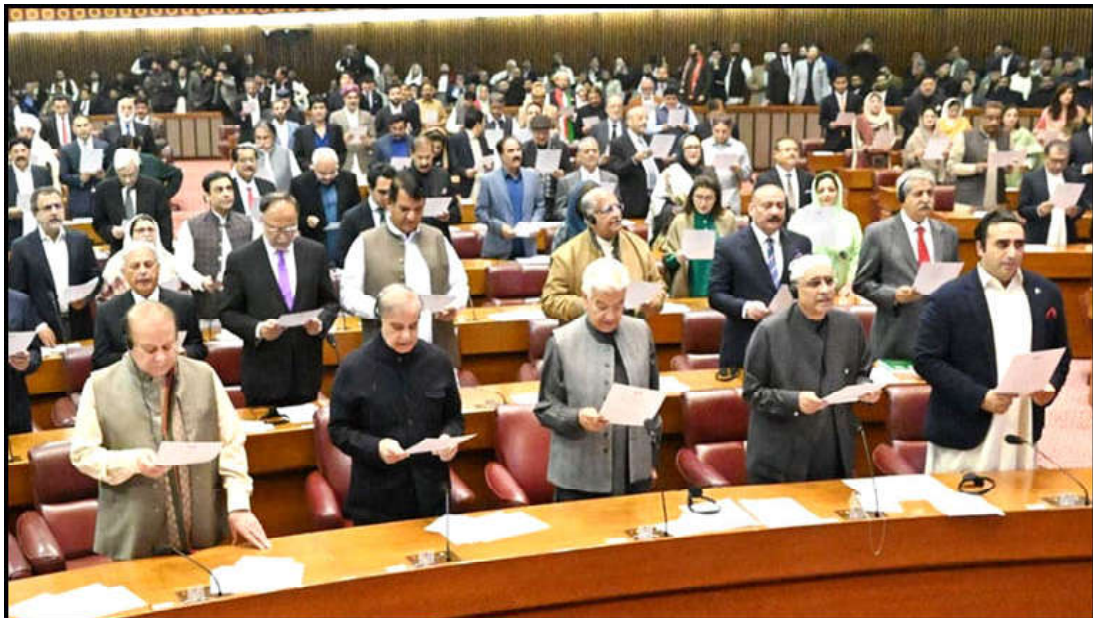


Independent

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ISLAMABAD: The newly elected members of the National Assembly taking oath of their office during the inaugural session of the 16th National Assembly at the Parliament House.

Newly elected MNAs take oath amid loud sloganeering

Election of PM to be held on March 3; Nomination papers of Ayaz Sadiq, Amir Dogar for NA Speaker accepted

ISLAMABAD (INP): The inaugural session of the newly elected National Assembly commenced with Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf in the chair to induct a fresh batch of lawmakers, who started arriving in the Parliament House before the scheduled time. The newly elected MNAs were administered the oath by the speaker after which they all also signed on the registration rolls. Moreover, the election for the Lower House speaker and deputy speaker will be held today, March 1. After the oath, the speaker first asked the candidates for speaker and deputy speaker to sign on the roll of members, which included PML-N Ayaz Sadiq and Awais Leghari. As per the official agenda, the session commenced with a recitation of the naat, the holy Quran and the national anthem. Following the national anthem, the Sunni Ittehad Council's MNAs-elect gathered in front of the speaker's dais and created a commotion with a strong protest with slogans and chants. As a result, the PML-N members also responded with counter slogans of "Gharchor (watch thief)" against the PTI and its leadership. The Sunni Ittehad Council members were carrying posters of Imran Khan, while several leaders, including Barrister Gohar, were clad in masks depicting the former prime minister. On consistent sloganeering by PTI members, the speaker warned they would be evicted from the House. The National Assembly Secretariat has also issued the procedure for polling for the speaker and deputy speaker, which is set to take place on March 1. In order to avoid any mismanagement, the entry of political workers into parliament has been banned.

Writing letter to IMF is anti state act: Nawaz Sharif

Letter proof Imran wants country's destruction: Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD (Online): PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif has said writing letter to IMF is tantamount to commit anti state act. "Writing to letter to IMF is tantamount to indulge in anti state act, he said this in an informal talks with the media men on his arrival in parliament house to attend inaugural session of National Assembly (NA) here Thursday. Talking on matter of writing letter by PTI to IMF on polls rigging he said no political party can write letter this way. Only they can write such letter. This is their routine norm. Writing this letter is anti state act. You can deduce result from this letter. Like wise Shehbaz Sharif nominated Prime Minister said while talking to media men after his arrival in NA that PTI has proved by writing letter to

IMF after cipher that it wants to annihilate country. We condemn this act on the part of PTI. He held PTI wrote this letter to sabotage IMF program. INP adds: PML-N President and prime minister in waiting, Shehbaz Sharif, has called the letter written by the PTI to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) another anti-national move of the party. "After the cipher, this letter is another proof of the PTI's anti-state interests," he remarked while arriving at the Parliament House for the inaugural National Assembly session on Thursday morning. Shehbaz further insisted that there should be no doubt now that PTI Founder Imran Khan wants the destruction of the country. He regretted and condemned the letter written to the IMF. "No Pakistani,

despite political differences, will resort to anti-national activities," he asserted. PML-N leader Hamza Shehbaz remarked that democracy had emerged victorious, while those setting up obstacles in the way have been defeated. He further claimed that the economy is also being set ablaze just like the incidents of May 9, 2023. However, he said these attempts will also fail. The inaugural session of the newly elected National Assembly was set to convene at 10am on Thursday to induct a fresh batch of lawmakers, who started arriving in the Parliament House before the scheduled time. Not only will the newly elected MNAs be administered an oath, but they will also sign on the rolls. Moreover, the election for the Lower House speaker and deputy speaker will be held today, March 1.

Attends 7th Pak Army Team Spirit Exercise-2024 PATS, right forum fostering team spirit in evolving character of war

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir on Thursday said Pakistan Army Team Spirit (PATS) was the right forum, which appropriately combined professional military skills and tactical acumen of all participating soldiers, fostering much-needed team spirit in the face of evolving character of war. The Army Chief was addressing the participants of the 7th Pakistan Army Team Spirit (PATS) Exercise-2024 as chief guest that concluded at Kharian Garrison with an impressive Closing Ceremony, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The COAS appreciated the participating teams for their professionalism, physical & mental endurance and high morale displayed during various stages of the exercise. He reiterated mutual learning during such exercises and said: "Pakistan Army upholds rich soldierly attributes of character, courage and competence which have amply been displayed by our men in the face of fight against terrorism." The 60 hours rigorous "Patrolling Exercise" aimed at enhancing combat skills through sharing of innovative ideas and experiences by the participants of the forum. Seven teams from Pakistan Army and fifteen teams from friendly countries including Bahrain, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Morocco, Qatar, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Turkiye participated in the exercise. Azerbaijan, China, Germany, Indonesia, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Myanmar witnessed the exercise as observers.



Chief of the Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir addressing the closing ceremony of the Seventh Pakistan Army Team Spirit Exercise-2024 at Kharian.

