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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shabbaz Sharif meeting with Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Qazi Faez Issa at Supreme Court of Pakistan

Executive meddling in judicial affairs won't be tolerated, CJP tells PM

Under no circumstances can independence of judiciary be allowed to be compromised, says Isa; Prime Minister commits to upholding judiciary's independence; Pledges his full support for the initiative, vowing to convene a meeting of the federal cabinet to seek approval for the commission's formation

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): In a resolute stand against encroachments on judicial independence, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on Thursday reaffirmed the sanctity of the judiciary, declaring that under no circumstances would the autonomy of judges be compromised.

His remarks came during a crucial meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Supreme Court earlier today, attended by Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar and Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan.

The meeting, convened in the wake of startling revelations by six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) regarding alleged interference by intelligence agencies in judicial proceedings, marked a pivotal mo-

ment in the ongoing saga surrounding judicial integrity.

Just days ago, the aforementioned judges penned an open letter, detailing coercive tactics employed by intelligence agencies to influence court proceedings.

Responding swiftly to the gravity of the situation, CJP Qazi Faez Isa called for a series of high-level consultations, culminating in today's meeting with the prime minister. A subsequent press release from the apex court outlined the meticulous deliberations undertaken in response to the IHC judges' letter.

During the meeting, CJP Isa emphasised the pivotal role of an independent judiciary in upholding the rule of law and fortifying democracy. He unequivocally stated that any

executive interference in the affairs and workings of judges would not be tolerated, highlighting the indispensable nature of judicial autonomy. In a significant development, a proposal was tabled to constitute an inquiry commission under the Pakistan Commissions of Inquiry Act, 2017, to delve into the allegations of interference.

The commission, to be headed by a retired Judge of unblemished integrity, aims to unravel the complexities surrounding the issue and safeguard judicial independence.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, in response, pledged his full support for the initiative, vowing to convene a meeting of the federal cabinet to seek approval for the commission's formation.

He echoed the sentiments expressed by CJP Isa, affirming his commitment to upholding an independent judiciary and undertaking necessary measures to safeguard its autonomy.

Following the meeting, CJP Isa reconvened a full court meeting to apprise the judges of the developments. The swift and decisive actions taken by the judiciary and the executive have underscored the seriousness with which the issue of judicial independence is being addressed.

In the aftermath of the revelations, bar associations across the country rallied behind the judges, sounding the alarm over the perceived threat to judicial independence. The collective response reflects a unified front in defence of the judiciary's autonomy

amidst a charged political climate, where recent court rulings have come under intense scrutiny.

APP adds: Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa on Thursday said that freedom and independence of the judiciary wouldn't be allowed to be compromised under any circumstances. The Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) received a letter dated 25 March, 2024 from six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), on 26 March, 2024, said a press release issued by the top court.

Considering the gravity of the allegations levelled in the said letter, the CJP called a meeting on the same day with the Chief Justice and all the Judges of the Islamabad High Court after Ifar at 8:00 pm at the Chief Justice's residence, it added.

President for further boosting bilateral cooperation with UK

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK) enjoy cordial relations, rooted in history and shared legacy, which have been reinforced by high-level interactions and people-to-people contacts over the years. He stressed the need to further strengthen trade and economic ties for the mutual benefit of the two friendly countries.

The president expressed these views while talking to the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Both sides exchanged views on

matters of bilateral importance.

During the meeting, the president expressed his warm sentiments for His Majesty King Charles III and the Princess of Wales, Catherine Middleton and wished them good health. He also mentioned that the people of Pakistan held His Majesty the King in high esteem. Talking about the economic situation of the country, the president stated that the stabilization of the economy was the priority with a key focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation.

The president highlighted that climate change

posed a serious challenge to Pakistan as it was among the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

He informed the High Commissioner that Sindh had mangrove forests, covering an area of 600,000 hectares, which supported the coastal ecosystem, besides contributing to environmental sustainability. He said that Pakistan had huge potential for solar and wind energy and their proper utilization could help the country meet its energy requirements. Jane Marriott felicitated President Asif Ali Zardari on assuming the office of the President of Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: The British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms Jane Marriott, calls on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

NEPRA okays Rs2.75 tariff hike for three months

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) approved an increase of Rs2.75 in the electricity tariff applicable from April across the country under fuel price adjustment (FCA).

The power regulatory body forwarded its decision to the federal government for notifying the hike in the power tariff. After the notification, the new tariff would be in effect for the upcoming three months, imposing a significant burden on consumers amounting to Rs85.2 billion.

The decision was made with NEPRA's approval of the fiscal year 2023-24 second-quarter adjustment. Distribution Companies (Discos) requested a higher increase of Rs4.43 per unit; however, NEPRA decided to go with the Rs2.75 hike.

Interior Minister, CM KP vow to eliminate terrorism

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur here on Thursday vowed to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and expedite intelligence-based operations further.

Both the leaders expressed deep condolences on the killing of the Chinese national at the Besham suicide blast.

The Interior Minister arrived at the Chief Minister House where he was welcomed by the KP CM and exchanged views on the security situation in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa.

They expressed complete solidarity with families of victims of Chinese nationals, people, Govt of China and expressed the resolve to bring the facilitators behind the attack to justice.

Mohsin Naqvi said that culprits could not escape from the clutches of law.

The minister directed effective coordination to counter the menace of terrorism and that through such nefarious acts, the courage of the Pakistani nation could not be shaken.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur.

Gov't to form independent inquiry commission on IHC judges' letter: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on Thursday said that the federal government has decided to place the IHC judges' letter before cabinet meeting tomorrow for formation of an independent inquiry commission into the matter.

He said that the commission would be headed by a reputable retired judge and its terms of references (TORs) would be finalized after the consultation with attorney general of Pakistan.

He was addressing a press conference here in Islamabad along with Attorney General of Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan.

Azam Nazeer Tarar said that the letter has been trending in the media and social media. Now, it is the duty of the government that this matter should be investigated, he said, adding that the Prime Minister would place this matter in the cabinet meeting tomorrow.

The minister said that

the Prime Minister had said that he would go to meet the Chief Justice despite all of his busy schedule.

The meeting between the Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lasted for one and a half hours, he said, adding that the most senior judge Justice Mansoor Ali Shah was also present in the meeting. The issues pertaining to the important national issues including economic and judges' letter were also came under discussion, he said.

Tarar said that we leave it to the judiciary to decide whether the judges' letter is misconduct or not. He said that the TORs of the inquiry commission would also include this letter and past cases as well.

