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PM, newly-pick cabinet members visit GHQ. Civil, Military leadership reiterate commitment to work together for prosperous, secure Pakistan

PM says Pakistan is destined to rise and the role of the Armed Forces in ensuring peaceful rise of Pakistan cannot be over-emphasized

Independent Report
RAWALPINDI: Civil and Military leadership of the country have reiterated the commitment to upholding national interests and working together for a prosperous and secure Pakistan. This was expressed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir during Prime Minister's visit to General Headquarters in Rawalpindi today. He was accompanied by key members of the Cabinet. The Prime Minister was received by Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, and was presented guard of honour. Floral wreath at Yadgar-e-Shuhada was laid by the Prime Minister, to pay tribute to the martyrs.

During the visit, Prime Minister and Cabinet members engaged in discussions with military leadership on matters of national security, regional stability and military preparedness. They were briefed on the current security environment, threat spectrum, response to the security threats and ongoing counter terrorism operations. Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assured that the Government shall provide all the resources required for ensuring operational readiness of the Armed Forces. The Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet appreciated the professionalism, operational readiness, and sacrifices of Pakistan Army in war

against terrorism. They also commended the dedication of the Pakistan Army in safeguarding the nation's territorial integrity and ensuring peace and stability. The Prime Minister said Pakistan is destined to rise and the role of the Armed Forces in ensuring peaceful rise of Pakistan cannot be over-emphasized. The COAS thanked the Prime Minister for the visit and reposing confidence in the Army. The COAS affirmed that Pakistan Army will continue to measure up to the nation's expectations and will resolutely support the Government in addressing the security challenges facing Pakistan.



RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif presiding over a meeting during his visit to GHQ

NA passes resolution condemning Israeli war on Palestinians

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Assembly on Friday passed a resolution categorically condemning Israeli war on Palestinians. The resolution moved by Shazia Marri denounced the continued Israeli aggression which has led to the loss of over thirty thousand lives of Palestinians since October last year. The resolution called upon the federal government to play a more proactive role in pushing the international community to enforce a ceasefire in Gaza. The House also offered feteiha for the Palestinians martyred in Gaza. Meanwhile, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar laid before the House two bills today. These included: The Civil Courts Amendment Bill, 2024 and the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Amendment Bill, 2024. The chair referred the bills to the standing committees concerned. Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar also laid before the House seven ordinances. These included: Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation Amendment Ordinance 2023, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation Amendment Ordinance, 2023, Pakistan Postal Services Management Board Amendment Ordinance, 2023, the National Highway Authority Amendment Ordinance 2023, the Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, 2023, the Privatization Commission Amendment Ordinance, 2023 and the Establishment of Telecommunication Appellate Tribunal Ordinance, 2023. The House also passed a resolution moved by the Law Minister extending the period of the ordinances for a further period of one hundred and twenty days. Responding to a calling attention notice moved by Naveed Qamar and others, Minister for Commerce Jamal Kamal Khan said the temporary ban on export of bananas and onions is Ramadan specific.

People have been left at the mercy of those waving prohibited arms freely: SC

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Friday issued written order regarding hearing on a case pertaining to the license of sub-machine guns and prohibited bore weapons. In response to the question raised by the top court, Mr. Muhammad Saad, who was then the Deputy Inspector General of Police ("DIG") of the Mardan Region stated "That the document in question (permit) was not issued" by him. It seems that the Province was only interested to save the former DIG but not interested to ascertain who had issued the said document/permit, it said. It said, "The population is left at the mercy of those publicly brandishing

SMGs and other prohibited bore weapons and the police, the home departments of the provinces and the Ministry of Interior appear uninterested in keeping the people safe. In the area of virtually every market, marriage hall, school and even hospital there are SMGs on open display, including pickups with gun-toting men; the police look the other way and do not challenge when they are illegally double-parked. A great sense of insecurity must undoubtedly be felt by the majority of the law abiding citizens, who are also intimidated by such offensive behaviour. This lawless state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. "We are informed that licenses for prohibited

bore weapons are issued "for the purpose of protection or sports". With regard to whether any other document or permit allowing possessing and carrying prohibited bore weapons the Ministry of Interior skirts the query; it does not provide an answer", it said. The order said, "During the hearing we enquired how the police or the members of any other law enforcement agency would verify whether the license shown is genuine; we were shockingly told that there is no such mechanism in place. Therefore, even if the police wanted to verify whether a person is in legal possession of a nonprohibited bore weapon they would not be able to do so."



LARKANA: President Asif Ali Zardari showering flowers on the grave of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at his mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto.

President Zardari visits mausoleum of Bhutto family

LARKANA (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday visited the mausoleum of the martyrs of Bhutto's family at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh. He visited the grave of former prime minister and chairperson of PPP Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, laid a floral wreath at the grave and offered "Fateha". Asif Zardari also visited the graves of founder-chairman of PPP Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Madar-e-Jamhooriyat late Begum Nusrat Bhutto, late Shireen Amir Begum, late Mir Murtaza Bhutto and late Mir Shah Nawaz Bhutto and laid floral wreaths and offered feteiha. He also prayed for the development and prosperity of the country. The president was accompanied by Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah on the occasion. Earlier, on his arrival at Sukkur Begum Nusrat Bhutto Airport, the president was received by Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, Mayor Sukkur Barrister Arslan Sheikh, DIG Sukkur range, Commissioner Sukkur and other top officers of the Sukkur and Larkana divisions.

President Zardari's gratitude shows Pak-China ties now at high level: Wang Wenbin

BEIJING (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari's positive statement is commendable and his gratitude to Chinese President Xi Jinping also shows that the relations between Pakistan and China are now at a high level, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Wang Wenbin said on Friday. In his letter, President Zardari thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for extending warm congratulations on his re-election as the President of Pakistan. President Zardari also expressed his commitment to working closely with the Chinese President to the deepen practical cooperation, strengthen the all-weather partnership, and foster a shared community for the benefit of the two countries. "We commend President Zardari's positive statement," Wang Wenbin said during his regular briefing in response to a question raised by APP. The spokesperson said that after President Zardari's election, President Xi Jinping expressed congratulations pointing out that the two countries are good neighbors, friends, partners and brothers. "The ironclad friendship is a historical choice and the treasures for the two peoples," he added.

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Pak Railways breaks record with longest freight train run

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has shattered records with its latest freight train journey, marking a significant milestone in the nation's transportation sector.



The historic freight train, spanning an impressive length of over 2,500 feet and comprising a whopping fifty coaches, embarked on its journey propelled by the formidable GE U40 locomotive engine, said Railway spokesperson on Friday.

