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Islamabad not seeking armed conflict with Kabul: Khawaja Asif

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): Days after Pakistan hit outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targets inside Afghanistan, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said that Islamabad does not want any "armed conflict" with Kabul. "Force is the last resort. We do not want to have an armed conflict with Afghanistan," Asif said while speaking to the Voice of America.

The defence minister's remarks come as the neighbouring countries have experienced a spike in their already tense bilateral relations over increasing terrorist attacks by the TTP and other banned outfits, which are based in Afghanistan, inside Pakistani territory.

On Monday, Pakistan carried out intelligence-based operations (IBOs) targeting TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group which is responsible for the March 16 attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan and multiple other terrorist attacks in the country. Islamabad's action came following a deadly attack on Pakistani forces which resulted in the martyrdom of seven soldiers including a lieutenant colonel and captain. Pakistan has repeatedly called on the Afghan interim government to prevent its soil from being used against Pakistan by TTP and other militant organisations — a claim vehemently denied by Kabul. Terming Pakistan's

military action inside Afghanistan as a necessary message against increasing cross-border terrorism, the minister called on the Afghan interim regime to "control" the TTP and "not let them start a war" with Pakistan while living in Afghanistan. "We cannot continue like this," he said, adding that Islamabad will be forced to retaliate if the TTP continues its attacks. Elaborating on the prospects of bilateral trade and prospects of providing an economic corridor to Kabul, owing to the country being landlocked, Asif questioned why Islamabad should entertain such a possibility if the neighbouring country treats it "like an enemy".



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs special session of the Apex Committee of Special Investment Facilitation Council.

PM vows to tackle economic challenges, protect vulnerable

Says deep-rooted structural reforms needed during term of new IMF deal; Civil-military leadership vows to ensure continuation of policies; COAS Gen Munir reassures "fullest support of Pakistan Armed Forces to backstop" gov't economic initiatives

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the government will take strict measures to bring deep-rooted structural reforms in the country. With the reforms, he said "we will succeed to gradually break the begging bowl and come out of debt trap".

He said that the burden of these measures would primarily fall on the wealthy and elite, with safeguards in place to protect the interests of the poor and vulnerable.

Addressing the meeting of the Apex Committee of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) here, the prime minister said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had concluded the review for issuance of the last tranche of US\$1.1 billion that hopefully be received by next month. After this, he said Paki-

stan also wanted to start another programme with the IMF for a period of three years during which the government will take strict measures to bring deep-rooted structural reforms in the country.

The prime minister sought support of all political parties and the provincial governments to successfully implement the agenda of macro economic stability in the country. "For this we will have to work together. With the support of all the provinces, we will together resolve all the challenges and difficulties faced by the country", he added.

PM Shehbaz said the presence of chief ministers of all the provincial govern-

ments, Army Chief, and other concerned officials from across the country conveyed a clear message to the nation that all had gathered here for the cause of the country's development, prosperity and integrity.

He said the SIFC was formed in June 2023 to remove bottlenecks in the investment process and since then nine meetings of the Apex Committee had been held besides more than 200 relevant meetings.

Consequent to the meetings, he said a number of important decisions had been taken and implemented under the umbrella of the Council.

The prime minister pointed out that when the PDM government took over the charge of the government in 2022, Pakistan was at the brink of bankruptcy but all the coalition

partners decided to save the country from plunging into default by putting their politics at stake.

He said unfortunately a major chunk of the country's resources drained down in shape of corruption. "This year's target of tax collection is Rs 9 trillion but its potential was over Rs 1.3 trillion.

Similarly, he said the cases of the taxes worth of Rs 2.7 trillion were pending either in the tribunals or courts that should have been resolved as soon as possible.

The annual power theft is around Rs 400 billion in the country while the combined circular debt of electricity and gas was over Rs 5 trillion, the prime minister added.

As regards the achievements of the interim government under SIFC, the

prime minister informed that the caretaker setup, due to its measures against power theft, saved Rs 87 billion. Similarly, strict measures were also taken to curb smuggling besides introducing reforms in the land information system. Besides, it also successfully concluded the privatization process of Heavy Mechanical Complex (HMC).

The prime minister highlighted that annually hundreds of billions of rupees were lost in the State Owned Enterprises as PIA alone owed debt worth of Rs 825 billion. Likewise, he said that the interim government also signed many important agreements with different countries to bring investment in the country including that with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) valuing \$10 billion.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in a group photo with Chief Ministers of all the provinces.

FM calls for increasing IAEA technical cooperation fund

BRUSSELS (APP): Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has called for ensuring access to technology, financing nuclear power projects, and increasing IAEA technical cooperation fund for further development of nuclear energy.

In his remarks at the Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels today, he said provision of nuclear power reactors, nuclear fuel and other associated infrastructure to the developing countries in accordance with respective safeguard obligations should be ensured. He said financing for nuclear energy, and multilateral development funds, need to be catalyzed.

The Minister said International Atomic Energy Agency's capacity for technical assistance in peaceful uses of nuclear energy may be facilitated through either a dedicated funding stream or through enhanced allocations to existing technical cooperation fund.

Ishaq Dar said Pakistan will remain a steadfast partner of the international community and the IAEA in further enhancing role of nuclear technology for energy and other peaceful purposes.

Highlighting the potential of Pakistan in Nuclear energy sector, he said the country has hundred reactor-years' experience of safely operating nuclear power plants.

He revealed that nuclear energy constitutes around eight percent of our installed electric generation capacity as currently Pakistan has six operating nuclear power plants generating 3,530 MW of electricity. The Foreign Minister reaffirmed that Pakistan stands ready to share its experience and expertise in peaceful uses of nuclear technology with the world as country has fully trained human resource capable to support nuclear power infrastructure.



BRUSSELS: Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar meeting with Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Mariano Grossi, on the sidelines of the Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels.

Mohsin Naqvi orders countrywide crackdown against gas, electricity thefts

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday making a major decision, tasked Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to initiate a crackdown across the country against power and gas thieves.

Chairing an important meeting at his office, the minister gave instructions to the Agency to take strict legal action against those involved in electricity and gas thefts. The FIA officials informed the minister that special teams were already constituted to crack down on electricity and gas thieves on the past instructions given in the last meeting.

Upon receiving a detailed report on Greece boat accident submitted by the FIA officials, the minister directed that all the elements involved in this tragedy must be brought to justice.

He also directed strict action against all the elements involved in human trafficking to curb this evil from the society.

The minister also directed to further tighten the cordon against those involved in the Hundi/Hawala business.

The action against those involved in the Hundi/Hawala business has improved the value of the Pakistani rupee, the FIA Officials informed the minister.