He further said that in his opinion when such matters come up, they should not be suppressed. What ever commissions have been formed, they have been bringing all the things to public, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif exchanging views with Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf at Naval Headquarters.

PM lauds PN for safeguarding country's maritime interests

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the Naval Headquarters here wherein he appreciated the services of Pakistan Navy to safeguard the maritime interest of the country despite limited resources.

The prime minister, who was accompanied by the federal ministers, especially lauded the professional response of the Pakistan Navy to foil the recent terrorist attack on Naval Airbase Turbat.

Upon arrival, the prime minister was welcomed by the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed

Ashraf and was presented Guard of Honour by a smartly turned out naval contingent.

The prime minister also laid a wreath at the Shuhada monument and afterwards was introduced to the Principal Staff Officers of Naval Headquarters.

During the meeting, matters pertaining to the Regional Maritime Security milieu and operational readiness of the Pakistan Navy were discussed.

The Naval Chief apprised the prime minister on roles, capabilities and future modernization plans of the Pakistan Navy.

All watercourses in Punjab to be brick lined: CM

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Thursday ordered to complete brick lining of all watercourses in the province in five years under 'Sarsabz Punjab Khushaal Khastkar' initiative.

The chief minister was presiding over a meeting in which formal approval was given to various agriculture projects.

During the meeting, approval was given to the project under which lining of all watercourses in Punjab would be carried out besides solar tube-well project. In the first phase, lining of 1,200 watercourses would be carried out in two years at a cost of Rs 10 billion while in the second phase lining of 7,000 watercourses would be ensured. Farmers possessing upto 25 acres of land would be provided solar system in two years.

In the meeting, the agriculture secretary briefed the chief minister about agriculture projects.

Decision was made in the meeting to give 56 types of agricultural machinery to farmers on 60 per cent subsidy while farmers would be given 1,000 laser levelers in the next six months.

Maryam Nawaz directed the relevant authorities to increase seed production from 400,000 tons to 600,000 tons.

The meeting also discussed proposal to cultivate soyabean seed on 100,000 acres of land with the cooperation of University of Agriculture, Faisalabad.



LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz inspecting the upgradation pilot project of Basic Health Centre Shamkay Bhatian.

US Says it's monitoring Kejriwal's arrest, Congress party accounts freezing

WASHINGTON: Reiterating the US's position regarding the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal,

the Congress party's allegations that tax authorities have frozen some of their bank accounts in a manner that will make it challenging to effectively campaign in the upcoming elections,



the leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the State Department has again stated that they "encourage fair, transparent, and timely legal processes."

Mathew Miller, spokesperson for the State Department, at a briefing on Wednesday was asked by Mushfiqul Fazal Ansarey about the US's reaction as the Indian government had summoned a US diplomat over comments regarding Kejriwal's arrest.

He was also asked the spokesperson's view on recent political turmoil in India, including the freezing of the Congress's bank account.

In response, Miller said the US continues to follow incidents in India closely, including the arrest of Delhi chief minister Kejriwal.

"We are also aware of

and we encourage fair, transparent, and timely legal processes for each of these issues," said the State Department spokesperson.

He further told the this reporter, "With respect to your first question, I'm not going to talk about any private diplomatic conversations. But of course what we have said publicly is what I just said from here, that we encourage fair, transparent, timely legal processes."

"We don't think anyone should object to that, and we'll make the same thing clear privately," Miller added.

India's foreign ministry summoned Gloria Berberna, the US's acting deputy chief of mission in New Delhi, to a 40-minute meeting at its office in Delhi to protest Washington's remarks on Kejriwal's arrest.

SC conditionally allows army courts to announce reserved verdicts

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday granted conditional permission to army courts to pronounce reserved judgments against the accused allegedly involved in the incidents of May 9.

The top court ordered that judgments should be pronounced only in those cases in which the accused may have been released before Eid.

The court sought details of the accused sentenced to less than three years and adjourned the hearing to the fourth week of April.

The court also instructed the attorney general of Pakistan to submit the compliance report to the registrar's office.

Eight of a family killed in Buner crash

BUNER (INP): At least eight members of a family were killed after their vehicle fell into a gorge in Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday. The victims, including five women and two children, were travelling from Sawari Bazaar to Shahi area when their vehicle plunged into a ravine after its brakes failed near Chagharzai Pandir area, according to police.

Daily Voice of Masses Independent

Judiciary's SOS

Some clearly thought that senior judges would prove just as easily 'manageable' as our seasoned politicians usually are. They must have received a shock this Monday when almost the entire Islamabad High Court formally decided to take a stand and push back against what many of its judges describe as repeated interference and meddling in their court and the cases before them.

A day later, the public learnt that six of the IHC's eight sitting judges had forwarded a complaint to the chief justice of Pakistan to seek the Supreme Judicial Council's guidance on what judges ought to do when they are subjected to blackmail, harassment and coercion by "members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies". The judges made it clear that they expected some action from the judiciary to reclaim its independence and improve their institution's deteriorating image in the eyes of the public.

The judges who co-signed the letter framed their demand for a judicial convention to look into the matter by referencing a recent judgement from the Supreme Court, in which it reinstated former IHC judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui's status as a duly retired judge. It may be recalled that retired justice Siddiqui had been unceremoniously ejected from the judiciary in October 2018 over a complaint he had made regarding interference by Pakistan's apex intelligence agency in cases tied to the PML-N chief, Nawaz Sharif.

It appears that because the SC endorsed retired justice Siddiqui's position, the judges of the IHC also want to consider what serving judges are being forced to endure and, at the least, issue an advisory on what judges are supposed to do when faced with such situations. The ball is now in Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa's court, and, as head of the judiciary, he will feel pressure to take action.

A judge's bedroom was reportedly spied on with a concealed camera; another's relative was picked up and tortured into giving a statement against them. Two judges felt pressured to reconsider their position on the maintainability of a high-profile case because intelligence operatives began harassing their friends and family. A district and sessions judge reported that a 'cracker' was thrown into their home in a bid to intimidate them. When out-of-favour politicians complain about the threats, intimidation and even torture they face, they are often tuned out; however, six sitting judges detailing brazen abuses of power are quite difficult to ignore.

Though he seems to have been aware of these issues for almost a year, Justice Isa must now pay heed to them and address them to the satisfaction of his subordinate judges. The die was cast the moment this letter appeared in the public domain; all eyes are on the SJC to see how it proceeds.

