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Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

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PTI, PML-N break ice as Gandapur calls on Shahbaz PM assures of resolution of KP's feasible demands

CM Gandapur hails positive meeting with PM, Stresses political engagement to solve political issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday assured that all justified demands of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province would be met while keeping in view the current financial situation of the country.

Welcoming Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, the prime minister said that all the four provinces were the components of the federation and when they moved together, the country achieved progress and development.

The chief minister who called on the prime minister also briefed him on the administrative affairs of the province in detail, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The meeting was attended by Minister for Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar, Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for States and Frontier Regions Amir Muqam and other relevant senior officials.

The prime minister stressed to sit together to resolve all issues, adding the public welfare would be the

top priority of their collective efforts.

The federal government believed in working in harmony with all the provincial governments including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and would foster the strong bonds.

The chief minister also expressed the resolve that the provincial government wanted to move with good intentions and was committed to play its positive role in the national development.

Meanwhile Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Continued on page 2



QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti presiding over a review meeting about Communication and Works Department

PM reaffirms to ensure timely implementation of CPEC initiatives

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday emphasised that his government would work tirelessly to ensure timely implementation of the initiatives under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He stressed that Pakistan was keen to move to the next phase of CPEC, including operationalisation of the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to facilitate Chinese investment in Pakistan.

The prime minister was talking to Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Jiang Zaidong who called on him at the Prime Minister's House, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Dr. Ahsan Iqbal,

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Tariq Fatemi and the foreign secretary also attended the meeting.

The prime minister said the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) had been created during his previous tenure to attract foreign investment in priority sectors including agriculture, IT, minerals and renewable energy.

He said Chinese companies would find many profitable opportunities in Pakistan. The prime minister thanked President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang for their warm messages of greetings on his re-election and assumption of office.

He reciprocated the warm sentiments expressed by the Chinese leadership and lauded their contribution and commitment to the strengthening of the iron-clad friendship between Pakistan and China.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Ambassador Jiang Zaidong calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Imran Zarkoon posted as Principal Secretary to Chief Minister

Independent Report QUETTA: In a significant administrative reshuffle within Balochistan's governance framework, the Balochistan Provincial Service proudly announces the appointment of Grade 20 officer, Imran Zarkoon, as the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister of Balochistan. This appointment comes as a result of Imran Zarkoon's exceptional service record and his recent promotion in grade 20 during the review board, underscored by his advanced educational pursuits overseas.



He hailed from the Kohlu region of Balochistan. Mr. Zarkoon is distinguished as the sole officer from the Balochistan Provincial Ser-

vice to have graduated from the esteemed Oxford University, UK. His academic brilliance further shines through his Masters in Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. Imran Zarkoon also has the

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Imran foresees SL-like situation in Pakistan following 'rigged polls'

RAWALPINDI (INP): Slamming the 2024 nationwide general election once again, incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding chairman Imran Khan has predicted Sri Lanka-like situation in the country as the nation's hopes were shattered by "stealing the mandate".

"My all predictions have proven true," the former prime minister said during an informal interaction with journalists in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, in which he reiterated that he was not engaging into talks with the current rulers to reach a "deal".

"Each and everything is based on lies [...] like the election was a lie [...] the security threat was also a lie," the cricketer-turned-politico said, adding that the PTI was deliberately kept away from the 2024 polls.

Khan, the deposed premier who was removed from power via a parliamentary vote in April 2022, said that the voters took revenge on the polling day but the "change via vote was not accepted".

Nine die in recent rain-related incidents in Balochistan

QUETTA (INP): As many as nine people, including children, lost their lives in recent rain-related incidents in Balochistan.

According to a report released by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), those who died belonged to Kharan, Kech, Barkhan, Chaman and Pishin on Wednesday.

The report says 259 houses were completely destroyed, while 1,40 were partially damaged.

Similarly, it says that four roads were completely destroyed while one of the bridges was washed away by floodwaters.

The PDMA says 80 boats of fishermen were also destroyed due to rains. The Authority says more rain and snow are expected in different districts of the province, including the provincial capital Quetta, during the next 24 hours.

Giving further details, it says thundershowers are expected in Chaman, Ziarat, Pishin, Kalat, Chagai, Sorab, Sibbi, Naseerabad, Mastung, Noshki and Loralai.



ISLAMABAD: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

CM expresses dissatisfaction over quality of development projects; directs to improve performance

Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti directs to prepare comprehensive mechanism for recruitments on vacant posts purely on merit

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has expressed dissatisfaction over the quality of development projects executed by the Communication and Works (C&W) department and directed to improve performance in this regard.

The Chief Minister was chairing a meeting held to review the performance and functioning of the C&W department here on Wednesday.

The Secretary C&W Department briefed the meeting about the functioning of department and development projects.

While expressing his dissatisfaction over the construction projects, the Chief Minister remarked that standard of development projects don't happen to be of national standard

even, what to speak of international level.

He also observed that the PC-I of the projects are not prepared keeping in view of the requirements, rather these are copied and pasted.

Questioning about the concept paper, Mr. Bugti asked the concerned high ups that how a concept paper prepared otherwise only in 10 minutes can meet the public needs?

He asserted that the direction has to be corrected and governance has to be improved.

He also asserted that the concept paper bases on the cut and paste would not be considered in future at all.

Speaking at the meeting, Chief Minister inquired from the Secretary C&W that how many officers were suspended on the ad-

vance-payment?

On this, the Secretary Communications told that departmental action is continued against them.

However, the Chief Minister told that he would be pleased if you (Secretary) would present the data about suspension of the officers.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that there's no concept of accountability and answerability without reward and punishment.

He ordered to all the officers to remain present at the places of their postings in zones and districts. He made them bound to continuously monitor the projects while remaining in the field.

He said that the people of province should know that officers are present in

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ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi chairing a meeting at FIA headquarters.

Interior Minister orders FIA to take measures to curb corruption, smuggling

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Interior and Anti-Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday vowed to crackdown on corruption and improve the agency's efficiency.

He was addressing officer after reaching Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)

Headquarters where he was welcomed by Director General (DG) FIA.

He said corruption will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Corruption is the evil of our society, there will be zero tolerance on it.

He said that FIA is a

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Two candidates withdrawn: Seven candidates in competition run for 3 general seats of Senate from Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: Two candidates have withdrawn their candidature for the election being conducted for three general seats of Senate from Balochistan today (Thursday) here.

According to the Provincial Election Commissioner, Tariq Hussain and Shakeel Durrani have withdrawn from the competition.

Now, there are seven candidates contesting election in three general seats of Senate.

The necessary arrangements have already been made for the bi-elections on three seats of Senate today (Wednesday).

The PEC Muhammad Farid Afridi told that polling would be held at the Balochistan Assembly Hall declared polling station for the Senate election.

The polling would remain continued from 09:00 AM to 04:00 PM, the PEC maintained.



QUETTA: Vice Chancellor University of Turbat Dr. Jan Muhammad meeting with Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar

PTI conspiring against Pakistan by giving a false narrative to European Union: Tarar

PTI spokespersons receiving instructions from jail to harm Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ataulah Tarar on Wednesday said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was conspiring against Pakistan by giving a false narrative to the European Union.

"The spokespersons of PTI are getting instructions from jail to harm the country, but no one will be allowed to harm the economy," he said while addressing his maiden press conference after assuming



charge as Minister for Information and Broadcasting here.

Lashing out at the PTI

Continued on page 2

Commander Bahrain National Guard, CJCSC discuss matters of security, defence cooperation



Independent Report RAWALPINDI: Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa called on Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), General Sahir Shamsah Mirza, here at Joint Staff Headquarters on Wednesday.

Both sides reiterated the resolve to further strengthen security and defence cooperation between the two countries were discussed.

Earlier, upon arrival at Joint Staff Headquarters, a

smartly turned-out tri-services contingent presented 'Guard of Honour' to the visiting dignitary.

Bolan Medical Complex Hospital: 20 doctors, even number of paramedics suspended on absence from duties

Independent Report

QUETTA: As many as 40 doctors and other medical staff who were found absent from their duties in the Bolan Medical Complex (BMC) Hospital were suspended on Wednesday.

The suspension of absentee doctors and medical staff has been made by the Medical Superintendent of BMC Hospital in line with the directives of Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

According to the offi-

cial sources, 20 doctors and even number of paramedics were suspended by the Medical Superintendent of BMC Hospital. The departmental action has also been initiated against the absentee doctors and medical staff of the hospital.

Meanwhile, the Medical Superintendent of BMC Hospital has sent a summary regarding departmental action and suspension of the absentee medical officers and staff to the Secretary Health.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal chaired a meeting to bring major reforms in Planning Commission on March 13. The meeting was attended by the Secretary Planning Ministry and Members Planning Commission.

CM Balochistan grieved over loss of lives: Three persons including father, two sons died in severe Sui gas leakage explosion in Quetta

Independent Report

QUETTA: Three persons including a person and his two children died due to the powerful blast triggered by gas leakage in a house located near Airport road Quetta in wee hours of Wednesday.

According to details, the head of family namely Shafullah tried to lit the gas heater with matchbox, there was an explosion in the house killing him and his two minor children.

Her wife and another child were also burnt and injured.

The rescue teams and area police rushed towards the area on being informed, and shifted the deceased

and injured to the Bolan Medical Complex Hospital.

The necessary treatment is being provided to the injured, however, their condition is stated to be serious, said the hospital sources.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has expressed deep grief and sorrow over the loss of lives in the gas leakage blast occurred at Airport road.

He said that he shares the grief with the bereaved family. He directed the concerned authorities to provide best medical treatment to those injured in the blast.

Masood Khan testifies comparative advantage of apparel sector before US ITC

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's apparel-ymanic entrepreneurship and commitment to meeting quality and Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) standards. "These factors," he said, "are underpinned by the Government's aggressive measures to improve efficiency, regulatory environment and ease of doing business."

Masood Khan also highlighted that United States was the largest export destination for Pakistan. "Textiles and apparel constitute around 85% of Pakistan's total exports to the US," he said.

"Pakistan has a 3.3% share of the US market in the textiles and apparel segment, however, all the exports of apparel products are subject to applicable MFN tariffs of up to 38.3%

as Pakistan does not enjoy preferential access to the US market," he added.

He pointed out that Pakistan was the fifth largest cotton producer in the world.

"Pakistan is the third largest producer of Better Cotton globally and promotes cultivation of organic cotton to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," he said.

Pakistan was making concerted endeavors to increase cotton productivity and transition towards sustainable development, the Ambassador added.

Highlighting the resilience of the sector especially in wake of COVID-19, Masood Khan pointed out that Pakistan recorded textiles and apparel exports of US\$ 19.3 billion in FY 2021-22, up by 54.4% as compared to US\$ 12.5 bil-

lion in FY 2019-20. This growth, he said, was driven by apparel exports which increased by 69% to US\$ 9.03 billion in FY22 from US\$ 5.35 billion in FY20.

"Because of massive disruption in supply chains in last two years, Pakistan like other leading exporters of apparel witnessed a declining trend. However, right now, we are in the recovery mode of rapid growth," said the Ambassador.

He also pointed out that Pakistan followed a liberal investment regime that offered conducive environment to attract foreign and local investors. He said that Pakistan attracted high-value-added, export-oriented, and resource-efficient investments through increased integration with global value chains.



QUETTA: MPA Dr. Rubaba Buledi meeting with Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Safaraz Bugti

PM assures of resolution of...

Continued from page 1
Ali Amin Gandapur on Wednesday expressed satisfaction following his first meeting with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, highlighting its positive tone and focus on addressing public and provincial concerns.

Addressing a joint press conference with federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal and federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) Amir Muqam, Gandapur emphasized the importance of cooperation between the federal and the provincial governments in delivering solutions to a number of pressing issues. Following is a recap of the significant discussions and outcomes of the meeting.

Chief Minister Gandapur underscored the constructive dialogue with PM Shehbaz Sharif, emphasizing their discussions on matters ranging from law and order to public

welfare. The CM lauded the PM's commitment in providing full support and fulfilling promises made, signaling a collaborative approach to ensure good-governance.

Gandapur stressed the significance of political engagement, advocating for a meeting citing it as a pathway to political resolution.

Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal echoed Gandapur's sentiments, expressing optimism about the talks' outcomes.

He highlighted the PM's assurance regarding the settlement of the province's dues by the federal government and directives to address challenges faced by the people during suhoor and iftar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

He further expressed the resolve that the federal government wanted to move with good intentions and was committed to play its positive role in the national development.

Imran Zarkoon posted...

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Saraiki, Punjabi, Khetrani, and Sindh languages. This linguistic proficiency reflects his deep connection and understanding of Balochistan's diverse cultural landscape.

Known for his bold, decisive, and brave persona, Mr. Zarkoon's appointment was championed by the Chief Secretary Balochistan and the Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, who views him as a visionary regional leader. Having known Mr. Zarkoon for nearly three decades, Chief Minister Bugti's decision to appoint him as Principal Secretary was driven by his outstanding academic qualifications and his profound grasp of regional affairs.

