

# Independent

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## In congratulatory telephone call Crown Prince reaffirms Saudi support for Pakistan

PM vows to transform Pak-Saudi ties into strategic partnership



ISLAMABAD (Online): Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has reaffirmed his country's support for Pakistan.

In a congratulatory telephone call to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, he said both the countries enjoy close brotherly relations.

The Crown Prince felicitated the Prime Minister on his re-election. The Prime Minister thanked the Saudi Crown Prince for the telephone call

of Ramadan to the Saudi leadership as well as the Saudi people, and prayed that this holy month brings peace and prosperity to Muslims all over the world. Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan is proud of its historic, deep rooted and fraternal ties with Saudi Arabia and the two countries have always stood together through thick and thin. He lauded Saudi Arabia for its unwavering commitment and support to Pakistan.

The Prime Minister reiterated his invitation to the Crown Prince to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at the earliest convenience and said the people of Pakistan are awaiting to accord a very warm welcome to him.

The Crown Prince thanked the Prime Minister for his kind sentiments.

as well as the warm message of greetings sent by him immediately after he had assumed the office. Shehbaz Sharif also conveyed his sincerest wishes and prayers for the health and wellbeing of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz. He said the people of Pakistan have great love and respect for the Saudi King and the Crown Prince. The Prime Minister also wished a blessed month



QUETTA: Iranian Consul General, Hassan Darvishwand exchanges views Balochistan Governor Malik Abdul Wali Kakar and others during Iftar Dinner Party hosted by Iranian Consulate

## Mohsin Naqvi seeks report of Greece, Libya boat incidents

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday summoned a report of Greece, and Libya boat incidents.

According to the details, Mohsin Naqvi asked the Director General Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to submit a report of the investigation proceedings so

far. The Federal Interior Minister said that those who are involved in crimes related to human trafficking deserve no concession. He maintained that the real culprits of the boat accidents must be dealt with iron hands, as criminals of human trafficking must be jailed for their wrongdoings.

It is pertinent to mention here that an Italy-bound fishing trawler reportedly carrying at least 800 people — including hundreds of Pakistanis — capsized off Greece. Only 104 people are known to have survived and the chance of finding more survivors was seen as virtually nil.

In another incident, around 61 migrants went missing and presumed dead after their boat sank off Libya's coast, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said, in the latest migrant tragedy off North Africa. The "large number of migrants" are believed to have died because of high waves that swamped their vessel after it left from Zuwara, on Libya's northwest coast, the IOM's Libya office said in a statement.

## 36 candidates file nomination papers for 11 different seats of Senate from Balochistan

QUETTA: In all 36 candidates belonging to different political parties and independent have filed their nomination papers for 11 seats of Senate from Balochistan here on Saturday.

The candidates have filed papers for seven general seats and two each allocated for women and technocrats in the Senate of Pakistan.

The prominent who submitted their nomination papers are included: Anwarul Haq, Mir Changez Jamali, Sardar Umar Gorgeji, Maulana Abdul Wasey, Kauda Babar, Aimal Wali Khan, Rahila Hameed Khan Durrani, Rahat Jamali, Sana Jamali, Amanullah Kanrani, Ahmed Khan, Jan Muhammad Buledi, Abdul Haq Hashmi, Attaur Rehman, Nasimur Rehman, Shahezab Durrani, Saeedul Hasan, and others.

The elections are scheduled to be held on the seats of Senate on April 2, 2024.



QUETTA: Senate elections candidates submitting their nomination papers to Provincial Election Commissioner Fared Ahmed Afridi



Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain General Shaikh Mohamed bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa meeting with Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir at GHQ in Rawalpindi

## COAS underscores commitment to enhance ties with Bahrain

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain, General Shaikh Mohamed bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa called on General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) here at GHQ on Saturday.

The meeting focused on strengthening bilateral military cooperation. Both leaders discussed matters of mutual interest including regional security dynamics, counter-terrorism efforts and training exchanges, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

On the occasion, the COAS said that Pakistan values its traditionally strong defence, diplomatic and economic relations with Kingdom of Bahrain and underscored Pakistan's commitment to enhancing military ties with Bahrain. The COAS emphasized upon the importance of collaboration in addressing shared security challenges and promoting peace and stability in the region.

The visiting dignitary commended Pakistan for its efforts in combating terrorism and extremism and acknowledged the professionalism and dedication of Pakistan Army.

