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Ruling alliance bags five out of six seats in Senate by-elections

PPP gets four, PML-N and JUI-F win one seat each in by-polls held in National, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies

Independent Report

KARACHI: The ruling alliance at the Centre managed to win the by-polls on the five out of the six Senate seats with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) securing the majority of the seats.

The polling for the six Senate seats in the National, Sindh and Balochistan assemblies began at 9am and ended at 4pm.

These six seats had fallen vacant under Article 223 of the Constitution which prohibits lawmakers from holding dual membership.

The sub-section 4 of the article states: "Subject to clause (2) if a member of either House or of a Provincial Assembly becomes a candidate for a second seat which, in accordance with clause (1), he may not hold concurrently with his first seat, then his first seat shall become vacant as soon as he is elected to the second seat."

Islamabad In the National Assembly, PPP's Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani managed to retain the seat he vacated after securing.

Out of the 301 votes cast, Gilani, who was a joint candidate of the ruling coalition of six parties, secured 204 votes compared to his rival Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) Ilyas Mehran who could only get 88 votes.

Nine votes were rejected during the vote count. The seat on which the elections were held today had fallen vacant after Gillani was elected as MNA in the Feb 8 elections.

The PPP leader has been tipped for the Senate chairman's slot.

Sindh

In Sindh, 124 votes were cast during the polling held to fill the two vacant general seats of the upper house. After the count, PPP's Jam Saifullah Khan Dharejo and Muhammad Aslam Abro managed to get elected to the Senate by obtaining 58 and 57 votes respectively.

While Nazeerullah and Shazia Sohail of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) were only able to get 4 votes each. During the count, one vote was rejected.

The seats had fallen vacant as PPP senators Nisar Ahmed Khuhro and Jam Mehtab Dahar were elected to the Sindh Assembly in the February 8 general elections.

Provincial Election Commissioner, Sindh, Sharifullah, acted as the returning officer in the Sindh

Balochistan

Meanwhile, in the Balochistan Assembly 61 votes were cast for the three general seats of the Senate from the province. A total of seven candidates were running for three seats. However, PPP's Abdul Qudus Bizenjo, PML-N's Mir Dostain Khan Domki and JUI-F's Abdul Shakoor Khan managed to win the elections.

Bizenjo bagged 23 votes, Domki got 17 while the JUI-F's candidate got elected with 16 votes. These three Senate

seats became vacant after senators Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti and Prince Ahmad Umar Ahmadzai became members of the National and Balochistan assemblies in the February 8 general elections.

Haideri belongs to JUI-F, while Bugti and Ahmadzai were elected on the BAP tickets to the senate. Bugti, who is now the chief minister of the province, has jumped ship and joined the PPP.

A day earlier, the leaders of the JUI-F and the PPP held talks and decided to support each other's candidates in the Senate by-polls. The PPP sought JUI-F's support for its candidate from Islamabad while JUI-F sought backing for its candidate in the Senate by-polls in Balochistan.



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

PM reviews five-year roadmap for economic progress

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

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

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

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

The prime minister said a schedule of implementation for the projects

should be presented, adding steps should be taken on priority basis to speed up progress in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, information technology, foreign investment and small and medium industries.

He said the government would reduce its expenditure and he would not allow further waste of money of poor people.

He said in the next five years, the country's economy would be stabilized to put the country on the path of progress.

The PM said tax revenue would be increased with digitalization and technology, while the per acre yield in the agriculture sector would also be increased with the use of technology.

The loss-making government institutions would be privatized on priority basis, he added.

The meeting was informed in detail about the roadmap for economic progress and about proposed measures in important sectors including electricity, agriculture, livestock, exports, small and medium enterprises, taxes, information technology, investment, and privatization.

Federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Muhammad Jehanzeb, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Dr Musadiq Malik, Minister of State Shiza Fatima Khawaja, Jehanzeb Khan and high-ranking officers attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: The IMF Mission Chief for Pakistan Mr. Nathan Porter and Federal Minister for Finance Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb along with their teams started second review of Stand-by Arrangement.

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

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

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

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

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

digitisation within the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

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

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

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

Zardari welcomes interaction between PM, CM KP

Independent Report

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

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

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

Interior Minister meets Sudi Ambassador in diplomatic enclave

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Interior & Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday arrived in diplomatic enclave to meet Nawaf Bin Saeed Ahmed Al Maliki, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. The ambassador congratulated Mohsin Naqvi on assuming the post of Minister for Interior. He expressed his best wishes for the minister for his new responsibilities.