The Balochistan Provincial Service, along with the people of Balochistan, extends its heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Imran Zarkoon on his new appointment. We are confident in his ability to serve with distinction and dedication, furthering the prosperity and development of Balochistan. We wish him success in earning the trust of the Chief Minister and in his role as a dynamic and active Principal Secretary.

The recovered bodies were promptly handed over to the relevant authorities for further proceedings.

With this latest development, the total number of bodies retrieved from the sea stands at twelve. The search for the remaining two bodies is ongoing, with PMSA and PN units deployed at sea maintaining close coordination with local authorities and the fishing community. The incident, which occurred on March 5 near Hajambo Creek, is believed to have been caused by a combination of technical issues and adverse weather conditions.

Moreover, the fruits of development and government's initiatives must reach to the common men, adding he stressed.

Similarly, the Chief Minister directed to prepare comprehensive mechanism for recruitments on the vacant seats purely on merit. He declared that no vacancy would be sold out in the province. It was witnessed in the past that the poor people gave money for jobs after selling valuables of their houses, he regretfully pointed out.

He said that it would be better not to make recruitment if the jobs are to be sold out.

The Chief Minister on the occasion minced no words when said that recruitments must be made purely on merit without taking any pressure.



QUETTA: Commissioner Quetta and Administrator Quetta, Muhammad Hamza Shafiqat presiding over a meeting, at Metropolitan Corporation Office in Quetta.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits various special distribution points of Utility Stores Corporation set up with regard.

Shaza calls for completion of all IT projects within specified timelines

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, on Wednesday, called for the completion of all Information Technology projects within specified timelines.

Presiding over a meeting, she directed the efficient utilization of funds for all projects.

She pledged efforts to accelerate the promotion of the IT and Telecom sector and attract investments in the sector.

The meeting was at-

tended by IT Secretary Hassan Nasir Jamy, Additional Secretary Aisha Humera Moriani, and senior officials of the Ministry of IT.

Various subsidiary departments of the Ministry of IT, including NTC, PTA, Universal Service Fund, and other government entities, were present in the meeting. During the session, detailed presentations were given on the workings of the Ministry of IT, the IT sector landscape, Telecom Ecosystem, and the Ministry's projects.

PM summons SIFC Apex Committee today

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD (INP): A meeting of the apex committee of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has been called under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday.

According to the details, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir will also attend the Apex Committee meeting.

Apart from this, former Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and Caretaker Cabinet have also been invited to the meeting.

Doors of negotiations open to all: Barrister Gohar

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD (INP): - PTI leader Barrister Gohar says doors of negotiations are open to all.

PTI leader termed terrorism a serious concern. He said that they were trying to melt the ice and move forward. He said that the government's actions are taking them to a crossroads.

He also lamented the ban imposed by the Punjab government on meeting the PTI founder in Adiala jail. "It is difficult to run in such conditions but let's see what they do next" he questioned.

The PTI leader also talked about the Al-Qadir Trust hearing in Adiala Jail.

IG Punjab directed to increase security of courts across the province

Independent Report
LAHORE: Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that foolproof security of courts across the province is among the top priorities in which any negligence or irresponsibility will be intolerable.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed to increase the security of courts across the province. He said that the day-to-day locking of the courts under the guise of unnecessary protest is not acceptable at all. IG Punjab said that the protection of judiciary is the first priority, ridicule of

judges is not tolerated, courts will remain open in any case, normal court proceedings and justice will be ensured in a peaceful environment.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar directed that the RPOs, DPOs and concerned officers conduct a security audit and reconfigure the security plan of the courts. IGP Punjab directed that RPOs, CPOs and DPOs should maintain close coordination with the court administration and make ensure best security arrangements with mutual consultation.



ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja chairing a briefing on the working and projects of Ministry of IT & Telecom.

PTI conspiring against Pakistan by giving...

Continued from page 1
leadership, the minister said its conspiratorial elements were again trying to attack the country's

economy as in the past too, PTI did a heinous act by writing a letter to the International Monetary Fund asking it not to enter into a loan agreement with the Pakistan government.

He said that the PTI spokespersons were getting instructions from Adiala jail to harm Pakistan. Tarar alleged that the founder of PTI had tried to make this country default but with the grace of Allah and Shehbaz Sharif's personal interest, Pakistan entered into an agreement with the IMF.

He said now again the PTI leadership wanted to sabotage the agreement with the IMF through another letter.

He asked the question as to in what capacity were they writing this letter to the IMF.

"Protecting the state of Pakistan and the national interest is our first responsibility. Strategies and steps are being taken for revival of the economy," Tarar maintained.

The minister said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was working day and night for the improvement of the economy and daily he chaired three to four meetings on the economy only.

He said that the prime minister was working to end inflation and unemployment in the country.

The minister said on the other hand there was a political party which did not see anything beyond itself, and it did not care about the national interests or integrity of Pakistan.

He said Pakistan could

earn precious foreign exchange if GSP plus status from EU continued, it would help create more job opportunities and strengthen rupee as a currency.

"If Pakistan has GSP plus status, foreign exchange will come, our exports will increase, rupee will become stable, inflation will be reduced and employment opportunities will be provided", Ataullah Tarar remarked.

At the start of his press conference he assured that he would try his best to take measures for the welfare of media workers and journalists.

"The doors of the Ministry of Information are opened for journalists and will try to play the role of a bridge between the government and the media," he added.

He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had started working on a strategy to deal with the challenges faced by the economy as soon as he assumed office.

He said it was an honour that yesterday, Bloomberg magazine mentioned Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif regarding his potential for betterment of Pakistan's economy.

The minister said that Bloomberg also termed the choice of Muhammad Aurangzeb as finance minister as the best choice who as an economist had vast experience at global level.

Tarar said that Bloomberg also mentioned the policies of the Prime Minister for revival of the economy.

Replying to a question, he said that these elements were contacting the European Union and asking them to withdraw the GSP plus status, which was tanta-

mount to a conspiracy and nefarious attempt to make the poor people of Pakistan suffer.

To another question, he said Imran Khan was living a lavish life in jail, adding the founder of PTI had been given not only a room but the entire gallery for walk.

According to the prison manual of 1978, every prisoner was allowed one meeting in a week, but the founder chairman PTI was allowed four meetings in a week, he added.

The minister said one meeting was held with lawyers, one with friends, one meeting with political associates and one meeting with family members.

Since Imran Khan had been in prison, he had met hundreds of people, the minister informed.

Besides, he said, Imran was given exercise equipment in jail.

About PTI, he said, these were the people who attacked and destroyed the memorials of the martyrs on May 9 and ransacked the residence of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in Lahore.

He said the PTI had hatched a cipher conspiracy and tried to spoil Pakistan's relations globally. Now attempts were being made to put the country's economy at stake through a campaign based on lies, he remarked.

To a question, he said that meetings banned on reports of sabotage near Adiala Jail and security audit of Adiala, Mianwali and DG Khan jails was being done.

Pakistan, China vow to cement ironclad ties

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan and China are planning more high-level exchanges and steps to take their relations to even greater heights, Islamabad's top envoy to Beijing said, with the recent election of Pakistan's new leadership fueling expectations for fortified bilateral cooperation going forward.

Pakistani Ambassador to China Khalid Hashmi said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that the two nations are "resolved to further bolster high-level exchanges, instill additional substance to the already robust bilateral relations, and further fortify the ironclad friendship in the face of a complex geopolitical and regional milieu".

Hashmi noted that President Xi Jinping was the first foreign leader to send a congratulatory message to both President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan "in a matter of a few hours" after the announcement of the election results.

Sharif wrote in a post on social media platform X that he wished to extend sincere gratitude to the Chinese president for congratulating him on his reelection. "Look forward to working with him to further strengthen Pakistan-China ironclad friendship and for high-quality development of CPEC as flagship of BRI," he wrote, referring to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Pakistani envoy stressed that ties between China and Pakistan, as iron brothers and all-weather strategic cooperative partners, have weathered many storms and achieved many milestones.

a diplomatic gesture underscoring the strong ties between the two neighbors.

In his messages, Xi underlined his readiness to work with the two leaders in carrying forward the traditional bilateral friendship and advancing pragmatic cooperation in various sectors.

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CHARSADDA: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif offers condolence over the demise of wife of Asfand Yar Wali, President of Awami National Party.

Earthquake jolts KP and Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): An earthquake of 5.3 magnitude on the Richter scale jolted various parts of the country on Wednesday.

According to a private news channel, the National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC) confirmed that tremors were felt in various parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the federal capital, and the adjoining areas.

Earthquake tremors occurred in the Upper and Lower Dir, Mohmand, Buner, Orakzai and Abbottabad areas of KP.

Earthquake tremors also occurred in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

According to NSMC Islamabad, the epicenter was in the Hindu Kush region, and the depth was 130 km.

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

Interior Minister orders...

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The performance of the officers posted in different countries should also be reviewed, he said.

A comprehensive plan should be formulated to stop the smuggling of dollars getting out of the country, the minister directed the officials.

Hundi & Hawala businesses will also have to be addressed with effective measures and entry and exit from the country on fake documents should also be stopped, Naqvi said.

Good work has been done with respect to Interpol, it can also be improved, he said adding that it is also very important to enhance the efficiency of the officers and align them with the modern requirements through training.

The condition of police stations will also have to be improved, the minister said adding that all resources should be utilized to improve public service delivery.

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Ahsan reviews progress of National Centers of emerging technologies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Newly-appointed Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal Wednesday visited the National Center of Artificial Intelligence (NCAI) at NUST to review its progress, along with other national centers focusing on robotics, cyber-security, big data, and cloud computing established by the minister.

Ahsan Iqbal underscored the pivotal role of these centers in driving economic growth through product commercialization and digital exports, stressing the significance of technological advancement in the modern global economy.

During his interaction with stakeholders, Professor Iqbal highlighted the importance of investing in AI and technology, noting its transformative potential across various sectors.

He advocated for the integration of AI into governance processes, emphasizing its role in facilitating good governance and fostering economic development.

The minister urged for collaborative efforts between academia and industry to accelerate the commercialization of technological innovations. He emphasized the need for curriculum reforms, accreditation, and standardization processes to ensure the quality and relevance of educational programs.

Addressing issues of sustainability, Professor Iqbal directed the Higher Education Commission (HEC) to revisit existing decisions and expedite the approval of proposed policies aimed at sustaining the efforts of the national centers. He emphasized the importance of operational plans focused on commercialization and industry collaboration to enable the centers to thrive.

Moreover, Professor Iqbal instructed HEC to expedite the release of promised funds and address delays in salary revisions, demonstrating his commitment to supporting technological initiatives. He stressed the crucial role of technology in driving Pakistan's economic growth and urged for swift resolution of pending issues.

Earlier, the minister was comprehensively briefed on NCAI progress and on collaborative initiatives with international partners, such as the Memorandum of Agreement with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), showcasing Pakistan's commitment to global collaboration in the field of technology.

He was also briefed on the National Center of Robotics and Automation (NCRA) and showcased its achievements in agriculture, healthcare collaborations, and advanced robotics for industries. The National Center of Cyber Security (NCCS) highlighted the launch of over 50 products, international partnerships with Saudi Arabia, and its role in improving Pakistan's global ranking.

The center's initiatives include cyber audits for over 30 national bodies, launching degree programs, and contributing to the security evaluation of cyber and non-cyber products under the Common Criteria Lab framework.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Development & Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal visited at the National Center of Artificial Intelligence of National University of Science and Technology (NUST) on March 13 to review the progress of the NCAI and other national centers focused on robotics, cybersecurity, big data, and cloud computing established by the Minister.

NDMA announces Prize Competitions for Pak Int'l Expo on DRR 2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): As part of Pakistan's International Expo on Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR) 2024, NDMA announces a series of prize competitions open to students nationwide and will feature categories in painting, photography and disaster-resilient model creation.

The themes for the competitions are designed to reflect Pakistan's resilience in the face of natural disasters, the impact of climate change, human-induced disasters, disaster risk reduction strategies, and the role of technology and innovation in preparedness, a news release said.

The top three participants in each category will be awarded substantial cash prizes of PKR 100,000, PKR 75,000, and PKR 50,000 respectively. The deadline for project submissions is March 25, 2024.

Eligible participants must be at least 18 years of age and enrolled in an educational institution. For more details, please visit the NDMA's social media platforms. PIEDRR 2024, a first-of-its-kind event, is set to take place from April 23 to 25, 2024, at the Pak China Friendship Center, Islamabad. The expo will host delegates from 44 countries, including members of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

IHC summons PTA, PEMRA chairmen in audio leaks case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday again summoned chairmen of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in person in audio leaks cases of Bushra Bibi and Najam u Saqib.

The court directed the chairman PTA and members to submit their report along with their affidavits. The hearing of the case was adjourned till March 14.

Justice Babar Sattar heard the identical petitions. The court asked the chairman PEMRA to tell that what steps have been taken to stop spread of leaked audios on media without verification.