Cruel malignity

F.S. Aijazuddin

Cancer respects neither age nor position. One has only to visit a cancer hospital to realise how indiscriminate the choice of its victims is. Or read recent revelations by royalty.

The public announcement by Catherine, Princess of Wales, that she has been diagnosed with an unspecified cancer is at one level heartrending. She is 42 years old, a loving wife and a devoted mother of three. At another level, by appeasing the ravenous press, she is paying the price for marrying into the fish-bowl of royalty.

With an almost Shakespearean irony, her 75-year-old father-in-law King Charles III has also been diagnosed with cancer. The House of Windsor is two steps closer to becoming a hospice.

In 2011, the same year that Prince William and Kate Middleton married, the billionaire Steve Jobs died of pancreatic cancer. Famously, he said that "being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me", adding the truism, "the most precious resource we all have is time". Unconsciously, Jobs echoed the sentiments of the dying Queen Elizabeth I: "All my possessions for a moment of time."

Over the centuries between the first and second Elizabethan ages, the British monarchy has usually applied the drip-feed system of information about itself. Paid to lead public lives, their personal lives (however salacious) remained private, off-limits.

For instance, Queen Mary is remembered as an elderly dowager, dripping with jewels. Few knew that, while her husband George V was ill, she slept for a week with her wig tied in place be-

cause her hairdresser was on leave.

Or that in 1936, she ensured that his 'peaceful end' was accelerated with a morphine injection, to catch the serious morning papers instead of the less desirable afternoon editions.

Commanding as a queen, to her six children Queen Mary could be cold, aloof and unapproachable. The youngest — an epileptic — she kept hidden from view in Sandringham.

Queen Mary came from a long-lived family. Her grandmother died aged 91, her aunt at 94, and her uncle at 93. She herself died aged 85. Her granddaughter Queen Elizabeth II inherited strong genes. Elizabeth's mother died at the age of 101, her maternal grandmother at 75, and grandfather at 89. That genetic longevity may be withheld from the present House of Windsor.

In Pakistan, it took the death of a mother to bring cancer to the forefront of the public's awareness. In the 1980s, Imran Khan's mother Shaukat Khanum was diagnosed with colon cancer. Disappointed with the facilities available in local hospitals, he took her abroad for treatment.

His resolve to build a facility in Pakistan for cancer patients who could not afford equivalent treatment here was cemented by one incident — the sight of an elderly distraught Pathan in Mayo Hospital. His sick brother lay in the corridor of the crowded hospital. To pay for his brother's medicines, the man had to labour daily at a nearby construction site.

Today, the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centres founded by Imran Khan in memory of his mother (she died in 1985), have two state-of-the-art tertiary care cancer hospi-

itals in Lahore and Peshawar with a third — the largest — currently in an advanced stage of construction in Karachi. The efficiency of their organisation, their facilities and the medical attention patients receive — whether fee-paying or free — are more than legendary. They are a reality.

Cancer is not like an appendectomy: here today, gone tomorrow. It requires continuous treatment and monitoring to detect recurrence. The Shaukat Khanum hospitals received almost 14,500 new cancer patients last year. In addition, they have over 30,000 patients on active follow-up for a period of up to five years following treatment. Over 75 per cent of all patients in the SKMCH system are treated entirely free of charge, funded by zakat and donations.

Each patient is a helpless victim of a cancer the US-Pakistani oncologist Dr Azra Raza calls a "motiveless malignity", just as the hospital itself is often the target of malignant criticism. If you have the time that Elizabeth I and Steve Jobs were denied, go to the Shaukat Khanum Hospital in Lahore. There, you will meet an Afghan national. He will show you photos of his three children — two boys and a girl, bright faced and smiling, the same ages as William and Kate's children. He will then show you an image of his once beautiful wife. Because she is undergoing free treatment for leukaemia, involving a complete blood replacement, they have not seen their children for three years. If you wait, you will then see her emerge from the recovery room — an emaciated living corpse. She is, in Maulana Rumi's words, neither hair, nor skin — only a soul that lives within. -- Courtesy Dawn

Domestic workers

Parvez Rahim

On assuming power after his landslide victory in West Pakistan in the 1970 elections, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced five labour welfare laws and brought in amendments in other laws applicable to industrial and commercial establishments. These laws pertained to the education of workers' children, the constitution of a workers' welfare fund, cost of living relief, rules on workers' participation in company profits, and old-age pension for retired employees.

In 1972, an amendment to the Provincial Employees Social Security Ordinance, 1965, ensured that full-time domestic servants were brought within the law's fold. It became mandatory for every employer of a domestic worker to provide the latter with comprehensive medical care. This included inpatient and out-patient treatment, essential drugs supplies prescribed by a doctor, hospitalisation, including in cases related to pregnancy. However, such medical treatment, though on the statute books, has not been implemented.

Incidents of violence against maids and other domestic staff prompted the Punjab and federal government to promulgate the Punjab Domestic Workers Act, 2019, and the Islamabad Capital Territory Domestic Workers Act, 2021, respectively. Both laws envisage protecting the rights of domestic workers, including regulating their terms of employment and working conditions, and ensuring social protection, besides safeguarding their welfare.

The Acts require the employer to provide dignified working conditions and take occupational health and safety

measures. The lawmakers have mentioned that domestic workers shall be addressed as such and not as 'servant'. (It is ironical that there is no issue with the commonly used term 'government servant'.)

However, there are glaring differences in the two laws. In Punjab's case, a child under 15 years is not allowed to work in a household in any capacity while the age limit is 16 for the capital. Before imposing age limits, the government should have formulated plans for their compulsory education and implemented them. In Punjab, no domestic worker is required to work beyond eight hours a day, while the Islamabad law is more realistic in that it allows a 12-hour period free of duty during the day.

The Acts have taken key provisions from various labour laws and combined them. For instance, leave entitlement, the registration of employers, daily working hours, overtime pay, vaccination, the appointment of inspectors, prosecution of employers, penalties and accidents involving domestic workers have been taken from the Factories Act. Similarly, the fixation of a minimum wage, conditions of payment of wages and the establishment of the Minimum Wages Board are taken from the Minimum Wages Ordinance, while the resolution of disputes is from the Industrial Relations Act. The service of notice, or payment in lieu thereof, is from the Standing Orders Act. The domestic workers' welfare fund is from the Companies Profits (Workers Participation) Act, and maternity benefits from the law on the subject.