The ambassador appreciated the performance of Mohsin Naqvi for completing public projects in Punjab with exceptional speed and high quality in record time.

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

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

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

President vows to work closely with Chinese counterpart to deepen cooperation

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

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

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

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

"Our solid friendship serves as an anchor for regional peace, stability and development", he highlighted.

He wrote that Pakistan and China were not merely neighbours, but iron-clad brothers fully committed to the success of our All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership. The president noted with satisfaction that Pakistan and China had made significant progress in the diverse fields of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the development of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

PHC dismisses petition of SIC seeking reserved seats

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

Earlier, during his arguments, SIC's lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar said the Constitution does not mention when a party has to submit a list of names for reserved seats to the ECP. He argued that it is not written anywhere that a person cannot resubmit the list or when it has to be submitted, adding that there is no restriction on

providing a second list and that the ECP could have issued a second schedule, as it did for the general elections.

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

The court then questioned Barrister Zafar if it was not clearly stated anywhere that the second schedule could not be issued. "The law does not prevent the Election Commission from issuing another schedule," the lawyer responded.

Justice Arshad Ali remarked that Section 104 explains the mechanism for reserved seats as it states that when a list is submitted then another list can be given. "Section 104 says that if a political party participates in an election, it will give a list," the lawyer argued.

Commander Bahrain National Guard called Chief of Naval Staff

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

The visiting dignitary appreciated and acknowledged Pakistan Navy's efforts and commitments in support of collaborative maritime security in the region. Both leaders pledged to further strengthen and diversify scope of existing bilateral defence relationship.

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

Pak takes strong exception to implementation of CAA by India

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

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

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

She advised the Indian authorities to stop pre-orchestrated targeting and systematic marginalization of minorities. She said only a few days ago, a group UN special rapporteurs urged corrective actions to protect human rights and attacks against minorities in the run up to India's national elections. She urged India to take action to protect its own minorities especially Muslims who, she said, are in a very difficult situation because of rising Hindutva.



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

IHC orders Adiala Jail superintendent to arrange Imran's meeting with lawyers

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday ordered the superintendent Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi to arrange a meeting of four lawyers of the former prime minister and ex-PTI chairman Imran Khan with him today.

The court also made it clear to the superintendent that non-compliance with the order would invite contempt of court proceedings. Speaking on the occasion, the advocate general, Punjab prayed to the court to make it binding on these lawyers that they would restrict them-

selves only to the cases the former prime minister was facing, and would not discuss with him any political matter.

The court asked the AG not to go into details, and ordered the superintendent to arrange Imran's meeting with his lawyers today.

The superintendent said that as far his information was concerned, decision in the intra-court appeal was still awaited. Naem Haider Panjutha, on the occasion, requested the court to order the inclusion of his name on the list of lawyers as well.

Maryam accords approval to reconstitute education council

Independent Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif presided over a meeting regarding the School Education department.

It was decided to reconstitute the School Education Council during the meeting. Approval was also granted to undertake restructuring of the Punjab Curriculum Wing.

CM directed to restore morning assembly in the government schools. On the direction of CM, tetra milk will be provided in the schools in order to meet dietary needs of

the students. This pilot project will be launched in the schools of district Rajanpur and flavoured milk will be provided with the cooperation of Engro Foods. Maryam Nawaz directed to launch provision of milk project for the students across the province.

She expressed her concern over the affairs of Punjab Text Book and Curriculum Board.

She expressed her indignation over delay being caused for the provision of curriculum books to the students. CM sought a comprehensive plan to

transfer the schools across Punjab on solar energy.

The proposal to start afternoon classes and evening coaching centers in the government schools was also reviewed.

CM directed to ensure implementation on the appointment of CEO. Maryam Nawaz underscored that we would initiate all possible steps for the revival of better and quality education in

the government schools across Punjab adding that it is the right of every child studying in the government schools to acquire education according to the international standard.



LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz presiding over a meeting regarding School Education.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Economic agenda

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Will Shahbaz's Hard Work alone Do the Magic?

By Qamar Bashir

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



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

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

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

The Prime Minister

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

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

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

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

from power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the complexity of navigating the political landscape in Pakistan.