The court said that the PTA's lawyer has raised the objection that the bench couldn't seek affidavit from chairman PTA. The court said that this argument of PTA's lawyer was based on misunderstanding.

It further said that the court has sought comments from PTA being a telecom regulator to inform that whether the department has given direction to telecom operators for phone tape. The PTA, in its written comments, has adopted the stance that it has no authority to issue such directions.

The court said that PTA's lawyer Irfan Qadir, however, has stated that the authority has such provision. It said that the statements of PTA and its lawyer were contradicting.

The court adjourned the case till tomorrow with above instructions.



ISLAMABAD: A view of fire broke out in a care at Islamabad Highway in the Federal Capital.

Islamabad to have a IT park; CDA given approval

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Directorate of Technology and Digitalization of Capital Development Authority (CDA) is taking several steps to provide IT facilities to the citizens.

According to the details, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) board has approved the construction of an IT park on an area of 3.3 acres in Sector G-10 of Islamabad, for which a plot has also been allocated.

Further, Islamabad IT Park will be established under Public Private Partnership. The covered area of this park will cover 1 lakh square feet. In the IT Park, working space for freelancers, start-ups, software houses, library, space for exhibition of IT products, research centers, conference halls and meeting rooms will also be allocated.

It should be noted that private companies will bear all the costs of construction of IT Park, while after 15 years this park will be completely handed over to CDA.

900 Scouts ready to serve Umrah performers, visitors to Grand Masjid in Ramadan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Saudi Arabia's Director General of Education in the Makkah Region Abdullah bin Saad Al-Ghannam Wednesday checked on the work of scout leaders, students, and girl scouts participating in serving Umrah performers and worshippers at the Grand Holy Mosque.

He assessed the voluntary services and the Bader Scout Center for volunteer work, and learned about the scouts' readiness to serve Umrah performers and visitors to the Grand Mosque during the blessed month of Ramadan.

Some 900 boy and girl scouts, along with 40 scout leaders, provide volunteer services for the Ministry of Education's scouts. These services include pushing carts, distributing Iftar meals, organizing crowds, coordinating with government, security, and voluntary agencies, serving visitors to the Grand Mosque, SPA reported. They project a bright image of the generous citizens serving visitors, highlight the educational role of scouting, and serve Umrah performers. Al-Ghannam stressed that the voluntary work carried out by the Ministry of Education's scouts at the Grand Mosque is an extension of the efforts exerted by the government.



ISLAMABAD: Gypsy boy on his way carrying garbage bag during rain in the Federal Capital.

300 faithful to observe Aitekaf at Faisal Masjid

ISLAMABAD (APP): Faisal Masjid is set to host 300 individuals for Aitekaf, a revered Islamic tradition of seclusion and devotion, in a bid to deepen their spiritual connection during the holy month of Ramadan.

The administration of Faisal Masjid has opened its doors to those seeking this profound spiritual experience in the last Ashra (10 days) of the holy month.

The administration has announced that applications for Aitekaf will be accepted until the 10th of Ramadan, allowing eager devotees to secure their spots in advance. Applicants are advised that the process operates on a first-come, first-served basis, emphasizing the importance of prompt submission.

Prospective participants are required to obtain an application form from the Faisal Masjid Islamic Centre office, accompanied by a non-refundable fee of Rs. 5,000. Alongside the application, individuals must provide two passport-sized photographs and a copy of their national identity card, ensuring all necessary documentation is in order.

With the responsibility of Suhoor and Iftar arrangements falling upon the participants, individuals are urged to prepare accordingly for the duration of their Aitekaf.

It's worth noting that the opportunity for Aitekaf is open to individuals up to 60 years of age, fostering inclusivity within the spiritual community. Moreover, participants are reminded of the necessity to arrive before Iftar on the 20th of Ramadan, marking the commencement of their seclusion. In anticipation of this sacred undertaking, Faisal Masjid has made special arrangements to accommodate the devotees embarking on this spiritual journey. From provisions for prayer to facilities for rest and reflection, the Faisal Masjid aims to provide a conducive environment.



Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Housing and Works, chaired a high level meeting of Estate Office in Islamabad on March 13, 2024. Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Secretary Housing and other senior officers of the ministry were also present during the meeting.

Pirzada emphasizes importance of upholding rule of law

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Housing and Works Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada Wednesday emphasized the importance of upholding the rule of law and maintaining the integrity of the allocation process of government accommodations.

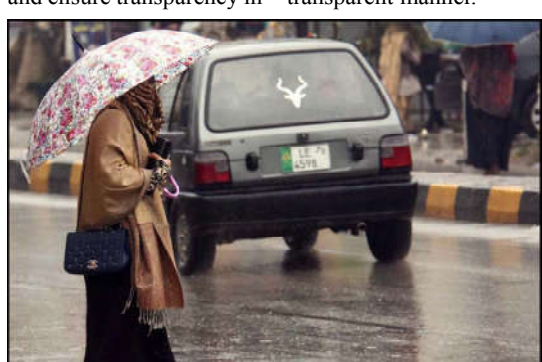
Chairing a high level meeting of Estate Office, he directed the concerned to conduct a thorough review of all previous allotments to identify any instances of illegality or irregularity and strict action will be taken against those found guilty.

The meeting was held to focus on devising strategies to curb the previous practice of illegal allotments and ensure transparency in the allocation process, said a news release.

During the meeting, Riaz Pirzada was apprised by Director General, Estate Office Obaid ud Din about the management and working of the department.

The minister also directed to implement strong mechanisms to prevent future occurrences of illegal allotments and to streamline the allocation process to ensure efficiency and fairness.

Riaz Pirzada reiterated the government's commitment to providing affordable housing solutions to the federal employees and general public while ensuring that all transactions are conducted in a fair and transparent manner.



ISLAMABAD: A woman standing on the roadside waiting for transport under the shade of an umbrella during rain at Ghouri Town.

'Youm-e-Tahafuz-Namoos-e-Risalat' Legal Commission on Blasphemy to mark March 15

ISLAMABAD (APP): To prevent the spread of blasphemy content on social media and raise awareness about it, a non-governmental organization 'Legal Commission on Blasphemy Pakistan' has announced to observe 'Youm-e-Tahafuz-Namoos-e-Rasalat' on March 15.

The commission has appealed to the public to participate in this awareness campaign actively.

According to a statement issued by the commission, there has been an increase in the spread of blasphemous content by some malicious elements on various social media platforms. Also, an increase in sharing of such content in specific groups on various websites has been reported.

In this regard, the commission said, educational institutions, mosque imams, intelligentsia, law-

IHC seeks comments on appeals of PTI founder, Qureshi

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday accepted the appeals for hearing against the sentences of PTI founder and Shah Mehmood Qureshi in cipher case.

The court served notices to respondents and sought arguments from lawyers on March 18.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb heard the appeals of the two accused challenging their conviction.

Earlier, the special prosecutor has objected over the appeals and adopted the stance that there was no provision of appeal in Official Secrets Act.

Defence lawyer Barrister Salman Safdar argued that the act has mentioned the procedure and law for the trial. As per the judicial references the appeal was the continuity of the trial process, he said.

He said that as per the directives of the apex court, one couldn't be deprived of the right of appeal.

3 bike lifters held, stolen motorbikes recovered

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) Shahzad Town and Khanna police teams arrested three wanted members of bike lifter gang involved in numerous criminal activities and recovered two stolen motorbikes, spare parts and valuables from their possession. A public relations officer on Wednesday said that, responding to the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Shahzad Town police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending a wanted member of a motorbike lifter gang involved in numerous criminal activities. The accused was identified as Ehsan Haider. Police team also recovered a stolen motorbike from his possession.

Mushaal urges UN to fulfill long-promised right to self-determination of Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (APP): Hurriyat leader Mushaal Hussein Mullick Wednesday called upon the United Nations (UN) to uphold its commitment to the right of self-determination.

Talking to a Private news channel, she said that India has violated all international laws and conventions in IIOJK, adding, that the actions of the Modi-led government are undemocratic and illegal and in direct violation of UN resolutions and the Geneva Convention.

She said Pakistan was gravely concerned over the escalation of systematic brutalities, killing of innocent civilians, and human rights violations by the Indian security forces with impunity in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

"We are reminding the international community from time to time to ensure the peaceful implementation of UN resolutions which is the only way out to resolve the Kashmir dispute", she added.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Lawyers from various bar councils called upon Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Senator Azam Nazir Tarar, to extend congratulations on his assumption of office.

Chief Commissioner, DC visit Ramzan bazaars; inspect arrangements

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Anwar-ul-Haq and Deputy Commissioner, Irfan Nawaz Memon have visited Ramzan bazaars to ensure accessible supplies for residents at subsidized rates.

According to the ICT Spokesman, Dr Abdullah Tabassum, the Chief Commissioner emphasized the significance of these budget-friendly bazaars and issued directives to uphold government-approved prices and ensure the uninterrupted availability of essential goods, aligning with relief measures outlined by the district administration. Meanwhile, he reviewed the price lists and scrutinized the quality of goods offered by various vendors. Expressing concern for consumers, he emphasized the significance of adhering to the urban rate list to prevent overcharging.

Furthermore, he engaged with vendors to ensure the origin and quality of products sourced from different cities, underscoring the importance of consumer satisfaction.

On the occasion, the DC emphasized the affordability and quality, highlighting the significance of these Ramzan bazaars in providing essential food items at subsidized rates.

ICP nab 12 outlaws; drugs, weapons seized

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) apprehended 12 outlaws including four professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession.

A public relations officer said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.

Meanwhile, Aabpara police team arrested an accused namely Zeeshan Masih and recovered one liquor bottle from his possession. The Karachi company police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Naseeb and recovered one 30 bore pistol with ammunition from his possession. Likewise, the Golra police team arrested an accused namely Saeed involved in illegally selling petrol. The Sumbal police team arrested an accused namely Ameen Ullah and Shoaib and recovered two 30 bore pistols from their possession. The Shams Colony police team arrested an accused namely Awais Nasir and recovered one 30 bore pistol.

Faisal Javed indicted in case of threatening a journalist

ISLAMABAD (APP): The District and Sessions Court of Islamabad has indicted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Faisal Javed in a case of threatening a journalist lodged at Bani Galla police station. Civil Judge Qudrat Ullah heard the case on Wednesday. The Defense Counsel, Sardar Masroof, sought some time to analyze the documents and urged to adjourn the proceedings without a hearing. The court dismissed the plea of the defense counsel and imposed the indictment.



AIOU uploads merit lists of M Phil and PhD programs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has compiled merit lists of M Phil /MS and PhD programs, offered in semester spring.

According to AIOU, transparency has been ensured throughout the process upon the special directives of Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood.

The students can check their names in merit lists available on university websites or at respective departments. Late date for fee submission of these programs is March 17.

IHC seeks reply against imposing ban to meet prisoners

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has sought a reply from the Superintendent of Adiala Jail regarding the imposition of a ban on meetings with PTI founder and other prisoners incarcerated at Adiala Jail.

Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir heard the application on Wednesday against the ban imposed by the Punjab government.

PTI's lawyer, Sher Afzal Marwat, argued that imposing a ban on meetings with imprisoned persons at Adiala Jail was not within the jurisdiction of the Punjab government.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Thursday March 14, 2024

Political faults

Constructive politics goes beyond mere agitation and protest. Unfortunately, over the past decade or so, all of Pakistan's major political parties have demonstrated a disappointing lack of vision with which they could inspire the people of this country.

Admittedly, this is not entirely our politicians' fault: incessant interference in the democratic process has upended the rules of politics, making it so that political parties see a greater incentive in winning the favour of those pulling the strings than in putting effort into generating good ideas for public welfare that can be backed by popular support.

Considering how long this disequilibrium has been allowed to persist, it is no surprise that modern politicking in Pakistan has been reduced to 'us vs them' fights based on divisive narratives, referring to rivals with insulting epithets, rabble-rousing over moral panic situations, and accusing the competition of corruption.

The PTI is often accused by its critics of triggering this decline, and not without reason. The party was initially nurtured by the establishment as a counterweight to the PML-N and PPP, and it seized power by constantly attacking and delegitimising its peers. It was fed with so much confidence that it came to believe it was above the rules of politics. It sought to tear down the fragile structure of Pakistan's fledgling democracy, perhaps aspiring to build it anew.

However, it came up short in terms of capability. By the time its crutches were taken away, the party had grown too accustomed to confrontation. It fought for survival using the same self-righteous anger it had once been encouraged to use against its rivals — only this time, it was turned on those who had been nurturing it.

In the recent elections, the party managed to achieve the unthinkable. Its credentials and mandate can no longer be denied — it is now an entity that doesn't need any external support. However, the manner in which it has wielded power in the past still gives many cause for concern. Its quick successes seem to have engendered a youthful hubris that sees it get carried away when the situation requires patience. Its supporters don't realise that change is a process, not an event.

Their angry campaigns on social media only reinforce their image as a volatile crowd. In this context, the party's recent announcement of a shadow cabinet to oversee the Punjab government is an encouraging sign. It indicates that the party is maturing politically. It must do more. Another good step would be to start talking to other political parties.

