

Independent

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Karachi

Ph: 0300-3898091 Vol: 06. No. 60 Ramazan 11, 1445 AH Friday March 22, 2024 Pages 04 Price Rs. 12.00

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" govt's economic initiatives

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said the government was going to take tough economic decisions to steer the country out of crisis assuring to protect downtrodden segments of the society.

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 will be received by next month.

After this, he said Pakistan 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.

With the reforms, he said "we will succeed to gradually break the begging bowl and come out of debt trap".

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.



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

Donald Lu, Asad Majeed rejected Imran's narrative regarding cipher: Sharjeel

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader and Senior Minister Sindh Sharjeel Inam Memon on Thursday said the cipher was a drama, Imran Khan concocted a false narrative regarding the census to protect his political interests, not only Donald Lu but also Asad Majeed rejected the claims of Imran Khan. PTI founder hired lobbyists to save his politics and attempted to distort Pakistan's image.

In a statement, Sharjeel Memon said that the PTI's sloganeering during Donald Lu's speech made Pakistan a mockery in the eyes of the whole world. The congressman who supports the genocide of innocent Palestinians is also a supporter

of Imran Khan. He stated that the rigging to install Imran Khan on the throne had commenced prior to 2018. The unannounced censorship serves as evidence of the rigging in 2018. There were irregularities in the constituencies during 2018, and European observers acknowledged that the results lacked transparency.

Memon stated that the introduction of RTIS in 2018 was aimed at bringing PTI into power. To ensure PTI's victory in 2018, a "go-slow" policy was implemented with the voters during the election. The process of counting, custody, or delivery of the ballot boxes was kept secret during the 2018 elections.



KARACHI: Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Sindh President, Haleem Adil Sheikh talking to media persons during press conference regarding electoral fraud in NA-238 East Karachi at the Election Tribunal established in the Sindh High Court, in Karachi.

Senate polls: MQM-P session to discuss Vawda support, final candidates

KARACHI (INP): The MQM-P has summoned its central adhoc committee meeting on Friday to discuss support for Faisal Vawda in Senate election.

A private TV channel citing sources said that the session will consider over various options of support to Faisal Vawda in the Senate election.

The MQM-P meeting will also decide about the party's final candidates for Senate, sources shared.

The party session will also take decision about the party's priority with regard

to candidates in the election of the upper house scheduled on April 02.

It is to be mentioned here that the MQM's two MPAs had proposed and seconded nomination papers of Vawda for Senate election. The party had recently also expressed its willingness to see former federal minister Faisal Vawda join its ranks.

MQM-P leader Rauf Siddiqui while speaking to media in Karachi recently said, "We had invited him to join the party in the past".

PTI terms Donald 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.

PCG seizes illegal weapons

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Coast Guards (PCG) conducted a search operation in the area of Sarbandar, Gwadar (Balochistan) based on intelligence received through covert sources, apprehending a suspect and seizing 36 Glock pistols hidden in 2 drums.

Further actions were taken during the search of nearby houses upon identification of the apprehended suspect, resulting in the seizure of one motorcycle, two cars, and one double-barrel shotgun, leading to the arrest of six suspected individuals involved in arms smuggling, according to a news release on Thursday.

The seized weapons, vehicles, and suspects have been placed under custody for legal proceedings.

In another operation, Pakistan Coast Guards conducted an anti-smuggling operation at sea in the vicinity of Jiwani, apprehending a fishing trawler after a two-hour chase, transferring it to Jiwani Jetty and handing it over to Balochistan Fisheries.



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

Thatta water supply reference: President 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, Manahal Majid, Abdul Nadim Bhutto and others.

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 re-

spective 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.



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

Sherry Rehman assails PTI over cipher narrative after Donald Lu's statement

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan People's Party Senator Sherry Rehman has said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) narrative about cipher has proved false after US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu's statement in Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress.

Senator Sherry in her statement issued here on Thursday said Donald Lu in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress has clearly called the cipher statement a lie. Sherry Rehman said that now it has been formally cleared that the PTI had used US cipher's narrative falsely to protect its political objectives in the country.

The PPP senator said that PTI founder Imran Khan and his associates had

already been heard planning to play politics on cipher in the audio leak some time ago. Senator Sherry Rehman added that Imran Khan's principal secretary Azam Khan has also given a detailed explanation in the cipher case hearing.