He reaffirmed Bahrain's commitment to deepening cooperation with Pakistan in defence and security domains.

## Govt. decides for special anti-polio drive

ISLAMABAD (INP): Following the presence of the polio virus in the sewerage of major cities of three provinces, government has decided to launch a special three-day anti-polio drive, sources said.

Polio virus was found in the sewerage of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan's big cities.

Sources familiar with the development said the samples taken from Karachi, Okara, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Jacobabad, Islamabad, Kohat, Quetta, Peshawar and Sibi sewerage, tested positive, pushing the number of the positive polio virus samples to 46 this year.

A schedule for a three-day anti-polio drive (March 25-28) has been finalised with the input of the provinces.

## Speaker Punjab Assembly calls on PM

LAHORE (APP): Speaker of Punjab Assembly Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan on Saturday called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

The speaker congratulated the prime minister on assuming the office and expressed his good wishes, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

During the meeting, the overall situation in the country including political and other issues of mutual interests were discussed.

## US envoy reaffirms support for democratic process in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House and discussed bilateral relations and other issues of mutual interest.

In his remarks, the Speaker said Pakistan attaches great importance to long-standing friendly relations with the United States.

He emphasized promoting parliamentary ties between the US and Pakistan saying these can play an important role in promoting public and parliamentary relations between the two countries.

The US Ambassador reiterated his country's commitment to continue supporting the democratic process in Pakistan. He said collective efforts are necessary to promote regional and international peace and prosperity.

## Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to expand 'counter terrorism' cooperation

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan and the Taliban-led Afghan government Saturday agreed to expand "counter-terrorism" cooperation and continue working together in building fraternal bilateral relations.

The development came during a telephonic conversation between Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his Afghan counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi.

"Expanding cooperation in connectivity, trade, security, counter terrorism and people-to-people contacts is a top priority for Pakistan," Dar posted on X, as he received a congratulatory call from the Afghan interim minister.

## President, PM, other condemn Two army officers among seven martyred in terrorist attack on Mir Ali checkpost

ISPR says troops effectively engaged and sent to hell all 6 terrorists during clearance operation

Independent Report RAWALPINDI: Seven security personnel including a lieutenant colonel and a captain embraced martyrdom during a terrorist attack on security forces' post and ensuing clearance operation in North Waziristan in the early hour of this morning.

According to the ISPR, a group of six terrorists attacked a security forces' multiple suicide bombing attacks, which led to collapse of portion of a building, resulting into Shahadat of five soldiers. These included Havildar Sabir, Naik Khurshid, Sepoy Nasir, Sepoy Raja and Sepoy Sajjad.

During the conduct of ensuing clearance operation, the troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Kashif, effectively engaged and killed all

the six terrorists. However, during intense exchange of fire, leading his troops from the front, Lieutenant Colonel

post in Mir Ali area. The troops foiled the initial attempt of intrusion. The terrorists rammed an explosive laden vehicle into the post, followed by



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## CM condemns terrorism attack on security forces caravan in North Waziristan

Independent Report QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has condemned the terrorism attack on the caravan of security forces in North Waziristan.

In an official condemnation statement issued here on Saturday, the Chief Minister said that the attack of terrorists on the security forces is condemnable.

The terrorists would never succeed in their nefarious designs. He also paid rich tributes to the brave officers and jawans who embraced martyrdom in line of duty in North Waziristan.

Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti said that the morale of security forces and General public would not be

## Tarar condemns PTI's 'malicious campaign' against Mir Ali's martyrs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar while paying tribute to all seven martyrs of Mir Ali including Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar on Saturday strongly condemned the "malicious campaign" launched by some social media accounts associated with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

"Terrorists have attacked on the ground while PTI supporters did that on social media front," the minister said in a strong reaction to the PTI's alleged "malicious campaign" against the martyrs.

"The PTI has remained involved in disrespecting the martyrs," said the minister in a news statement while citing some examples such as May 9 when the state institutions came under attack and martyrs' memorials defiled, and also Lasbela helicopter crash. He paid tribute to the mar-

tyrs on behalf of the entire nation which saluted them for their "unforgettable" sacrifices.

The minister said there is no soft corner in the hearts of the people for those who had disrespected its martyrs. "We will not compromise on the dignity and honor of the martyrs and the law will take its course."