The PTI should know that it is welcome as a disruptive force in the political landscape as long as it can make a distinction between disruption and outright destruction. It must learn to wield its influence responsibly.



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

On the occasion of the World Day Against Cyber Censorship, celebrated globally on March 12th, the Paris-based media watchdog, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), unveiled the launch of Operation Collateral Freedom (OCF). This initiative empowers over 100 media outlets in 32 countries to bypass censorship, marking a 20% increase from the previous year. Operation Collateral Freedom achieves this by creating mirror sites of blocked websites, ensuring constant synchronization with the originals and placing them in various online locations.

OCF helps the journalists to adapt to the evolution in censorship techniques, provides the media with IT resources through the Collateral Freedom app since August 2023, which allows them to mirror sites hosted on the online infrastructure used by RSF. So far 480 mirror sites on RSF's servers are currently enabling access to 100 censored media outlets.

Pakistani journalists grappling with censorship and social media restrictions have an opportunity to benefit from RSF's Operation Collateral Freedom. Through this initiative, RSF creates mirror sites of blocked media outlets, providing users access to content other-

wise censored. Journalists can request their websites be mirrored and utilize the Collateral Freedom app for technical support, ensuring their content remains accessible despite censorship attempts. By staying informed about RSF's efforts, collaborating with international partners, and advocating for press freedom, Pakistani journalists can effectively combat online censorship and ensure their voices are heard.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has consistently voiced concerns regarding restrictions, both official and unofficial, on press and media freedom in Pakistan. In an open letter to Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif on March 4th, RSF urged the new government to take immediate steps to restore press freedom, significantly weakened in recent years. RSF highlighted that the 2024 electoral process witnessed a notable surge in violations against media freedom, emphasizing the critical need for prompt and effective measures to address these issues. RSF condemns the arbitrary shutdowns of the Internet and mobile services, as well as the blocking of social media platforms for political purposes, deeming such actions unacceptable in a democratic society and urged the government to provide an assurance that it will refrain from resorting to these authoritarian measures, which undermine freedom of expression and ac-

cess to information.

RSF's assessment underscores Pakistan's standing in media freedom, ranking 150th out of 180 countries. Shockingly, between 2012 and 2022, 53 journalists lost their lives in Pakistan, with convictions secured for only 4% of these cases. RSF highlights various forms of media coercion in Pakistan, including military interference, journalist abductions by intelligence agencies, legislative misuse to muzzle journalists, arbitrary Internet shutdowns, and draconian media laws. The lackluster investigations into these crimes perpetuate impunity, denying justice to victims. RSF emphasizes the urgent need for strengthened legislation to combat impunity and ensure respect for the rule of law, particularly concerning criminal activities by security services targeting journalists deemed "troublesome," such as abductions, secret detentions, and torture.

RSF underscores Pakistan's status as one of the most perilous environments for journalists, marked by extensive censorship and self-censorship. Urgently, RSF calls upon the new government to address this critical issue and honor commitments made by political parties during the electoral campaign. These include establishing a Safety and Security Commission for journalists, as pledged by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and revising the Prevention of Electronic Crimes

Act (PECA) 2016, as promised by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). RSF urges the government to combat harassment against women journalists, enforce laws protecting journalists, repeal restrictive legislation on information rights, ensure media independence, cease arbitrary Internet and social media shutdowns, and enable journalists to work safely while upholding the free flow of information.

RSF emphasizes the urgency for the federal government to enact the 2021 federal law on the protection of journalists and media professionals without delay. Despite Prime Minister Sharif's public commitment in Islamabad on December 6, 2022, to establish the planned security commission, it has yet to be implemented, rendering the law ineffective. Additionally, RSF calls for the revision of Article 6 to eliminate the contentious reference to "bona fide journalism." These measures are crucial to safeguarding the rights and safety of journalists in Pakistan.

RSF urges the information ministry to cease using advertising revenue as a tool to manipulate the editorial direction of privately-owned media outlets, whose financial stability relies heavily on legal notices and state sector advertising. Additionally, RSF condemns the military's persistent intervention in media affairs to suppress information. Journalists must have the freedom to cover all topics without fear, including those con-

cerning the armed forces, terrorism, and the defense of civil liberties. This entails ensuring unbiased reporting and protecting journalists from undue influence or intimidation. RSF challenges the government to review several laws that encroach upon press and media freedom, including certain clauses of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance 2023 (PEMRA Amendment Act). These amendments purportedly combat disinformation but risk enabling media censorship. RSF insists on precise definitions for terms like "authentic information" and "disinformation" to prevent license withdrawal or outlet suspension. The Official Secrets Amendment Act (2023) requires revision to prevent its misuse against journalists. Additionally, Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, known as "PECA," is currently utilized to censor social media criticism and must be revised to safeguard online freedom of expression.

In his inaugural address to the newly sworn-in cabinet, the Prime Minister rightly underscored trade and investment as critical areas for uplifting the beleaguered state of the economy. However, while emphasizing hard work as the primary pathway to achieving economic progress, it's imperative to recognize that the perception of a country's brand value plays a pivotal role in attracting favorable trade

and investment. Regrettably, the current brand image of Pakistan languishes at its lowest, trailing behind many regional counterparts and only marginally above war-torn nations. This dismal performance extends across various international indices and rankings, spanning from soft power and economic indicators to rule of law, legislative freedom, democracy, justice, and freedom of press and media.

To effectively stimulate trade and investment, there must be a concerted effort to uplift Pakistan's brand image across all these fronts. This entails upholding the rule of law, adhering steadfastly to democratic principles, ensuring the freedom and independence of vital institutions, and safeguarding the fundamental rights of speech, assembly, and media.

Without tangible improvements in these areas, mere lofty promises, impassioned speeches, or even diligent hard work will fall short in revitalizing the country's economic prospects.

Investors and trade partners seek stability, transparency, and reliability, qualities that can only be fostered through genuine institutional reforms and unwavering commitment to democratic values which include freedom of press and media. Therefore, it's paramount for the government to prioritize these foundational pillars of governance to pave the way for sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

Blighted Britain

Mahir Ali

The notion that Britain's royal family represents the superglue that keeps the kingdom united is a gross exaggeration, but the House of Windsor can be relied upon to provide a useful distraction every now and then.

Amid a wide range of alarming political and economic trends, a substantial proportion of the media's feeding frenzy has focused on a photoshopped image of the Princess of Wales with her three children. For what it's worth, the officially released photograph was in the first place a response to weeks of speculation about Princess Kate's well-being, alongside the thousands of words devoted to the king's health concerns.

Prostate exams — let alone allegations of paedophilia, such as those unconvincingly denied by Prince Andrew — is probably not what Walter Bagehot imagined when, more than 150 years ago, he identified the monarchy as the 'dignified' part of Britain's political structure. But then, Bagehot also referred to cabinet government as the 'efficient' part of the political establishment.

Efficiency has hardly been a hallmark of British governance for most of this century. And while the Thatcher regime could indeed be efficient, it is rightly remembered for its ruthless brutality, best exemplified by its response to the miners' strike 40 years ago, in which all the coercive arms of the state joined forces to crush the challenge to the economic status quo.

It took decades for the union movement to find its feet again, and for the purportedly progressive mainstream party to recover from its 'New Labour' incarnation under Tony Blair — which Margaret Thatcher recalled as

her greatest achievement, apart from anointing Blair as her favourite heir. Even though New Labour's devotion to neoliberalism depleted its vote share, it remained in power until Blair's decision to back the Bush war in Iraq, followed by Gordon Brown's dedication to rescuing banks and financiers in the wake of the global financial crisis, marginally shifted the dial.

David Cameron stepped into the breach on behalf of the Tories, armed with 'austerity' and a plan for a referendum on EU membership. Both backfired, paving the way for Theresa May, Boris Johnson (whose epicurean tendencies fed his epic tendencies towards incompetence), Liz Truss (who avoided offering even the vaguest impression of efficiency), and, finally, Rishi Sunak. The incumbent PM's strategy for limiting the extent of the Conservative wipeout evidently involves tacking further to the right.

That's partly a response to born-again New Labour under Keir Starmer reclaiming the centre-right ground and sidelining the party's left wing, often via suspension or expulsion, by taking a sledgehammer to almost every mildly progressive Labour platform in the interests of demonstrating a fealty to markets, the captains of industry, and conservative values.

Starmer's predecessor as opposition leader was dislodged via a campaign spearheaded by the Israeli embassy in London and reinforced by local Zionist groups, the media, plus the Tories and much of the parliamentary Labour Party. Jeremy Corbyn was elected by Labour's membership (twice) because the innate decency and principled politics reflected in his long record seemed like a novelty.

That record included

resistance to racism in any form. The smear of antisemitism ought to have been dismissed as absurd — it was clearly a vicious reaction to Corbyn consistently defending the Palestinian cause as part of his broader commitment to human rights. Even the tiniest likelihood of a British PM who might refuse to worship at the altar of Israeli supremacy was anathema to the Zionists and their acolytes.

Starmer effectively played the role of a snake in the grass, and now doesn't dare offer any pronouncements on the Gaza genocide without checking with the Israeli authorities. That includes the deviously achieved recent parliamentary resolution on a 'humanitarian ceasefire', which translates as a brief interval in the deadly proceedings. After all, ceasefires are humanitarian by definition.

Anyhow, the change in government that will follow whenever Sunak takes a break from redefining 'extremism' as chiefly a left-wing, Muslim or 'woke' problem to announce the next election won't alter Britain's political landscape much. Growing poverty, hunger and homelessness — plus alarming degrees of alienation and racism — cannot be resolved via marginally superior management skills.

But blighted Blyth's denizens are encouraged to ignore their mounting woes and bring out their magnifying glasses to concentrate on a young princess's misaligned cuff or her younger brother's extended middle finger. Perhaps that finger is pointing towards a future in which Britons will abolish the anachronistic monarch and House of Lords and usher in a meaningful democracy. But it could be a long wait. -- Courtesy Dawn

Women in Punjab

Luay Shabaneh

I recently had the opportunity to attend the Women of the World festival held in Lahore. It was exciting to see Punjab-based female leaders from all spheres — such as art, industry, commerce, education, and voluntary work. The event coincided with an important milestone in Pakistan, as Maryam Nawaz was elected the first female chief minister of the province, which is home to a population whose size exceeds that of Egypt, the largest Arab country.

Although Maryam Nawaz's appointment is not altogether unprecedented in the country's history — Benazir Bhutto was Pakistan's prime minister — it sends a positive signal for potential and genuine social change and women's empowerment. The legacy of Benazir Bhutto inspires optimism for positive change. When women are given the opportunity to thrive, they can make significant contributions to the development of nations. The empowerment of women and girls is crucial for a peaceful and prosperous future.

Thirty years ago, during the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 179 countries reached a consensus that empowering women was the right course of action and the necessary path forward for sustainable global development. Since then, dedicated investments in the health and rights of women and girls have led to significant global improvements.

Numerous women in the province of Punjab continue to face challenges in terms of healthcare, gender-based

violence, education and family planning. Addressing these issues demands immediate and sustained support for the rights of women and girls. Fortunately, we have a clear understanding of what works, and that investing in women's rights has proved to be a significant and worthwhile endeavour.

The new chief minister can make a difference and enhance confidence in women's leadership in Pakistan.

However, while trends show notable progress in the pursuit of gender equality, many women and girls continue to be left behind. This is largely due to the persisting gender inequality, often in combination with other forms of discrimination. Women and girls with disabilities, as well as those belonging to ethnic and racial minorities, are still prevented from realising their sexual and reproductive rights; many are forced into early marriages, which hinders them from fulfilling their potential and getting a chance to turn their dreams into reality.

According to analyses by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its academic partners, globally, we need \$222 billion in new investment to secure an end to preventable maternal deaths, eliminate the unmet need for family planning, and safeguard women and girls everywhere from gender-based violence and harmful practices by 2030. These analyses underscore the critical need for the new Punjab chief minister to consider rational investment in family planning and prevention of gender-based violence. Such strategic allocations are required to achieve transformative results. In this context,

the importance of mobilising the private sector as a responsible partner to contribute to social change and the development transformation cannot be overstated.

Girls who are not married off as children have a greater chance of finishing school and securing employment, translating into billions of rupees in economic benefits for Punjab. Increasing women's participation in the workplace raises their lifetime earning potential and could boost per capita GDP by at least 20 per cent, according to UNFPA global analyses. Businesses that subsidise the sexual and reproductive health of their workforce can increase productivity up to 15pc and reduce talent attrition by 22pc. In brief, when we invest in women and girls, everyone gains.

Only by investing in the societal, economic, and political inclusion of women and girls can we strengthen our social fabric and create something truly beautiful: a future that works for all in the province of Punjab. Taking all of these steps is necessary, but speaking to women and girls directly and engaging men and boys through the efforts of the chief minister and her team are essential for breaking all the barriers faced by women. It is a make or break issue, which calls attention to the fact that the foundation of enjoying rights should be laid within the family. It is time for political parties to fulfil the promises in their manifestos regarding their population planning agenda.