She said a diplomatic document was distorted for political and personal interests, adding that the false cipher narrative of PTI will be remembered as the worst example of putting domestic and foreign interests at stake for achieving their petty political goals. US cipher issue and Donald Lu is the diplomat whose supposed warning to former Pakistan Ambassador to the US Asad Majeed was the subject of a cipher sent by the envoy to Islamabad.



KARACHI: View of site after fire eruption at Dow University of Health Sciences Ojha Campus after a fire broken out incident as the fire brigade and rescue officials are busy in extinguishing fire during rescue operation, at Suparco road in Karachi.

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. Sources further said army chief took PM into confidence on his visit to Saudi Arabia.

PM expressed satisfaction over relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

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Appointment of new Sindh IGP likely in 48 hours

KARACHI (INP): The appointment of the new inspector general of police (IGP) in Sindh is expected in the next 48 hours as the deadlock over the name of one of the persons whose name has been recommended persists, sources said on Thursday.

Sources further said that in this connection, Sindh Chief Minister (CM) Syed Murad Ali Shah had sent the names of three persons, Ghulam Nabi Memon, Ameer Sheikh and Javed Alam Odho, to the federal government.

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.

Islamabad not seeking armed conflict with Kabul: 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.



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.

Sindh Govt decides to draft policy for utilizing Thar's Coal for gasification

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Government has decided to prepare draft policy in relation to make Liquid Gas and Fertilizer from Thar's Coal through which a foreign exchange worth US dollars 500 million could be saved annually.

This was informed in a meeting of Sindh Coal Authority held here at the office of Energy department under the chair of provincial Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah on Thursday. The meeting was informed that sample of the Coal excavated from Thar was checked up from South Asian Laboratory which has declared it fit for utilizing it for gasification.

The meeting was told that as a result of gas production from coal, country can save about 500 million dollars in foreign exchange annually.

The DG Sindh Coal Authority Haq Nawaz Shar and Consultant Dr Fareed A Malik told the meeting that if we build an energy system from Thar's 175 billion tons of coal reserves, the energy import bill can be reduced by 50%, while green Pollution can also be avoided with coal technology.

Syed Nasir Hussain Shah said provincial government has decided to draft policy in that regard and he will personally hold meeting with Federal Energy Minister to discuss the matter so that project could be materialized.

The meeting was attended by Chairman Planning and Development Syed Najam Ahmed Shah, Secretary Energy Musadik Ahmed Khan, DG Sindh Coal Authority, Consultant and others officers.



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.

Roads, streets to be paved in Orangi Town: Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that 55000 square feet of roads and streets would be paved at a cost of Rs 80 million in Orangi Town.

He said this while talking to media representatives after laying the foundation stone of paving works of various roads and streets in Orangi Town on Thursday.

Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that Pakistan People's Party was making every possible effort to solve the problems of the people. Water, sewerage, infrastructure improvement and development are among our priorities. Development works are also going on in the suburban areas of

Karachi frequently, he said. The Mayor Karachi said that the roads and streets in Orangi Town had been paved under the ADP scheme. In order to solve the long-standing problem of the people of this area, this project has been started on priority basis to provide better facility to people especially, women and children in Orangi area and will be completed as soon as possible for which the credit goes to the leadership of the People's Party, he added.

He said that the parks in Orangi Town are also being improved, Afaq Shaheed Park was restored by us so that the people of the area can get better recreational facilities.

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-logy is an approach to agriculture that seeks to integrate ecological principles into farming systems, emphasising 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.

They 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.

Young 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

Independent Report
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 Bekker 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.

During an extraordinary session with the governing body of state-run medical colleges on Thursday, the prime minister emphasized the paramount importance of maintaining high educational standards, emphasizing that no compromises will be made in this regard.

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.



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.

EC issues notification of election tribunals

LAHORE (Online): Election Commission (EC) has issued notification of election tribunals with reference to by polls in Punjab.

According to notification 4 judges of high court will hear the petitions against the approval or rejection nomination papers in connection with by polls.

As per notification Justice Shahid Karim, Justice Sarfraz Dogar, Justice Ahmad Nadim Arshid and Justice Mirza Waqar Rauf are included in the judges.