CM Punjab directs authorities to complete Rwp Ring Road project by December

Independent Report RAWALPINDI : Chief Minister (CM) Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif here on Thursday visited Rawalpindi Ring Road and directed the authorities to complete the project by December. NESPAC and FWO officials briefed the chief minister on the progress of Rawalpindi Ring Road Project at Tehraiya site. The CM was briefed that the project started in September 2023 and all the construction work would be completed by February 2025. All the structures on the way of 38.3 kms long Ring Road Project had been removed for speedy construction work while removal of the utility services in the right of the way was underway. 24 percent work on Rawalpindi Ring Road project has been completed. Five interchanges, 11 overpasses, bridges on 2 rivers, 6 canals and a railway bridge would be constructed under the project while 15 subways and 53 small bridges would be constructed on the Rawalpindi Ring Road. A rest area would be constructed on the Ring Road. The project was indispensable for ease of transportation of the citizens. Maryam Nawaz said adding, industrial zones would also be built on the project. The CM said that the project would be a game changer for Rawalpindi, adding creation of the industrial zones would provide employment opportunities to the local people. Two years were fixed for the completion of the project and all-out efforts would be made to complete it before the deadline, the CM said. The completion of the most important public welfare project should not be delayed, she directed. The work on the ring road project was going on day and night and it would be completed before the stipulated time frame, Maryam Nawaz informed.



LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz being briefed about the Rawalpindi Ring Road Project.

US urges new Pak govt. to prioritize economy, continue engagements with IMF

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The United States supports Pakistan's efforts to "break free" from the vicious cycle of debt and financing, a State Department Spokesperson has said, urging the new government to continue working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other global financial institutions. "Pakistan's new government must immediately prioritize the economic situation because the policies over the next several months will be crucial to maintaining economic stability for Pakistanis," Spokesperson Mathew Miller told his daily news briefing on Wednesday. The spokesperson was responding to a question at the daily State Department briefing about a letter sent by ex-PTI's Chairman Imran Khan's to the IMF, suggesting to link the next loan facility to an audit of the Feb 8 general elections in the country.

People's representatives to run country's affairs after general elections : Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan. To a query, he said the newly elected Prime Minister would take oath on March 4 while Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly would be elected on Friday. He said newly elected Members of National Assembly had taken oath today as the notification for convening of National Assembly session was issued late night. Murtaza Solangi said the process of negotiations with International Monetary Fund would go forward despite PTI's letter. Speaking in a talk-show of the Pakistan Television, he said the caretaker government had fulfilled its constitutional responsibility of holding elections in free, fair and peaceful manner by fully facilitating the Election Commission of

Pakistan's total liquid foreign reserves reach \$ 13.038 billion

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan stood at US\$ 13,038.5 million in the week ended on February 23, 2024 while foreign reserves held by State Bank reached \$ 7,949.6 million. The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank decreased by \$ 63 million to \$ 7,949.6 million due to debt repayments during the week under review. Meanwhile net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at \$ 5,088.9 million.



ISLAMABAD: Newly elected Members of National Assembly Omar Ayub Khan and Barrister Gohar Khan arrives to attend 1st session of 16th National Assembly at Parliament House.

Umar, Ali Khan vow to bring PTI founder as prime minister

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders Umar Ayub and Ali Muhammad Khan said on Thursday that the PTI founder will be in the assembly as prime minister. He was talking to media outside the National Assembly here before attending the session of the newly-elected house. He vowed that the PTI would resolve people's problems. Ayub said that the international financial institutions want proper use of the debt as the government does not have the ability to do so. He said that the members of the Sunni Unity Council (SUC) would attend the assembly session en masse, take oath and stage protest. The PTI founder has directed the members-elect to ensure their presence in the assembly session. Ali Muhammad Khan said that their leader would return to the highest office with a two-thirds majority. He said that the party had won 180 seats but deprived of its mandate by Form 47.

Petrol price increases by Rs4.13 per litre

ISLAMABAD (INP): The outgoing caretaker government Thursday jacked up the price of petrol by Rs4.13 per litre, further impacting the already inflation-stricken masses. The new petrol price is Rs279.75 per litre, a notification from the Finance Division read, which will remain in place till March 15. The Finance Division mentioned that the price of high-speed diesel has kept unchanged at Rs287.33 per litre. The prices of petroleum products are revised every 15 days in Pakistan adjusting them to the trend of global oil prices and the rupee's exchange rate to the dollar. The Pakistani rupee has held steady recently. This was the third consecutive hike by the interim set-up and will be the last by them as an elected prime minister is all set to take office by the end of this week, marking an end to the longest-serving caretaker government.

JUI-F to sit on opposition benches: Fazlur Rehman

Will not take part in PM, president, speaker elections, says JUI Chief ISLAMABAD (INP): Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman has announced that his party will not participate in the upcoming elections for the Speaker, Prime Minister, and President of Pakistan. This decision signifies JUI's intention to sit on opposition party in the newly formed parliament. Speaking to the media in Islamabad on Thursday, Maulana Rehman stated that JUI will "not use the right to vote" and will instead "sit in the opposition." He further emphasized that JUI will not be involved in the selection of the Prime Minister, Speaker, and Deputy Speaker. When questioned about the future of their protest movement, Maulana Rehman remained ambiguous, stating, "wait, God willing, we will represent the people." He also revealed details of a meeting with representatives of other political parties, including the Muslim League-N, Pakistan Peoples Party, Balochistan Awami Party, and the Independent Parliamentary Group. While describing the discussions as positive and highlighting his party's sincerity, Maulana Rehman reiterated JUI's refusal to participate in a parliament that, in his view, does not represent the will of the people.

MQM rejects offer to join federal cabinet

ISLAMABAD (INP): MQM Pakistan rejected the offer to be part of the federal cabinet. MQM decided to give Prime Minister vote to PML-N candidate but refused to join the federal cabinet. PML-N had offered federal ministries to MQM at the centre. According to sources, the party wanted support on the constitutional amendment to give financial and administrative autonomy to the local bodies across the country.

Routine life paralysed in port city, adjoining areas: Gwadar declared calamity-hit due to critical situation of torrential rains

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial government has declared Gwadar as calamity-hit district. This was announced by caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai here on Thursday. Jan Achakzai said that Gwadar has been declared calamity-hit owing to critical situation emerged following torrential rains for last few days. According to the Minister Information, the caretaker Chief Minister has already signed the summary regarding declaring the port city as calamity-hit. He informed that the caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Domki



has been personally monitoring the situation in the rain hit areas of the province including Gwadar. He said that the basic infrastructure has been damaged due to the rains in the district. However, rescue activities are being carried out by the Pak Army along with other concerned departments and local administration. He commended the role and spirit of personnel of Pak Army and other institutions in this regard. Meanwhile, the caretaker Chief Minister said that effective rescue activities are continued with assistance of Pak Army in Gwadar. He mentioned that the extraordinary situation was emerged due to the continuous rains. He said that steps are being taken to mitigate the sufferings of affected people in emergent basis. He commended Pak Army for carrying out relief activities together with civil administration in critical time. The Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to mobilize all available resources in the critical time. Needless to mention here is that the routine life has been paralysed due to the continuous rains in Gwadar and adjoining areas.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Unchanged rating

International ratings agency Moody's decision to keep Pakistan's long-term credit rating unchanged at Caa3, with stable outlook, is reflective of the poor standing of a cash-strapped nation in global financial markets. The rating indicates a higher probability of default and a greater degree of investment risks amid weak debt affordability. It also takes into account Pakistan's low growth rate and high exposure to extreme weather events, which can increase economic and social costs, with high debt-servicing requirements reducing the fiscal flexibility to undertake key expenditures on infrastructure and social initiatives. Global rating agencies have long ranked the country among 'speculative grade' economies, with very high credit risk owing to the liquidity crisis and external vulnerability challenges. A year ago, Moody's had downgraded Pakistan from Caa2 to Caa3, relegating it to almost the bottom of the riskiest markets, shortly after the IMF suspended its funding support due to the authorities' failure to meet the goals of the previous Fund programme.