Parallels cannot be drawn between a resourceful entrepreneur

from an industrial or commercial establishment and an old couple dependent on their meagre lifetime savings or pension to survive, and who employ a domestic worker to look after their needs. There does not appear to be any justification to apply the same laws to the latter.

While many households employ domestic workers on a part-time basis, it appears that both Acts only extend to full-time domestic workers. Proponents of these laws may think that an obligation has been fulfilled in view of ILO convention C189, (Domestic Workers' Convention, 2011), which has so far not been ratified by Pakistan. The convention addresses discrimination with regard to the conditions of employment and work, and to other abuse of the human rights of migrant domestic workers.

Article 4 (2) of the convention asserts that the minimum age of employment should not deprive domestic workers from compulsory education, nor interfere with opportunities to participate in further education or vocational training. There are millions of households in Punjab and Islamabad, who employ domestic workers. Who will ensure that they are following the law in letter and spirit? The governments' labour departments have consistently failed to ensure even the registration of the numerous industrial and commercial establishments falling within their domain. Expecting them to achieve the gigantic task of registering and inspecting all households employing domestic workers is unrealistic. There is no point in framing laws which look impressive but whose implementation is hugely uncertain. -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

PM chairs review meeting on stoppage of electricity theft



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting on Anti-Power theft campaign.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a high level meeting on stoppage of electricity theft and directed that immediate disciplinary action should be initiated against the officers and exemplary punishment should be given to them for abetting the crime and causing loss of billions of dollars. He said it was their responsibility to create a stable system by taking measures like launching a

campaign to stop electricity theft. The present situation of the economy could not bear the problem of electricity theft, he added. He said a strategy should be formulated at the earliest for decreasing line losses and for upgrading of transmission lines. He said generation companies were a burden on the national exchequer and work should be started on their privatization at the

earliest. A report on complete plan for solarization of tubewells in Balochistan should be presented, he added. During the meeting, it was decided to install smart meters on transformers under the public sector development programme. Feeder monitors would be deployed at the feeders which were causing huge losses. The meeting was briefed that the areas with

low rate of electricity theft would have less loadshedding. An amendment was brought in section 462(O) of Pakistan Penal Code through an ordinance to make electricity theft a cognizable offense. Due to the anti-theft campaign in September last year, the rate of electricity theft had seen a considerable drop. The prime minister said under the anti-theft campaign, since September 2023,

NCA approves revised first quarter GDP estimates for 2023-24

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Accounts Committee (NAC) on Thursday reviewed the quarterly estimates of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for first and second quarter for the years 2023-24 and approved the revised first quarter estimates of 2023-24.

The 108th meeting of the NAC was held with Secretary Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives in chair, said a press release issued by the ministry.

The 107th NAC meeting held in November 2023 approved the introduction of Quarterly National Accounts (QNA)

in the statistical system of the country. QNA provide the pulse of the economy at a shorter interval as compared to the Annual National Accounts (ANA).

The committee approved the revised first quarter estimates of 2023-24. Overall GDP of the first quarter for financial year

2023-24 has witnessed a revised growth of 2.50% as compared to 2.13% estimated in 107th NAC meeting.

Growth in agriculture has witnessed a healthy revision to 8.58% from 5.06% mainly due to upward revisions in crops posting a double digit

growth of 17.66% as compared to 6.13%. The important crops, which were previously estimated based on area, has witnessed a phenomenal growth of 31.47% because of very low base in 2022-23.

The significant increase in production in final estimates of cotton increased by 108.2% to 10.22 million bales this year against 4.91 million bales last year, rice output increased by 34.8% to 9.87 million tons as against the production of 7.32 million tons last year, where as maize crop out put during the period under review grew by 5.6%.

Korean envoy promises all efforts to enhance direct trade with Faisalabad

FAISALABAD (APP): Korean Ambassador Park Kijun said on Thursday that serious efforts would be made to enhance direct trade between Faisalabad and Korea.

Addressing the business community at the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), he said Faisalabad was the textile hub of Pakistan. He said bilateral cooperation in the sector would be further improved in the coming years. He

particularly identified agriculture, textile, energy and IT and said that these sectors had potential to increase cooperation for benefit of the two countries. He said that Korean businesspeople fully understand the potential and hopefully they would exploit it by enhancing investment and technical cooperation. He was optimistic that Pakistan would soon emerge as a major player in South-West Asia because of its economic growth.

Rupee gains 01 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Rupee on Thursday gained 01 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.03 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.04.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.2 and Rs280.9, respectively. The price of the Euro decreased by 98 paise to close at Rs299.99 against the last-day closing of Rs300.97.

Govt. taking every possible step to increase IT exports, FDI: Shaza

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Thursday said that the present government was diligently pursuing measures to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and boost IT exports.

During a discussion with a high-level delegation from the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), led by its Chairman, Muhammad Zohaib Khan, Shaza Fatima highlighted the critical role of the IT industry,

particularly in providing international-level training to youth and creating employment opportunities for them.

The Chairman P@SHA extended congratulations to Minister of State for IT, Shaza Fatima Khawaja for assuming the office.

The minister said that Pakistan's IT professionals can serve as the premier choice for international companies and urged P@SHA to assist in bridging the demand-supply gap of IT professionals.

Russian Ambassador greets Jam on assuming charge, discusses trade

ISLAMABAD (APP): Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Albert Khorev on Thursday engaged in discussions with Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, aiming to enhance trade connectivity and tap into the true potential of bilateral trade.

Federal Minister Jam Kamal emphasized the need for exploring new routes and avenues to bolster trade relations, said

a press release issued here. The minister commended the successful initiation of "Kino exports" to Russia by road and expressed the possibility of further increasing trade in this sector.

Additionally, he acknowledged Russia's vast market potential, offering Pakistani exporters ample opportunities for growth and diversification.



ISLAMABAD: Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Albert Khorev, engages in discussions with Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, aiming to enhance trade connectivity and tap into the true potential of bilateral trade.

Minister chairs meeting on land record computerization

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Minister for Revenue, Nazir Ahmad Abbasi on Thursday chaired a meeting that was convened to discuss the computerization of land records. The meeting among others was attended by Project Director, Khalid Zaman and concerned officials of the Land Revenue Department.

The meeting was briefed about ongoing projects of land record computerization in the province. Chaining the meeting, the provincial revenue minister directed the setting up of counters in patwar circles of Lora, Bakot and Booni to issue computerized documents of land records.