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

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

However, this move is a familiar tactic employed before the implementation of stringent economic measures. The provision of free ration, though ostensibly a gesture of support, is woefully inadequate to sustain vulnerable families

for more than 15 days. It fails to address the systemic challenges faced by these families, leaving them vulnerable to hunger, deprivation of basic necessities, lack of livelihood opportunities, inadequate education, and even insufficient clothing and footwear. Thousands of employees of State-Owned Enterprises are anxiously anticipating the potential privatization and sale of their employers, which could lead to retrenchments, golden handshakes, or terminations, exacerbating the already high levels of unemployment. The looming decisions have deterred the PPP from securing cabinet positions, as they seek to avoid public backlash and preserve their political capital.

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

Commerce News

PM made strategy for Rural, Urban centers: Musadiq Malik

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

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

Secondly, the

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

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

would be a start of green revolution in the country.

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

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

The government if

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

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

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



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



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

Steering Committee meeting held to enhance country's olive sector

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

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

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

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

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

essential for nurturing olive cultivation and enhancing olive oil production.

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

Surplus wheat available in market: Minister Bilal

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan's seafood exports to China reached \$247.3 million in 2023 compared to the previous year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kyrgyz honorary consul felicitated

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

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

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

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

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

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

Governor inaugurates foreign faculty hostel in Islamia College

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

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

He was told that

hostel has 16 rooms having all the needed facilities.

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

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

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

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

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



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

KPCM for relaunching of billion tree project

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

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

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

Injured ASI of Machni Gate firing attack died in hospital

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

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

Health Minister hosts E-Kacheri to address public concerns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Minister calls for collective efforts to address climate change challenges

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

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

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

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

Nine dead, 1,180 injured in Punjab road accidents

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

ANF recovers 46 kg drugs in 3 operations

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

Deputy Speaker asks officials to provide ration bags at doorsteps

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

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

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

PHC orders removal of Qadri's name from ECL

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

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



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

International News

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Israel strikes UN's aid centre in Rafah

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

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

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

Second ship loaded with Gaza aid from Cyprus, says charity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Biden and Trump clinch nominations, setting election rematch

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

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

Russian military cargo plane crashes with 15 people on board

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

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

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

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

Biden govt bypasses Congress to approve weapons for Ukraine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ties accurately.

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

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

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

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



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

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

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Pakistan was ranked at 161st position among 191 countries on UN's 2022/23 Human Development Index (HDI) annual rankings—three steps up from the 2021/22 ranking, according to a new UN

Development Programme (UNDP) report. The HDI is a composite of statistics measuring such factors as per capita income, educational attainment and life expectancy. In the last (2021/22) HDI ranking, Pakistan was placed at 164, amid global fall in development set off by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

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

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

poorest nations continue to languish below their pre-COVID crisis levels.

India ranked at 132nd on the HDI index; Sri Lanka: 73rd; Bangladesh: 129th; Maldives: 90; Nepal: 143; Bhutan 127 and Afghanistan 180. Switzerland tops this year's rankings, followed by Norway and Iceland, while Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Somalia lagged the furthest behind.

"The widening human development gap revealed by the report shows that the two-decade trend of steadily reducing inequalities between wealthy and poor nations is now in reverse," said UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner.

PM lauds Qatar's contribution to peace efforts in Gaza

ISLAMABAD (Online): Ambassador of Qatar Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khatir called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on Thursday.

Shehbaz Sharif thanked Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Deputy Amir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani for their warm messages of felicitations on his re-election as Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said Pakistan is proud of its close, fraternal relationship with Qatar, with bilateral ties having the potential to grow even stronger and meaningful, particularly in the areas of economy, trade and investment.

He highlighted that the Special Investment Facilitation Council that was es-

tablished during his previous tenure as Prime Minister, is now functioning as an efficient and productive mechanism. It is ensuring that foreign investors are able to benefit from investment opportunities in Pakistan's key sectors like agriculture, Information Technology, mining and minerals as well as renewable energy.

The Prime Minister lauded Qatar's contribution to peace efforts in Gaza. He said it is disappointing that violence is continuing in Gaza even during the holy month of Ramadan.