Army chief calls on PM

ISLAMABAD (Online): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has called on Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif.

The meeting was held before meeting of apex committee of SIFC. Army chief took the PM into confidence on his visit to Saudi Arabia.

According to sources the two exchanged views on outcome of ongoing intelligence based operations against terrorism and overall national and internal security situation in the meeting. The matters related to the Pakistan Army's operational matters were also discussed in the meeting.

Pak, UK to strengthen bilateral trade

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, and British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms. Jane Marriott, on Thursday outlined key strategies to bolster the already robust trade relations between Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK).

The minister emphasized the deep-rooted political and historical ties between the two nations, underscoring the significant strides in trade and commerce, said a news release here.

The minister lauded the Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), initiated in June 2023, as a pivotal opportunity for Pakistan to amplify its trade volumes with the UK.

Terrorist Chakar Liaquat killed in Panjgur operation

RAWALPINDI (APP): The security forces on Thursday killed a terrorist and injured the other two during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted on the night of March 20 and 21 in District Panjgur.

During the conduct of operation, the Army troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and resultantly terrorist Chakar Liaquat was eliminated, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. Weapon and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorist, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities.

Pakistan reaffirms commitment to Iran-Pak gas pipeline project

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan has reaffirmed commitment to Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project.

Responding to the queries of the media persons regarding yesterday's US congressional hearing, the weekly news briefing in Islamabad Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said it is the sovereign decision of Pakistani government to move forward on the project. She made it clear that at this point there is no room for any discussion or waiver from any third party for the construction of the pipeline inside Pakistan's territory. She

said Pakistan has also conveyed to the US authorities the importance of this project for its energy security.

When asked about the concerns raised at the US congressional hearing over the alleged rigging in the general elections, the spokesperson said some statements made there reflected misunderstanding of Pakistan's domestic situation and electoral laws. She hoped to engage in meaningful discussion with the US to address these misunderstandings. She said Pakistan values its close relations with the US and believes in constructive engagement with it.

Mubashir Hassan appointed PIO

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Information Officer of Grade 20 Mubashir Hassan was appointed as Executive Director General/Principal Information Officer (BS 21) of the Press Information Department (PID).

The appointment was made in accordance with sub-section 10 of the Civil Servants Act, 1973, said a notification issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Thursday.

Mubashir Hassan is a senior officer of Informa-



tion Group who has held various important positions and also successfully completed National Security and War Course 2024 from National Defense University Islamabad recently.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi chairing a meeting on matters related to Federal Investigation Agency.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar exchanging views with Jiang Zaidong, Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China during meeting held in Islamabad.

Tarar for devising mechanism to counter fake news regarding CPEC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday emphasized the need to devise a mechanism at the government-to-government and media-to-media level to counter fake news regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Ataullah Tarar said this during a meeting with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, Jiang Zaidong who called on the minister here.

The Chinese Ambassador congratulated Attaullah Tarar on assuming the portfolio of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

The CPEC, Pakistan-China strategic relations, ongoing cooperation in the media and film sector, and China-Pakistan Information Corridor were discussed in the meeting.

Discussions were held regarding the expansion of cooperation between the two countries in the fields of media and the establishment of the Pakistan-China Information Corridor to prevent fake news about CPEC. Pakistan highly valued its relations with China, the minister added that both countries were bound by the eternal bond of friendship.

Ataullah Tarar said in 1998, his grandfather Muhammad Rafiq Tarar received the then Prime Minister of China on his visit to Pakistan as President.

"We have seen Pakistan-China friendship from generation to generation. We have to inform our new generation about our historical and strong friendship," he maintained. "We have to tell the new generation how China and Pakistan supported each other in difficult times," the minister said.

Tarar said that China had supported Pakistan at every international forum including Shanghai Cooperation Organization and United Nations.

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PTI terms Lu's statement on ciphergate as lie

ISLAMABAD (INP): Reacting to the US assistant secretary of state's testimony before a Congressional panel, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan has termed Donald Lu's statement on ciphergate a "lie", and demanded reopening inquiry into the controversy.

"I've held a detailed meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan today," Barrister Gohar said while speaking to journalists outside

Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail on Thursday.

The politico demands a "clarification statement" from former Pakistani ambassador to the US Muhammad Asad Majeed after Lu's testimony in which the latter, once again, rejected former prime minister Khan's allegations that the United States engineered his ouster from power by supporting the then opposition's no-confidence motion in April 2022.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Gwadar attack

Yesterday's audacious attack on Gwadar's Port Authority Complex is yet another reminder of the grim trajectory of militancy in the country. Within days of a major terrorist attack in North Waziristan, militants targeted a facility which houses government offices, including those of the security agencies.

The Majeed Brigade, affiliated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army, claimed responsibility. At least eight terrorists were killed by security forces, while two soldiers were martyred. The ambush shows that far from being neutralised, separatist militants in Balochistan very much remain a threat to the province's security. This is not the first time Gwadar and its environs have been targeted by insurgents. Here, separatism and geopolitics combine in a lethal cocktail, as militants believed to have the support of hostile agencies target Chinese interests in what is supposed to be the jewel in the CPEC crown. The luxury PC hotel witnessed a similar attack in 2019, also carried out by the BLA, with the terrorist group saying it had targeted the facility as it was hosting "Chinese and other foreign investors". Even a Chinese-language institute inside Karachi University was hit in a deadly attack in 2022. Striking Gwadar has immense geopolitical significance, as such attacks are designed to scare away whatever investment and economic activities are being carried out in the coastal city.

A proper investigation must uncover how the attackers were able to strike such an official facility housing LEAs. Even otherwise, Gwadar is said to be under a security blanket, mainly to protect Chinese nationals and others associated with CPEC projects in Balochistan. In fact, several observers have pointed to the 'working relationship' between religiously inspired militant groups such as the TTP, and Baloch separatist outfits, including the BLA. This nexus needs to be broken immediately, or else it will compromise the security situation to a dangerous extent in KP and Balochistan, especially if both sets of militants are getting help from beyond our borders. After the Gwadar attack the Balochistan chief minister said that whoever uses violence "will see no mercy from the state". While that may be so, along with the security dimension, the sociopolitical and economic aspects of the insurgency must also be examined. This paper has long argued that poverty and deprivation in Balochistan need to be addressed if the issue of separatism is to be tackled successfully. Foreign investment is direly required but the fruits of these projects — whether CPEC-related, mining schemes, or others — must reach the people of Balochistan. Furthermore, issues such as enforced disappearances, and miserable health and education indicators cannot be ignored and must be given priority. Unless these contributory factors are addressed in earnest, eradicating separatism will be very difficult, and hostile foreign actors will continue to exploit our internal weaknesses.