Restaurants, wedding halls to pay fixed sale tax on services: Muzzammil

Independent Report PESHAWAR: All restaurants and wedding halls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) will be registered under the tax net, and they will be charged a fixed sales tax for the services they offer. This was stated by the Advisor to KP Chief Minister on Finance Muzzammil Aslam at a consultative session on subordinate legislation under the KP Sales Tax Act 2022 arranged by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) here on Thursday.

He was the chief guest in the session which was funded by the Sub National Governance Program and was attended by lawyers, tax experts, government officials, withholding agents, businessmen, and representatives of the chambers of commerce. The advisor to CM said that the 23 percent province tax, charged in the province is very high due to which people have opted for stamp papers and only 6 percent of the property tax collected in the province is paid to the province and the rest goes to the federal government. To encourage women entrepreneurs, the advisor directed the Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA) to establish a women's desk in KPRA for their facilitation.

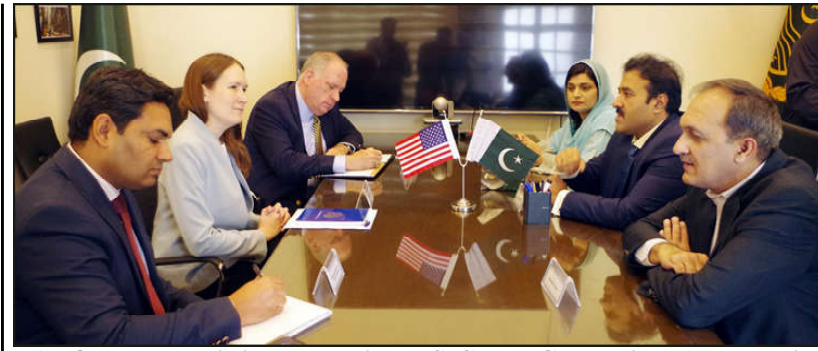
UNICEF's delegation calls on KP CM, discusses matters of mutual interest

PESHAWAR (APP): A delegation of UNICEF headed by Abdullah Fadil, called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur here at Chief Minister's House on Thursday.

During the meeting they discussed matters of mutual interest with special focus on public welfare activities being carried out in the province with the assistance of UNICEF. Prospects for further expanding mutual cooperation and partnership between UNICEF and the provincial government were also discussed in the meeting.

Speaking on this occasion, the chief minister said that UNICEF is playing an important role for the public welfare in the province. He said that incumbent provincial government also intends to further enhance and expand this partnership to some other sectors including upgradation of schools, supply of clean drinking water, sewerage, solarization of schools, Madaris, tube wells and deserving households in the province.

Touching upon the priorities of his government regarding development of newly



LAHORE: Ms. Kristin K. Hawkins, U.S. Consul General in Lahore meeting with Provincial Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafique. Secretary Local Government Shakeel Ahmed is also present on the occasion.

Minister expresses anguish over alleged use of poor-quality material

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister of Communications and Works (C&W) Shakeel Ahmed has expressed his anguish over the alleged use of poor-quality material in the projects of the Malakand Thana University bridge, Aladand and Bazdara roads and District Headquarters Hospital Malakand.

These projects have been completed at Rs 150 million.

The concerned authorities have been directed to submit a report within 10 days. He has also

taken action over the installation of defective cable and street lights in the Agra locality.

He issued these directives while presiding over a meeting held in Peshawar regarding the projects constructed with foreign assistance here on Thursday.

Secretary Communications and Works, Idris Marwat, Managing Director Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highways Authority Asad Ali, Chief Engineer Foreign Aid Naveed Iqbal, Project Directors Waqas, Zahid and Arslan and other officers were also present on this occasion.

Quintuplets born in Faisalabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): A mother from Jhang welcomed quintuplets into the world on Thursday at Faisalabad's Allied Hospital.

The five newborns, comprising three boys and two girls, were safely delivered, with both the mother and babies confirmed to be in stable condition by attending physicians, said a private news channel. This joyous event contrasts with a tragic incident last year in Hyderabad, where a woman from Umerkot gave birth to sextuplets, though unfortunately, five of the infants were stillborn. Despite this loss, the mother successfully underwent the delivery and is reported to be in stable health.

Health Minister handovers emergency medicine supplies to hospitals in 17 districts

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah handed over the first batch of emergency medicines worth 2.9 billion rupees to district health officers and hospitals in 17 districts of the province, including former FATA.

He handed over these medicines while visiting Provincial Ware House of the Health Department, accompanied by Director-General Health Dr. Shaikat Ali. Additional DG Administration Dr. Siraj, Director Public Health Dr. Irshad Roghani, and DHOs from various districts.

Speaking to the media Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah told that emergency medicines have been dispatched for all hospitals across the province, totalling 17 districts.

A total of 47 different types of emergency medicines have been included in this essential supply. The Health Minister highlighted that the shortage of essential medicines was a significant challenge for the new government, as hospitals had been facing shortages for the past six months.

He expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur for ensuring the provision of medicines on priority basis. Approximately three billion rupees have been released for medicines, ensuring their availability for patients in hospitals; otherwise, hospitals would not benefit from such funds.



FAISALABAD: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Faisalabad Maqsood Ahmad Lone installing a kite string protector on a motorcycle for safety measure at Allied Chowk.

HESCO cracks down on electricity theft: 339 connections apprehended

HYDERABAD (APP): The Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (HESCO) has intensified its crackdown against electricity thieves and defaulters.

During the past 24 hours, an additional 339 connections including 11 commercial and 328 domestic, involved in electricity theft were apprehended. The power body authorities submitted letters to various police stations for the registration of cases against 307 people involved in power theft, leading to the filing of FIRs against 29 individuals.

According to the HESCO spokesperson, all connections involved in electricity theft were disconnected and involved consumers were issued detection bills of 1,60,636 units, amounting to 3.895 million rupees.

During the operation, ongoing for 202 days, the HESCO has recovered more than 11,975 million rupees.



GILGIT: Minister Social Welfare Gilgit-Baltistan, Dilshad Bano addressing during the 18th Assembly session of Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly under the chair of Speaker Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly Nazir Ahmad Advocate.

Directorates for special education, women to be established soon: Mashal

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to the Chief Minister, Mashal Azam Yousafzai participated as Chief guest in the annual prize distribution ceremony at Special Education Complex Hayatabad here on Thursday. She was of the view that separate directorates of special education and women empowerment will be created soon, while steps will be taken to increase the quota for disabled people in government jobs by 10%.