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.



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 1,162 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.

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 respon-

sibility 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.

In the meeting, the overall law and order situation in Larkana district was reviewed. Targeted and intelligence-based operation against criminals, actions against crime professionals and other departmental matters including police efficiency were under consideration.

Jinnah House attack: ATC extends interim bail of 10 lawyers

LAHORE (APP): An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Thursday extended the interim bail of ten lawyers involved in the Jinnah House attack case until March 25. The court also sought an investigation report from the police, on the next date of hearing.

ATC Judge Arshad Javed presided over the bail petition proceedings, with the lawyers appearing and marking their attendance. The advocates - Zameer Ahmad, Gulraiz Iqbal, Ahad Amir.

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. However, an AFP journalist saw what appeared to be unconscious people or dead bodies being loaded into ambulances in the wake of the blast.

Firefighters and security personnel were clearing the area, where blood, scraps of clothes and shoes littered the ground.

Samangani said "the situation is under control" at one of the city's hospitals where wounded were transported, denying that the need for blood donations was urgent as had circulated on social media.

"There is no such issue, and the wounded people are not in serious condition, they have super-



Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom Grant Shapps and Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles exchange Defence Treaty documents during a meeting at Parliament House in Canberra.

Senate Democrats 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. "As such, we request the Biden administration promptly establish a bold, public framework outlining the steps necessary" to establish a Palestinian state over both the West Bank.

Hamis says Israeli response to its truce proposal was negative

Monitoring Desk
CAIRO: A senior Hamas official said on Wednesday that Israel's response to the group's latest Gaza ceasefire proposal was negative after mediators handed it over.

"On Tuesday evening, our brothers, the mediators, informed us of the occupation's position on the proposal ... it is a negative response in general and does not respond to the demands.

US unveils draft UN resolution seeking immediate Gaza ceasefire

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.

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 King-

dom 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. Australian National University security analyst David Andrews said Thursday's agreement gave the stalling AUKUS plan some much-needed momentum. "If there was a Trump administration at end of year, and for whatever reason they were not interested in pursuing the agreement, or not in the same way it is envisioned now.

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.

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSRelief) said the funds would support UNRWA's "humanitarian relief efforts in the Gaza Strip", where the crisis has raged for more than five months.

"The funding will provide food for more than 250,000 people and tents for 20,000 families," KSRelief said in a statement.

The UN agency, created in 1949, has come under heavy scrutiny after Israel accused about a dozen of its employees of involvement in the October 7 Hamas raid on southern Israel.

Multiple countries have suspended their aid,

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 KSRelief 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.



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.

Vietnam's vice president becomes interim president

Monitoring Desk
HANOI: Vietnam's Vice President Vo Thi Anh Xuan will serve as acting president after the previous president's resignation a year into the position, a Communist Party newspaper reported Thursday.

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.

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.

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 Zelenskiy said on the Telegram messaging app.

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

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

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 ac-

cepted. 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.

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

Aseefa Bhutto's nomination papers for NA-207 approved

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's nomination papers for by-election in National Assembly constituency NA-207 approved.

The NA-207 seat fell vacant after her father Asif Ali Zardari was elected as the President of Pakistan.

People's Party's legal team comprised of Ferooz H. Naek and Sindh's ministers of law, home department and jails reached to the office of the RO for scrutiny of nomination papers.

The returning officer (RO) conducted scrutiny and approved the papers before the PPP's legal team.

Aseefa Bhutto had submitted her nomination form to returning officer of the NA-207 constituency, Sher Ali Jamali.

The PPP leadership has instructed party leaders to launch the election campaign of Aseefa Bhutto.

10 drug pushers held, 107 kg narcotics recovered

KARACHI (INP): As many as 10 drug pushers were arrested and 107 kilogram narcotics recovered during separate actions of Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) conducted in various cities of the country.

A spokesman of ANF said on Thursday that operations were launched against drug peddlers in Multan, Sheikhpura, Faisalabad, Daska and Zakhakel Khyber.

During separate actions, 10 drug pushers were apprehended besides recovery of 81.4 kilogram hashish, 25.2 kg opium and 74 heroin filled capsules.

Separate cases against the detainees were registered under Drug Act and further investigations were underway.