That had seen Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves plunge and had raised concerns over the country's weakening ability to pay its foreign debt. The agency kept the sovereign rating unchanged last summer, even after the IMF agreed to provide a short-term \$3bn loan to help Islamabad stabilise the economy and avert default. Moody's latest decision once again underscores that the fears of default, exacerbated by political uncertainty in the aftermath of the Feb 8 poll, will continue, unless a new, larger loan agreement is reached with the IMF. "Political risks are high," it says, "following... controversial elections."

It says that there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the new government's inclination and ability to quickly enter a new IMF programme, which is needed to attract additional financing from other multilateral and bilateral partners in order to reduce default risks.

It also maintains that the forthcoming coalition government's decision-making capacity will be severely constrained as its electoral mandate may not be sufficiently strong to pursue difficult reforms that will likely be required by a new IMF programme. Thanks to the current IMF facility and some other multilateral inflows, as well as strict controls on imports and profit repatriation in the last several months, Pakistan has successfully accumulated a small stock of foreign exchange.

That means the new set-up will likely meet its remaining external debt obligations for the present fiscal. However, as Moody's has said, there is "limited visibility" regarding the sovereign's sources of financing to meet its "very high external needs" after the current IMF Stand-By Arrangement ends in a few weeks. That concern will remain until Pakistan enters a new programme with the Fund.

However, the likelihood of Pakistan graduating from high-risk to investment-grade category will depend on the government's undertaking durable structural reforms, and political and policy stability.

Cultural summits

F.S. Aijazuddin

The advent of spring was celebrated each year with the Basant festival. Now, its arrival is heralded by cultural festivals — this spring in quick succession by the ThinkFest, the Faiz Festival and over the last weekend the Lahore LitFest. All three provided more than food for thought; they were an irresistible invitation to intellectual gluttony.

It is the irony in which Pakistan specialises that some years ago, the Lahore LitFest was denied the Lahore Arts Council complex as a venue. Today, the chairmanship of the LAC is occupied by Razi Ahmed — the prime mover behind the same Lahore LitFest. Six transit potentia.

Since its debut in 2013, the Lahore LitFest has grown into a cultural octopus that can perform separate functions simultaneously. To demonstrate its flexibility, it spreads itself over five covered halls and numerous open-air lawns in the Al Hamra complex.

If one has reason to cavil about LitFests, it is that too many programmes are crammed within too few days, with sessions of interest competing unfairly with each other. At the Lahore LitFest, for example, a visitor had to choose between discussions during the same hour on 'Museums in the West and Pakistan', 'Plants of the Quran', 'Sufi Literature', and 'Industrial Sustainability'. Oh, for the magical powers of replication! And yet therein lies the strength of these LitFests. They offer diversity in scarcity.

LLF 2024 opened with a qawwali and then a film (Songs of the Sufi) about the origins and growth of qawwali in the subcontinent, made by Kamran Anwar, a banker-turned-film producer. The

following morning, four novelists discussed their individual approach to character formulation — Monica Ali of Brick Lane fame, Portuguese author José Luis Peixoto, H.M. Naqvi and our own home-grown Hemingway Mohsin Hamid.

A small hall overflowed to hear Alejan-dro Vergara of the Museo del Prado, Madrid. His informed discourse on European art compensated those whom visa restrictions deny the chance of seeing the originals.

The plight of Pakistani womanhood had three articulate proponents of gender equality — Roshaneh Zafar of Kashf, Moina Saad of IFC, and Sadaf Abid. They spoke from personal experience of helping thousands of Pakistani women squirm out of poverty. Millions more could benefit, they said, from the use of smartphones to expand home-based e-commerce. Remember: it took two world wars in the West and two revolutions in Russia and China for their women to become emancipated. Women in Pakistan are gaining — slowly, too slowly — their innate rights in a battle against suffocating patriarchy. Politicians have provided poor role models. A woman prime minister (Benazir Bhutto) and now a female chief minister Punjab (Maryam Nawaz) both had to rely upon their maiden names to advance their careers. No Margaret Roberts (later Mrs Thatcher) here, just as a President Mrs X has yet to occupy the White House.

For those who could not attend the LitFest, technology offers a virtual substitute. They can download the recordings of the sessions. Particularly recommended is one on the 'Future of the Written Word in an age of AI'. Four writers assessed their vulnerability to AI.

Each of them — Monica Ali, Mohsin Hamid, the novelist Hannah Dubgen and the American humorist David Sedaris — read out AI-generated texts which, at the press of a cursor, produced a pastiche of their individual writing styles.

Sedaris read out an AI version of a fictitious story involving a man trapped in a latrine, and then his own description of the same incident. The contrast could not have been sharper — insipid chalk vs a tangy, mature cheese. All four argued that AI does not produce literature — culled after centuries of learning, fuelled by inspiration. It is most probably the byproduct of three or four unseen minds, expressing themselves through words, spawned from binary codes. Sedaris dismissed an AI-produced text as one composed by an eight-year-old, relying for options on a thesaurus.

But even eight-year-olds grow up. Man-made technology is maturing faster than God's human-kind. Who knows how soon AI will replace live authors? Sooner than we fear. Authors (and especially university professors) are all too aware that attentive readership is waning, being replaced by bytes and sound-bites and fabricated prose. Many attendees found the most inspirational session to be a film Above the Sleeping Giants, produced by the DARD foundation on the achievement of a young Pakistani mountaineer Shehroze Kashif. He has planted his country's flag on 13 of the highest mountain peaks in the world. Recently, an ageing Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan with a plan to scale the same PM-ship, for the fourth time. Shehroze, not yet 22, waits to conquer his 14th summit. It is a generational thing. -- Courtesy Dawn

Striving in uncertainty

Nadeem Hussain | Tabarak Rehman

Pakistan's youth dominated the discourse on the Feb 8 general elections and has stayed at the centre of the debate pre- and post-ballot counts. Some analysts attribute the poll upset to the new voters. However, rhetoric often outstrips tangible solutions when it comes to Gen Z driving national development. As a result, the millennials find themselves marginalised in the grand scheme of growth plans, struggling for recognition and space to contribute meaningfully.

The young in this country are often considered to be one of the greatest national assets, but how do we channel this energy and develop this resource to bring prosperity to our struggling nation of 240 million? This question mostly remains unanswered.