With a dynamic woman leadership in Punjab, the hope is to see positive change concentrated on improving the quality and standards of living — in letter and spirit. -- Courtesy Dawn

CM Maryam seeks plan to uplift tourism

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has sought a comprehensive "Punjab Tourism Plan" in seven days and ordered to undertake mapping of tourists sites across the province. The CM chaired a meeting in which Secretary Tourism gave a briefing about tourism and religious tourism here on Wednesday. Maryam Nawaz directed to undertake mapping of sites available for religious tourism.

The Sikh community and the followers of other religions coming to Punjab would be provided a tourist package. Maryam Nawaz directed to undertake a comprehensive planning so as to provide international level facilities to the each and every tourist visiting Punjab, adding that provision of complete security to every tourist is the first and foremost responsibility of the government.

The CM directed to identify holy places for the Sikh pilgrims along with formulating a complete development plan. Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora conveyed to the CM about goodwill messages sent by the Sikh community across the globe on her assuming the office of the Chief Minister. Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb.



LAHORE: A delegation from different walk of life meeting with Provincial Minister Specialized Health Care and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafeeq.

Peace, security not to be compromised under any circumstances: Law Minister

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Minister for Home, Law, and Parliamentary Affairs, Zia ul Hassan Lanjar Wednesday affirmed that peace and security will not be compromised under any circumstances.

control over the prevailing situation across the province, including Karachi.

"We anticipate a significant change in this regard, and I am thankful to those who have entrusted me with their confidence," he said this while talking to media at Sindh Assembly.

Prior to this, Zia ul Hassan Lanjar, held an introductory meeting with officers in the Department of Home government of Sindh.

He said, "My foremost priority is to establish peace and maintain law and order throughout the province, from Karachi to Kashmir. Those involved in street crimes in Karachi will face strict repercussions, especially those who resort to violence over trivial matters."

The Secretary of Home Affairs, IG Sindh Police, and other officials were present. Additionally, he chaired a meeting on law and order, where detailed briefings were provided by the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs of Sindh, my top priority has been to restore peace and ensure law and order. We aim to implement proactive policing and enhance security measures to curb the rising street crime in Karachi, given its status as a major city."

Lanjar said qualified and reputable police officers will be appointed, and with the cooperation of the public, we will ensure peace and maintain



LAHORE: Teachers and students of Islamia University Bahawalpur are protesting against the alleged sexual harassment in front of Press Club in the Provincial Capital.

China to launch merit, need-based scholarships for UAF students: CG

FAISALABAD (APP): Chinese Consul General Zhao Shiren has said that his country's relations with the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) would be taken to the new heights and in this context, they intended to launch a merit and need-based scholarship project for students of the university.

has however opened new avenues for development, he added.

He expressed these views during a meeting with UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr. Iqar Ahmad Khan whereas deans, directors and Chinese universities alumni were also present. Zhao Shiren said that Pakistan and China were enjoying time-tested relations which had strong bases on brotherhood. The both countries are collaborating with each other in energy, infrastructure, agriculture, education and other sectors to achieve common goals.

Dr Iqar Ahmad Khan said that 70 teachers from the UAF had received higher education from universities in China.

He praised the UAF leadership and faculty for the university development and addressing agricultural challenges. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

He said that the UAF has launched a Sino-Pak dual diploma in modern agricultural technology in collaboration with Ballie College China, under which the students will study in the UAF for the first two years and in the third year in China. He said that the UAF had introduced high-yielding varieties of commodities including wheat, cotton, sugarcane, soybeans, chickpea, which will enable increment in per acre production. He said that the UAF had inked 73 memorandum of understanding with Chinese universities and research institutions.

He said that the university has Pak-Korea Nutrition Center, Center for Advance Studies, Confucius Institute and others established under international partnership.



LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz presides over the meeting regarding tourism in Punjab Province.

Sindh Cabinet approves wheat procurement target of 900,000 tons

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presided over the first meeting of his new cabinet on Wednesday which decided a wheat procurement target of 900,000 tons for Rs 4,000 per 40 kg.

The cabinet expressed its reservations about the appointment of the Chairman of the Indus Rivers System Authority (IRSA).

The meeting was held at CM House and was attended by provincial ministers including Sharjeel Memon, Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Nasir Shah,

The Cabinet believed that the chairman of IRSA should be selected from among the members of the provinces or the federal government. No one from outside could be appointed as chairman of IRSA. Minister Food Jam

Sardar Shah, Saeed Ghani, Jam Khan Shoro, Zia Lanjar, Muhammad Bux Mahar, Haji Ali Hassan Zardari, Zulfiqar Shah, Advisors- Babal Khan Bahyo, Ehsan Mazari, Najmi Alam, Advisors, new Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, Advocate General, Prosecutor General, and others.

The department after deliberations and discussions decided to fix a target of 900,000 tons of wheat to be procured for the crop 2023-24 at a support price of Rs 4000 per 40 kg.

The CM directed the food department to procure 100,000 bags/ bardana and mobilise food department

teams to start procurement of the wheat at the earliest.

Commissioner Karachi Saleem Rajput briefed the cabinet on the initiative taken to control prices of edible items, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, said that the district administration was conducting raids to control prices.

The district administration from March 6, 2024, onwards conducted 1500 raids, registered 1,150 cases, sealed 14 shops, and recovered Rs7.14 million fine.



KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori taking oath from Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah as a Provincial Minister. Chief Minister Sindh Syed Muraad Ali Shah is also present.

PFA imposes Rs 630,000 fine on six FBOs

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA), under the supervision of its Director General Muhammad Asim Javid, visited 18 food points including five supermarkets, seven poultry shops and six chicken carrier vehicles in Samanabad and Tollinton Market.

Local govt minister pledges to make 'Clean Punjab' campaign mass movement

Independent Report
LAHORE: Minister for Local Government and Community Development (LG&CD) Punjab Zeeshan Rafique has pledged to ensure cleaning of drains every week at village level and to increase the number of cleaning staff, saying that "Clean Punjab" [Suthra Punjab] campaign will be turned into a mass movement with the help of people.

Civil Secretariat, he said cleanliness campaign was going on vigorously across the province. "On the directions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, provision of necessary machinery was being ensured," he added.

He said for provision of better civic facilities, an effective sanitation model was being developed in villages.

Secretary Local Bodies Punjab Shakeel Ahmed Mian, Commissioner Lahore Muhammad Ali Randhawa also participated in the meeting, while chief officers of major municipal corporations across Punjab joined through video-link. Measures related to special focus on villages under the 'Suthra Punjab' campaign were also reviewed.

While presiding over a meeting on 'Suthra Punjab' campaign at the

Canadian HC visits Meesaq Centre in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI (APP): A delegation led by the Canadian High Commissioner visited the Meesaq Centre in Cantt Thana here on Wednesday and received a briefing on the facilities and initiatives at the centre.

LHC gives opportunity to govt for filing reply to SIC's plea

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday adjourned hearing of a petition against non-allocation of reserved seats to Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) till March 25.

During the proceedings, a provincial law officer sought time for filing written reply to the petition while responding to a court query. He submitted that some members had taken oath on reserved seats. The reply will be filed to the extent of other members who had not sworn in yet, he added.

The court gave an opportunity to provincial and federal governments for filing written replies to the petition by the next date of hearing.

The single bench comprising Justice Chaudhry Muhammad Iqbal heard the petition filed by SIC Chairman Sahibzada Hamid Raza.

At this stage, the petitioner's counsel requested the court to issue a stay order, adding that it was an important matter.

However, the court declined the request.



RAWALPINDI: People are standing in a queue to purchase flour bags at subsidized rate in the Holy Month of Ramadan, during rainy weather at Double in the city

Chief Minister KP holds meeting over law, order

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Ghandapur Wednesday presided over the important meeting related to law and order here with all concerned authorities including Chief Secretary and Inspector General of Police.

noted decisions by the children of police martyrs and directed the concerned authorities to fix a one-time quota for the recruitment of children of all martyrs under the Shahada Quota.

The chief minister was briefed by the officials of the security forces on the overall law and order situation in the province with challenges, future action plans, and other matters on behalf of the concerned authorities were also discussed.

A case should be prepared for the approval of the Cabinet for this purpose, the chief minister directed the meeting.

The decision was taken to release a fund of three billion rupees for the purchase of armored vehicles, weapons and other modern equipment for the police. Chief minister announced inclusion of the heirs of police martyrs in the Ramadan package. He said that Rs 10,000 will be given to the heirs of police martyrs under the Ramadan package of the provincial government. Chief Minister Ali Amin Ghandapur has also taken

It is worth mentioning here that by setting a one-time quota, all the children of martyrs waiting for recruitment under the martyr quota will be able to be recruited simultaneously.

Children of police martyrs have been waiting for recruitment for many years due to the low quota of martyrs, the meeting was told. Work should be done to start the Safe City project in all the divisional headquarters of the province, the Chief Minister directed.

The meeting also deliberated on issues related to the establishment of a security division within the police for the security of important personalities and installations.



KARACHI: Passengers sit on the roof of a bus on MA Jinnah Road in Provincial Capital. Pakistan has one of the world's worst records for fatal traffic accidents, blamed on poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving.

Minister Health for eradication of polio

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting, chaired by Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah, took place on Tuesday to discuss polio, ongoing challenges, and future strategies.

highlighted, with a special exchange of views on the challenges faced in those areas.

The meeting included the Special Secretary of Health for Polio Eradication, Abdul Basit, as well as the Provincial EOC Deputy Coordinator, Team Lead from the World Health Organization, and other officials.

Minister Shah delved into the reasons behind the persistence of polio campaigns in regions such as Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and Upper and Lower Waziristan.

During the meeting, the minister was briefed on the current situation of polio in the province, imminent challenges, and proposed plans for the future. Special Secretary for Polio Eradication, Abdul Basit, presented an overview of the polio situation, addressing concerns and outlining potential strategies.

The meeting also addressed the security challenges faced during polio campaigns in the southern regions. Minister Shah was informed about the security concerns and issues leading to the cancellation of polio campaigns in various southern districts.

The situation of polio cases in southern regions was particularly

Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah expressed satisfaction that no polio cases had been reported in the province in the current year. Special Secretary highlighted that over 7.3 million children under the age of five receive polio vaccination drops regularly.



KARACHI: Volunteers prepare food for sahur (pre-dawn) meal to the Muslim devotees during the holy month of Ramadan at a street in Provincial Capital.

Dedicated parking facility for young doctors at LGH

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore General Hospital (LGH) has achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first hospital in Punjab to allocate separate parking exclusively for young doctors. Officials from the Young Doctors Association LGH/PINS spearheaded the initiative, marking a positive step towards addressing the parking challenges faced by medical professionals.

Punjab health minister vows comprehensive health sector improvement

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Specialized Healthcare and Medical Education Khawaja Salman Rafique reiterated the government's commitment to enhancing the health sector.

a comprehensive report to the chief minister after conducting thorough visits to government hospitals, aiming to address public concerns and enhance service delivery. Expressing gratitude for the trust bestowed upon them by the people, the minister vowed to uphold his faith and deliver on the government's promises of genuine public service.

In a series of meetings held at his office on Wednesday, he emphasized the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process to ensure effective reforms. Under the directive of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Minister Rafique affirmed the government's dedication to providing better health facilities to the public. Improving the conditions of government hospitals across Punjab stands as a top priority on the agenda.

Furthermore, the minister highlighted the government's proactive approach towards addressing the issues faced by the medical community, promising swift action on priority matters. In a separate development, Minister Salman Rafique met a delegation from the Young Doctors Association (YDA).

He pledged to present

PM visits USC outlets to inspect Relief Package implementation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday paid surprise visits to different Utility Stores across the federal capital to inspect the execution of the Prime Minister's Ramadan Relief Package.

During the visit, he interacted with the beneficiaries of the scheme and inquired whether they faced any issues while benefiting from the package.

He instructed the authorities concerned to ensure that entitled beneficiaries of the Relief Package faced no problem in availing the facility.

Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister said the federal government had announced a historic Ramadan Relief Package worth Rs 12 billion under which eatable items would be provided to the deserving families at

subsidized rates during the holy month of Ramadan at the Utility Stores outlets across the country. Besides, he said under the package, additional stipend will also be given to the families registered in Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP).

PM Shehbaz Sharif said under the federal government's Ramadan Relief Package, Rs 77 per kg subsidy was being given on wheat flour while Rs 100 per kg subsidy was being offered on ghee besides a subsidy of 20-30% on other food items such as rice, pulses, sugar etc for the deserving families.

He informed that under the package, the BISP beneficiaries would get additional stipend worth Rs 10,000 each, while under Kafalat programme, thousands of families from Azad Jammu

and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Balochistan will get additional amount of Rs 2000 each.