A Rubik's Cube

F.S.Aijazuddin

If you can recall the Rubik's Cube, you are a child of the 1980s. Its inventor Ernő Rubik (a Hungarian professor of architecture) perfected his brainchild in 1979, intending it for use in his classroom. He explained its genesis: "Space always intrigued me, with its incredibly rich possibilities, space alteration [,] objects' transformation [and] movement in space and in time."

The public took a less lofty interest in his invention. It bought 350 million of them as a game, making it the world's most popular selling toy.

The Rubik's Cube is a ridiculously simple contraption — wooden (later plastic) tiles bored with holes, threaded with elastic bands to hold them together. Its novelty lay in aligning tiles of the same colour on each face of the cube. It has over three billion combinations with only one solution. The fastest anyone has been able to solve it is 3.13 seconds, a record held by Max Park who incidentally suffers from autism.

Had the Rubik's Cube been invented in Pakistan, it would have been designed differently. In our makeshift nation — its wooden faces held together by elastic bands — the aim would have been, not to align similarly coloured tiles, but to return to an originally haphazard configuration.

After months of jiggling by the less than dextrous chief election commissioner, our electoral toy has yielded the same pattern that we saw in August 2023. The PML-N-PPP duo is back in power in Islamabad, the provinces have reverted to their traditional loyalties, and the PTI sans its leader Imran Khan has coiled within itself, waiting to spring again. The country faces

the unappetising prospect of a second serving of a stale meal.

Drawing rooms are rife with speculation that a disappointed Nawaz Sharif will return to London, now that the IMF, the Chinese and the Saudi crown prince have anointed his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif. Having ensured that his daughter Maryam is installed as chief minister Punjab, he has stayed to see his sons Hussain and Hassan safely through the judicial carwash which may now restore them to the pink of wealth.

Maryam Nawaz is articulate, feisty, photogenic, and determined in time to occupy the PM's house in Islamabad. There is no reason why not. She is only 50 years old. Her uncle Shehbaz is 23 years older.

She may not like being compared to Benazir Bhutto, but the similarities between them are obvious. Like Benazir, she owes much to being her father's daughter. She too entered politics reluctantly and endured imprisonment for her father's sake. And she brings with her the baggage of a husband who, like a younger Mr Zardari, may succumb to temptation.

Benazir once wrote: "As children we had been taught that no price was too high to pay for our country. But the personal price to our family had been high." For the Bhuttos and the Sharifs, the price has been high: the rewards have been even higher.

Maryam Nawaz has the next five years (or so) to prove Benazir Bhutto's belief that "what is important is that a political party articulates the mood of a generation". Benazir was born in 1953; she belonged to the 1980s. Maryam Nawaz, born in 1973, belongs to the new millennia, to a different

age group of Pakistanis. They are in their mid-50s — mature, jaded, and cynical. They are tired of being fobbed off with unfulfilled promises.

Will she be able to lure and capture the votes of a younger generation of Pakistanis, 'the youth dividend', the ones who voted for someone behind bars in the last elections?

Her uncle Shehbaz Sharif, ensconced in the foothills of Islamabad, faces grander challenges. He needs to manipulate his Rubik's Cube there to yield another configuration. A loner by temperament, he has to borrow his elder brother's talents as a conciliator to bring some semblance of ragged unity within his government. Some inside it would prefer to watch him steer the ship of state alone through the perilous waters ahead, while they sit strapped secure in their life jackets. *Sauve qui peut.*

Some may ask why it has taken centuries for women to be elected leaders? The closet misogynist Winston Churchill maintained there was no need for women's suffrage: "Women are well represented by their fathers, brothers and husbands."

Interestingly, the first female elected leader came not from the democratic West but from the disorderly East — Sri Lanka. Following the assassination of PM Solomon Bandaranaike in 1959, his 'weeping widow' Sirimavo succeeded him. She, like Mrs Indira Gandhi and Mrs Margaret Thatcher later, served a number of terms as prime minister.

How did Mrs Bandaranaike manage her male-dominated cabinet? She explained: "Well, I appointed my own ministers." Maryam Nawaz may not be permitted that luxury. -- Courtesy Dawn

Save soil, save life

Nasira Habib

Soil is our lifeline. It sustains life with a variety of foods, holds and filters water to provide us with clean and safe potable water and maintains ecological balance by storing carbon. But Pakistan has played havoc with its soils. We refused to accept that soil is much more than just a combination of minerals in rock material in the form of sand, silt and clay. We started deep tillage and monocropping was preferred over biodiverse fields. Inorganic chemical fertilisers and pesticides replaced natural soil rejuvenating practices and water-intensive seed varieties were imposed on the farmers.

The result was massive destruction of the soil's microbial life, which nature deploys to help plants produce delicious and nutritious food. Bacteria and fungi decompose dead organic matter. Without these decomposers, dead materials will pile up, causing unimaginable pollution and making life impossible. They break down the organic waste and recycle it to process food for plants.

Another group of microbes has taken on the role of mining minerals from the rock material in the soil. They make the organic acids that break down crystalline structures of the rocks into sand, silt and clay.

There is yet another set of microbes that partner with certain plants, colonise their roots and fix nitrogen. These microbes thrive in favourable conditions and grow massively. Their huge populations attract their predators — protozoa, nematodes, and microarthropods that feast on the bacteria and fungi and keep their population under control. The predators'

intake contains more nutrients in their bodies than they need. They excrete the surplus nutrients. The excreted matter, referred to as 'predator poop', contains nutrients that plants need and are in a form that plants can uptake.

As we know, plants make food through photosynthesis and store 20 per cent to 85pc of that energy (depending on the category of plants) in their roots. However, the sugars produced through photosynthesis are not enough and don't fulfil their nutritional requirements. They also need a wide range of minerals to grow, maintain their health, and produce healthy, delicious, and nutrient-dense food. They offer 30pc to 40pc of the photosynthetic food stored in their roots to soil bacteria and fungi to attract them, which fulfils different food requirements of all species of beneficial bacteria and fungi. The microbes respond positively. They are lured to the plant roots and colonise them.

Predator poop contains soluble inorganic nutrients in plant available form. Plants take up the nutrients they require, get great returns on their investment, and grow happily and healthily. Some of these microbes in the soil travel to the above-ground parts of the plant and cover stems, leaves, flowers and fruits. Here too, the exchange between the plants and the microbes takes place. This is nature's way of nutrient cycling and providing nutrients to the plants.