Some propose vocational training, while others think providing employment opportunities should be the priority. Successive governments in the past two decades have come up with programmes like the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme, E-Rozgar, Ehsaas Scholarship Pakistan, Prime Minister's Youth Business & Agriculture Loan Scheme, Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Programme, etc.

But despite such initiatives, Pakistan has not witnessed a significant growth in national productivity. Where is the magic then? Let's look at our neighbour, India (yes, let's compete outside the cricket ground and battlefield). From 2003 to 2016, India was busy establishing 1,000 colleges annually, ie, on an average three colleges a day, or one every eight hours! American higher education institutes are at least considered to be among the top, if not the best,

places for creativity and advancement. The US has led with the unicorns (start-ups valued at over \$1 billion) for many years, owing to its top-quality higher education, robust venture capital ecosystem, entrepreneurial culture, and strong innovation hubs.

In 2023 alone, India sent a total of 131,338 young men and women to American colleges and universities on F-1 student visas, while Pakistan managed to send only 3,353 students in the same year. F-1 visas issued to Pakistanis account for less than one per cent of all F-1 visas, whereas for Indians, the figure is roughly 30pc. The result at the highest level? The heads of two of the world's top five tech companies — Microsoft and Google — came to the US after completing their undergraduate studies in India.

Satya Nadella, Microsoft's executive chairman and CEO, completed his Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the Manipal Institute of Technology in Karnataka before coming to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and subsequently joined the Windows-maker in 1992. Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Alphabet and Google, graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, with a B.Tech degree, and went on to complete a Master's degree from Stanford University. Following a short spell at McKinsey & Co, a management consulting firm, Pichai joined Google in 2004. Most American schools require standardised tests for admission in undergraduate and graduate programmes. Last year, 137,884 Indian college graduates took the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) and the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), compared to

3,485 Pakistani graduate school applicants who took the test in 2023. Similarly, a large number of Indian students take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) compared to a relatively small number of Pakistani test-takers.

The Higher Education Commission recognises close to 350 universities and degree-awarding institutions across Pakistan, with an enrolment of close to 1m students and virtually no public university schedules for graduate school admissions in the US. Single-digit private academic institutions do have some awareness series to help their graduates secure admissions in American higher education institutes. Most of the HEC's study-abroad programmes are flawed in design and are not bringing the intellectual capital that could drive the knowledge economy at home.

For Pakistan to come out of its current (and future) financial crisis, it needs to logically invest in top-quality higher education by fielding our young in the global grounds of innovation and knowledge. Some Pakistanis — mostly US business school graduates — are working hard to help fellow Pakistani men and women navigate their academic and professional journeys to the US. Their initiative, Sarzameen Pakistan, is being run and managed by volunteers at a very small scale. However, a larger programme to increase the number of Pakistani students in universities in the US, and hence the number of professionals in the American market, would provide a strong foundation for the nation to prepare for future crises and global challenges. -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

ICCI delegation visits POF to explore business chances in defense industry

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) led by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President visited the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) and held a meeting with Lt. Gen. Syed Tahir Hameed Shah, Chairman POF to explore business opportunities for the private sector in the defense industry.

Chairman, POF, Lt. Gen. Syed Tahir Hameed Shah briefed the ICCI delegation about the role of Pakistan Ordnance Factories, which was the country's premier defense production organization.

He said that besides meeting the defense needs

of the country, POF exported its products to several countries around the world. He said that POF imported many parts and equipment to produce its finished products and said that it would welcome local vendors who could supply it with parts and equipment according to the required standards. He said that POF was the largest defense industrial complex comprising 14 ordnance factories and three commercial subsidiaries.

He said that the surplus products of POF were sold in the civil market and the standards of POF products were not less than any international company.



PESHAWAR: A delegation of Association of Small Medium Enterprises (BVMW) Germany meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali.

Identifying agro-ecological zones crucial for maximizing output of agriculture

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for National Food Security and Research Dr Kausar Abdulla Malik on Thursday said that identifying agro-ecological zones was crucial for maximizing output of agriculture products as well as to achieve sustainable economic growth in the country.

Addressing the launching ceremony of the updated "Agro-Ecological Zones

of Pakistan", he commended the efforts of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) scientists and also emphasized the importance of establishing a dissemination mechanism to engage all stakeholders.

The report offered a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's updated agro-ecological zones, considering changing environmental

conditions, he said adding that it was prepared under the directive of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, categorizing Pakistan's ecology into various zones and sub-zones with a specialized database.

Chairman PARC, Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali highlighted its significance updated agro-ecological zones in identifying appropriate crops for diverse

ecological conditions nationwide, which would help tailor agricultural practices to specific environmental conditions, maximizing crop productivity. He said that understanding these zones could lead to more sustainable and profitable farming methods, better resource allocation, contributing to food security and economic growth in the region.

OGDCL, ISGS agree to collaborate for SUGS project

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) and Inter-State Gas Systems (Private) Limited (ISGS) have agreed to collaborate for the development of the Strategic Underground Gas Storage (SUGS) project to address the challenge of surplus gas management in Pakistan.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between OGDCL and ISGS on Thursday, said a news release issued here on Thursday.

The parties will evaluate potential opportunities in

developing SUGS at OGDCL fields to enhance the country's energy infrastructure and ensure efficient utilization of gas resources.

The SUGS Project is a critical initiative designed to establish storage facilities for surplus gas, particularly during off-peak seasons when demand is low relative to supply in the Pakistani market. Through the SUGS Project, OGDCL and ISGS aim to mitigate these challenges by creating storage capacity and facilitating gas-swapping arrangements with other stakeholders in the industry on commercial basis.



GILGIT: A shepherd guiding herd of goats heading towards grazing field near Nomal area.

Facilitate rescue & relief operations Ufone 4G provides free calls in Gwadar to help connect flood-affected families

ISLAMABAD (APP): As Gwadar faces a large-scale natural disaster caused by catastrophic rains and flash floods, Pakistani telecom company, Ufone 4G has announced free calls to help connect local families, and assist in swift execution of rescue and relief operation in the affected port city. The heavy downpour has inundated large parts of Gwadar, destroying homes and livelihoods, and rendering hundreds of families homeless, said a news release.

A considerably large section of the local population is associated with the fishing industry,

whose boats were wrecked, and businesses decimated by the deluge. As a responsible Pakistani corporate citizen, Ufone 4G has always stepped up to help fellow Pakistanis affected by natural disasters. The free minutes will help the locals to connect with their loved ones, alert authorities to their plight and request urgent rescue and relief assistance.

The initiative is particularly crucial as the extensive flooding has disrupted communications channels and made it harder for people to find ways to recharge their mobile balance.

FCCI rejected Implementation of Cess tax in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh President Federation Of Pakistan



being created for the newly elected provincial government under a deliberate conspiracy by the bureaucracy, which cannot be ignored under any circumstances while our country is already running in economic crises. He further said that the business community of the province and the importers and exporters are already under burden of heavy taxes while the Cess levy of 2% on import and export trade by the care-taker provincial government will further increase the problems and complications which is to be condemned.