Dacoit snatches cash from customer inside Karachi bank

KARACHI (INP): An unidentified robber snatched nearly a million rupees from a customer inside the bank in front of a security guard at Korangi Industrial Area in Karachi on Thursday.

The bank CCTV footage of the incident shows that the robber followed the customer who was approaching the bank to deposit cash.

Realizing the robber was after him, the customer hurriedly picked up his cash bag inside the bank's boundary wall and threw it in front of the bank's security guard.

The robber picked up the cash bag and escaped from the scene as the security guard looked away.



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.

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 remains important, the greater focus now includes trade, investment, energy, IT, environment, education, culture.

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 impacted the value of the Pakistani rupee, the FIA Officials informed the minister.

The minister also reviewed the progress on pending promotions of FIA officials and directed to deal with pending promotion cases on urgent basis.

Maryam Nawaz became CM Punjab through electoral fraud: Gandapur

DI KHAN (INP): Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has issued a warning, stating that he is giving a final ultimatum for the federal and Punjab governments to resign.

In a video statement, the Chief Minister's aide, Ali Amin Gandapur, said that if they do not step down voluntarily, he would like to see how they can continue to govern.

Ali Amin Gandapur further stated that Maryam Nawaz became Chief Minister through electoral fraud. Her government is illegitimate, lacking both the support of the people and their votes.

Mayor Karachi visits residence of Ameer JI Karachi

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab visited the residence of Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman on Thursday and prayed for his speedy recovery. On this occasion, he

paid special thanks to Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman's family for giving great respect on his arrival, said a statement issued here. "Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman is the leader of a party and he is like his elder," he said. Later, Hafiz Naeem presented a gift of the holy Quran, to the visiting guest. Mayor Karachi requested JI chief to come forward for the betterment of the city. He further said that all political parties should work together for the development of Karachi.

Ambassador Hashmi says China-Pakistan relationship remains source of peace, stability in region and beyond

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan takes "immense pride" in its unique and "time-tested friendship" with China.

The two countries are not only connected by land, rivers, and mountains, but also by a heart corridor, founded on the shared values of mutual respect, trust, solidarity, and support, said Pakistani Ambassador to China Khalil-ur-Rahman Hashmi.

Hashmi also stressed that as Ambassador of Pakistan to China, he and his team are committed to "implementing the consensus reached between the two countries' leadership to fortify the strategic trust between the two countries, strengthen ties across multiple domains, and build an even stronger China-Pakistan Community of Shared Future in the New Era.

The Pakistani diplomat made the remarks during an event to celebrate the 84th National Day of Pakistan hosted by the Pakistani Embassy in Beijing. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong was also present at the event.

"China and Pakistan are good neighbors, good friends, good partners, and good brothers. The ironclad friendship between the two countries, deeply rooted in the hearts of the two peoples, remains rock solid and keeps growing from strength to strength," Sun said.

"China is glad to see that Pakistan's general election was smoothly held, and a new government has been formed.

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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, at her 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.

Indian fishermen arrested, one PMSA sailor embraces martyrdom

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) ship while patrolling Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) encountered around 8 Indian fishing vessels engaged in illegal fishing activities well within Pakistani waters.

To evade capture, one of the fishing boats increased its speed and started to move towards Indian waters, according to a news release issued by PMSA on Thursday.

During hot pursuit, the fishing vessel continued to evade capture despite multiple verbal warnings and instructions to stop and cooperate.

Eventually, the fishing vessel slowed down allowing the PMSA ship's boarding team to embark.

However, after PMSA personnel were on the fishing vessel, it suddenly accelerated and altered its heading thereby colliding with the PMSA ship.

Consequently, the fishing vessel capsized and sank with all personnel on board i.e. PMSA boarding team and fishermen, being thrown into the sea.

HYDERABAD: Jeay Sindh Mahaz Chairman, Abdul Khaliq Junejo and Vice Chairman, Professor Ameer Chandio addressing a press conference, at Hyderabad press club.

Karachi's educational institutes at the mercy of drug smugglers

KARACHI (INP): An organized network of drug supply has been revealed in educational institutions of Karachi wherein women drug dealers are also key members of the underground network.