Many special children are out of schools and we will get buildings on rent to admit them in schools where they will be equipped with the jewel of education. She expressed these views while addressing the annual prize distribution ceremony held at Special Education Complex Hayatabad Peshawar.

Advisor to Chief Minister Mashal Azam Yousafzai attended the ceremony as a guest and distributed prizes and shields among students who performed well during the academic year.

Lahore Police launch campaign to install safety wires on m/cycles

LAHORE (APP): In compliance with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's directives, Lahore Police has launched a campaign to install safety wires on motorcycles to protect against fatal accidents caused by metal wires. The distribution of safety wires among motorcyclists is being carried out free of charge.

Secretary HUD&PHE Asad Khan visits RDA

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Secretary Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering (HUD&PHE), Capt. @ Asad Ullah Khan here on Thursday visited Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA).

Chairing a meeting held at RDA office, the Secretary appreciated the work being done by RDA.

According to RDA spokesman, the DG RDA briefed the Secretary about the reforms and development works being carried out by RDA. Detailed briefings were also given on RDA projects including Rawalpindi Ring Road project, Nullah Lai Expressway project and

others. The Secretary directed the authorities to initiate the projects as soon as possible.

He instructed the officers to take strict action in accordance with the law against illegal housing schemes.

The DG RDA on the occasion said that the projects would be started soon and all-out efforts would be made to complete construction work within shortest possible time frame.

The officers of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) and Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) also briefed the Secretary about the performance and projects of WASA and PHA.

Man gets life imprisonment for killing wife

KHANEWAL (APP): A man was convicted of life imprisonment and a fine for killing his wife over a domestic dispute in the last year.

According to the prosecution, Azhar killed his wife on March 21, 2023, over a domestic dispute.

A case number 249/23 was registered against him under section 302 with Tulamba police station.

On Thursday, Additional District and Session Judge Muhammad Fakhir Altaf awarded life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 500,000 to the accused.

International News

Putin says he won't start a war with NATO but Western bases hosting Ukraine F-16s would be targets

Monitoring Desk
KYIV: Russian President Vladimir Putin scoffed at the possibility of his country launching an attack on a NATO member, calling it "sheer nonsense," but warned that any Western air base hosting U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets that are slated for deployment in Ukraine would be a "legitimate target" for the Kremlin's forces.

"Their statements about our alleged intention to attack Europe after Ukraine is sheer nonsense," Putin said late Wednesday, referring to warnings in the U.S. and Western Europe that Russia could turn its sights on other countries unless it is stopped.

He noted that the U.S. defense budget is more than 10 times higher than Russia's. "In view of that, are we going to wage a war

against NATO? It's ravings," he told military pilots during a visit to an air base.

Ukraine is awaiting the delivery of F-16s, which will increase military pressure on Russia, from its Western partners. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year that 42 F-16s had been promised. Ukrainian pilots have been training in the West for months on how to fly the warplanes.

The F-16s require a high standard of runways and reinforced hangars to protect them from bombing attacks when they are on the ground. It is not clear how many Ukrainian air bases can meet those requirements, and Russia would be certain to quickly target a few that could accommodate them once the jets arrive.

Putin warned Ukraine's Western allies against providing air bases in their countries from where the F-16s could launch sorties against the Kremlin's forces. Those bases would become a "legitimate target," he said.

"F-16s are capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and we will also need to take that into account while organizing our combat operations," Putin added.

Military analysts have said the arrival of F-16s won't be a game-changer in view of Russia's massive air force and sophisticated air defense systems, though Ukrainian officials have welcomed them as an opportunity to hit back at Russia's air dominance.

Putin insisted the F-16s "won't change the situation on the battlefield."



Palestinians search for food and belongings through the rubble of the buildings that were destroyed in the overnight Israeli bombardment in Rafah.

Russian veto brings end to UN panel monitoring enforcement of North Korea nuclear sanctions

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: Russia vetoed a U.N. resolution Thursday in a move that effectively abolishes the monitoring of sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear program, though the sanctions themselves remain in place.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia told the council before the vote that Western nations are trying to "strangle" North Korea and that sanctions have proven "irrelevant" and "detached from reality" in reining in the country's nuclear program.

Ukraine destroys 26 Russian drones in latest overnight strike

Monitoring Desk
KYIV: Ukrainian forces shot down 26 out of 28 attack drones launched overnight by Russia, Kyiv's military said on Thursday.

The Iranian-made drones were destroyed over parts of eastern, southern and southeastern Ukraine, the air force added.

The Zaporizhzhia region's governor said on Telegram that two women had been wounded when debris struck a residential neighbourhood in the regional capital.

UK minister threatened with jail over Afghanistan probe

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: A UK government minister is on a collision course with the law over his refusal to reveal the sources of allegations that British special forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan. Johnny Mercer, Britain's minister for veterans, has said "multiple officers" told him about alleged murders and a subsequent cover-up during the Afghan conflict. He has refused to divulge their identities to a public inquiry examining whether a unit executed males of "fighting age" who posed no threat in the war-torn country between 2010 and 2013. The Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan ordered Mercer, 42, to hand over the names next week or face a potential prison sentence. In a statement, the Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan revealed it had issued the MP with a Section 21 notice under Britain's Inquiries Act.

Italian woman held in Hungary to remain in jail

Monitoring Desk
BUDAPEST: An Italian woman charged in Hungary with taking part in an anti-fascist group's assaults on people they viewed as far-right activists will remain in jail after a judge denied her attorney's request that she be released into house arrest.

Ilaria Salis, a 39-year-old teacher, is accused of taking part in a serious assault on two far-right militants by a group of anti-fascist activists in Budapest last February. She pleaded not guilty at a hearing in January. Prosecutors are seeking an 11-year sentence for her.

More Rafah strikes raise fears of all-out Israeli assault

Monitoring Desk
GAZA STRIP: Israel bombed at least four homes in Rafah on Wednesday, raising fresh fears among the more than a million Palestinians sheltering in the last refuge on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip that a long-threatened ground assault could be coming. One of the airstrikes killed 11 people from a single family, health officials said.

The health ministry said on Wednesday that at least 32,490 people have been killed in the territory during more than five months of war between Israel and Hamas.

The toll includes at least 76 deaths over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said, adding that 74,889 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the Israeli invasion began on October 7.

Fighting has raged since last week around Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, and more recently near two hospitals in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, Al-Anal and Nasser.

Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles have also massed around the Nasser Hospital, the Gaza health ministry said, adding that shots were fired but no raid had yet been launched.

