated goal of destroying Hamas, saying the UN should send more aid to the territory.



Voters cast their ballots at a polling station on the final day of the presidential election in Moscow, Russia.

## Climate protesters under fire in Europe, says UN

Monitoring Desk GENEVA: Environmental activists are increasingly facing hostility across Europe, a UN expert said, warning that the very right to protest was "at risk" in countries usually considered beacons of democracy.

Michel Forst, the UN special rapporteur on environmental defenders, said that he was deeply troubled by the hardening tone against climate activists in countries including France, Austria, Germany and Britain.

Government ministers have been throwing about terms like "eco terrorists" and "Green Taliban" to describe non-violent activists, he claimed, also blaming some media reporting for contributing to an increasingly hostile public attitude. "It creates a sort of chilling effect," warned Forst, an independent expert appointed under the UN's Aarhus Convention — a legally-binding text that provides for justice in environmental matters.

## Mossad chief may lead Doha talks on Gaza

Monitoring Desk DOHA: The head of Israeli intelligence is expected to lead ceasefire talks with mediators which resume in Qatar today (Sunday) in direct response to a new proposal from Hamas, a source close to the talks said on Saturday. The talks between Mossad head David Barnea, Qatar's prime minister and Egyptian officials will focus on remaining gaps between Israel and Hamas including over prisoner releases and humanitarian aid, the source said.

Israel had said on Friday it would be sending a delegation to Doha, but did not spell out when it would do so or who would take part. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected to convene the security cabinet before the talks. Israeli officials were not immediately available to comment on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.

Barnea was involved in previous significant pushes for a deal. A short-lived truce in November was agreed and came into effect after his participation in talks in Doha. His last meeting with Qatar's prime minister in January led to a proposal for a temporary ceasefire that Hamas ultimately rejected.

## Sixteen Nigerian soldiers killed in community clashes in Delta state

Monitoring Desk ABUJA: Sixteen Nigerian Army soldiers were surrounded by youths and killed earlier this week after they attempted to quell community clashes in the oil-producing southern Delta state, an army spokesperson said on Saturday.

The troops from 181 Amphibious Battalion had returned to the conflict in the Okuoma community when they were killed on Thursday. Brigadier General Tukur Gusau said in a statement.

## Venezuela's Maduro announces candidacy for July re-election

Monitoring Desk CARACAS: Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro will run for a second re-election to secure another six-year term in voting planned for July 28, the ruling Socialist party said.

Maduro, a 61-year-old former union leader, was proclaimed as the Socialist party's candidate by Vice President Diosdado Cabello, and took the stage at a large sports arena to address supporters.

"There's just one outcome, the people's victory on July 28," Maduro said, wearing a bright red zippered jacket.

"They haven't been able to stop us, nor will they be able to."

Recent polls show 13.9% of Venezuelans plan to vote for Maduro, far behind opposition candidate Maria Corina Machado's 54.5%.

## Trump predicts the end of US democracy if he loses 2024 election

Monitoring Desk WASHINGTON: Donald Trump said on Saturday if he does not win November's presidential election it will mean the likely end of American democracy. The Republican presidential candidate, speaking to supporters in Ohio, made the claim after repeating his baseless assertion that his 2020 election defeat to Democratic President Joe Biden was the result of election fraud.

During an outdoor speech that was whipped by strong winds and punctuated by some profane language, Trump predicted that if he does not win the Nov. 5 general election, American democracy will come to an end. "If we don't win this election, I don't think you're going to have another election in this country," Trump said.

Trump, who is under criminal indictment in Georgia for trying to overturn the result of the 2020 election there.

## Bolsonaro says he does not fear being put on trial

Monitoring Desk RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro said he does not fear being put on trial, one day after a police investigation revealed the far-right politician tried to cop the country's military chiefs in a coup plan to overturn his 2022 election defeat. Bolsonaro did not refer directly to the allegations made by two armed forces commanders that he had summoned them to discuss a possible coup d'etat to prevent leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from returning to power.

## EU to bolster Egypt ties with billions in funding

Monitoring Desk CAIRO: European leaders are expected to announce a multi-billion euro funding package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt in Cairo on Sunday, part of a push to stem migrant flows across the Mediterranean that has been criticised by rights groups.

The agreement is designed to enhance cooperation in areas including renewable energy, trade, and security while delivering grants, loans and other funding over the next three years to support Egypt's faltering economy.

European governments have long been worried about the risk of instability in Egypt, a country of 106 million people that has been struggling to raise foreign currency and where economic adversity has pushed increasing numbers to migrate in recent years.

Inflation has been running close to record highs and many Egyptian say they struggle to get by. Over the past month, however, the financial pressure on the government has eased as Egypt has struck a record deal for Emirati investment, expanded its loan programme with the IMF, and sharply devalued its currency.

Diplomats say Egypt's strategic importance has been underscored by the conflict in neighbouring Sudan, which has created the world's biggest displacement crisis, and the war in Gaza, which borders Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

Egypt has been the main conduit for international humanitarian aid sent to Gaza, and along with Qatar and the United States has been trying to mediate a truce between Israel and Hamas. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will lead a delegation on Sunday that also includes the Italian and Greek prime ministers and the Cypriot president.