He said that this monumental train journey commenced from Karachi, the bustling metropolis of Pakistan, carrying a staggering load of over 3,000 tons of cargo destined for Kotri. This monumental initiative not only signifies a breakthrough for Pakistan Railways but also promises substantial benefits for the nation, he added. By transferring such massive quantities of cargo via rail, the spokesperson said the endeavor was poised to alleviate the burden on road traffic significantly, easing congestion and enhancing transportation efficiency across the country. Moreover, he said the shift towards rail transport for freight purposes aligns with global efforts towards environmental preservation, as it effectively reduces pollution and carbon emissions associated with traditional road transport methods.

Remarkably, despite its colossal size, he said the freight train achieved remarkable speeds, attaining a top speed of 60 km/h and maintaining an impressive average speed of 38 km/h throughout its journey. Similarly, he noted that the sheer scale of the freight vehicle's capacity is awe-inspiring, capable of accommodating goods equivalent to that of more than 94 22-wheeler trucks.

Five more MNAs take oath

ISLAMABAD (APP): Five more Members of the National Assembly elected on reserved seats took the oath on Friday. Speaker of the National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, administered the oath to the women elected on reserved seats. MNAs who took the oath included Naima Kanwal, Asma Arbab Alamgir, Shaheen Shah, Ghazala Anjum and Naema Kishwer Khan.

Allegations against Donald Lu are false: State Dept spox

WASHINGTON (INP): State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller while briefing the media in Washington on Thursday said that allegations [levelled by former prime minister and PTI chief] against Assistant Secretary Donald Lu are false. He was replying to a question pertaining to US congressional committee hearing next week on the fairness of Pakistan's elections in which Assistant Secretary Donald Lu has been asked to testify before the committee. Matthew Miller said: "Any number of State Department officials testify all the time before Congress. We see it as an important part of our job to help Congress do its job, both from a policymaking perspective and from an oversight perspective."

NA extends seven ordinances amidst opposition tumult

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Assembly passed a resolution on Friday, amidst ruckus by the opposition, extending seven ordinances for a period of 120 days. The resolution - moved by Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar - received approval under Article 89 of the Constitution. The extended ordinances include the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the Pakistan Postal Services Management Board (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the National Highway Authority (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, the Privatisation Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023, and the Establishment of Telecommunication Appellate Tribunal Ordinance, 2023. The resolution brought by Tarar received 130 votes in favour, while sixty-three lawmakers, mainly from the PTI-SIC, opposed it, tearing up copies of the agenda. The opposition labelled the assembly proceedings as "unlawful". Speaking on the floor of the House, PTI leader Omar Ayub stated, "We reject the extension of the ordinances." He criticised the rushed legislation, questioning if it was tantamount to selling off the country.

Opposition calls out govt's amendments in ordinances without consultation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The opposition on Friday claimed that the government's amendments in various ordinances would cast direct impact on the lives of the people. In a press talk at Parliament's Media Centre, PTI Secretary General and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub, flanked by his party Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali and senior leader Asad Qaiser, criticized the government for carrying out legislation without any consultation with the opposition. Omar Ayub alleged that no one was given the chance to go through the seven ordinances, which were tabled in the House to seek its consent for their extension. "We have objection to this as the standing committee concerned of the House should have held deliberations on them," he added. Barrister Gohar Ali said legislation was the function of the Parliament, however, the legislators should have been given three days for deliberations on the laws before their passage by the House.

FO rejects news regarding visit of IAEA delegation to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch has rejected the news circulating on Media regarding the visit of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) delegation to Pakistan. In response to media queries regarding this visit, she said any stories regarding the visit of a high-level IAEA delegation to Pakistan are fake news. She said no official from IAEA is currently visiting Pakistan, nor are any policy talks planned in the near future with IAEA. She further said that Director General IAEA visited Pakistan in February 2023.

Bilawal forms committees to negotiate with political parties for Senate elections

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has formed committees to negotiate with other political parties for the Senate elections to be held in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on April 2, 2024. According to private TV channel, the four-member committee of Punjab included Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Syed Hasan Murtaza, Nadeem Afzal Chan and Ali Haider Gilani. The channel said PPP committee for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) included Syed Khurshid Shah, Faisal Karim Kundi, Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha and Shuja Khan.



ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaullah Tarar addressing a Press conference.

Handful miscreants bent on sabotaging Pakistan, IMF deal: Attaullah Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Friday said a handful of miscreants associated with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was bent upon sabotaging Pakistan's deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that was crucial for economic stability. "In a bid to disrupt Pakistan's ongoing talks with IMF, some miscreants protested in front of IMF and World Bank offices in United States and indulged in sloganeering against Pakistan Army," he said while addressing a news conference here. The protestors belonging to the PTI were urging the IMF to give funds to Pakistan only if their jailed leader was released, he said, regretting that "activists of an anti-national party" continued to hold sit-in and protest outside the IMF office. "This is a fashionable crowd and these are the enemies of Pakistan who are left with no love for the

country," the minister said while paying tributes to the overseas Pakistanis who were sending their hard-earned money to the country by doing white and blue collar jobs abroad. He said these people were protesting to stop funding to the people of Pakistan were wearing costly branded shoes and carrying branded bags. They only wanted to sabotage the IMF deal because their dream was to make Pakistan default but Inshallah, Pakistan would make progress and the growth rate would increase soon. The heinous conspiracies of anti-national elements would not have any effect on the IMF deal, the minister said emphatically, adding the imprisoned PTI founder chairman was involved in Toshka Khana fraud, 190 million pound scam and cypher case. He advised the PTI to approach courts of Pakistan for release of Imran as IMF and World Bank had nothing to do with his cases.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal, receives comprehensive briefing at Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

Irsa controversy

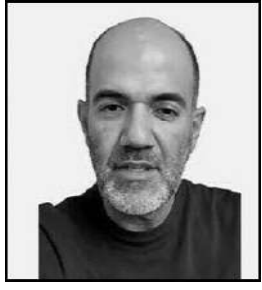
On Thursday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif avoided a public showdown with the PPP — a key ally whose support he must retain to keep the minority PML-N government in power — by rescinding the contentious appointment of retired bureaucrat Zafar Mahmood as the new Irsa chairman. However, it remains unclear if he moved with such speed just to appease the PPP, or whether his advisers had realised the ‘illegality’ of one of his administration’s first major acts.

It appears that the appointment was made under a controversial ordinance seeking to restructure Irsa. The ordinance became inoperative as former president Arif Alvi had refused to sign it, as it could have caused friction between the centre and provinces.

The ordinance, prepared by the caretaker government towards the end of its tenure, in breach of its mandate and without consulting the provinces or the CCI, had suggested substantive changes in the ‘federal structure’ of the water regulator, which monitors the distribution of Indus waters among the provinces in accordance with the Water Apportionment Accord, 1991. The ordinance aimed to revise Irsa’s composition, vest its chairman with vast powers, and cut the provinces’ role in its decision-making functions. The chairman was empowered to also review and settle provincial grievances, rendering Irsa members ineffective. Currently, the Irsa chairmanship rotates among the four provincial members, and the authority’s decisions on water issues are made based on majority votes.