The prime minister said he had appointed several teams that would pay surprise visits to various USC outlets to check the availability and quality of the food items adding that strict action would be taken against those involved in selling low quality items at the stores. During his visit, he expressed satisfaction over the availability of the subsidized items at the stores in sufficient quantity. He was of the view that the blessed month of Ramadan would bring peace, prosperity and development for the country.

He also thanked the ministers and all the concerned officers and departments for making this relief package possible.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif visits various special distribution points of Utility Stores Corporation set up with regard to PM's Ramzan Relief 2024.

Jam Kamal leads trade initiative to address economic challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): In response to directives from Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, chaired meeting at the Ministry of Commerce, marking a proactive approach to addressing current economic challenges.

During the meeting, Minister Khan reiterated the government's unwavering commitment to increasing the nation's trade volume, said a press release issued here.

He emphasized the urgency of meeting the targets set by the Prime Minister and outlined plans for implementing proactive measures.

Minister Khan outlined a clear vision for the Ministry's direction over the next five years. This vision prioritizes increased trade volume, enhanced investment opportunities, and a focus on aligning with global standards.

He emphasized the crucial role of both local and foreign investors in achieving these goals and pledged to create a more facilitating environment for all.

The Minister further emphasized the importance of measurable targets and tasked the Ministry with setting ambitious yet achievable benchmarks for growth and progress.

Recognizing the critical role of trade

revitalization, Minister Khan underscored the importance of strengthening relationships with both domestic and foreign business communities.

He highlighted the necessity of collaboration with stakeholders at all levels to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Minister Khan reaffirmed the government's dedication to creating a favourable environment for investment and trade.

He emphasized the importance of fostering innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable development to promote long-term



Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb chairing a meeting during his visit to FBR Headquarters.

Digital financial services experience significant growth in Q2-FY24: SBP

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold in the local market decreased by Rs.1,800 and was traded at Rs.228,300 on Wednesday as against its sale at Rs.230,100 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.1,544 to Rs.195,730 from Rs.197,274 whereas that 10 gram 22 karat gold decreased to Rs.179,420 from Rs.180,834, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver witnessed no change and was traded at Rs2,600 and Rs2,229.08 respectively. The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$18 and was traded at \$2,179 from \$2,197, the Association reported.

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Mobile Banking Users reached 16 million and Internet Banking Users reached 11 million in the second quarter of fiscal year 2023-24 indicating a quarterly growth rate of 8% and 5%, respectively, the report stated.

"The number of e-wallets registered with EMIs also increased by 15% to 2.7 million during the quarter marking a more than twofold increase in last four quarters," the report mentioned adding that, over 67 million m-wallets were registered with Branchless Banking (BB) service providers.

During Q2-FY24, retail transactions processed by Banks, MFBs and EMIs, witnessed a quarterly growth of 15%, as compared to the 5% growth in the previous quarter. During the quarter under review, volume of digital transactions constituted 82% of the overall retail transactions, compared to 80% during the previous quarter. However, in terms of value, over-the-counter (OTC) transactions constituted 85% share of the overall retail transactions.

In the same quarter, more than 90% of the retail fund transfers and 73% of bill payments and mobile top-ups were conducted using digital channels. In the previous quarter, the share was 88% and 68% respectively.

According to the payment system review for Q2-FY24, the user base of the payments infrastructure experienced growth in the quarter while Mobile and Internet Banking remains the preferred mode of digital transactions for Pakistanis.

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Gold rates dip by Rs.1,800 per tola

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Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, Melody, Rhine and Dravin, scheduled to load/offload Rice, Palm oil and LPG, berthed at Multi-Purpose Terminal, Liquid Terminal and Engro Terminal respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile three more ships, Maersk Cape Town, Spar Octans and Fuwairit with Containers, Coal and LNGs also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim.

Seven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a containership, MSC Aria-III left the Port on today morning, while two more ships, Madison Eagle and Menomonee are expected to sail on same day. Cargo volume of 81,281 tonnes, comprising 64,323 tonnes imports cargo and 16,958 tonnes export cargo carried in 998 Containers (729 TEUs Imports and 499 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours. There are 8 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them three ships, Spar Octans, Fuwairit.

Responding to a question about issuing multiple visas, Zhao said a very limited number of multiple visas were being issued in addition to the single and double entry visas. He said that multiple visas were being issued by assessing the financial status and its volume of trade with China. He said that eligible exporters from the FCCI could contact him for multiple visas, enabling him to recommend their case to the Chinese embassy. He said currently visas were being issued from Islamabad and Karachi while a proposal was under consideration to issue visas from Lahore also. He said 13 chambers of Punjab had been authorised to issue letters of support while the applicants could submit their applications through Gerry.

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PAJCCI hails by-road transportation of fruits from Pakistan to Russia

PESHAWAR (APP): Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has highly hailed transportation of fruits from Pakistan to Russia through centuries old road link between Sub-Continent and Central Asian Republics (CARs) via Afghanistan.

The news about sending of citrus in 16 trucks of National Logistic Cell (NLC) from Pakistan to Russia is very good omen for businessmen of the country and would

open new vistas of trade and commerce in the region," observed Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Coordinator PAJCCI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In a press statement issued here on Wednesday, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said this trade route has great potential which if tapped would prove very valuable for country from commerce point of view and will create hundreds of thousands of livelihood opportunities in the whole region.

OGRA takes notice of reports regarding surges in LPG prices

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has taken notice of market reports regarding a surge in LPG prices, despite ample stocks of LPG molecules being sufficiently available in the country.

Initial scrutiny of the matter reveals that hoarding of LPG stocks is the primary cause of the artificial increase in LPG prices, and some unscrupulous elements are artificially restraining the stock from consumers' approach and selling the product beyond OGRA-prescribed LPG prices, said a news release.

In this context, OGRA has communicated with the Provincial Chief Secretaries to direct the local governments to take immediate necessary action against illegal hoarders and ensure the sale of LPG at OGRA-prescribed prices to end consumers.

Contracting Company W.L.L (HBK), Ali Bin Ali Holding W.L.L, Sheikh Jabor Bin Mansour Bin Jabor Bin Jassim Al Thani (JMJ) Holding, Tabeeb Care Medical Services, and Al Rawnaq International Commercial Projects, marks a crucial step in strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Qatar in the field of human resource development. In addition to these agreements, the Pakistani delegation held a significant meeting with Mr. Hamad Saleh Al Qamra, Chairman of Al Qamra

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LESCO detects 63,066 power pilferers in 181 days

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 63,066 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) in 181 day of grand anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Wednesday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 61,866 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 20,011 accused have been arrested. The LESCO has so far charged a total of 81,150,947 detection units worth Rs 3,086,591,507 to all the power pilferers. Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue.

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Finance Minister says: Documentation of economy, digitization top Govt priorities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Wednesday that documentation of economy and end to end digitization of tax system were the top priorities of the government.

The finance minister Wednesday visited Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Headquarters and held introductory meeting with its members to discuss the board's performance and future initiatives.

The minister stressed the urgent need for digitizing the FBR to enhance transparency and efficiency in tax collection. These initiatives would focus on enhancing tax collection through improved FBR governance, comprehensive documentation of the economy, and full-scale digitization.

The government is considering strategies to broaden the tax base by incorporating wholesale/retail, real estate, and

agriculture sectors into the tax framework, he said.

Aurangzeb said that digitization is a means to an end and implementing digital solutions are pivotal to modernizing our tax administration.

He said that by leveraging technology and enhancing transparency, a more equitable tax system could be developed that fosters economic growth and benefits all citizens.

The meeting concluded with a firm commitment from both sides to work towards promoting the welfare of the Pakistani people. Minister Aurangzeb praised the dedication of the FBR team and pledged the government's full support in implementing transformative measures.

The minister's visit to the FBR headquarters underscored the government's dedication to strengthen fiscal governance and promoting economic prosperity in Pakistan, the statement added.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Food Bilal Yaseen and Provincial Minister for Agriculture Syed Ashiq Hussain along with Deputy Commissioner Rafiyya Haider inspecting the prices of Edibles Items during their visit to Badami Bagh Vegetable and Fruit market.

Shafay for bringing new investments to Punjab

LAHORE (INP): Provincial Minister for Industries & Trade Chaudhry Shafay Hussain on Wednesday underscored the need to bring new investment in Punjab so as to create new employment opportunities and vowed to make the province as a real trade and investment hub.

He expressed these views during his visit to Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT) office here. The Board CEO Jalal Hassan briefed the minister about the performance of PBIT and its future line of action.

Chaudhry Shafay Hussain called for arranging road shows in such countries having potential to invest here in Punjab. He said that the PBIT Board of Directors would be activated soon and such persons would be introduced in the PBIT who can play their vigorous role to bring new investment in the province.

The Provincial Minister directed the authorities concerned to persuade the solar panel companies to manufacture solar panels at the local level.

The PBIT Chief Executive Officer Jalal Hassan apprised the minister that 18 Special Economic Zones.

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SECP holds meeting with insurance 'Companies on Digitization'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) held meetings with the insurance companies including life and non-life separately, on digitization of the insurance sector in Pakistan.

Commissioner Insurance, Aamir Khan while prioritizing the growth and expansion of the insurance sector, as evident from the launch of a 5-year Strategic Plan targeting an inclusive, innovative, and sound insurance industry by 2028, highlighted innovation, digitalization, and data accessibility as core objectives of the plan, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

He apprised the industry's representatives of the initiatives taken by SECP on the digitalization front and SECP's engagement with the insurance companies to launch an insurance policy finder and an auto insurance repository to facilitate policy tracking and enforce compulsory motor third-party insurance. He also shed light on the industry's role

in leveraging technology for improved customer journey and organizational efficiency and sought input from the participants for further advancements.

The representatives of life insurance companies highlighted the issues in existing regulations which were formulated for the physical distribution of saving products and currently act as hindrances to the digital distribution of the same products.

The representatives of non-life insurance companies emphasized the need for the availability of data repositories, implementation of compulsory insurance, collaborations, and information sharing for enhanced digitization of the insurance sector, to pave the way towards increased insurance penetration.

In the closing remarks, Commissioner Insurance informed of the initiation of working on the report covering suggested digital infrastructure and areas for end-to-end digitalization throughout the customer journey. He also updated of the work done on Risk-Based Capital Regime.



Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja chairing a briefing on the working and projects of Ministry of IT & Telecom in Islamabad.

Putin warns the West: Russia is ready for nuclear war

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Wednesday Russia was technically ready for nuclear war and that if the U.S. sent troops to Ukraine, it would be considered a significant escalation of the conflict.

Putin, speaking just days before a March 15-17 election which is certain to give him another six years in power, said the nuclear war scenario was not "rushing" up and he saw no need for the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine.

"From a military-technical point of view, we are, of course, ready," Putin, 71, told Rossiya-1 television and news agency RIA in response to a question whether the country was really ready for a nuclear war.

Putin said the U.S. understood that if it deployed American troops on Russian territory - or to Ukraine - Russia would treat the move as an intervention.

"(In the U.S.) there are enough specialists in the field of Russian-American relations and in the field of strategic restraint," said Putin, the ultimate decision maker in the world's biggest nuclear power.

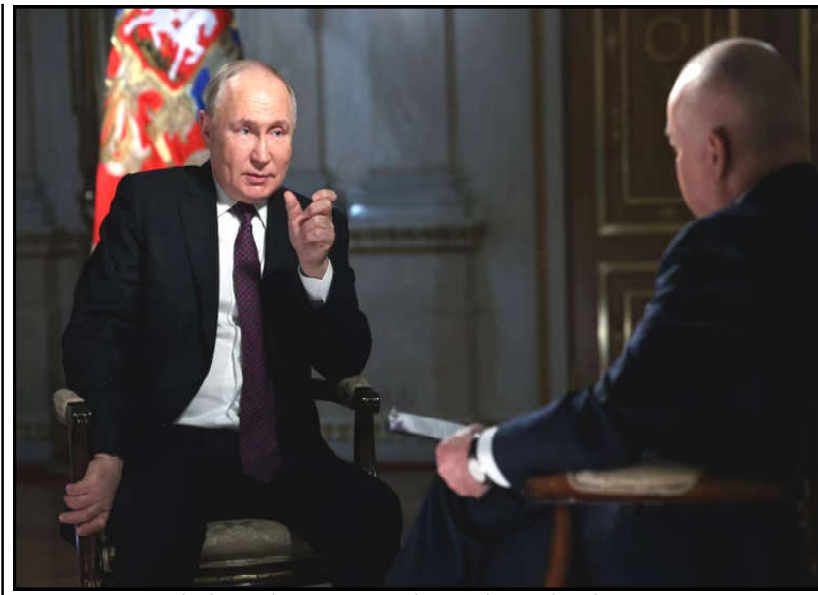
"Therefore, I don't think that here everything is rushing to it (nuclear confrontation), but we are ready for this."

Putin's nuclear warning came alongside another offer for talks on Ukraine as part of a new post-Cold War demarcation of European security. The U.S. says Putin is not ready for serious talks over Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine has triggered the deepest crisis in Russia's relations with the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and Putin has warned several times the West risks provoking a nuclear war if it sends troops to fight in Ukraine.

Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, triggering full-scale war after eight years of conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian forces on one side and pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russian proxies on the other.

In a U.S. election year, the West is grappling with how to support Kyiv against Russia, which now controls almost one-fifth of Ukrainian territory and is rearming much faster than the West and Ukraine.



Vladimir Putin speaks during an interview in Moscow.

China says military delegation visited Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: A Chinese military delegation recently visited the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal to discuss further cooperation in defence issues, Beijing said on Wednesday.

Beijing is seeking to build closer ties in South Asia in a push to counter its strategic rival India for influence.

Last week, the Maldives said it had signed a "military assistance" deal with China after ordering Indian troops deployed in the small but strategically-

placed archipelago to leave. Beijing confirmed on Wednesday that a delegation had visited the country and met with pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu during a trip that also took them to Sri Lanka and Nepal from March 4 to 13.

In all three countries, "they exchanged views on military relations and regional security issues of common concern", the Chinese military said in a statement on its official WeChat account.

The delegation of of

Israeli forces kill teenager, two other Palestinians in West Bank raid after deadly night

Monitoring Desk
JENIN: Israeli forces killed two Palestinians during a raid in the occupied West Bank early on Wednesday, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported, bringing to five the number of Palestinians killed in different incidents within several hours. Yousef Nimer, a witness, said Israeli forces began firing at people he was sitting with outside a hospital in the city of Jenin as they were finishing Suhur, the final meal before sunrise during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

Relations between the two Nato allied countries have been frosty over the past years, as the United States has frequently criticised Hungary for its close relations with Russia, for holding up Sweden's Nato bid and over democratic backsliding.

US announces emergency Ukraine aid, as Poles warn of Russia threat

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden announced an emergency \$300 million military aid shipment for Ukraine on Tuesday, as Poland's leaders visited the White House to warn of the growing threat from Russia.

The White House sidestepped Republicans in Congress, who have for months blocked a much larger package for Kyiv's desperate fight, by using money that the Pentagon had saved on recent purchases. But it warned that the new stopgap package would only last weeks, far too little to stem recent military advances by Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops as they take advantage of US paralysis.

The announcement came as Biden was preparing to host Poland's President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who came bearing

Hezbollah attacks two Israeli bases with 100 rockets

Monitoring Desk
BEIRUT: Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah said on Tuesday it launched over 100 rockets at Israel's two military bases in retaliation for a strike on the country's east that killed one person the day before.

Hamas ally Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged near-daily cross-border fire since the Gaza war erupted in October, but several Israeli strikes have recently hit Hezbollah positions further north, raising fears of a full-blown conflict.

Hezbollah launched more than 100 Katyusha rockets on Tuesday morning at two military bases in the occupied Golan Heights, the group said in a statement.

of Baalbek and the killing of a citizen", it added.

On Monday, Israeli air strikes near Lebanon's city of Baalbek killed one person. The Israeli military confirmed its jets had hit two sites belonging to Hezbollah's forces in retaliation for strikes on the occupied Golan Heights over several days.

Earlier on Tuesday, Hezbollah said its chief Seyed Hassan Nasrallah met Khalil al-Hayya, a leading member of Hamas's political bureau.

They discussed ceasefire talks for the Gaza war, as well as attacks by Hamas's regional allies to support its war efforts, the Hezbollah said in a statement.

Hezbollah chief Nasrallah is due to give a televised speech on Wednesday.



Greta Thunberg is removed by police officers as she demonstrates outside the Swedish parliament building together with a group of climate activists in Stockholm, Sweden.

Aid groups sue Denmark over arms exports to Israel

Monitoring Desk
COPENHAGEN: Four humanitarian organisations on Tuesday said they were suing Denmark to get it to stop its weapons exports to Israel.

The lawsuit was filed against the national police and the foreign ministry. "Denmark should not be sending weapons to Israel when there is a reasonable suspicion that it is committing war crimes in Gaza," Tim Whyte, the secretary general of Action Aid Denmark, one of the organisations behind the lawsuit, said in a statement.

"We need to get the court's word on Denmark's responsibility," he said.

Investigative media Danwatch in November revealed that Israel's F-35s were equipped with parts made by the Danish group Terma. The three other

organisations behind the legal action were the Danish branches of Amnesty International, Oxfam and Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq.

The lawsuit came almost a month after a Dutch court ordered the Netherlands to stop exporting F-35 parts to Israel.

In mid-February, a Dutch appeals court judge ruled that there was "a clear risk that serious violations of humanitarian law of war are committed in the Gaza Strip with Israel's F-35 fighter planes."

Several similar lawsuits are underway in other countries, including in Canada where the foreign and justice ministers have been targeted. But London's High Court last month rejected a similar petition to suspend British arms exports to Israel.

Indian troops begin Maldives pullout after quit order

Monitoring Desk
MALE: India has begun withdrawing military personnel operating surveillance aircraft in the Maldives after the new pro-China president ordered them to leave, defence authorities said on Tuesday.

An official of the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said 25 Indian troops deployed in the southernmost atoll of Addu had left the archipelago ahead of March 10, the official start of the withdrawal agreed by both sides.

"We can confirm that the Indian troop withdrawal is underway," the MNDF said in a statement. President Mohamed Muizzu came to power in September on a pledge to kick out Indian security personnel deployed in the Maldives to patrol its vast maritime border. The two sides had agreed to complete a withdrawal of 89 Indian troops and their support staff in the Maldives by May 10.

Britain to stop foreign states from buying newspapers

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Britain is considering changing the law to stop a foreign state owning a news organisation, government sources said on Tuesday, as it weighs up whether to allow Abu Dhabi-backed Redbird IMI to buy the Telegraph newspaper.

The bid for the politically influential Telegraph has raised questions about the independence of the media and the role of foreign investors acquiring assets that could undermine press freedom.

Around 100 lawmakers, from all parties, have signed a letter opposing the takeover of the right-leaning newspaper and the Spectator political magazine by Redbird IMI, citing concerns about the possibility of editorial interference and censorship.

Missile hits apartment buildings in Ukraine's Kryvyi Rih, 3 dead, 38 hurt

Monitoring Desk
KYIV: A Russian missile slammed into two apartment buildings in the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih on Tuesday, killing three people and injuring at least 38, with rescue teams sifting through rubble late into the night in a search for survivors.

"Two buildings were hit, one five storeys, one nine storeys," Lysak wrote on Telegram. "The number of injured is constantly rising as is the number of children injured."

Oleksandr Vilkul, head of the Kryvyi Rih's military administration, said at least three hits from the missiles were recorded in the city. He said at least five of the adults and one child being treated in hospital were in critical condition.

Serhiy Lysak, governor of Dnipropetrovsk region, put the provisional injury toll at 28 adults and 10 children and later said



A person holds a placard as demonstrators take part in a pro-Ukraine protest against the Slovak government's foreign policy, after Slovakia's Foreign Minister Juraj Blahar met with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Unemployed Afghans risk death and debt in hunt for gold

Monitoring Desk
YAF TAL SUFLA: Tearing off a piece of mouldy flatbread, Homayon gulped tea in a brief reprieve from the din of the machines he and a dozen other men were using to dig for gold on a mountainside in northeastern Afghanistan. The 30-year-old found little work as a mechanic in nearby Faizabad city, so he banded with other unemployed men to try their luck carving out a living in the rocky mountains that dominate Badkhashan province.

"Five, six of us were jobless, we came here to see if we can find anything," Homayon said, as the hand-

ful of men finished their break and returned to work at the small-scale mine they had set up.

Their efforts digging four tunnels have borne little fruit, even as they pour money into fuel, tools and labour. Other mines in the area had proved productive, Homayon said, so they kept digging — the promise of a windfall outweighing the risks of debt.

The losses can be significant, warned fellow miner Qadir Khan. "There are people who went into debt and were not able to find anything from these kinds of tunnels," he said.

'Chemical cat' sparks alert in Japan

Monitoring Desk
TOKYO: Locals in a city in western Japan have been told not to approach or touch a missing cat that fell into a vat of dangerous chemicals and then scampered off into the night.

An employee at a metal plating plant in Fukuyama arrived for work on Monday morning to find feline paw prints leading away from the container, the firm said.

Grainy security camera footage released by the company shows the furry fugitive fleeing from the factory, apparently unharmed.

Search on for missing Indonesia boat crew after 11 found alive at sea

Monitoring Desk
JAKARTA: Rescue teams searched waters in central Indonesia on Wednesday for 24 fishermen missing since their boat sank at the weekend, with hopes kept alive by the discovery a day ago of 11 survivors who had been floating at sea for three days.

The boat with 37 crew went down on Saturday near Selayar Island off South Sulawesi province, according to the search and rescue agency, with 11 survivors in life jackets spotted by fishermen only on Tuesday. Two other crew were found dead.

Dozens abducted in new Nigeria kidnapping: sources

Monitoring Desk
KADUNA: Gunmen abducted dozens of people from a northwestern Nigerian village on Tuesday, according to two local representatives and a UN source, just days after the kidnapping of more than 250 pupils from a school in the same region.

Criminal gangs often carry out mass kidnappings in northwest Nigeria, targeting schools, villages and highways where they can quickly snatch large numbers of people for ransom payments.

Tuesday's abductions in Kaduna State's Kajuru district came as security forces searched for the pupils who were kidnapped from their school in Kuriga village about 150 kilometres (93 miles) away.

The spate of large-scale abductions is challenging President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's government, which promised to tackle insecurity while also managing a cost-of-living

crisis and bringing more investment to Africa's most populous nation.

Kaduna State officials did not immediately respond to requests for information on the new attack.

But local councillor Abubakar Buda told Channels TV that gunmen stormed the village early Tuesday morning, going house-to-house to kidnap residents and opening fire sporadically.

Buda said only a military intervention stopped more people from being kidnapped, according to Channels. State lawmaker Usman Danlami Stingo told Arise News that 32 women and 29 men had been snatched.

A UN source, who was not authorised to speak publicly to the media, also told AFP that gunmen stormed the village early Tuesday morning.

"The initial tally showed 40 persons were abducted but the figure rose to around 60," the source said.

US troops depart for mission to build Gaza aid port

Monitoring Desk
JOINT BASE LANGLEY-EUSTIS: Four US Army vessels departed a base in Virginia on Tuesday carrying about 100 soldiers and equipment needed to build a temporary port on Gaza's coast for urgently needed aid deliveries.

The first—a hulking gray-painted watercraft known as a Logistics Support Vessel—slowly churned away from the pier at Joint Base Langley-Eustis as "The Imperial March" from "Star Wars" played over its loudspeaker system.

It was followed by three smaller vessels that will also make the roughly 30-day trip to the eastern Mediterranean for the port mission—part of US efforts to boost assistance for Gaza as Israel delays deliveries of aid by ground.

The new facility—which will consist of an offshore platform for transshipment of aid from larger to smaller vessels and a pier to bring it ashore—is ex-

pected to be up and running "at the 60-day mark," US Army Brigadier General Brad Hinson told journalists.

"Once we get fully mission-capable, we will be able to push up to two million meals, or two million bottles of water, ashore each day," he said.

US officials have said the effort will not involve "boots on the ground" in Gaza, but American troops will come close to the beleaguered coastal territory as they construct the pier, which has to be anchored to the shore.

"I'm not going to go into the specifics of who we're working with in order to anchor the pier, but we will have some assistance," said Hinson, who also declined to discuss security measures.

Asked if the planned deployment will still take place in the absence of a ceasefire in Gaza—which Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas have yet to agree to—Hinson said.



A worker walks past Boeing's new 737 MAX-9 under construction at their production facility in Renton, Washington, U.S.

Pakistan, China to march toward shared development, prosperity: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Wednesday said Pakistan and China will march toward shared development and prosperity with joint investments in diverse projects.

In an interview with Xinhua news agency, PM Sharif said the friendship between Pakistan and China spanned more than 70 years and has been nurtured by both countries' leadership to promote friendly relations.

He added that the two countries have developed as all-weather, "Iron Brothers" and have unique associations of friendship that have stood the test of time.

"This friendship now must achieve higher heights," he added.

Chinese President Xi Jinping had congratulated Sharif on his election as prime minister of Pakistan on March 3. In his response, Sharif deeply appreciated Xi's warm message of facilitation and continued support for Pakistan.

"I deeply value his sentiments not only for the people of Pakistan, for our friendship, but our mutual cooperation," he said. "For me, it's a very good start."

Highlighting Chinese modernization, a key term defining China's journey to rejuvenation, Sharif, who

has served three terms as chief minister of Punjab province, stressed that Pakistan should emulate the model.

"It is a great success model and success story," the prime minister said, adding that generations of visionary Chinese leaders have led their people to create unprecedented development miracles, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and providing vast rural populations with access to education, health, medical facilities, and employment.

The Chinese modernization model created growth centers and sectors that produce competing

products by procuring modern knowledge in science and technology, he said.