There are no nutrients that are lacking in the soil. Nutrients are massively more than enough to grow plants. No plants depend on us to add inorganic chemicals to the soil. However,

deep tillage and massive use of agricultural chemicals have resulted in the loss of biodiversity and soil degradation, costing Pakistan's economy over Rs365 billion every year. We are facing gigantic challenges of salinity and sodicity, waterlogging, soil erosion, depletion of soil fertility, imbalance of nutrients, decline in productivity, droughts and desertification. Sixty-two million hectares of Pakistan's land, almost 80pc of the total area, is vulnerable to desertification.

We urgently need to respond to the crisis. The most cost-effective and sust-a-i-nable solution lies in following nature by bringing life back to the soil. Agroeco-lo-gy is an approach to agriculture that seeks to integrate ecological principles into farming systems, e m p h a s i s i n g biodiversity conservation, natural pest control, climate change mitigation and sustainability. Agroecological practices are low-cost, can ensure higher productivity, relieve farmers of the back-breaking costs of chemical agricultural inputs and enable them to build a soil structure with a sponge-like ability to hold water and prevent waterlogging or drought stress. This shift can lead to a sustainable economy and rescue our farmers from the spiral of debt, disease, pollution and food insecurity.

To reap the wide-ranging benefits of agroecology, we need a strong political will that heralds a fundamental policy shift, detailed planning and robust implementation to protect our soils and climate from corporate greed. We must remember nature doesn't need us, we depend on it for our survival. -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

Pakistan, ADB discuss collaboration to foster economic growth

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Young Ye, here Thursday called on Minister for Finance & Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb to discuss ongoing collaborations and future initiatives aimed at fostering economic development in Pakistan.

Ye reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening their partnership, with a shared goal of promoting sustainable economic growth and development in the country, said a press statement issued by

finance ministry. Furthermore, the status of ongoing policy-based programs, including the Public Private Partnership (PPP) Program and the Climate and Disaster Resilience Enhancement Program (CDREP) were also discussed.

Ye, congratulated Minister for Finance and Revenue on staff level agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and stated that the market has positively responded to the development.

During the meeting,

Minister Aurangzeb expressed appreciation for the support provided by ADB over the years.

He particularly highlighted ADB's assistance through Policy Based Lending (PBL) to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and floods.

Acknowledging ADB's pivotal role in promoting climate-conscious programs across Asia and the Pacific, the Minister emphasized the alignment of ADB's climate operations with Pakistan's own climate goals and commitments.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb calls on by Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Young Ye.

Ambassador vows to expand Pak-Czech diverse cooperation including trade, tourism

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan in Czech Republic Ayesha Ali on Thursday expressed her commitment to enhancing bilateral relations with the land-locked Central European country, focusing on political, trade, economic, cultural, and people-to-people interactions.

The ambassador, in an interview with 'Czech & Slovak Leaders' magazine, said the strong economic and trade relationship between the

two countries continued to grow. "Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world, with a large middle class. Pakistan also has one of the best foreign direct investment regimes in the world, and offers opportunities for investment in all possible sectors, including automotive, machines & tools, mining, agriculture, and IT & energy," she said.

Ayesha Ali said as these are also strong performing sectors of the Czech economy, the

collaboration possibilities are immense. She said, "We welcome Czech investment, and want to expand our bilateral trade ties beyond the traditional and into new areas for mutual benefit." She told the interviewer that the platform of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) of Pakistan was very important, and that the embassy had been sensitizing the Czech counterparts regarding opportunities offered by the SIFC.

C&W, Energy and Power to ensure full compliance with sales tax on services

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PESHAWAR: Secretaries of Communication and Works Department and Energy and Power Department announced to ensure strict compliance with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sales Tax on Services on Thursday.

The announcements came during separate meetings of the Director General KPRA and her team with the officials of both departments. The meetings were held at the committee rooms of C&W and Energy and Power under the chairmanship of the departments' respective secretaries.

DG KPRA Miss Fouzia Iqbal gave detailed briefings about the KPRA and its mandate along with

giving a short history of the sales tax on services in the province and explaining the agenda points at both the meetings.

The DG Informed the Secretary C&W Mr. Idrees Khan Marwat and the officials of the department present in the meeting that the exemption to FATA and PATA in the government-funded ADP and PSDP Schemes seized to exist after July 2021, however, it is still given which is wrong and shall be stopped immediately.

She informed the participants that due to misclassification of sales tax on goods and sales tax on services, the tax of KPRA is going to FBR that needs to be stopped.

Jazz invests Rs. 37b to support growing data demand, strengthen digital ecosystem

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite a challenging macroeconomic environment, Jazz, Pakistan's leading digital operator, invested Rs. 37 billion in 2023, aimed at supporting Pakistan's growing data demand and strengthening the digital ecosystem in key areas including fintech, cloud services, and data analytics, bringing its overall investment in

Pakistan to \$10.6 billion.

The digital operator witnessed a remarkable 20 percent year-on-year (YoY) growth in revenues in the local currency; however, Jazz's revenue declined by 12.9 percent in USD terms during the financial year 2023 primarily due to the devaluation of the Pakistani Rupee (PKR).

Rupee gains 01 paisa against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Rupee on Thursday gained 01 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.39 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.40.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.3 and Rs281.05, respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.83 to close.

Over 4.535 mln tons wheat available for local consumption

ISLAMABAD (APP): The wheat stocks of the country by the middle of the current month (March) 2024 were recorded at over 4.535 million metric tons, which is sufficient to tackle the local dietary needs.

Besides these reserves were enough for keeping the strategic stocks as well as maintaining supply and demand at the smooth level in local markets till the arrival of new crops as well as to ensure the price stabilization of the commodity, said Intiaz

Ahmad Gopang Food Security Commissioner of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. Talking to APP here on Thursday, he said that out of the total stocks, the carry forward of the grains was recorded at 1.610 million metric tons, whereas the government had procured about 5.998 million metric tons during last year's wheat procurement drive.

Meanwhile, the wheat reserves in Punjab province comprised over 2.405 million tons.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Four ships namely, Maersk Kinloss, Maersk Cabo Verde, Trans Spring and Gaschem Leda, carrying Container, Steel coil and Chemicals, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal and Engro Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile four more ships, Solar Roma, Sky Runner, PGC Patreas and Southern Anoa carrying Palm oil, LPG and Chemicals also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim during last 24 hours.



SIALKOT: Chairman Air Sial Fazal Jilani is addressing the charity iftar dinner of Anjuman Mughalia.