Since these proposals allow the PM to exercise a lot of power on Irsa through its chairman and the federal government and effectively have complete control on the authority’s decision-making functions, the ordinance had drawn wide opposition from the Sindh caretaker cabinet and experts. At a time when certain centralist forces are touting the reversal of the landmark 18th Amendment and curtailment of the provincial share of federal taxes under the NFC award as the solution to Pakistan’s economic and political problems, the attempt to ‘centralise’ Irsa and reduce the provincial role in decision-making could exacerbate centre-province and inter-provincial disharmony. Besides, the message Islamabad tried to send to the smaller provinces by appointing a strong proponent of Kalabagh as Irsa’s head was unmistakable.

In this context, nobody can fault PPP’s Naveed Qamar for calling out the PM for his ‘very serious, illegal and unconstitutional’ order to, intentionally or unintentionally, attempt to use the inoperative ordinance to ‘usurp’ the rights of the provinces through the appointment of the Irsa chief. ‘On the very first day, if we start encroaching upon the rights of the provinces, how do we function as a federation?’ he asked. While making consequential decisions like this, Mr Sharif should not forget that ill-advised actions can have very serious ramifications for the federation, even if these suit his own party’s politics.



Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

Long before Pakistan’s latest hybrid regime imposed its unannounced ban on the social media site X, TikTok was shut down four times between 2020-21. YouTube was also temporarily banned by Pakistani authorities in the recent past. But the TikTok story takes us far beyond our own uniquely militarised content.

Earlier this week, 81 per cent of members in the US House of Representatives voted in favour of a bill to ban TikTok. The only way the fastest-growing social media app amongst the young can avoid being kicked out of the US market is by its parent company, ByteDance, to divest entirely within six months. The layperson has been led to believe that China owns — and hence controls — ByteDance. In fact, like most contemporary tech companies, it is mostly financed by global investors.

The bill still has to be cleared by the US Senate before going to the White House, but the fact that it has been floated shows how the contradictions of a complex global political economy have become acute and will likely intensify. On the one hand is the fact that capitalism is a fully globalised economic system in which China and many other non-Western economies are major players due to the outsourcing of the manufacturing industry from Western countries after the end of the Cold War. On the other hand is the increasing insularity

TikTok wars

of politics in the face of fallout due to the unfettered globalisation of capital.

The far right in Western countries grew out of the global financial crisis of 2007-9. But today, it is a supposedly ‘liberal’ Democratic president in the US that is ratcheting up geopolitical tensions between the pre-eminent global superpower and its emergent rival, China.

Cutting-edge digital technology embodies these contradictions. The world’s most profitable tech companies include Google, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Nvidia and Meta. All of them are headquartered in Silicon Valley and can, on the surface, be considered ‘American’ companies. But to take just one example: Apple’s most well-known and marketable commodity, the iPhone, is largely manufactured in China by an outsourcing company named FoxConn. While there have been attempts to shift some production to India after Covid, the vast majority continue to be manufactured in China.

At an even more molecular level, China is the world’s biggest market for semiconductor chips — the single most important intermediate good in the manufacturing of electronic devices. The US is highly reliant on Chinese companies for materials that are vital for semiconductor production, like gallium and germanium. Long before the prospective TikTok ban, the Biden administration articulated its plans to roll back China’s growing influence by announcing trade bans which equate to ‘choke points’ in the semiconductor supply chain. But the problem is that globalised supply chains supersede any particular ‘national interest’. For most of the modern era, Western dominance has been sustained despite contradictions generated by the interests of Western traders, merchants

and manufacturers to seek profit across the world on the one hand, and the imperatives of empire-building in the name of individual nations — whether Dutch, British, French or American — on the other hand. But in our hyper-digitalised, globalised present, contradictions are of a different magnitude.

Where does that leave the mass of the world’s people? First of all, we must avoid the binary that technology companies and their social media platforms are harbingers of democracy while the state — whether US, Pakistani or another — is exclusively the bad guy. Most tech companies facilitate states when the latter impose censorship and demand access to our data for surveillance purposes. Tech companies also use data to make us into dumbed-down consumers — this ‘platform capitalism’ has earned these companies trillions, turning them into the most profitable businesses in history.

Yes, it is essential that we fight for the freedom to use social media apps for anti-establishment causes. We must resist the ban on X, which is all about suppressing disclosures against post-poll rigging and repression in Pakistan. We must defend TikTok’s mostly unfiltered algorithm, which has allowed the most pro-Palestinian content since Oct 7, 2023. In a similar vein, we must not be drawn into geopolitical wars such as that which Washington is propagating against China. But there are also other wars — class, ethno-national, patriarchal, ecological — in which the mass of the world’s people are pitted against both capitalist technology firms and the coercive surveillance state. These are the wars which will ultimately determine our collective fate. It is this long-term horizon which must guide our battle of ideas on social media. — Courtesy Dawn

Words vs works



Jan-e-Alam Khaki

Muslim-majority societies in general, and South Asian Muslim societies in particular, face numerous conflicting issues with regard to everyday life. These admittedly are very complex problems, which do not lend themselves to easy solutions. This article will focus on what the writer thinks is a major issue and its possible solutions. This issue may be seen as the vast difference between the words we profess (ideals), and the words or actions we demonstrate (realities) in daily life.

Moreover, I wonder where our leaders come from; do they fall from some other world, or do they rise from amongst us? Blaming our politicians, or bureaucracy, does not absolve us from the way we treat our society. Rich or poor, low or high, illiterate or educated, all seem to contribute to this mess. A beggar who does not need to beg but still does so is a corrupt human; a wealthy person feeding the cycle of corruption is corrupt; a blogger who disseminates fake news is corrupt. If one moves through small or big bazaars, or tries to drive on the roads, one is amazed as to who is really corrupt! Wherever we — the common folk — can, we usurp the rights of others with impunity, and then blame the police or politicians. Not that they are angels, but perhaps we all compete in this corruption.

I think one particular issue plaguing society is the habit of showing off via actions that are symbols of piety, but that lack the spirit that qualifies one as a decent human being. The double standard is reflected well through recent stories of corruption and moral degradation even by those who belt out slogans of justice. It was their actions that betrayed them. Why, one wonders, is there so much gap between words and works, even by those who profess godly attributes, yet resist them so easily?

We need to undertake a rigorous scrutiny of our lives to understand which aspects require serious attention. It is clear that we need to pay attention to our act-i-o-n-s, not so much to our slogans. Self-critique should lead us to focus more on good conduct, proving that actions speak louder than words.