The Palestinian Red Crescent warned that thousands were trapped inside and "their lives are in danger".

Talks in Qatar towards a truce and prisoner release deal, involving US and Egyptian mediators, have brought no result so far, with Israel and Hamas blaming each other.

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Philippines ups stakes in China row, vows countermeasures to coastguard 'attacks'

Monitoring Desk
MANILA: The Philippines will implement countermeasures against "illegal, coercive, aggressive, and dangerous attacks" by China's coastguard, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said on Thursday, upping the stakes in an escalating row in the South China Sea.

The Philippines is furious over what it calls repeated hostilities by Chinese vessels around disputed features inside Manila's 200-mile exclusive economic zone. The United States has weighed in with moral support for its former colony and military ally.

Marcos did not specify what the countermeasures would entail, but said they would come in succeeding weeks and be proportionate, deliberate and reasonable in response to what he called open and unabating attacks.

"We seek no conflict with any nation, more so

nations that purport and claim to be our friends but we will not be cowed into silence, submission, or subservience," Marcos said on Facebook.

The deterioration in relations with China comes as Marcos seeks to deepen defence ties with the United States, increasing US access to Philippine military bases and expanding joint exercises to include sea and air patrols over the South China Sea, frustrating Beijing. Chinese Defence Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian on Thursday said the Philippines was to blame for the breakdown and was counting on support from external forces while peddling misinformation and infringing on China's sovereignty.

"It is straying further down a dangerous path. The Chinese side will not allow the Philippines to act willfully," Wu told a briefing.



Italian teacher Ilaria Salis, facing charges for taking part in an anti-fascist assault on far-right activists, talks with her lawyer, Eugenio Losco, in a court on the day of her hearing, in Budapest, Hungary.

Rescuers lose hope of finding survivors from bridge collapse

Monitoring Desk
BALTIMORE: Rescuers have lost hope of finding more survivors of the Baltimore bridge collapse, the US coast guard said as efforts switched on Wednesday to looking for bodies of the missing and more answers to why a container ship smashed into the bridge. US federal safety

investigators have also recovered the black box from the freight ship that crashed into the bridge, the agency chief said. Search divers were expected to return to the waters surrounding the twisted ruins of the bridge in Baltimore Harbour to search for six workers missing and now presumed dead.

Russian mine with 13 trapped miners almost completely flooded, RIA reports

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Water has almost completely flooded the Pioneer gold mine in Russia's Amur region, where 13 miners are stuck, Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency said on Thursday, citing emergency services.

The miners became trapped on March 18 after a rock fall.

The Pioneer mine is one of the largest gold mines in Russia, and situated in the Amur region which borders China, about 5,300 km (3,300 miles) east of Moscow. Earlier, rescue efforts were suspended on Wednesday due to the risk of another collapse, state news agency TASS reported.

Emergency workers would study water deposits discovered at the bottom of four shafts, the emergency ministry said in a statement posted on the messenger app Telegram.

PM assures to resolve issues faced by journalist community

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar and relevant officers attended the meeting.

The delegation felicitated the prime minister on assuming his office and expressed their best wishes.

The prime minister congratulated the newly elected panel of APNS and expressed his best wishes.

He said he formed the government in very difficult circumstances and the rehabilitation of the economy was the biggest challenge and priority of the government.

He informed the delegation about the government's efforts and

strategy to revive the economy.

A strategy was being formulated to modernize the system of tax collection, he said adding Federal Board of Revenue was being completely digitalized and work was continuing for increasing the tax base.

Cases of more than Rs 2000 billion were pending in the courts and tribunals, he told.

He said recently the government held the Tax Excellency Award with the aim to encourage good taxpayers, exporters and women entrepreneurs.

Billions of rupees of electricity were being sto-



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of All Pakistan Newspapers Society calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Attorney General of Pakistan, Mansoor Awan, address an important press conference.

Foreign Office Bisham terror attack orchestrated by enemies of Pak-China friendship

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan has reaffirmed the commitment to bring to justice the perpetrators, facilitators and abettors of Bisham terrorist attack which claimed the lives of five Chinese nationals.

At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said this attack was orchestrated by the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship.

She said such attempts will not succeed and we will continue to work together to develop CPEC

Earthquake jolts Islamabad, Rawalpindi and parts of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): An earthquake measuring 5 on the Richter Scale jolted Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces and the Gilgit-Baltistan region on Thursday. Tremors were felt in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Swat, Bajaur, Upper Dir, Abbottabad, Mardan and other cities.

The epicentre of the earthquake was reported to be at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, around 55 kilometres from Chitral.

Pakistan's National Seismic Monitoring Centre reported that it was 5.3 magnitude earthquake and its epicenter was located at the depth of 86 kilometres.

As of now, there have been no reports of loss of life or damage to property.

Ministers review plan for establishment of Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab's Health Ministers Khawaja Salman Rafique and Khawaja Imran Nazir, reviewed plans for the establishment of the Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital in Lahore, aligning with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The hospital aims to provide comprehensive treatment facilities for cancer patients across Punjab under one roof.

During the meeting held at the Infrastructure Development Authority, Punjab (IDAP) head office

24 individuals including Imran Riaz, Sami Ibrahim added to ECL

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Cabinet has approved the inclusion of 24 individuals, including journalists Imran Riaz and Sami Ibrahim, in the Exit Control List (ECL).

According to media reports, the Federal Cabinet has given approval for the inclusion of the names of 24 significant individuals in the ECL. In this regard, the Ministry of Interior's summary was circulated for approval from the Federal Cabinet, which granted permission to include the names of journalists Sami Ibrahim and Imran Riaz in the ECL. Their names were included in the ECL due to ongoing inquiries.

It has been reported that the approval to remove Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Babar Awan's name from the ECL has been granted.

Babar Awan's name was included in the ECL in December 2023 due to the Al-Qadir Trust case. Additionally, the Federal Cabinet has approved the removal of names of 22 different personalities from the ECL. In light of recommendations from the sub-committee for ECL, the Federal Cabinet gave its consent.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Health Khawaja Salman Rafique being briefed about progress of construction work of New Lady Willington Hospital during his visit to site of the project.

Senior minister holds meeting with environment expert

Independent Report
LAHORE: Provincial Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb held a meeting on Thursday with environmental and climate change expert Advocate Parvez Hassan on the directives of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz.

Matters pertaining to improving the air quality index and environmental challenges, especially in Lahore, Punjab, were discussed. Parvez Hassan presented important recommendations regarding smog control.