Ethiopian Airlines getting overwhelming response in Pakistan: Envoy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ethiopian Ambassador to Pakistan Jemal Beker Abdula on Thursday visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), and had a detailed discussion with its leadership on strengthening cooperation between trade bodies of the two countries.

Upon his arrival at the ICCI, the ambassador was accorded warm welcome by the Islamabad Chamber's President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari

and other office bearers of the chamber.

Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest including the needful initiatives for fostering business and trade connections between the two countries.

On the occasion, the Ambassador highlighted the critical role being played by Ethiopia in "Look Africa and Engage Africa" policy by starting the Ethiopian Airlines operations in Karachi.



LAHORE: Clara Strandhøj, Head of Lahore Office - British High Commission meeting with Provincial Minister for Industries and Commerce Chaudhary Shafay Hussain.

AJK PM affirms commitment to enhance education standards

MIRPUR (APP): Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq of Azad Jammu and Kashmir reiterates his government's unwavering dedication to prioritizing the delivery of quality education, particularly in the field of medicine, during an important meeting at Jammu Kashmir House.

Addressing the critical issue of faculty shortages, he assured swift and decisive actions to address this pressing concern. Highlighting the pivotal role of medical graduates in shaping the nation's future, PM Anwar underscored the government's commitment to providing essential resources to ensure top-notch education for aspiring medical professionals.

The meeting, graced by government ministers and key officials, approved substantial budgets for multiple medical colleges, including Muzaffarabad, Rawakot, and Mirpur, with a focus on addressing faculty shortages and other pertinent challenges.

Moreover, the green light was given for the recruitment of new professors and assistant professors, signaling a proactive approach to bolstering the academic faculty in these institutions.

With these decisive measures and unwavering commitment to educational excellence, the prime minister's administration sets a strong precedent for the advancement of education, particularly in the vital field of medicine, in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.



KARACHI: People break their fast during Iftar arranged by NGO during holy month of Ramazan at Press Club Chowrangi.

5 die in 1,103 road accidents in Punjab

Independent Report
LAHORE: At least five persons were killed and 1,103 others injured in 1,103 road accidents in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

As many as 529 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 633 with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by the rescue medical teams.

Data the analysis showed that 607 drivers, 44 underage drivers, 186 pedestrians, and 374 passengers were among the victims of road crashes. The statistics show that 251 accidents were reported in Lahore, which affected 277 people, placing the provincial capital at top of the list, followed by Faisalabad with 88 accidents and 99 victims, and at third Gujranwala with 70 accidents and 64 victims.

According to the data, 990 motorbikes, 49 auto-rickshaws, 105 motorcars, 22 vans, five passenger buses, 17 trucks and 97 other types.

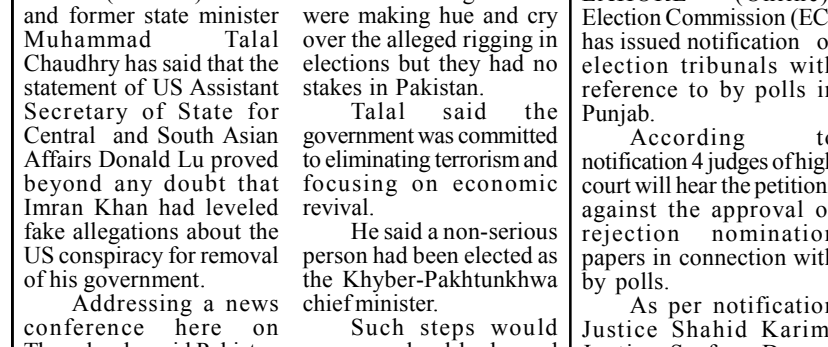
KP Govt initiates work based training scheme for technical education

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has embarked on a significant initiative to align technical and vocational education with global standards and to harness the province's skilled workforce through abundant opportunities both within and outside the country.

Under this endeavor, a special scheme of work-based training in industries and technical fields is being introduced for students enrolled in government technical training institutions.

The model of training under this project will include theoretical learning during various programs in technical colleges and vocational institutions across the province, followed by mandatory practical work in relevant fields.

Similarly, graduating students and skilled individuals will be provided with reasonable stipends during practical training.



GILGIT: Deputy Speaker Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly Sadia Danish in a meeting with the Director Banazir Incom Support Programme.

Donald Lu has rejected Imran's allegations: Talal

FAISALABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader and former state minister Muhammad Talal Chaudhry has said that the statement of US Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South Asian Affairs Donald Lu proved beyond any doubt that Imran Khan had leveled fake allegations about the US conspiracy for removal of his government.

Addressing a news conference here on Thursday, he said Pakistan had to face embarrassment in international community because of irresponsible attitude of the PTI founder. He said anti-Pakistan elements sitting abroad were making hue and cry over the alleged rigging in elections but they had no stakes in Pakistan.

Talal said the government was committed to eliminating terrorism and focusing on economic revival. He said a non-serious person had been elected as the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa chief minister. Such steps would cause a backlash and perpetrators would have to face its consequences, he added.

Newly posted SSP Larkana holds meeting with police officials

LARKANA (APP): Newly posted Senior Superintendent (SSP) Larkana Mir Rohal Khan Khoso has taken over in charge of the office and held meeting with all the Police officers/officials of the district.

SSP office, on Thursday, issued directives to ensure the peace and law and order in Larkana adding that any lenience and slackness in duties will be dealt with stern legal action.

SSP Larkana further said that it is prime responsibility of Police to protect the lives and properties of public, all resources will be utilized to wipe out social evils and other crimes in the District so that Larkana be counted among crime free district, he added.

Senators urge 'bold' US push on Palestinian state

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: More than a third of the US Senate's Democrats called on President Joe Biden's administration on Wednesday to take "bold" action towards establishing a Palestinian state, in the latest pushback against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The letter to Biden comes days after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the country's highest-ranking Jewish elected leader and long-time advocate for Israel, sent shock waves with a speech

criticising Netanyahu's conduct of the Gaza war and urging new Israeli elections. Nineteen Democratic senators led by Tom Carper, a longtime ally of Biden from his home state of Delaware, in the letter said that the Middle East crisis had "reached an inflection point" that required US leadership beyond past "facilitation" of Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Russia launches largest missile attack on Kyiv in weeks

Monitoring Desk
KYIV: Russia staged its largest missile attack in weeks on Kyiv and the surrounding region on Thursday, injuring at least 17 people and damaging schools, residential buildings and industrial facilities, officials said.

The air force said its defences shot down all the inbound missiles that were fired after a 44-day pause in such attacks on the Ukrainian capital. The damage appeared to have

been caused by falling debris. "Every day and every night there is such terror. The world's unity can stop it when it helps us with air defence systems. Now we need this defence here in Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app.