In Islamic ethics, the contradiction between belief and action is called hypocrisy (munafiqat) — an act condemned in strong words. The Quran emphasises competing in good acts (fastabiqul khayrat), because ‘...the goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute’ (5:48). Rather than focusing on who is right we need to focus on what is right (action). Sometimes, people take refuge behind their religious garb to do all sorts of unethical things. This has led to tarnishing the name of religion.

No doubt there are countless very good people as well, doing marvellous things for society in their personal and professional capacity. There are people who always think of doing something good for others and society as a whole. There is no dearth of such people. Let us, therefore, try to do what we can to make this society a little better with each passing day. — Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

Temporary ban on banana, onion exports implemented for Ramazan: Jam Kamal Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Friday addressed concerns regarding the ban on the export of bananas and onions, clarifying that the restriction is specifically for the duration of Ramazan and is temporary.

The decision to impose the ban was made at the cabinet level following the submission of a summary by the Ministry of National Food Security, and a price escalation predicted by the sensitive price index and export association,

said a press release issued here.

This move came in response to a calling attention notice raised by Syed Naveed Qamar and other legislators regarding the impact of the ban on agricultural exports.

Minister Jam Kamal Khan assured the assembly that the ban would remain in effect until the 15th of the following month, highlighting the government’s sensitivity to the concerns raised by agriculturists.

The temporary ban on the export of bananas and onions during Ramazan aims to ensure an adequate

domestic supply of these essential commodities during the holy month, which would ease common people and does not create a false shortage perception.

The government’s decision reflects its commitment to balancing the needs of local consumers with the interests of agricultural producers. While the ban presents a short-term restriction on export opportunities for farmers, it underscores the government’s proactive approach to managing food security during religious observances.

Weekly inflation up by 1.35 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 1.35 per cent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on March 14, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the lowest consumption group was up to Rs. 17,732, increased by 0.91 per cent and went up to 320.06 points from last week’s 317.18 points.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Eight ships namely, MSC Rowan, Athenian, Grammy Brave, Silver Zoe, FSM, Dravin, Al-Rayyan and CP Shenzhen, carrying Container, General Cargo, Gas oil, LPG, LNG and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, FOTCO Terminal, Engro Terminal, Southern Gas Terminal and Pakistan International Bulk Terminal respectively on Thursday. Meanwhile three more ships, Bharadwaj, MSC Spring-III and Hafnia Shanghai scheduled to load/offload River Sand.



ISLAMABAD: CEO Telenor Khurram Ashfaq calls on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb calls on by Ambassador of the European Union (EU), Dr. Riina Kionka & discussed matters of mutual interest, economic & financial relations between the EU & Pakistan.

Finance minister apprises EU, Ambassador on vital reform priorities of Govt

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday apprised the European Union (EU) Ambassador to Pakistan Dr. Riina Kionka about the important reform priorities of the Government.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan Dr. Riina Kionka called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, said a press release issued here.

The Finance Minister also shared possible areas

of mutual collaboration including digitization, export competitiveness, livestock and dairy production.

The Ambassador acknowledged the economic agenda of the Government and assured the Finance Minister of EU’s continued support to Pakistan.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan Dr. Riina Kionka congratulated the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, at the Finance Division.

Finance Minister

Zong, JS Zindigi sign MOU

ISLAMABAD (APP): Zong 4G Pakistan’s leading mobile network operator, and JS Zindigi, a leading digital financial services provider, announced a lucrative partnership to offer Banking-as-a-Service (BaaS) within the My Zong App (MZA).

JS Zindigi is a digital financial services provider in Pakistan, offering a comprehensive suite of mobile wallet solutions and digital banking services. Based on a dedicated team empowered by the latest technology, upholding the highest ethical standards

seeking to create value for their stakeholders and a responsible contribution to society, said a news release. This collaboration brings greater financial convenience to Zong 4G’s broad user base. My Zong App users can now open JS Zindigi wallet accounts directly within the app, enabling them to avail a range of JS Zindigi’s digital financial services.

This integration will allow users to effortlessly top-up their mobile accounts, settle postpaid bills and to purchase Zong 4G data bundles.

Economy improving, confidence of investors rising: Mian Zahid

KARACHI (INP): Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain has said that the economic conditions are improving and confidence of investors is rising.

Talking to business community on Friday, he said that the improved situation infuses confidence in the local and foreign investors, while the central bank was also considering some reduction in the interest rate. Mian Zahid Hussain said the business community wants the Central Bank

to slash interest rates by at least four percent.

During the current year, the overall economic conditions were better than last year, he added.

However, it was the new government’s responsibility to improve further the conditions, and they will continue to receive the unconditional support of the business community.

The business leader said there was yet to be an immediate solution to Pakistan’s economic problems. A long battle will have to be fought for this, which will be a test of the new government and the finance minister, and success will be the only option.



ISLAMABAD: MNA Anjum Aqeel and President ICCI Ahsan Baktawari taking oath from newly elected cabinet members of F-8 Traders Association.

Engro fertilizers engages dealers for urea price enforcement

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to support the Government’s efforts to ensure urea availability at official prices, Engro Fertilizers has urged its dealers to comply with company guidelines on pricing and strictly ensure product availability to the farmers.

To enforce guidelines of selling Urea at MRP, Engro Fertilizers hosted dealer conferences in Lahore, Multan and Hyderabad, said a news release received here on Friday.

Addressing the event participants, Engro Fertilizers VP Marketing Atif Muhammad Ali commented that ‘Engro Fertilizers has always adhered to highest standard of integrity and holds the same expectations from its dealers. To support the prosperity of farmers, Engro dealers must ensure urea availability at official prices.

Further, Engro Fertilizers has not increased the selling price of imported urea to facilitate the Government in providing support to farmers.’

At the conference, the dealers were also updated on the recent gas price hike and the disparity of gas prices that exists among different fertilizer players.

ADB delegation calls on KP CM, discusses mutual cooperation

PESHAWAR (APP): A delegation of Asian Development Bank (ADB) called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur at Pakhtunkhwa House, Islamabad and discussed with him matters related to mutual cooperation with special focus on development projects of public welfare being carried out in the province with the financial assistance of the bank, said an official press release issued here on Friday.

Provincial Minister Arshad Ayub was also present on the occasion.

Talking on this occasion, the Chief Minister termed the Asian Development Bank as an important development partner of the provincial government and said that his government wanted to continue this partnership

in a more integrated and an effective manner.

He added that work on a number of development projects in the various sectors with the financial assistance of Asian Development Bank was in progress. However, the chief minister said that incumbent provincial government also wanted to further enhance and extend this mutual cooperation and partnership to different sectors including water supply, solar energy, flood protection, solid waste management, urban transport, agriculture, livestock, food security and other sectors of social services. "We expect special cooperation from our development partner for the development of newly merged districts and other backward areas of the province," he said and added that providing employment opportunities

to the people and promoting self-employment among our talented youth are the priority areas of his government. Apart from this, he said the government also plans to initiate a program for renovation of all major cities in the province. He further stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project assisted by ADB was an important project of the provincial government; we need special cooperation for implementing Phase-II of this project as well.