"Despite challenges in recent years, China's growth has still gone steadily compared to other countries, which is a remarkable achievement," he added.

Pakistan should replicate this model in the country to alleviate poverty, provide jobs to the youth, and encourage small and medium entrepreneurs to kickstart businesses in villages, towns and cities in sectors of agriculture, industry, information technology and on other platforms, the prime minister said.



QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Safaraz Ahmed Bugti presiding over a meeting to review affairs of Health Department.



Federal Minister for Interior & Narcotics Control, Mohsin Naqvi chairing a meeting at Ministry of Narcotics Control in Islamabad.

NA passes resolution demanding ZAB be declared national democratic hero

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution urging the Federal Government to officially declare former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as a Shaheed and national democratic hero.

The resolution, moved by Shazia Marri, recognized that the trial and subsequent conviction of former Prime Minister Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto were a gross miscarriage of justice.

The resolution saluted the struggles of Begum Nusrat Bhutto, Shaheed

Mohatma Benazir Bhutto, and the Pakistan People's Party workers who sacrificed their lives to establish this truth.

It appreciated the determination with which President Asif Ali Zardari filed a presidential reference to reopen the case 12 years ago, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who single-mindedly pursued it.

The resolution lauded the Supreme Court of Pakistan for finally acknowledging and accepting the glaring injustice meted out to Shaheed Zulfiqar Bhutto 44 years ago in its judgment.

In light of the historic judgment of the court, the resolution demanded that the unjust verdict given in the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto case must be overturned.

It also called for conferring the highest civil award, Nishan-e-Pakistan, upon Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Furthermore, the resolution demanded the establishment of the Nishan-e-Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Award for workers and activists who have fought and sacrificed their lives for true democracy in Pakistan.

Emphasizes on public-private partnership: Sarfraz Bugti pledges to build standard healthcare institutions in Balochistan on Sindh pattern

Chief Minister directs to ensure online biometric system to ensure attendance of doctors in all district headquarter hospitals of province

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has made a pledge to build the standard healthcare institutions in the province on pattern of Sindh.

He stressed that we have to go for public-private partnership in order to provide quality medical services to the patients.

The Chief Minister was chairing a review meeting of the provincial health department here on Wednesday.

The meeting decided to ensure posting of doctors and quality healthcare facilities in the interior province.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister regretfully pointed out that majority of doctors are desirous of making their postings in Quetta. However, he directed to the concerned authorities to transfer the doctors in interior province from Quetta with-

out any pressure, and beginning should be made from his district i.e., Dera Bugti in this regard.

The Chief Minister directed to ensure online biometric attendance of the doctors at their respective duty places.

He also directed to install biometric system in all district headquarter hospitals within one month. The necessary summary should be sent for installation of biometric system to him today, and he would accord approval to it right now, adding he stressed.

Mr. Bugti directed to lodge FIR against those making the biometric system disorder intentionally. In addition to this, he also directed to make the Cath lab and CT scan machine functional immediately, he directed further.

He said that we are spending Rs. 60 to 70 billion annually on treatment of the people, but the re-

PM hopeful of Pak-Gulf trade to surpass \$1 bn annually

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that once the Pakistan-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Free Trade Agreement come into effect, the existing bilateral trade volume of USD 1 billion per annum had the potential to enhance manifold.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain General Sheikh Mohammad Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa who called on him to convey the greetings of King of Bahrain Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

The prime minister warmly welcomed General Sheikh Mohammad to Pakistan and thanked the Bahrain leadership for their messages of felicitations on his re-election as prime minister, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The situation in Gaza was also discussed and both sides called for an immediate ceasefire and ensuring urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the innocent Palestinians, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan.

The two countries had excellent defence cooperation, and his visit would enhance these relations even further.



ISLAMABAD: Commander of Bahrain National Guard calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Dar receives congratulatory messages from world FMs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has received congratulatory messages from his counterparts of various countries on assuming his office.

Foreign Minister of Czech Republic Jan Lipavsky, congratulating Ishaq Dar on his appointment as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan said Czechia and Pakistan had long enjoyed friendly and constructive relations.

Foreign Minister of Maldives Moosa Zameer also extended congratulations saying he was confident that the bilateral relations will continue to grow stronger under his leadership.

Responding to his congratulatory message, Foreign Minister Dar posted on X expressed his gratitude to Moosa Zameer and said that he looked forward to working closely with him to promote cooperation between Pakistan and Maldives.

Likewise Ukrainian FM Dmytro Kuleba congratulating Ishaq Dar on his appointment as Pakistan's 39th Foreign Minister wished him every success in his most responsible mission. "I look forward to expanding mutually beneficial bilateral and international cooperation between Ukraine and Pakistan", he added.



QUETTA: MPA Raheela Hameed Durrani along with wife of Japanese Consul General Khadija Nadem watching Japanese food exhibition

Security wall at Gwadar North Free Zone completes

ISLAMABAD (INP): The construction of the 8-km-long boundary wall around Gwadar North Free Zone (Phase II) has been finally completed.

It is a landmark security project that will make sure safety at the north and the south side of Gwadar North Free Zone (Phase II) spreading over 2,221 acres of land, Gwadar Port reported on Wednesday.

The 14-feet-high security cemented-wall starts from Gwadar Fish harbor and ends at Koh-e-Mehdi (famous mountain of Gwadar), around five kilometers away from Gwadar Port. The wall runs along the six-lane Eastbay Expressway.

Alongside the Security wall, Gwadar Free Zone North Phase (II) is going to be equipped with all allied services including telecom cabling, sewerage pipes, power transmission lines, road networks and potable water supply lines.

Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) is responsible to provide all such allied facilities till entry of Gwadar Free Zone North (Phase II).

GPA official Dawood Baloch told Gwadar Pro that work is afoot on expeditious way to provide all allied utilities and amenities in the North Free Zone.

COPHC official said that completion of security wall will work as shot in the arms of companies either starting operation or flexing their muscles to roll out formal functions in the North Free Zone.

Recently Agven fertilizer company on 10 acres of land has begun its test operation in Gwadar North Free Zone. Agven private limited is the first investor that has set up an industry in Gwadar North Free Zone.

It is first of its kind in Gwadar in terms of both size and manufacturing product.

ECP finalizes arrangements for conducting Senate by-polls today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday has finalized arrangements for conducting by-elections on Thursday to fill six Senate seats left vacant by the Senators, who were elected to the National and provincial assemblies in the February 8 elections.

The ECP has already dispatched ballot papers and other polling materials to provincial assemblies of Sindh and Balochistan.

Polling was being held for one seat reserved in Islamabad and two general seats in Sindh, as well as three general seats for representing Balochistan. The polling will continue from 8 am to 4 pm at Parliament House, as well as in the buildings of the Sindh and Balochistan Assemblies.

Pakistan envoy calls on Vietnam President

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam, Samina Mehtab called on President of Vietnam Vo Van Thuong in Hanoi for a farewell meeting.

During the call on, both sides reviewed the overall bilateral ties, with special emphasis on political relations and economic cooperation.

Ambassador Samina Mehtab expressed the desire of the Government of Pakistan to further strengthen bilateral ties with Vietnam in all spheres of mutual interaction.

According to a press release issued on Wednesday, she put forward proposals for cooperation in the fields of political ties, trade, and parliamentary exchanges.

CM orders to dismiss doctors absent from duties in BMC Hospital for several years

Displeased to see poor cleanliness, out of order machines

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has ordered to dismiss all the doctors who have been absent from their duties for several years in the Bolan Medical Complex (BMC) Hospital Quetta.

The Chief Minister was on late-night surprise visit to the BMC Hospital between Tuesday and Wednesday.

He visited the BMC Hospital to review the situation of health services in the night at the major public sector hospital of Quetta. He expressed his anguish over the absence of doctors from their duties in the hospital. He ordered to dismiss all those doctors who are absent from their duties for last many years.

He also directed to suspend all those doctors and medical staff who are committing negligence from their duties.

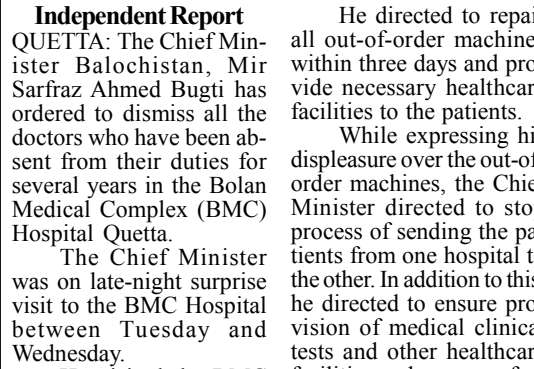
Mir Sarfraz Bugti was also displeased to see the poor cleanliness situation in the hospital besides seeing the non-functional machines there.

He directed to repair all out-of-order machines within three days and provide necessary healthcare facilities to the patients.

While expressing his displeasure over the out-of-order machines, the Chief Minister directed to stop process of sending the patients from one hospital to the other. In addition to this, he directed to ensure provision of medical clinical tests and other healthcare facilities under one roof.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also met the attendants of patients admitted in different wards of the hospital and inquired about the medical facilities available to their patients.

He announced that the attendants would continue to be inquired about the health facilities available to their patients. He directed to the Secretary Health to transfer those committing negligence in their duties to the remote areas and compel them to perform. He on the occasion announced to encourage the doctors and other health staff performing their duties honestly and with dedication.



QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Safaraz Ahmed Bugti enquiring about health facilities from a patient during his visit to BMC.

School admission drive continues in full swing, says Director Schools

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Director Schools Balochistan, Abdul Wahid Shakir has stated that the school admission campaign is continued in full swing in the province.

He expressed the hope that desired goal of the admission campaign would be achieved by enrolling maximum number of children in the schools.

The academic books have been distributed in all government educational institutions.

While speaking to the senior journalist of Chaman, Syed Sardar Muhammad Khondoi, the Director Schools exhorted the parents to get their children enrolled in the schools and decorate them with the ornament of knowledge so that their future is brightened.

SC issues written order regarding hearing on journalists' case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday issued written order regarding hearing of a case pertaining to the FIA's notices to journalists on alleged anti-judiciary campaign.

The four pages order issued by the top court said that the reports of FIA and police regarding attacks on journalists are not satisfactory. It directed the FIA and police to submit detailed reports again.

It said that the Supreme Court or the Registrar Office did not ask for any action against any journalist. The name of the judiciary was wrongly used in the notices issued to journalists.

Naqvi visits Ministry of Narcotics Control

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Interior and Anti-Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi visited the Ministry of Anti-Narcotics on Wednesday.

On his visit, he announced not to use his office in the Ministry of Anti-Narcotics saying office in the ministry of interior is enough for him because offices in two ministries are a waste of resources.

He ordered to post his personal staff in the ministry of narcotics control in another department.

The staff of my office in the Ministry of Anti-Narcotics should be posted in another department.

The manpower of the Minister's Office should be used in other necessary places in the Ministry, said Mohsin Naqvi.

Federal Minister of Interior and Anti-Narcotics Mohsin Naqvi was given a special briefing regarding the affairs of the Ministry.

The minister said that drug eradication is the need of the hour to secure the future of future generations and for this purpose the government will use all resources to get rid of the scourge of drugs.



ASTORE: Heavy machinery being used to remove snow and boulders from the blocked road of Astore Valley by the staffer of Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management authority and Works Department after heavy snow fall and rain in area caused land sliding in diffident area.

By-elections for 23 constituencies on April 21

ISLAMABAD (APP): By-elections for 23 constituencies, comprising six national and 17 provincial assembly constituencies, would be held on April 21, said the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The by-elections for many of these National and Provincial constituencies were postponed from February 8 due to various reasons, including the death of contesting candidates and candidates running for multiple seats. Additionally, some constituencies were vacated by winners of dual seats.

According to the schedule released by the Election Commission of Pakistan, by-elections will be held in six National Assembly constituencies, 12 in Punjab, two in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, two in Balochistan, and one in the Sindh Assembly constituency.

encry. Polling is being held in NA-08 Bajaur, NA-44 Dera Ismael Khan-I, NA-119 Lahore-III, NA-132 Kasur-II, NA-196 Kamber Shahdadkot-I, and NA-207 Shaheed Benazirabad-I constituencies. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly comprises PK-22 Bajaur-IV and PK-91 Kohat-II constituencies, while the Balochistan Assembly includes PB-20 Khuzdar-III and PB-22 Lasbela constituencies. A by-election will be held in the Sindh constituency PS-80 Dadu-I. The elections are being held in various Punjab Assembly constituencies, including PP-22 Chakwal-Cum-Falagang, PP-32 Gujrat VI, PP-36 Wazirabad-II, PP-54 Narawal-I, PP-93 Bhakkar-V, PP-139 Sheikhupura-IV, PP-147 Lahore-III, PP-149 Lahore-V, PP-158 Lahore XIV, PP-164 Lahore-XX.



QUETTA: Speaker Balochistan Assembly Captain (retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai presiding over a meeting regarding repair and renovation of Balochistan Assembly