US unveils draft UN resolution seeking immediate Gaza ceasefire

Monitoring Desk
JEDDAH (INP): The United States has circulated a draft UN Security Council resolution calling for an "immediate ceasefire linked to the release of hostages" in the Gaza Strip, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

The diplomat made his announcement whilst on a tour of the Middle East that will include a stop in Israel. Key Israel backer the United States has vetoed previous UN Security Council votes on the nearly six-month war.

City and regional officials said at least 13 people were injured in different parts of Kyiv and four more in the surrounding region.

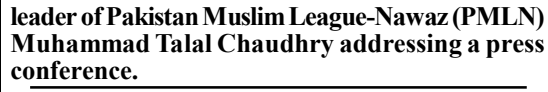
KP Govt to launch work place-based technical training project: SACM

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is mulling over bringing technical and vocational training in the province at international standard and launching a scheme of work place-based training to the under-training students in industrial and technical sectors to utilize the skilled manpower in domestic and foreign markets.

The model of this training project instead of teaching theory will consist of practical in technical and vocational institutions while the graduated students and skilled workers under the project will also be given a reasonable stipend during their practical training.

In this regard, a meeting regarding Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority was held under the chairmanship of Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Technical Education and Industries and Commerce, Abdul Karim Tordhirs here on Thursday.

Besides, the Managing Director (MD) TEVTA Aamir Afaq and Director Finance Munir Gul, other officials also attended the meeting. The Special Assistant was briefed regarding the basic outline of the plan of the said proposed project and given details regarding its usefulness and importance.



FAISALABAD: Former State Minister and central leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) Muhammad Talal Chaudhry addressing a press conference.

Punjab Ombudsman facilitates disbursement of pending grants

BAHAWALNAGAR (APP): Under the directives of Provincial Ombudsman Punjab Major Azam Sulaiman Khan, 36 petitioners have received long-overdue grants totaling 7.2 mln, while 38 deserving students from Lahore were granted educational scholarships amounting to over Rs 1.6 mln.

Notably, these initiatives address the concerns of applicants who had been tirelessly pursuing their entitlements, reflecting the Ombudsman's commitment to expeditiously resolve such matters.

The proactive intervention led to the disbursement of marriage grants, death grants, and farewell grants to 36 applicants, bringing long-awaited financial support to these individuals. This concerted effort involved various provincial departments, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to addressing the welfare needs of citizens.

International News

Suicide bombing in Afghanistan's Kandahar city kills 21

Monitoring Desk
KANDAHAR: A suicide bombing killed at least 21 people and wounded several others on Thursday in the Afghan city of Kandahar, a provincial official said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, and while multiple explosions have been reported around the country since the start of the holy month of Ramazan on March 11, few have been confirmed by Taliban officials.

Afghanistan's capital is Kabul but Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada lives in Kandahar city, for decades the stronghold of the Taliban movement.

A British media outlet reported nearly two dozen people were killed citing a doctor at the regional hospital; however, the government said that three people had died, while numerous others were wounded.

The explosion at around 8:00 am (0330 GMT) targeted a group of people waiting outside the New Kabul Bank branch in central Kandahar city.

"Commonly our compatriots gather there to collect their salaries," Samangani said, adding that the "victims were civilians". Taliban authorities had surrounded the area outside the bank and did not let journalists close to the site.

UK and Australia sign new defence pact

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: The United Kingdom and Australia inked a new defence agreement in Canberra on Thursday, as they try to boost a fledgling nuclear-powered submarine programme with the United States.

UK defence minister Grant Shapps signed the agreement in Canberra with his counterpart Richard Marles, establishing a legal framework that makes it easier to host troops and share military intelligence.

The agreement stops short of a full mutual defence pact, which would bind one side to intervene if the other was attacked.

But it does include a "commitment to consult" about emerging threats and establishes a "status of forces agreement", which makes it easier to host soldiers from the other nation.

"It is extraordinary, actually, the United Kingdom and Australia didn't already have a defence co-operation treaty in place," Shapps said after the signing ceremony.

Alongside the United States, Australia and the UK are members of the fledgling AUKUS defence alliance — a landmark pact aimed at curbing Chinese military expansion in the Asia-Pacific. Barely two years old, there are already signs the AUKUS programme is under threat — and some fear Donald Trump could scrap it completely if he returns to power next year.

Saudi Arabia donates \$40 million to UNRWA

Monitoring Desk
RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced on Wednesday it will donate \$40 million to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which has faced massive funding cuts and calls for its abolition spearheaded by Israel.

although the United Nations has said that Israel has not provided it with any evidence for the allegations. The UN has launched both an internal and an independent investigation into the claims.

"It is crucial to address the desperate needs of the people in Gaza," said KRelief chief Abdullah al-Rabeah. UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini said the donation "reflects the solidarity that the kingdom has always shown Palestinians".

UNRWA employs around 30,000 people in the occupied Palestinian territories — including 13,000 in Gaza — as well as neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Lazzarini, a veteran of UN and other humanitarian missions, said last month that he believed Israel's aim was "destroying UNRWA", long at the forefront of relief efforts and education in Gaza.

Multiple countries have suspended their aid, and the UN has called for a ceasefire in Gaza.



An Afghan security personnel checks a vehicle near the site of a suicide bomb attack in Kandahar.

Irish PM resigns, says he isn't 'best person' to lead nation

Monitoring Desk
DUBLIN: Leo Varadkar on Wednesday announced that he was stepping down as Ireland's prime minister and leader of the Fine Gael party in the governing coalition, citing "personal and political" reasons.

Pundits called the surprise move, just 10 weeks before Ireland holds European Parliament and local elections, a "political earthquake". A general election also has to be held within a year.

Deputy Prime Minister Micheal Martin, leader of Fianna Fail, the main coalition partner, said Varadkar's announcement was "unexpected" but added that he expected the government to run its full term.

An emotional Varadkar, who is in his second stint as prime minister and at 45 remains one of Europe's youngest leaders, said he felt he was no longer the "best person" to lead the country.

"Politicians are human beings. We have our limitations," he said in a statement on the steps of Government Buildings in Dublin, surrounded by his Fine Gael cabinet colleagues.

Xuan, 54, became vice president in 2021 and she will be serving as acting president for the second time, the Tuoi Tre daily reported.

On Wednesday, President Vo Van Thuong resigned due to unspecified violations that hurt the perception and reputation of the party and the state.