Marriyum Aurangzeb stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a Smog Legislation Plan had been devised, with all departments working

Digital transformation can lead country towards progress: Shaza Fatima

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, and GSMA country lead for Digital Transformation, Saira Faisal on Thursday discussed matters pertinent to digital transformation, innovation, and the startup ecosystem.

During the meeting, Saira Faisal extended congratulations to Minister of State Shaza Fatima for assuming charge of the Ministry, said a news release.

Saira Faisal provided an overview of GSMA's operations, upcoming programs, and their coordination with the Ministry of IT to Minister Shaza Fatima.

Shaza Fatima highlighted the ongoing digitalization efforts in Pakistan, and said that digital transformation is crucial for the country's progress.



ISLAMABAD: CEO Jaz, Aamir Ibrahim accompanied by Karim Khoja, CEO of Roshan, call on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

Assisting Pakistan to deal with energy crisis top priority: US

WASHINGTON (INP): US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on Wednesday maintained that assisting Pakistan in addressing its energy crisis remains a top priority for the United States.

During a routine news briefing in Washington on Wednesday, Miller when questioned about US pressure on Pakistan to halt its gas pipeline project with Iran, underscored America's commitment to aiding Pakistan's energy needs, noting that the US has provided substantial support, including 4,000 megawatts of energy through various projects.

These initiatives have significantly bolstered Pakistan's power generation capacity and are actively contributing to the provision of electricity to its citizens.

Miller also mentioned ongoing efforts in areas such as smart agriculture and energy. However, he refrained from commenting on the potential damages Iran may impose due to the pipeline project.

A day earlier, Matthew Miller told newsmen that the US does not support Pakistan's plan to build a pipeline to import gas from Iran. He refused to comment on the nature of sanctions Pakistan could face for importing energy from Iran.

However, he cautioned Islamabad against going ahead with the plan. "But we always advise everyone that doing business with Iran runs the risk of touching upon and coming in contact with our sanctions, and would advise everyone to consider that very carefully," said Miller, adding that "the assistant secretary made clear last week, we do not support this pipeline going forward."

Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia told the House Foreign Affairs committee last Wednesday in a hearing that importing gas from Iran would expose Pakistan to US sanctions.

Pakistan's outgoing caretaker government approved the construction of an 80-kilometer section of the pipeline in February, largely to avoid paying Iran \$18 billion in penalties for years of project delays.

Miller's remarks came after Pakistani media reported Tuesday, Islamabad was planning to seek a US sanctions waiver.

Ahsan Iqbal says: PMDC's int'l recognition 'historic milestone' for Pakistan's health industry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday said the recognition of Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) by the World Federation for Medical Education was a testament to Pakistan's commitment to excellence in healthcare and medical education.

"An effective healthcare system's greatest indicator is to ensure that all citizens, despite their socioeconomic background, get the best available health facilities in a timely, acceptable, affordable, and accessible manner," he said while addressing a ceremony held to commemorate a significant milestone in the history of medical education and healthcare in Pakistan.

The minister commended the collective efforts of healthcare professionals, educators, policymakers and stakeholders who tirelessly worked towards enhancing the standards of medical education and healthcare delivery in Pakistan, a news release said.

Highlighting the notable progress of Pakistan's healthcare sector over the past decade, the minister shared that 3.5 percent increase in life expectancy from 2005 to 2019 was recorded. In the area of infant mortality, he said a 15 percent decline was recorded from 2000 to 2019, with an infant mortality rate of 58 per 1,000 live births.

Remarkable increase was also marked in the number of healthcare facilities, which grew up to 20 & from 2007 to 2017, resulting in a total of 7,089 healthcare facilities.



LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif presides over the special meeting about Mines and Minerals.

Seven foreign investors show interest in Pak airports outsourcing

ISLAMABAD (INP): Investors from seven countries have shown their interest in the outsourcing of the country's airports, it has been learnt on Thursday.

Quoting its sources, the channel reported that the investors are from Germany, France, the Netherlands, Qatar, UAE, Malaysia and Turkey.

In this connection, sources disclosed, the aviation minister had directed the ministry officials to arrange his online meetings with the ambassadors of Pakistan in these countries so that he could brief them on how to pursue this matter.

On the other hand, they revealed, local investors had been asked to form a consortium and then participate with the foreign investors in bidding.

ICT admin intensifies efforts against social evils, inspects 648 areas, arrests 29

ISLAMABAD (APP): All magistrates have launched rigorous campaign targeting inflation, illegal occupation and panhandling across the Federal Capital's bustling markets and arrested 29 accused during the inspections of 648 areas while imposing a fine of Rs 84,000 to violators.

Talking to APP here Thursday, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabassum said this proactive approach aimed at to ensure fair pricing, maintain public spaces, and curb the nuisance of professional beggars during the holy month of Ramadan and beyond.

During the inspections of all three Ramadan bazaars, which were set up by the district administration, magistrates accompanied by the district administration teams, apprehended thirteen individuals for flouting price regulations, while a fine of Rs 84,000 was also imposed to the violators.

Similarly, district administration teams intensified efforts against alms-seeking and arrested 14 professional beggars from different areas of the city and handed over to different police stations, he said.

Furthermore, anti-encroachment operation were also conducted in the Federal Capital and cleared illegal encroachments from different paths, roads and markets, he added.

Additionally, stringent measures were taken to regulate petrol stations, leading to the closure of two illegal filling agencies and the arrest of two individuals involved in malpractice. The spokesman emphasized the paramount importance of ensuring the consistent availability of essential commodities at government-mandated rates.

Psychological test of Islamabad Capital Police officials conducted

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police conducted a psychological test of officials deputed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to improve the performance and mental capabilities of officials who are going abroad.

This initiative seeks to enhance the aptitude of officials within the security division. The test included a special psychological examination committee, chaired by SSP Security Division, while SP CTD, SP Headquarters, and psychological experts were the members of the committee.

Officers and personnel from the Foreign Office actively participated in the test. The conclusion of the workshop saw recommendations formulated for resolving ongoing issues faced by officers and officials.

Islamabad Capital Police is always engaged in law and order duties in order to ensure the safety of the lives and property of the citizens.

Maintaining the law and order situation in the federal capital, Islamabad is a big challenge, due to which the officials were facing not only physical but also mental difficulties.

In this regard, psychological tests of different division police officials were conducted. The purpose is to further improve the performance and solve the problems faced by the officials on a priority basis.