Atif Ikram further said that instead of giving relief to the poor people of the province, problems are

FCCI emerges as first E-chamber in country

FAISALABAD (APP): The Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) has emerged as the first E-chamber of the country by starting a 24/7 online digitalise service to issue new as well as renewal of the existing memberships.

Acting President FCCI Dr Sajjad Arshad renewed the first membership of his firm through this facility while Vice President FCCI Hajji Muhammad Aslam Bhalli was also present during the inaugural ceremony.

PR CEO announces plans for train restoration, improvements

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Railways Chief Executive Officer Aamir Baloch said on Thursday that train service would be restored gradually based on resource availability.

During an online live e-Kuchery session, Baloch revealed that a new train timetable was set to be implemented from March 15 while the restoration of Sandal and Khushhal Khan Khattak Express trains was possible upon available resources. He highlighted ongoing efforts to enhance track conditions in the

Rupee stands at break-even point against Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani rupee witnessed no change against the US Dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at the previous day's closing rate of Rs 279.11. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.3 and Rs 282.2, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 30 paisa to close at Rs 302.41 against the last day's closing of Rs 302.11, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Punjab Governor says: Role of ombudsman is commendable in redressal of people's complaints

Independent Report
LAHORE: The Ombudsman Punjab, Major (Rtd) Azam Suleman Khan, presented the annual performance report of the Office of the Ombudsman Punjab for the year 2023 to the Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman in a ceremony held here today at Governor House Lahore. Additional Chief Secretary Punjab Ahmad Raza Sarwar and administrative heads of the Punjab government along with advisors and

consultants of the Ombudsman Office were present in the ceremony. Speaking on this occasion, Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that the role of provincial ombudsman is commendable in redressal of people's complaints related to public institutions. He said that he appreciates Ombudsman Punjab for embracing information technology and facilitating people. The Punjab Governor lauded the

initiatives like complete digitalization of the Ombudsman Punjab office. He said that extending the offices of the Punjab Ombudsman to various districts and providing maximum relief to the people was commendable. Governor Punjab said that the decisions of the provincial ombudsman are written in Urdu which is easy for people to understand and they do not need to hire any lawyer for it. Governor Punjab further said,



LAHORE: Ombudsman Punjab, Major (Rtd) Azam Suleman Khan presenting annual performance report of the Office to Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman during a ceremony.

PPP leader stresses constitutional limits for institutions' functioning

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) South Punjab President Makhdoom Ahmed Mahmood has reiterated the party's longstanding stance on the importance of adherence to constitutional limits by all institutions of the country. He emphasised that such adherence was crucial for democracy, economy, federation, and overall stability of the country. In a recent gathering at Makhdoom House on Thursday, Ahmed Mahmood stressed the significance of politicians understanding and

respecting their political boundaries, asserting that the approach could prevent constitutional crisis like those witnessed on May 9. He highlighted the need for mutual respect among politicians, media, judiciary, and other institutions, stating that resolving personal animosities and ego clashes could contribute to addressing the nation's challenges. Ahmed Mahmood also shed light on PPP's decision to support the government despite lacking sufficient numbers, attributing the move to perilous state of the country's economy.

May-9 violence: ATC grants interim bail to PTI leader in 9 cases

LAHORE (APP): An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Thursday granted interim bail till March 7 to absconding Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Hafiz Farhat Abbas in cases related to May-9 violence.

The court granted bail to the PTI leader in nine cases including attack on Jinnah House and Askari Tower and ordered him to furnish surety bonds of Rs 100,000 for availing the relief. ATC Judge Arshad Javed conducted the proceedings on the bail petition of the PTI leader, who also appeared in the court.

Babar, Surayya take oath as KP Assembly Speaker, Deputy Speaker

PESHAWAR (Online): Babar Saleem Swati and Surayya Bibi of Sunni Ittehad Council took oath as new Speaker and Deputy Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in Peshawar Thursday.

Outgoing Speaker, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani administered the oath to newly elected speaker of provincial assembly, while the new Speaker Babar Saleem Swati administered

oath to the newly elected Deputy Speaker.

During the election at provincial assembly, Babar Swati secured eighty-nine votes while his opponent Ihsan Ullah Mian Khel obtained seventeen votes.

Earlier, in his last address as speaker, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani thanked the assembly staff and members for their cooperation during his tenure.



LARKANA: Student presents a bouquet to her teacher during a function at Govt little folks Girls High School Jinnah Bagh.

Sindh Police wins over NYP in T-20 cricket match

KARACHI (APP): The Karachi Academy on Thursday hosted a riveting T-20 cricket match between the Sindh Police and the New York Police (NYP) teams.

IGP Sindh Riffat Mukhtar Raja, was the chief guest on the occasion. Opting to bat first after winning the toss, the NYP team set a target of 87 runs, showcasing their batting prowess.

However, the early players of the Sindh Police team displayed exceptional skill and determination, successfully chasing down the target in just 13 overs, clinching a well-deserved victory.

IGP Sindh lauded the players for their remarkable performance, rewarding them with cash prizes and commendation certificates in recognition of their outstanding contributions

both in batting and bowling. Moreover, a special commemorative shield was presented to the visiting New York Police Cricket Team as a token of appreciation from the Sindh Police.

Reflecting on the significance of sports in enhancing physical and mental well-being, Raja emphasized the vital role sports play in fostering overall fitness and resilience.

The event witnessed the presence of various dignitaries including Joint DG Intelligence Bureau Azad Khan, DIGPs from West, East, and South, SSP East, and several other police officials, underscoring the importance of such sporting initiatives in promoting healthy competition within law enforcement agencies.



QUETTA: MPA Engineer Zamrak Khan Achakzai taking oath from Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) candidate Captain (Retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai as Speaker Balochistan Assembly

HEC chairman inaugurates new Faculty at UAF

FAISALABAD (APP): Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr Mukhtar Ahmad inaugurated the new Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) in order to strengthen arts and literary works.

A UAF spokesman said here on Thursday that the newly established faculty comprised of the Department of Islamic Studies, Department of English and Linguistics, Waris Shah Chair, Faiz Chair, Pakistan Studies/ History/ Anthropology/

Psychology and degrees of Fine Arts and Art and Design. The proposed building of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities would be completed within 10 months at a cost of Rs.469.64 million. It would include exhibition halls, multipurpose halls, classrooms, waiting rooms, offices, common rooms and others, he added. Moreover, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad also inaugurated the amphitheater in D-Ground UAF, meant to promote co-curricular activities and to sharpen the God-given qualities of the students.

PDA launches tree plantation campaign in Hayatabad, RMT

PESHAWAR (APP): The Director General (DG) Peshawar Development Authority (PDA), Captain (Retd) Khalid Mehmood launched a tree plantation campaign here on Thursday.

Under the campaign PDA in collaboration with IMSciences University will plant saplings at Hayatabad Township.

15 dead, 1,359 injured in Punjab road accidents

LAHORE (APP): At least 15 persons were killed and 1,359 others injured in 1,271 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

As many as 604 seriously injured people were shifted to different hospitals, while 755 with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams.

The analysis showed that 731 drivers, 44 underage drivers, 185 pedestrians, and 458 passengers were among the victims of road accidents. The statistics show that 249 accidents were reported in Lahore.