Analysts said a permanent candidate was unlikely to be selected soon, underscoring the growing concerns among foreign investors about political instability in the Southeast Asian nation that is a growing manufacturing hub and sits at the middle of the U.S.-China competition for global influence.

Pakistan, Turkiye agree to increase bilateral trade to \$5billion

BRUSSELS (APP): Pakistan and Turkiye have reaffirmed the resolve to utilize the optimum potential of their bilateral trade and increase it to five billion dollars.

The commitment was expressed during meeting between Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his Turkish counterpart Fidan Hakan on the margins of Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels today.

The two sides also vowed to further enhance cooperation in defence, strategic and civil aviation sectors.

Ishaq Dar reiterated

Pakistan's readiness to share experience and expertise in nuclear energy and applications.

He appreciated Turkiye's principled stance on Kashmir dispute and its unflinching support for the oppressed people of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Deliberating upon the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the two foreign ministers also reaffirmed unflinching support to the people of Palestine. Ishaq Dar extended invitation to his Turkish counterpart to visit Pakistan which he gladly accepted.

The Turkish Foreign Minister conveyed felicitations on behalf of the President of Turkiye to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on successful elections.

He highlighted that the two countries have immense potential given their strategic and geographic locations and underlined the importance of synchronizing their actions and policies for cooperation at global and regional level.

The two Foreign Ministers noted with satisfaction the upwards trajectory of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Turkiye.



ISLAMABAD: Karakoram-8 (K-8) aircrafts of PAF perform aerobatic manoeuvres during a rehearsal ahead of the Pakistan Day parade, in Federal Capital.

PM calls upon nation to become part of government's Green Pakistan initiative

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday called upon the provincial governments, civil society and all the citizens to become partners of the government's quest for Green Pakistan.

"Today is about investing in our future. I urge the nation to synergize their efforts in safeguarding this invaluable resource and ensure its effective stewardship for our next generation," he said in a message on observance of International Day of Forests 2024.

He said Pakistan joined the global community in commemorating the International Day of Forests 2024. "This year's theme 'Forests and Innovations: New solutions for a better world,' highlights the need

to harness technological innovations to address the growing threats to our forests."

The prime minister pointed out innovations could help sustainably restoring, protecting, managing, and using the forests in the most efficient manner by hampering risks of deforestation, habitat degradation, and climate change.

He said Pakistan's total area under forest cover was less than 5 percent, and around 1.5 percent of these forests were lost every year which had profound impacts on Pakistan's biodiversity, environment and agriculture.

Being one of the most climate-impacted countries in the world, he said climate change events were becoming more frequent and mas-

sively devastating for Pakistan, pointing to the urgent need to conserve our indigenous forests. "This has become critical to our survival as a nation."

"Our government is embarking on the next phase of our ambitious Green Pakistan Initiative which was first launched by PMLN-led government in 2016 to improve forest cover and concerted efforts were made for conservation of biodiversity in Pakistan," he said adding in its next phase, the Green Pakistan Initiative aims to improve the forest cover, preserve wildlife habitats and help carbon sequestration.

"Given the important role that forests play in the environment, let us resolve to protect and conserve them."



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Health Khawaja Suleman Rafique being briefed about master plan of Services Hospital revamping project.

Salman inspects Services Hospital's revamp project

Independent Report LAHORE: Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique has assured that patients visiting Services Hospital will not encounter any inconveniences during the ongoing revamping process.

During his visit to the hospital on Thursday to oversee the project, Minister Rafique emphasized the timely completion of the renovation work, urging contractors to adhere strictly to deadlines. He underscored the importance of enhancing patient convenience post-revamp and pledged zero

tolerance for any lapses in the project's execution. The revamping, conducted in two shifts, is under close scrutiny to ensure steady progress. Minister Rafique toured various sections of the hospital, including the admin block, surgical ward, and private rooms, to gauge the project's advancement. Earlier briefings by contractors and IDP officers provided insights into the ongoing renovations. The minister's visit was attended by officials including Additional Secretary Development Department of Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Agha Nabil.

Search and combing operation conducted in Bani Gala Police Station jurisdiction

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police Counter Terrorism Department (CTD)

Akbar Nasir Khan, the search and combing operations are being conducted in different areas of the city,



conducted a search and combing operation at Bani Gala police station jurisdiction, a public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directives of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr.

to ensure the safety and security of the Islamabad citizens.

Following these orders, a search and combing operation was conducted in different areas of Bani Gala police station by CTD and local police teams.

Water supply reference: Zardari seeks presidential immunity

ISLAMABAD (Online): President Asif Ali Zardari has sought presidential immunity in Thatta Water Supply Reference in Accountability Court (AC) Islamabad.

A petition seeking presidential immunity has been filed by President Asif Ali Zardari.

Judge Nasir Javed Rana of AC Islamabad heard the case Thursday. Arshid Tabrez counsel for President Asif Ali Zardari appeared in the court.

Counsel Arshid Tabrez took the plea that Asif Ali Zardari enjoys presidential immunity. The proceedings of the case against Asif Ali Zardari cannot be moved ahead.

The court while issuing notice to NAB adjourned the hearing of the case till April 22.

The other accused are former secretary Ijaz Ahmad Khan, Ali Akbar, Ijaz Memon, Ali Akbar Abro, Khawaja Abdul Ghani Majid, Manahat Majid, Abdul Nadim Bhutto and others.

WAPDA Chairman affirms crucial role in national development

MIRPUR (APP): In a message commemorating World Water Day, Chairman WAPDA Engr. Lt Gen (ret) Sajjad Ghani underscores the pivotal role of water resources in sustaining life and fostering human development. Emphasizing the significance of effectively harnessing Pakistan's abundant water resources, he highlights WAPDA's unwavering commitment to the nation's water, food, and energy security.

Chairman Ghani proudly announces WAPDA's implementation of the largest development portfolio, featuring eight transformative mega projects. These ambitious endeavors, including the Diamer Basha Dam, Mohmand Dam, Dasu Hydropower Project, and others, are poised to revolutionize Pakistan's economic landscape, providing essential water resources



BRUSSELS: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye Hakan Fidan on the sidelines of Nuclear Energy Summit 2024 in Brussels.

Largest tree planting campaign in history of Punjab launched

Over 1.5 million trees have been planted, including along highways, riversides, forests, and other areas; During the spring season, 18 million plants will be planted at 60,000 sites in Punjab; Senior Minister Foest Wild Life Maryam Aurangzeb

Independent Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has initiated the groundbreaking program "Plant for Pakistan" to make Punjab green. Under her directives, a crucial meeting on afforestation was chaired by Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb.