"The provincial government has a lot to do in different sectors specially in tourism, health, education, PHE and others," he remarked and said that the government would like to work in a partnership with ADB for providing basic facilities in the sectors of social services.



NAWABSHAH: President Asif Ali Zardari offers Fatcha on his father Hakim Ali Zardari's grave.

Minister inaugurates Ramazan Dastarkhwan in Panah Gar Mardan

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Provincial Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru has inaugurated the Ramazan Dastarkhwan at the Panah Gah run by the Social Welfare Department at the District Headquarters Hospital, Mardan. Members of Provincial Assembly, Iftikhar Ali Mashwani, Tufail Anjum, Abdul Salam Afridi, Ehtsham Advocate and Zarshad Khan besides Deputy Commissioner Mardan Muhammad Fayaz Khan Sherpao, Medical Superintendent of DHQ Hospital Dr. Javed

Iqbal also participated in the inauguration ceremony.

On this occasion, the minister was informed that Sehri and iftar facilities were regularly provided to common people including patients' caregivers. Talking to the media persons, Zahir Shah Toru said that at the moment a total of 11 Panah Gahs were functional in the province where quality food was provided in iftar and Sehri to the people. To a question, the minister informed that a special campaign was going on throughout the province to control prices.

PHC CJ to retire on April 14

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court Justice Ibrahim Khan would retire on April 14. The present Chief Justice PHC, Justice Ibrahim Khan, became an Additional Judge of Peshawar High Court in 2016.

He became a permanent judge of PHC in 2018 and the Chief Justice of the high court on July 6, 2023. After the retirement of Justice Ibrahim Khan, the number of judges in the High Court would be reduced to 14.

Man awarded 10-year jail for selling prohibited drugs

SARGODHA (APP): Chairman Drug Court Syed Khalid Javed Bukhari decided a drug case on Friday and awarded 10-year jail term to a medical store owner after solid evidence was presented against him about violation of the rules.

According to the prosecution, Drug Inspector Sahiwal Fahim Zia had sent a challan in 2017 against medical store owner, Hamza, a resident of Sahiwal, alleging that he was selling prohibited medicines without having any licence.

Governor hosts ceremony for gold medalist students of Khyber Girls Medical College

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Haji Ghulam Ali here Friday arranged a ceremony to give cash prizes to the top three gold medalists of Khyber Girls Medical College (KGMC).

The ceremony was also attended by Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali, Vice Dean KGMC, Professor Amir Muhammad, faculty members, students and parents of gold medalist students.

The governor gave cash prizes to three students of KGMC including Tasneem Zehra of Upper Dir who won the gold medal in the session of 2017-18, Mahnoosh Saleh winner of the gold medal in a session 2018-19 and Ayesha Iqbal who was on top in 2019-20.

Ten students from merged districts including four girl students of Mohmand, two from South Waziristan, and one student each from Khyber, Bajaur, North Waziristan and Frontier Region Peshawar were also given prizes. Cash assistance was also given to forty class IV employees of KGMC.

Addressing the ceremony, the governor congratulated students and their parents expressing hope that new doctors would tirelessly work for the betterment of the ailing community with passion and professionalism.



LAHORE: US Consul General, Ms. Kristin K. Hawkins meeting with Speaker Punjab Assembly Malik Muhammad Ahmed Khan.

7 dead and 1276 injured in 1195 road traffic crashes in Punjab

Independent Report
LAHORE: The Emergency Services Department (ESD) responded to 1195 Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours. In these RTCs, 7 people died, whereas 1276 were injured. Out of these, 566 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 710 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams thus reducing the burden of Hospitals.

The majority (73%) involved Motorbikes, therefore effective enforcement of traffic laws and lane discipline are essential to reduce the increasing number of road traffic crashes. Furthermore, the analysis showed those 700 drivers, 57 underage drivers, 177 pedestrians, and 406 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics show that 232 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 251 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by Faisalabad 97 in with 105 victims and at third Multan.



KARACHI: Senior Leader of MQM-P Syed Mustafa Kamal visiting Aukhwat Foundation Office.

Punjab govt to initiate think tank to boost healthcare systems

Independent Report
LAHORE: In a bid to enhance healthcare services across the province, Punjab Minister for Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafiq has announced the formation of a dedicated think tank. The initiative aims to revamp the health sector, with a focus on flagship programs at various levels of healthcare facilities. The inaugural meeting of the Health Advisory Committee, chaired by the minister alongside Primary and Secondary

Healthcare Department Minister Khawaja Imran Nazir, marked a significant step towards this endeavor. Both ministers emphasized the government's commitment to leveraging the expertise of seasoned health professionals for system enhancement. During the meeting, Provincial Minister of Primary and Secondary Health Care Khawaja Imran Nazir expressed gratitude for Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's dedication to improving healthcare.

Robbers gangs busted, stolen motorcycles recovered

MULTAN (APP): Police claimed to have arrested two gangs involved in motorcycle snatching and recovered Rs 1.5 million stolen motorcycles from their possession.

According to spokesperson for police, SHO Sadar Nazakaat along with his team raided and arrested two members of Adnan alias Dani gang including ring leader Adnan and Bilal.

Likewise, ring leader of Fida Hussain alias Fida gang named Fida Hussain was arrested by the police.

Police have also recovered 14 stolen motorcycles from the arrested suspects.

20 cases were traced from the arrested accused. Further action was being taken by the police against the accused.

Record of cases registered against Imran Riaz, Azam presented in LHC

LAHORE (Online): Record of the cases registered against the journalist Imran Riaz and PTI leader Azam Swati has been presented in Lahore High Court (LHC).

The petition regarding provision of details of the cases came up for hearing in LHC Friday.

FIA and IG Punjab presented details of cases on the order of court.

Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Tariq Bashir submitted the details of the cases from FIA side.

According to state counsel one case is registered in cyber crime Lahore against the journalist Imran Riaz, one in City police station Sangla Hill Nankana Sahb and two cases in police station Attock and Sadar police station Chakwal.

The other different five cases registered against Imran Riaz have been cancelled.

International News

Putin asks voters, including in annexed Ukrainian areas, to determine Russia's future

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin appealed to voters, including in annexed parts of Ukraine, to be united in determining Russia's future by casting ballots in this week's presidential election which he is all but certain to win.

"It is vital to underscore our cohesion and resolve and move forward together. Every vote you cast is valued and meaningful," Putin said in a video address first shown in the Russian far east and reported by national news agencies.

"I therefore ask you in the coming three days to

Polls open in Russian vote to extend Putin's reign

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Russians started voting on Friday in a three-day presidential election that is set to hand veteran leader Vladimir Putin another six-year term as the raging conflict in Ukraine spreads further into Russian territory.