As per investigation, drug orders are received from social media groups while drugs are delivered like pizza and burgers being delivered via delivery services. All types of drugs were used earlier only in remote areas and slums but with time, smugglers grew their network in the educational institutions of the port city — Karachi.

As per estimates, cocaine use and ice addiction have massively increased

among the students of Karachi. How much does it cost?

Cocaine — the silent killer — costs Rs15,000 to Rs17,000 per gram while ice started fetching Rs2500 to Rs3500 per gram. A token of Rs5000 for hashish and Rs300 rupees for heroin is being given.

According to police, organized drug smuggling networks are run by 'Dr. Baloch' and 'Pinky group' in educational institutions of Karachi.

Dr. Baloch Group is being operational from Nushki Balochistan while Pinky Group is run by a woman called 'Anmol' aka Pinky — hailing from Rahim Yar Khan (RYK).



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

Ataullah Tarar for devising mechanism to counter fake news regarding CPEC

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ataullah 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 Ataullah 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.

Quality of essential items monitoring on daily basis: Commissioner

SUKKUR (APP): Divisional Commissioner Sukkur Fayyaz Hussain Abbasi Thursday said that no compromise is being made on quality of essential items across the division.

While reviewing performance of Price Magistrates at his office, the Commissioner urged price control magistrates to remain proactive. In an effort to ensure the sale of essential commodities at prescribed rates, stringent monitoring is underway across the division and

price control magistrates are conducting rigorous operations, said Abbasi.

The district administration has intensified price control measures and raids are being conducted on daily basis, he added. Abbasi advised the public to check prices on the price check App before making purchases and in case of any profiteering.

He said that district administrations of Sukkur, Khairpur and Ghotki districts were monitoring the quality of essential items on a daily basis.



HYDERABAD: TB Control Additional Director, Samreen Ashraf addresses to media persons during press conference, at Hyderabad press club.

IRD releases groundbreaking results of end TB programme

HYDERABAD (APP): The Interactive Research and development (IRD) Pakistan has released the groundbreaking results of the end TB Clinical Trial, conducted with the support of Government of Sindh.

Comprising consortium of partners, including IRD, Medicines Sans Frontiers, and Partners in Health, Pakistan was part of a multi-center study that enrolled 754 participants with multidrug or rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis (MDR/RR-TB) from seven countries.

The trial aimed to evaluate five new, all-oral, 9-month regimens compared to the current standard of care MDR/RR-TB treatment.

Led by IRD in collaboration with Communicable Disease Control (CDC) Sindh from 2019 to 2023, Pakistan demonstrated unprecedented resilience despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic floods of 2022, maintaining full participation without any individuals discontinuing their treatment.



LARKANA: Newly posted Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Larkana, Mir Rohal Khan Khoso presides over the meeting to maintain Law and order situation in the district held at his office in Larkana.

CISSS to hold capacity building workshop for SID officers

KARACHI (APP): Director General Public Relations (DGPR), Muhammad Saleem Khan on Thursday said that Information department has assigned the task of publicizing activities of provincial government departments and other officials entities through print, electronic and social media. This he said while talking to a five-member delegation of Centre for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS) at his office here.

The delegation of CISSS team paid an introductory outreach visit to Information Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi. The CISSS team was received by DGPR Muhammad Saleem Khan.

Director Information (Admin and Accounts) Muhammad Yousif Kaboor, Director Information (Press Information) Akhtar Surhio and Aleem

Uddin Khan (Deputy Director Information), were also present.

He further said that Sindh Information department (SID) also acts as a bridge between various government departments and media and updates masses about public welfare initiatives through media.

He said that Public Relations Officers attached with provincial ministers and advisors to highlight government endeavours. The purpose of the visit was to introduce CISSS to Information Department and discuss the areas of mutual interest and scope of future collaboration between the two organisations. Director Research Aftab Hussain briefed the Director General about the aims, objectives, vision and Research Team of CISSS, and apprised him about the activities that CISSS has performed so far.

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Director Information (Admin and Accounts) Muhammad Yousif Kaboor, Director Information (Press Information) Akhtar Surhio and Aleem



KARACHI: Anti encroachment operation in progress removed illegal encroachment during anti encroachment drive under the supervision of Town Municipal Corporation, at Gulshan-e-Iqbal area in Karachi.