In this meeting, Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb announced the commencement of the largest tree planting campaign in the province's history, coinciding with World Forest Day 2024.

Over 1.5 million trees have been planted along highways, riversides, forests, and other areas. She

appealed to the public to participate in the "Plant for Pakistan" initiative, emphasizing that tree planting is a Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and urged schools, religious, and political organizations to actively participate. Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb emphasized the importance of combatting the smog, air pollution, and creating a healthier environment, urging every citizen, household, district, and institution to play a role.

She encouraged media, civil society, and environmental organizations to join the campaign. The Department of Forests and PHA

has set up stalls across the province offering free plants, and schools, colleges, and universities are encouraged to participate. Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb announced the plantation of thousands of trees at Jallo Forest Park Lahore today, with various departments and organizations actively participating in the campaign. During the spring season, 18 million plants will be planted at 60,000 sites in Punjab.

She announced the launch of the "Plant for Pakistan" app and emphasized the importance of maintaining the survival and sustainability of planted trees.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Information Uzza Bukhari offering Dua after inaugurating tree planting campaign by planting a tree at Al-Hamra Arts Council.

Azma Bukhari says: Trees vital for ensuring healthy environment

Independent Report

LAHORE: Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari has said that water is important for humans in the same way trees are important for ensuring healthy environment.

According to a press release issued here on Thursday, she said that it is a responsibility of every citizen to plant one sapling today to mark World Forest Day in an appropriate way. She said that tree plantation

campaign has been started across the province as per the direction of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

She further said that planting one sapling today would yield positive results in future for coming generations.

Azma Bukhari said, "Air Quality Index of Lahore has already increased to alarming level and planting saplings is the only cheapest way to deal with environmental pollution."

CCPO Lahore holds review meeting on Women and children related crimes

Independent Report

LAHORE: The Capital City Police Officer Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana presided over a review meeting at his office regarding cases related to crimes against women and children, here Thursday.

The CCPO strongly criticized the inefficiency of the Incharges Special Sexual Offences Investigation Unit (SSIOU). He issued directives to expedite the pending investigation cases and instructed supervisory officers to monitor the investigations personally.

Bilal Siddique Kamyana instructed to take immediate action against incidents of violence, harassment, acid attacks, abduction, and rape against women, emphasizing that delays in police action against violence and harassment incidents on children and women will not be tolerated. The CCPO reiterated the determination to impose strict punishments on individuals involved in incidents of violence and harassment against women and children. He emphasized Lahore Police's commitment to the protection of students, working women, and domestic women.

WMFP stands in solidarity with journalists in Gaza

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: Thirteen women journalists have been killed while covering the war in Gaza since October 7, 2023. The media fraternity has been horrified by the high toll in Gaza - more than 95 have been killed.

IFJ's Women Media Forum, Pakistan (WMFP) strongly condemns the killings of their colleagues in Gaza. WMFP stands in solidarity with the courageous journalists and media workers who continue to do their work despite threats to their lives. WMFP salutes their colleagues for continuing to do the right thing by Gaza and reporting facts. Such attacks on media while covering a conflict zone make it difficult for the facts to

come out but the media in Gaza has proved itself and protected media freedom and freedom of speech in the region literally in the face of death.

WMFP said in its statement, "Journalists and media personnel are generally vulnerable in peace but the threat increasing magnificently in a conflict zone. It takes immense courage and a sense of duty to continue to work in a conflict zone like Gaza."

The world has seen these brave people continue to work in active conflict zones despite losing colleagues and sustaining personal losses. WMFP stands in solidarity with the women and men of the media who continue to report facts from Gaza at the cost of their lives."

Roundtable with Blome discusses Pak-US relations in regional, global context

ISLAMABAD (INP): A Roundtable with Ambassador of the United States of America to Pakistan, Donald Blome on "Pakistan-U.S. Relations in the Context of Regional and Global Developments" was hosted by the Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) here Thursday.

Former Ambassadors and diplomats, heads of think tanks, academics, practitioners, and area experts participated in the roundtable, said a news release.

Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood in his welcome remarks recalled the past patterns of the relationship and dilated on its current dynamics. He noted that the Pakistan-U.S. relationship has been largely influenced by external circumstances, encompassing regional and global developments. The thrust of bilateral cooperation has now shifted from security to a wider range of areas, reflecting changing priorities. While counter-terrorism re-

mains important, the greater focus now includes trade, investment, energy, IT, environment, education, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. This aligns with Pakistan's pivot towards geo-economics and comprehensive human security.

The DG ISSI emphasized the importance of revitalizing the relationship, with due imagination and ambition about the future prospects.

In his remarks, Ambassador Blome highlighted the importance of establishing robust ties to strengthen the relationship even further. He emphasized that economic development is the cornerstone of Pakistan-US relations with a renewed focus on groundwork to bolster ties and collaborate effectively towards fostering enhanced peace, prosperity, and regional stability. Following the talk, the participants engaged in an interactive discussion that focused on a range of subjects - including the situation in Afghanistan; peace, security and strategic stability.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Narcotics Control and Chairperson Pakistan Cricket Board Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

PM, Interior Minister discuss matters related to security, PCB

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday held meeting with Federal Minister for Interior, Anti-Narcotics and Chairperson Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi.

During the meeting, they discussed matters related to ministries of Interior, Anti-Narcotics, national security and Pakistan Cricket Board.

The minister informed the prime minister about the task given to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for stopping theft of electricity in the country.

He also briefed the prime minister about the proposed reforms and restructuring plan of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and National Counter Terrorism Authority.

The PM said strict action should be taken against the power thieves and no leniency should be shown to them.

They also discussed the overall political situation in the country.



ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Police Personnel stand alert on the entrance of Hiking Trail 5 as the Trails 2,3,4,5,6 and 7 have been closed for the public from 19th March to 23rd March from 5AM to 5PM due to Parade preparations.

ICP ensuring foolproof security arrangements at High Security Zone

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police is using all available resources to ensure the peace and tranquility within the federal capital, a public relations officer said.

He said that the Islamabad Capital Police ensured data registration, identification documents and effective search of citizens entering the high security zone on a regular basis.

During the last week, the Islamabad Capital Police removed tinted glasses and improper number plates from 1468 vehicles, impounded 121 vehicles without documentation.

Strict directions have been issued to police officers and officials performing their duties at high security zone checkpoints to exercise their duty with full responsibility. The protection of important public and private property and embassies located in the high security zone is of paramount importance.

The police officials were further directed to ensure the data entry of all citizens entering the high security zone.



ISLAMABAD: Faizabad bus stands are deserted owing to Pakistan Day parade rehearsal, passengers suffering in the Federal Capital.