PDMA initiates development of disaster risk reduction policy

PESHAWAR (APP): The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the guidance of Relief Department, has initiated efforts to make Khyber Pakhtunkhwa resilient against potential disasters.

In a momentous step, the PDMA has commenced the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Disaster Risk Reduction Policy with the support of the Community Resilience Activity-North (CRA-N). A workshop was convened in Peshawar, chaired by Secretary Relief, Inayat Ullah Wasim, and Director General PDMA, Muhammad Qaisar Khan. Representatives from CRA-N, Academia and other organizations were also present. The forum, comprising key stakeholders and disaster management experts, unanimously agreed that the forthcoming policy,

International News

Putin warns West of risk of nuclear war

Warns West against sending troops to Ukraine in major speech

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin told Western countries they risked provoking a nuclear war if they sent troops to fight in Ukraine, warning that Moscow had the weapons to strike targets in the West.

The war in Ukraine has triggered the worst crisis in Moscow's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Putin has previously spoken of the dangers of a direct confrontation between Nato and Russia, but his nuclear warning on Thursday was one of his most explicit.

Addressing lawmakers and other members of the country's elite, Putin, 71, repeated his accusation that the West was bent on weakening Russia, and he sug-

gested Western leaders did not understand how dangerous their meddling could be in what he cast as Russia's internal affairs.

He prefaced his nuclear warning with a specific reference to an idea, floated by French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday, of European Nato members sending ground troops to Ukraine — a suggestion that was quickly rejected by the United States, Germany, Britain and others.

"(Western nations) must realise that we also have weapons that can hit targets on their territory. All this really threatens a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons and the destruction of civilisation. Don't they get that?" said Putin.

Speaking ahead of a March 15-17 presidential election when he is certain to be re-elected for another six-year term, he lauded what he said was Russia's vastly modernised nuclear arsenal, the largest in the world.

"Strategic nuclear forces are in a state of full readiness," he said, noting that new-generation hypersonic nuclear weapons he first spoke about in 2018 had either been deployed or were at a stage where development and testing were being completed.

Visibly angry, Putin suggested Western politicians recall the fate of those like Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and France's Napoleon Bonaparte who had unsuccessfully invaded Russia in the past.

China urges largest nuclear states to negotiate a 'no-first-use' treaty

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: States with the largest nuclear arsenals should negotiate a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other or make a political statement in this regard, the Chinese foreign ministry's arms control department said.

Director General of the department, Sun Xiaobo, called on nuclear states to fulfil their "special and priority responsibilities" on nuclear disarmament according to the UN Conference on Disarmament, which seeks to prevent nuclear war, official news agency Xinhua said on Wednesday.

During the forum's weekly meeting in Geneva on Monday, Sun said the body should define a roadmap or timetable for an international legal instrument that would protect non-nuclear-weapon states from the threat of nuclear weapons.



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers his annual address to the Federal Assembly, in Moscow, Russia.

More than 30,000 killed in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says

JERUSALEM (Online): More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since 7 October, the Hamas-run health ministry says. That number equates to about 1.3% of the 2.3 million population of the territory — the latest grim marker of the awful toll of this war.

The ministry says that the majority of those killed were women and children.

Its figures do not differentiate between civilians and fighters when identifying those killed.

In its daily update on Thursday, the ministry said 81 people had been killed in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 30,035.

The actual number of

UN 'appalled' by public executions in Afghanistan

Monitoring Desk
GENEVA: The United Nations on Wednesday condemned recent public executions in Afghanistan, urging the Taliban authorities to cease the use of capital punishment.

Afghanistan's Taliban government publicly executed three convicted murderers in the past week on death warrants signed by Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

All three men were shot multiple times in front of large crowds that included the families of their victims.

Palestinians urged to reach Al-Aqsa mosque in Ramadan

Monitoring Desk
CAIRO: Hamas urged Palestinians on Wednesday to march to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque at the start of Ramadan, raising the stakes in negotiations for a truce in Gaza. The call by Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh followed comments by Biden, broadcast on Tuesday, that there was an agreement in principle for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas during Ramadan.

'Uncommitted' votes show Gaza impact on Biden

Monitoring Desk
DEARBORN: Joe Biden's campaign and top Democratic officials vowed to double down on efforts to win back former supporters after being hit by a much stronger-than-anticipated protest vote in the Michigan primary over the president's support of Israel.

About 13.2 per cent of Michigan Democrats cast a ballot for "uncommitted" in the nominating contest, following a weeks-long push by activists, an Edison Research tally showed after 9am on Wednesday. With about 85pc of all votes counted, the uncommitted vote was already over 101,000 votes, far higher than expected. Turnout for

the Democratic primary was also high, at some 900,000 voters overall. About 81pc of those votes backed Biden.

As the results were being tallied, a senior Biden campaign official said the team will continue to "make our case in the state — to both uncommitted voters and the entire Michigan constituency. The president will continue to work for peace in the Middle East."

Biden's staunch support for Israel during its five-month war with Hamas, which has decimated Gaza, has sparked outrage and a well-organised backlash among progressive Democrats and Arab Americans, with Michigan as their epicentre.



People look at election results at a monitoring centre set up in Dearborn by the Listen to Michigan watch party, a group which asked voters to vote 'uncommitted' instead of voting for President Joe Biden.

US seeks Israel's assurance for using American weapons

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: The Biden administration has established a mid-March deadline for Israel to sign a letter committing to adhere to international law when using American weapons.

Furnished by Washington, the letter also mandates Israel to facilitate humanitarian aid into Gaza, where over half a million Palestinians are on the brink of famine.

Axios, a US news outlet, which has a copy of the letter, reports that on Tuesday, US officials in both Washington and Tel Aviv formally briefed their

Israeli counterparts on this new policy. They provided them with a draft letter, essential for Israel to sign.

According to a senior Israeli official, the US has requested written assurances by mid-March. This timeline aligns with Secretary of State Blinken's goal to certify them by month-end. Israel has the flexibility to designate the government representative signing the letter.

Similar letters have also been presented to several other nations utilising US weaponry, as disclosed by a US official to Axios.



A member of the press consoles a woman outside Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir el-Balah.

South Korea to send military doctors to hospitals amid doctors' protest

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: South Korea will send its military and community doctors to hospitals within the next few days as part of emergency measures to support the healthcare system after a mass walkout by trainee doctors, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said on Wednesday.

Han also pleaded with the young doctors to return to work by a

Thursday deadline set by the government, and said the authorities would listen to their concerns.

"The government fully understands that trainee doctors have serious concerns about the work environment and future career, and we are seeking measures to improve this from a number of perspectives," he told a government meeting.

Command & Staff Conference of Pakistan Navy reviews regional maritime situation

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Command and Staff Conference of Pakistan Navy concluded at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. The Conference was chaired by Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf.

During the conference, maritime situation in North Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden was deliberated and measures for safety and security of Pakistan bound shipping were reviewed. Naval Chief expressed confidence over combat readiness and significant contributions of the Navy in maritime domain. During the conference, matters related to geo strategic environment, national security, operational preparedness,

training and welfare of troops were reviewed. Comprehensive briefing on important on-going and future developmental projects of Pakistan Navy was also given to Chief of the Naval Staff.