In power as president or prime minister since the final day of 1999, the former KGB agent is casting the election as a show of Russians' loyalty and support for his military assault on Ukraine, now in its third year.

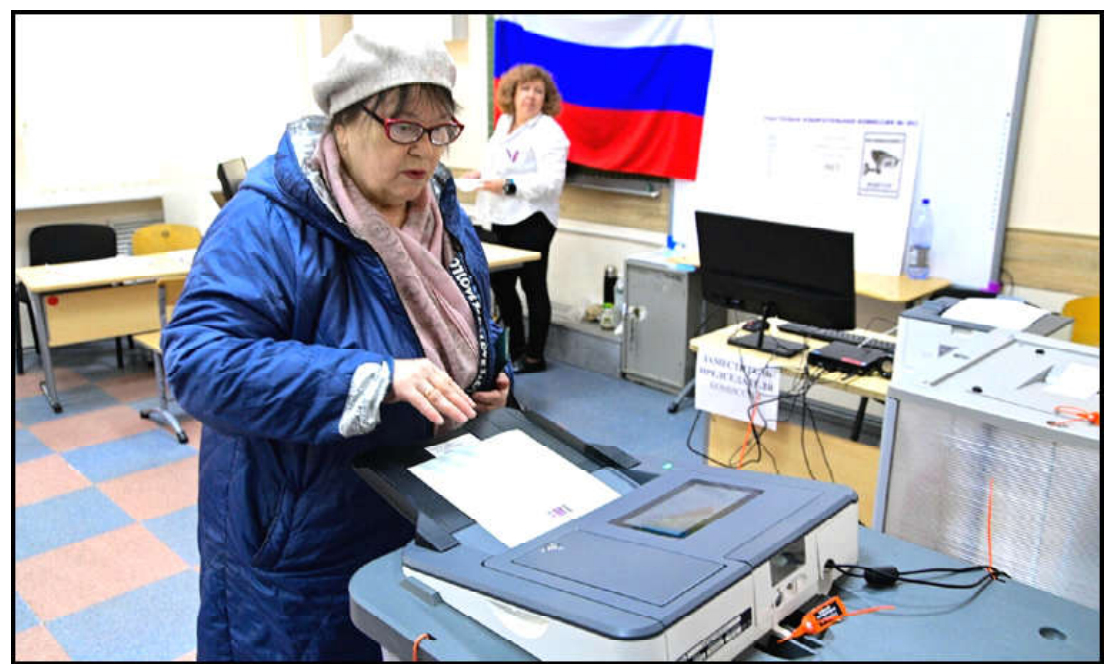
Polling stations in a country spread over 11 time zones opened at 8am on Friday (8pm GMT Thursday) on the Far Eastern Kamchatka peninsula and will close on Sunday at 8pm (6pm GMT) in Russia's Kaliningrad exclave, wedged between EU members Poland and Lithuania.

exercise your right to vote."

Putin, 71 and in power as president or prime minister since 2000, faces three challengers in three days of voting beginning on Friday. None of the challengers has criticised him.

Opinion polls show he is supported by a majority of Russians, with one survey last month giving him 75% support.

Two candidates who had hoped to run on a platform of calling for an end to the war in Ukraine, officially described by Russia as a "special military operation," were ruled ineligible.



A woman votes in Russia's presidential election in the far eastern city of Vladivostok.



PYONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in the driver's seat of a new main battle tank after a training exercise for tank crews at an undisclosed location.

The first ship to use a new sea route approaches Gaza with 200 tons of aid

Monitoring Desk
WADI GAZA: A ship carrying 200 tons of aid approached the coast of Gaza on Friday in a mission to inaugurate a sea route from Cyprus to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the enclave five months into the war between Israel and Hamas. The ship, operated by the Spanish aid group Open Arms, left Cyprus on Tuesday towing a barge laden with food sent by World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celeb-

city chef José Andrés. It could be seen off Gaza's coast Friday morning.

Israel has been under increasing pressure to allow more aid into Gaza. The United States has joined other countries in air-dropping supplies to the isolated region of northern Gaza and has announced separate plans to construct a pier to get aid in. Aid groups said the airdrops and sea shipments are far less efficient ways of delivering the massive amounts of aid needed in Gaza.

North Korean leader 'drives' new battle tank

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: North Korea leader Kim Jong Un drove a "new-type main battle tank" while overseeing military training exercises, state media said on Thursday, as Seoul and Washington wrap joint drills to improve deterrence.

Wearing a black leather jacket, Kim saluted ranks of camouflage-uniformed troops, and watched live-fire "training march" exercises from a field command post, flanked by top generals, images published by state media showed.

US Senate leader says Netanyahu an obstacle to peace

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called on Thursday for new elections in Israel, harshly criticising Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as an obstacle to peace.

Democrat Schumer, long a supporter of Israel and the highest-ranking US Jewish elected official, told the Senate that Netanyahu's government "no longer fits the needs of Israel" five months into a war.

"As a democracy, Israel has the right to choose its own leaders, and we should let the chips fall where they may. But the important thing is that Israelis are given a choice. There needs to be a free debate about the future of Israel after Oct 7," Schumer said.

"In my opinion, that is best accomplished by holding an election," he said.

Hezbollah tells Iran it would fight alone in any war with Israel

Monitoring Desk
DUBAI: With ally Hamas under attack in Gaza, the head of Iran's Quds Force visited Beirut in February to discuss the risk posed if Israel next aims at Lebanon's Hezbollah, an offensive that could severely hurt Tehran's main regional partner, seven sources said.

In Beirut, Quds chief Esmail Qaani met Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the sources said, for at least the third time since Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel and Israel's devastating retaliatory assault on Gaza.

The conversation turned to the possibility of a full Israeli offensive to its north, in Lebanon, the sources said.

Israeli strikes kill at least 29 Gazans awaiting aid, say Palestinian officials

Monitoring Desk
CAIRO: At least 29 Palestinians were killed while awaiting aid in two separate Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip on Thursday, Gaza's health ministry said.

In the first incident, Palestinian health officials in the Hamas-ruled strip said eight people were killed in an airstrike on an aid distribution centre in Al-Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip.

Later, at least 21 people were killed and more than 150 wounded by Israeli gunfire at a crowd awaiting aid trucks at a northern Gaza roundabout, Gaza's health ministry said.

In a statement, Israel's military denied attacking aid centres, describing the reports as "false."

"As the IDF assesses the incident with the thoroughness that it deserves, we urge the media to do the same and only rely on credible information," the statement said. The Gaza conflict has displaced most of the enclave's 2.3 million population. Chaotic scenes and deadly incidents have taken place during aid distributions as desperately hungry people scrambled for food.