Shehbaz Sharif fondly recalled his official visits to Qatar in August 2022 and March 2023. He extended an invitation to the Amir of Qatar to undertake an official visit to Pakistan and said the people of Pakistan look forward to welcoming him in the near future.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Pakistan, Ambassador Ali Mubarak Ali Essa Al-Khatir calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Commander Bahrain National Guard calls on Air Chief

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

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

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

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

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

He felicitated the foreign minister on assuming the office and conveyed the best wishes of the Pakistani leadership, according to a press release.

In the meeting, they also discussed the full spectrum of bilateral relations and emphasized the need for enhanced engagement in diverse fields, as well as exchanges and cooperation in regional and international forums.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan to Nepal Ahrar H Hashmi on Thursday called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal Narayan Kaji Shreshtha.

He felicitated the foreign minister on assuming the office and conveyed the best wishes of the Pakistani leadership, according to a press release.

In the meeting, they also discussed the full spectrum of bilateral relations and emphasized the need for enhanced engagement in diverse fields, as well as exchanges and cooperation in regional and international forums.

ISLAMABAD (Online): Accountability Court (AC) Islamabad while ending proclaimed offender status of Hussain and Hassan Nawaz sons of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in three referenced members of a snatcher gang involved in numerous criminal activities and recovered booty 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 its crackdown against the criminal elements to eliminate crime from the city.

Thursday and surrendered them before judge Nasir Javed Rana of the court.

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

On resumption of hearing Hassan and Hussain Nawaz appeared in the court along with their lawyer Qazi Misbah. Qazi Misbah said during previous hearing request was made to cancel permanent arrest warrants.

CDA for providing best civic facilities to citizens

ISLAMABAD (APP): To improve the road infrastructure in the city of Islamabad work on several projects is continuing by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) so the citizens could be provided best civic facilities.

In this regard, under the direction of Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), a new footpath is being constructed in Sector 1-8 of Islamabad, which will be completed at a cost of 14 million rupees.

In this regard, tenders have also been published in newspapers. It should be noted that after the scrutiny of the received bids, the construction of the footpath will be started soon.

On this occasion, the Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) while issuing instructions to the officers of the concerned departments, said that such footpaths, which are dilapidated, should be repaired as soon as possible.

Similarly, wherever there is a need to build new footpaths, new footpaths should also be constructed so that all possible facilities can be provided to the citizens. Similarly, the construction of these footpaths will not only promote the culture of walking in the city, but also significantly reduce the carbon and footprint.



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

Khawaja Asif chairs meeting on ministry of aviation

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

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

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

PHC directs to remove of Noor Qadri from ECL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pervez to contest by-polls; family signs nomination papers

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

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



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada chairs a meeting of Pakistan Public Works Department at Ministry. Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Secretary Housing and Works, Chief Engineers of all zones and other senior officers of the ministry are also present.

Pirzada directs to improve construction work of govt buildings, roads

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada Thursday directed to implement strict measures aimed at improving construction work and enhancing maintenance services of government buildings and roads.

He was chairing a meeting of Pakistan Public Works Department (PWD) at Ministry, addressing critical issues concerning construction standards, maintenance, repair of buildings, and tackling corruption within the department.

In this regard, the minister issued clear directives to the DG PWD to enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption.

EC issues election schedule for 48 vacant seats of Senate

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

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

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

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

Two wanted dacoits arrested, cash recovered

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) on Thursday arrested two wanted members of a snatcher gang involved in numerous criminal activities and recovered booty 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 its crackdown against the criminal elements to eliminate crime from the city.

EU denies PTI contact regarding Pakistan's GSP plus status

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

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



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

21 outlaws netted, narcotics, weapons seized

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) apprehended 21 outlaws including nine professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered narcotics and weapons 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 its crackdown against the criminal elements to eliminate crime from the city.

Meanwhile, the Karachi company police

team arrested an accused Zain Ali, and recovered one 30-bore pistol with ammunition from his possession, while the police team also arrested two accused namely Gul Agha and Noman Fayyaz involved in illegal gas refilling. Likewise, the Golra police team arrested an accused Farhad Ullah, and recovered 10 liters liquor from his possession. The Shams Colony police team arrested an accused namely Sher Ali and recovered one 30-bore pistol from his possession. Similarly, the Khanna police team arrested two accused Israr Ahmed and Muhammad Altaf involved in illegal gas refilling.



ISLAMABAD: A large number people attending Iftar arranged by an NGO at Ghouri Town.