Chief of the Naval Staff emphasized on strengthening of maritime security and maintaining combat readiness so as to effectively respond to any aggression against Pakistan. He urged on acquisition of niche and novel capabilities while exploiting indigenous sources in order to cope with modern day challenges in maritime domain.

He lauded the successful conduct of major Maritime Exercise SEA

SPARK-2024 followed by Live Weapon Firing of Surface to Air Missile FM-90B reaffirming operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy to meet all challenges while safeguarding the maritime frontiers of Pakistan. He specifically appreciated the prolonged deployment of Naval assets in North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden and Bay of Bengal during the exercise.

Command & Staff Conference is the apex decision making body of Pakistan Navy in which Chief of the Naval Staff along with all Principal Staff Officers and Field Commanders undertake review of Pakistan Navy's Policies and Plans.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf chairing the Command and Staff Conference held at Naval Headquarters.

Hajj visas from March 1: Makkah approves buildings to accommodate 1.2m pilgrims

ISLAMABAD (APP): A Saudi committee in charge of housing Muslim pilgrims during the upcoming annual Hajj season in the holy city of Makkah has already licensed a total of 1,860 buildings.

The licensed buildings can accommodate an estimated 1.2 million pilgrims, according to the government panel.

Deputy Governor of Makkah Prince Saud bin Meshal has recently extended the deadline for receiving applications from landlords of such buildings for licensing them until the end of Shawwal, the 10th

month in the Islamic lunar month corresponding to May 8.

The number of buildings for pilgrims in Makkah, known as the Holy Capital, is expected to eventually exceed 5,000.

Nearly 2 million pilgrims from around the world performed Hajj in and around Makkah last year, marking the return of their numbers to pre-pandemic levels, Gulf News reported.

Saudi Arabia has recently disclosed rules for the upcoming Hajj season due next June and stressed early preparations. According to these rules, no spe-

cific places would be allotted any more for countries at the Saudi holy sites in the new pilgrimage season, Saudi Minister of Hajj Tawfiq Al Rabiah has said.

He explained that places for different countries will be designated depending on finalising contracts.

The issuance of Hajj visas will commence on March 1 and end on the 20th of Shawwal, corresponding to April 29.

The arrival of Hajj pilgrims will begin on the first of Dhul Qaidah, the 11th Islamic month, corresponding to May 9.

60% dewatering of Gwadar floodwater completed: NDMA

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Thursday said that approximately 60% of dewatering of floodwater in Gwadar had been completed.

Some 250 houses were reportedly damaged so far, while 21 individuals were injured due to flood and wall collapses, and under treatment at medical centres, an NDMA news release said.

The residents of damaged houses had been shifted to rescue centres.

Some 200,000 water purification tabs were distributed in Gwadar and Turbat by the Health De-

partment Balochistan, whereas the response of Provincial Disaster Management Authority and District Administration of Gwadar was also appreciable, the NDMA said.

It added that another spell of rain was expected in southern region of Balochistan from tonight (Thursday night), which might hamper the rescue efforts.

"The NDMA is closely monitoring on ground situation and ensuring smooth coordination of rescue efforts between departments at provincial and national levels," the news release said.

PDM-2 will soon meet its doom: Pervaiz

ISLAMABAD (Online): PTI leader Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi has said PDM-2 will soon meet its doom.

He said this in an informal chat with journalists on the occasion of his appearance in Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) Islamabad Thursday.

He held how the defeated persons are taking oath by changing the mandate of PTI.

The junior darling failed senior ladra first and now he has come. He and the filth he has spread will be cleaned together.

He went on to say distribution of posts is not acceptable to people.



KHEWRA: President Dr Arif Alvi being briefed about salt mining during his visit to Khehra Salt Mine.

Pink salt may be projected as Pakistani product in world markets: President

KHEWRA (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday underlined the need for projecting pink salt as a Pakistani product in potential global markets after its value addition in line with the international standards.

"A significant amount of foreign exchange can be earned by adding value to the local raw salt and making various products," he said during his visit to the Khehra Salt Mine.

He also emphasized to utilize the modern technology to minimize the loss of salt during the mining process besides adopting atmo-

sphere-friendly and responsible mining ways.

He said Pakistan had huge reserves of high quality rock salt which was low-cost and full of minerals.

The president also reviewed the tourist places inside the salt mine.

On the occasion, the president was briefed on various ongoing projects of Pakistan Minerals Development Corporation in Khehra. He was informed about quality of the salt found in Khehra and various salt ingredients.

Managing Director, Pakistan Minerals Devel-

opment Corporation informed the president about various aspects of salt mining from Khehra Salt Mine. The president was informed about the ongoing activities for salt mining.

President Alvi also inaugurated the salt library at the Khehra Salt Mine and visited the Asthma Center.

He also interacted with the patients undergoing treatment in the Asthma center in Khehra salt mine.

He took special interest in the historical background of Khehra Mine and wrote down comments in the guest book.



ISLAMABAD: Newly elected Members of National Assembly Sardar Muhammad Latif Khan Khosa arrives to attend 1st session of 16th National Assembly at Parliament House.

Imran Khan's letter to IMF detrimental to national economy: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Member National Assembly (MNA) and Deputy Secretary General, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Attallah Tarar on Thursday said the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and ex-premier Imran Khan's letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was detrimental to the national economy. The former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Interior and Law while talking to media outside the Parliament House before taking his oath to the newly elected National Assembly said that in what capacity did the PTI founder wrote letter to the IMF, questioning, "Was he the FBR or an economist?"

Tarar said, "Imran Khan must have told the IMF that he was a prisoner and detained under corruption charges."

He added that this at-

PTA escalates crackdown on illegal issuance of SIMs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Zonal Office Rawalpindi, in collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Wing, successfully conducted three raids targeting franchisees of a mobile phone company and an illegal SIM registration vendor in Hasan Abdal, Wah, and Rawalpindi, respectively.

The sale channels were found to be involved in illegal issuance of SIMs, said a news release.

During the raid, 3550 pre-active SIMs, 3 BVS devices, 748 silicon thumbs, 11 thousand digital fingerprints, and a printer were confiscated.

Three individuals were apprehended on the premises by the FIA team, and FIRs have been filed against them. Currently, the FIA is conducting a thorough investigation into the matter.

PPP letter to CEC Election on 9 vacant seats of Senate held forthwith

ISLAMABAD (Online): PPP has written a letter to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) on the matter of 9 vacant seats of senate.

It has been said in the letter that 8 senators were elected as Members of National Assembly (MNA) in the recent general election. Those who have succeeded as MNAs are Yousuf Raza Gillani, Abdul Ghafoor Haidri, Nisar KhorroJam Mehtab, Sarfraz Bugti, Sadiq Sanjarani, Prince Umar and Nuzhat Sadiq. Caretaker prime minister has already resigned from his Senate seat.

He said that polio has no cure, only the vaccine can provide lifelong protection.

"I urge parents and caregivers to realize how important this vaccine is for their children's health and make sure that they open their doors to vaccinators and get children immunized," he added.