On Feb. 29, Palestinian health authorities said Israeli forces shot dead more than 100 Palestinians as they waited for an aid delivery near Gaza City. Israel blamed the deaths on crowds that surrounded aid trucks, saying victims had been trampled or run over.

In Deir Al-Balah, also in central Gaza, an Israeli missile hit a house on Thursday, killing nine people, Palestinian medical said.

At least 8 dead after migrant boat sinks off Turkey, state media says

Monitoring Desk
ISTANBUL: At least eight people drowned when a rubber boat carrying migrants sunk off Turkey's northwest province of Canakkale, the state-run Anadolu news agency reported on Friday.

US commandos train for the unexpected in North Korea's shadow

Monitoring Desk
GWANGJU: US special operations troops in South Korea are training and preparing for unexpected threats at a time when global crises are more interconnected than ever, their commander said during an exercise this week. "Nothing in the history of the United States should give us any faith and confidence that we know where the next threat is coming from," Brigadier General Derek Lipson of Special Operations Command - Korea said in an interview on the sidelines of joint drills. Nuclear-armed North Korea in recent years has made unprecedented strides in its weapons programs.

PM kicks off spring plantation drive, vows to save country from climate change risks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday launched the countrywide spring plantation drive by planting a sapling here.

Emphasizing the government's commitment, he announced to double the number of saplings planted in 2024 compared to the previous year's achievement of 240 million.

Speaking on the occasion, he highlighted the urgency to expand Pakistan's forest cover, currently at a mere 5% of the total area, to mitigate climate risks.

Quoting the Global Climate Risk Index, he underscored Pakistan's ranking as the 5th most vulnerable country to climate-related hazards, he stressed the necessity for immediate action.

"From 1999 to 2018, the country had to face the loss of 10,000 precious lives besides billions of dol-

lars of financial loss; therefore it is crucial to create awareness about the climate change risks at all levels including educational institutions," the prime minister remarked.

He directed the authorities concerned to make all possible efforts to spread this plantation drive to every corner to make Pakistan a green and pollution-free country.

He also asked all Pakistani citizens to help the government by fully participating in the plantation drive to save the country from climate change disasters and provide a healthy environment. On the occasion, the prime minister was also briefed about the area-wise plantation targets across the country.

He was informed that during the spring plantation 2024, a total of 54.38 saplings would be planted across the country out of

which 14.1 million saplings would be planted in Punjab, 11.72 million in Sindh, 5.71 million in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3 million in Balochistan, 11.85 million in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K), and 8 million saplings would be planted in Gilgit Baltistan.

While during the Monsoon 2023 drive, a total of 49.02 saplings were planted across the country out of which 14.62 million saplings were planted in Punjab, 19 million in Sindh, 10.68 million in KP, 1.06 in Balochistan, 3.3 million in AJ&K and 0.36 million saplings were planted in GB. The major species to be planted in the spring drive include Timar, Kikar, Jand, Amaltas, Shisham, Sukh Chain, Simal, Farash, Phulai, Chir, Kail, Deodar, Peepal, Neem, Drekh, Beri, Imli, Jaman, Chilgoza, Willow, Ailanthus, Sirus, and Poplar.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif plants a sapling to launch the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign 2024 in the federal capital.

Data collected through 7th digital census is strategic resource for data driven Policy making: Ahsan Iqbal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Prof. Ahsan Iqbal on Friday said the data collected through 7th Population and Housing Census-2023 is a strategic resource for "Data Driven Policy Making".

Ahsan Iqbal appreciated PBS on completing gigantic activity of 7th Population and Housing Census in challenging timelines during his visit to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) after assuming the charge of the Ministry, said a press release issued here.

Prof. Ahsan Iqbal an-

icipated that it is the time to get the benefits from the digital Population Census that was conducted in 2023 and was approved unanimously. Professor Ahsan Iqbal announced to conduct First Data Fest in Pakistan in 2024, the initiative of First Data Fest will be a great step towards extending the benefits of data and bridging gap between data producers and users. As it will inform Government and Private Sectors, Academia, business communities how to get benefit from Data.

"The population Growth Rate of Pakistan

is 2.55% which is alarming and indicative of decline in proper allocation of resources", Prof. Ahsan Iqbal. "Efforts should be made to work in collaboration with universities to share practical knowledge with students of Statics and relevant field", Prof. Ahsan Iqbal. For Price Governance and controlling inflation, PBS has developed Decision Support System for Inflation (DSSI). The live demonstration of system was presented by Mr. Muhammad Sarwar Gondal, Member (Support Services/IT).



ISLAMABAD: The CDWP meeting presides over by Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan, approves 2 development projects with a cost of Rs.7.87 million after the detail discussion.

Speakers underscore growing Islamophobia in western, non-western parts of world

ISLAMABAD (APP): The speakers at roundtable on significance of international solidarity to combat Islamophobia underscored the growing trend of hatred towards Muslims in the western and non-western parts of the world urging a major consensus and cooperation to overcome the menace.

To commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), hosted a Roundtable Discussion titled, "Importance of Global Solidarity to Combat Islamophobia", bringing to the fore a global dialogue aimed at addressing the prejudices, intolerance, violence and injustices faced by Muslims worldwide, a news release said.

Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Chairman of the Council of the Islamic Ideology (CII),

was chief guest; Ambassadors of Iran and Türkiye and noted academic and senior Foreign Office official joined as panellists.

In her introductory remarks, Dr. Neelum Nigar, Director CSP thanked the esteemed panellists and other participants and emphasized the importance of combating Islamophobia in contemporary times, which is marred by multiple global conflicts and issues.

DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcoming remarks, highlighted the journey since the March 2019 Christchurch terrorist attacks in New Zealand, highlighting the pivotal moments and global actions, including Pakistan's leading role in the OIC and the UN General Assembly, culminating in the designation of March 15 as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia'.

While tracing the evo-

lution and myriad manifestations of Islamophobia in recent decades, he emphasized that Islamophobia was not just prevalent in some Western countries but in non-Western parts of the world as well, including in Pakistan's neighbourhood where it was growing in the wake of the 'Hindutva' ideology.

Noting that the world was experiencing extreme levels of tumult, he stressed that this was the time to build bridges, not to accentuate religious or cultural fault-lines or create further divisions. People of goodwill in all faiths should come forward and play their part in forging greater mutual respect, understanding, and inter-faith harmony, he concluded.

A special video message by Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissen Brahim Taha for the occasion was shared.

AJK President calls EU to play role for solution of Kashmir issue

ISLAMABAD (APP): Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, President of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) has called upon the European Union's role to help resolve the longstanding Kashmir issue.

"European Union can play an important role as a mediator between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue for the sake of peace and security in the South Asian region", AJK President said while talking to the European Union Ambassador Dr Riina Kionka and Political Consul Rukiye Komurcu, who called on him at Jammu Kashmir House here, said a press release.

He said that the longstanding dispute posed a serious threat to peace and security in South Asia.

Stressing the need for early settlement of the dispute, Barrister Sultan said that the Kashmir conflict could lead to a nuclear war between the two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India.

Any mishap, no matter how small or big, can be a precursor to a nuclear war between the two nuclear neighbors," the president said. Talking on volatile situation prevailing in the region, the AJK President said that the European Union should appoint its special representative on Kashmir to help resolve the Kashmir issue amicably.

Meanwhile, AJK President Barrister Sultan Mahmood will begin state-wide mass public-liaison drive from Mirpur today (March 16).

KSA launches Iftar program in Faisal Masjid

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Saudi Embassy has launched the "Programme of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud for Iftar" in Pakistan for the holy month of Ramadan at Faisal Masjid.

The program was launched at the King Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and was attended by Saudi embassy officials and directors of Saudi offices, the President of International Islamic University, Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi, other university Officials, and thousands of faithful of twin cities. After this first Iftar in Islamabad, the embassy will continue this program on a daily basis across the country. The initiative by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of KSA sees similar events organized by its attachés in various nations during Ramadan.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people are being served Iftar dinner during the Holy Fasting Month of Ramadan at G-9.

CDA chief suspends 18 employees over Rs 7 bln corruption scandal

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) continues its inquiry into alleged corruption within the Capital Development Authority's (CDA) Land Department, prompting the suspension of 18 officers and employees by the CDA Chairman.

A confidential notification from the Deputy Director of CDA disclosed that the suspended individuals comprise an Assistant Accounts Officer, Senior Accountant, Deputy Collector, and four

Patwaris. Additionally, two Assistants, seven Junior Assistants, and a Record Keeper from the Deputy Commissioner's office are also among those suspended, citing violations of the CDA Employees Regulation 1992. CDA officials attribute the suspensions to the ongoing FIA inquiry, which stems from a fraudulent allotment scandal discovered last year, valued at approximately Rs 6.9 billion. In response, CDA Chairman Capt. (Retd.) Anwar-ul-Haq initiated an internal investigation.

IUII president end Rs 5,000 Aitekaf fee at Faisal Masjid

ISLAMABAD (APP): The President of International Islamic University Islamabad (IUII), Prof. Dr. Hathal Homoud Al-Otaibi, has taken cognizance of the Rs. 5,000 registration fee for Aitekaf at the Faisal Masjid. According to IUII Spokesperson Nasir Farid, the president has instructed the Dawah Academy to immediately revoke the fixed registration fee for Aitekaf. Furthermore, the president has mandated that any matters concerning the Faisal Masjid.

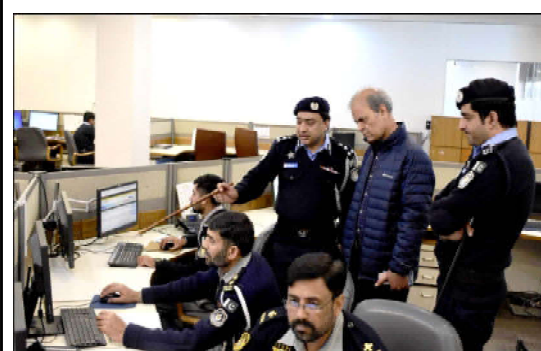


ISLAMABAD: People perform the first Friday prayer at a mosque during the holy month of Ramadan at G-7.

Inspector General of Police GB visits Safe City Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Inspector General of Police (IGP) Gilgit Baltistan Afzal Mehmood Butt visited Safe City

including the Police Operations Center, Emergency Control Center, Data Hub, Dispatch Control Center, E-Challan System, and the "Pukar-15" helpline.



Islamabad, a public relations officer said. He said that the Capital Police Officer (CPO) Safe City/Traffic gave an overview of the Safe City Islamabad operational duties to the IGP Gilgit Baltistan. At this occasion SSP Safe City was also present.

The IGP Gilgit Baltistan visited the command and control center, data hub unit, modern technology-equipped cameras, and the police operations center hall. They were fully briefed about the procedures and their effectiveness. Furthermore, the IGP Gilgit Baltistan was also briefed that Safe City Islamabad is playing a significant role in various sectors through modern techniques, in-

Face recognition cameras have been installed at the entry and exit points of the city, which are playing an important role in identifying suspicious elements. The IGP Gilgit Baltistan was also apprised of the functionality and benefits of the Safe City cameras in the city and their crucial role in ensuring the safety of the city, preventing crimes, and safeguarding the lives and property of citizens. The IGP Gilgit Baltistan acknowledged the modern technical system of the Islamabad Capital Police and its benefits. He expressed special gratitude to Islamabad Capital City Police Officer Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan and his team for this successful visit.

Maryam discusses proposal to issue of Kissan card

Independent Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz presided over a special meeting in which matters pertaining to wheat were reviewed.

A proposal for issuance of Kissan card was reviewed in the meeting. The CM said that the Punjab government stands with the farming community and it would not leave them alone. Maryam ordered to undertake all possible steps for assistance of wheat cultivators, adding that PML-N's manifesto outlines to ensure well-being of the farmers.

She said, "We are also well aware of problems being faced by the common man and we striving to provide them

with subsidised flour." It was informed during the briefing that the government had to bear circular debt to the tune of Rs 630 billion for granting subsidy on wheat. The government had to pay Rs 80 billion markup per annum on the circular debt. The Punjab government paid off Rs 469 billion debt in the last eight months.

A proposal with regard to the Social Protection and Targeted Subsidy was reviewed during the meeting. A proposal for uninterrupted provision of manure and pesticides to farmers was also mullied over.

Provincial ministers Bilal Yasin, Azma Bukhari, Ashiq Kirmani, former senator Pervez Rasheed.



Federal Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal chairing a meeting with the VC PIDE Dr. Nadeem Haque and discussed the current economics situation and way forward.

Azam Tarar urges opposition to play constructive role

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar urged the opposition on Friday to play a constructive role in the betterment of the country.

Speaking on the floor of the House, he defended the introduction of ordinances in the house and said that all these would be discussed in the committees.

He asked the opposition party to provide its input in the meetings.

Tarar criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

(PTI) for opposing the ordinance, stating, "The country will not progress like this. You should engage in some soul-searching; writing letters to the IMF and EU will not yield any positive results."

He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had issued directives to constitute National Assembly Committees regardless of the number of seats parties held in the parliament.

"The moment these ordinances are laid in front of this house, they will be converted into bills."

CTD conducted search & combing operation in PS Shahzad Town limits

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Friday conducted a search and combing operation within Shahzad Town police station's jurisdiction.

Following the special directives of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the search and comb-

ing operations are being conducted in different areas of the city, to ensure the safety and security of the Islamabad citizens, a public relations officer said.

Responding these orders, a search and combing operation was conducted in different areas of Shahzad Town police station by CTD and local police teams.

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