Pakistan has made incredible progress against polio, and we are working

Babar, Surayya take oath as KP Assembly Speaker, Deputy Speaker

PESHAWAR (Online): Babar Saleem Swati and Surayya Bibi of Sunni Ittehad Council took oath as new Speaker and Deputy Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly in Peshawar Thursday.

Outgoing Speaker, Mushtaq Ahmed Ghani administered the oath to newly elected speaker of provincial assembly, while the new Speaker Babar Saleem Swati administered

oath to the newly elected Deputy Speaker.

During the election at provincial assembly, Babar Swati secured eighty-nine votes while his opponent Ihsan Ullah Mian Khel obtained seventeen votes.

Earlier, in his last address as speaker, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani thanked the assembly staff and members for their cooperation during his tenure.



PESHAWAR: Speaker KP assembly Mushtaq Ghani administers oath to newly elected speaker Babar Saleem Swati.

ECP appoints five Presiding officers for presidential elections

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has appointed five Presiding officers to conduct election to the office of President of Pakistan, in Islamabad and four provincial capitals.

According to Spokesperson of the ECP, these officers will receive nomination papers from candidates and chair meetings of the Parliament at the Parliament House, Islamabad, and the Provincial Assembly of the respective province during the scheduled polling for the Presidential Election. According to the notifica-

tion, the Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court will oversee the elections in the Senate and National Assembly in Islamabad.

A Member of the Election Commission of Pakistan, Election Commissioner-1, will supervise polling in the Provincial Assembly of Punjab. The Chief Justice of the Sindh High Court will supervise the Presidential Elections in the Provincial Assembly of Sindh.

Similarly, the Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court will supervise the polls in the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Govt to utilize all available resources for polio-free country: Shahzad Baig

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Coordinator for Pakistan's Polio

Programme, Dr Shahzad Baig said the government is determined to make the country polio-free very soon through effective vaccination to every child throughout the country.

Talking to a private news channel, he said that the polio eradication campaign is a part of the efforts of the government towards complete eradication of the polio.

He requested all parents to allow polio teams to administer polio drops to their children, adding that we are confident that we together with our people and international partners will achieve our target goals of making a safer, healthier and polio-free Pakistan for our children.

He said that polio has no cure, only the vaccine can provide lifelong protection.

"I urge parents and caregivers to realize how important this vaccine is for their children's health and make sure that they open their doors to vaccinators and get children immunized," he added.

Pakistan has made incredible progress against polio, and we are working

hard every day to make the country polio-free, he mentioned.

"Polio eradication is and will remain a top priority for the Government of Pakistan," he said.

The Health Ministry has conducted the second nationwide polio vaccination of the year to vaccinate more than 45.8 million children under five across the nation to protect them from paralytic polio, adding, which will successfully continue until March 9.

Polio workers are visiting door to door to administer anti-polio drops to children below the age of five, he added.

Replying to a question, he said that 99% of polio cases in the country with continuous polio drives.

He said more than four lakh polio teams working in the field, adding that Dera Ismail and Banu, Quetta, Chaman and Peshawar are the main risky areas where environmental samples were being identified.

He said that at the same time, Afghanistan and Pakistan had initiated this present polio drive to eliminate the virus, adding that citizens asked to cooperate with polio teams.

Siraj calls for national dialogue for transparent election mechanism

LAHORE (INP): Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has expressing concerns over the future of democracy in the country has urged a national dialogue among political stakeholders to establish a transparent election mechanism.

Addressing a press conference at Mansoorah on Thursday, he said the JI's Working Committee in its Wednesday meeting has unanimously deemed the Election 2024 as rigged and controversial, vowing to expose it democratically.

Sirajul Haq had presided over the session of the JI's Majlise Aamal which discussed election and post-election's situation and future strategy.

He said that the JI has already started efforts for

holding of national dialogue to save the democracy and in this regard, it hosted a session of the observers and members of civil society.

The JI leader emphasized the importance of announcing results based on Form 45, asserting that any government formed on a fake mandate would fail to address the country's crises. The nation demanded the poll results should be announced on the basis of Form 45, he said. He criticized institutions for falling short of the nation's expectations regarding election impartiality. He called for the resignation of the chief election commissioner, saying the latter has failed to protect the democratic rights of the people of Pakistan.

CDA taking steps for uninterrupted water supply in capital city

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA), Water Management Wing has expedited work on several projects to meet the water shortage in the capital city.

In this regard, the Water Management Wing has been completely resolved all the repair work and complaints like leakages, including replacement of old and rotten pipes in the Simli Water Filtration Plant and Mai Line. It should be noted that the timely action of the Water Supply Wing has not only saved 800,000 gallons of water per day but also increased the water pressure in the pipelines.

Similarly, complaints like leakages in water supply lines have been addressed in Sector G-7/3. The water level in other dams including Khanpur dam has decreased due to lack of required rains in monsoon.

ICP strengthens security measures in Fed Capital

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: Following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr Akbar Nasir, the security of the federal capital Islamabad has been strengthened in order to deal with any untoward situa-

cal activities are allowed in the Federal Capital, and only individuals with invitations were permitted to go towards Parliament House.

Invitees were also directed to verify their invitations for the National Assembly session before

ters is being carried out from the Safe City. Legal action will be taken against those engaging in any unlawful activities.

Islamabad Capital Police is taking all possible measures to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property. Citizens are



tion and Section 144 has been imposed, prohibiting demonstrations and any gatherings with Islamabad, a public relations officer said.

arrival, as some invitations have been canceled. Additionally, SSP Operations need to be requested for any activity in the High-Security Zone. Strict monitoring of all mat-

terial and personnel entering the area. Moreover, no politi-



ISLAMABAD: Students of Model College F-7/2 performing in Annual Drama competition.

BISP to save 2bln through new payment system

ISLAMABAD (APP): The internationally acclaimed Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has introduced a new payment system for its beneficiaries through hiring the services of six banks which would help facilitate the beneficiaries and save Rs 2 billion. The agreement, in this regard, was signed by the BISP and six banks recently for the disbursement of funds among its 9.3 million beneficiary households.

According to an official source, initially, the program was utilizing the services of only two banks and the contracts of the same had expired some years back.

However, this expansion signifies the introduction of wider service provider banks thus leading to greater transparency.

The purpose of intro-

ducing this new payment system is to reduce the difficulties of the end users and facilitate them to withdraw their quarterly stipends without any hassle.

The BISP will annually save Rs 2 billion on account of competition introduced through this new payment system.

As a consequence, there will be 15 clusters and six banks providing service to BISP beneficiaries now with broader partnership service being provided by Bank Al Falah, Bank of Punjab, Mobilink Microfinance, Telenor Microfinance Bank, Habib Bank Limited, and HBL Microfinance.

BISP is poised to overcome challenges and achieve a more responsive system through beneficiary awareness and a grievance redressal system created in collaboration with banks.

14 drug peddlers netted, huge cache of narcotics seized

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) teams arrested 14 members of drug peddler gangs and recovered 2,095 gram heroin, 3,962 gram hashish, 60 liters liquor and 18 gram Ice from their possession.

A public relations officer said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.