Such vile campaigns against martyrs and national institutions laid bare the reasons of foreign funding being received by the PTI, he said alleging that such initiatives were meant to appease the terrorists and enemies of Pakistan.

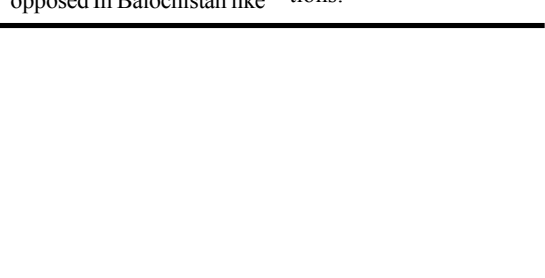
## ANP supported JUI-F in Senate's bi-elections, says Asghar Achakzai

Independent Report QUETTA: The Provincial President of Awami National Party (ANP), Asghar Khan Achakzai has stated that the ANP had supported Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) in the bi-elections of Senate held in Balochistan recently.

Talking to the media persons on Saturday, Asghar Achakzai said that PPP, PML-N and JUI secured one seat each in the Senate bi-elections.

Asghar Khan Achakzai said that it would be our endeavour and desire that Senators may be elected unopposed in Balochistan like

Sindh. We would also want that there may not set up mandi for sale and purchase of the Senate seat in the province. He said that PPP could have also won the third seat in the bi-elections even, it would make an attempt for the same. However, all parties honored the mandate of each other in the Senate bi-polls. He also demanded of all government and opposition parties to forge unity so as to get their seats in the upcoming Senate elections.



Asghar Khan Achakzai, Provincial President of ANP, speaking at a podium.

## Imran Khan approves names of PTI candidates for Senate election

ISLAMABAD (INP): As the country is now set to witness the Senate election following the government formation, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Saturday announced the final list of candidates for the upper house polls, which are slated to take place on April 2, amid confusion within the party over the names of contenders.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is set to hold the Senate election next month to fill the 48 seats that fell vacant upon the expiration of the 6-year term of the incumbent senators last week.

As per the electoral body's schedule for Senate polls, today (March 16) is the last date for the submission of nomination papers. Earlier, senior PTI leader Asad Qaiser expressed doubts if the names of candidates has been finalised by the PTI's founding chairman Imran Khan or not.

However, PTI later released the list of candidates "approved" by Khan, via the party's official account on X, formerly Twitter.

Here is the province-wise list of candidates:

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**  
General Seats: Murad Saeed (Covering: Azhar Mashwani) Faisal Javed Khan, Mirza Afridi, Irfan Saleem, Khuram Zeeshan.

**Technocrats:** Azam Swati, Irshad Hussain, Rubina Naz, Women: Ayesha Bano, Punjab

**General Seats:** Hamid Khan, Zulfi Bukhari (covering: Omer Sarfraz Cheema & Col Ijaz Minhas) Technocrats: Dr Yasmeen Rashid Women seat: Sanam Javed



LAHORE: Member National Assembly Abdul Ghaffar Wattoo calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## Pakistan to host ICC Champions Trophy 2025: PCB Chief

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman, Mohsin Naqvi, has assured fans that the ICC Champions Trophy will be held in Pakistan as planned for next year. Naqvi's comments came after the conclusion of an ICC meeting in Dubai.

"The PCB is looking forward to hosting the Champions Trophy in 2025," Naqvi said. "It will be a great privilege for Pakistan to welcome the top eight ODI teams to compete on home soil."

However, Naqvi acknowledged a potential challenge: India's participation. There's a history of political tensions hindering travel between the neighboring countries.

Beyond the Champions Trophy, Naqvi also confirmed a finalized tri-series between Pakistan, South Africa, and New Zealand. This ODI series will be held in February 2025, just before the Champions Trophy. The PCB chairman extended invitations to the chairmen of Cricket South Africa and New Zealand Cricket to visit Pakistan.

The tri-series marks a return to such events for Pakistan. The last time they hosted a tri-series was in October 2004, which included Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

## Death anniversary of "1965 War Hero" MM Alam on Monday

ISLAMABAD (INP): The 11th death anniversary of "1965 War Hero" Muhammad Mahmood Alam, popularly known as M M Alam will be observed on March 18, 2024 (Monday).

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) legendary war hero MM Alam's record of shooting down five Indian war planes in less than a minute remains unbeaten.

Alam, nicknamed as 'Little Dragon' popularly, while piloting an F-86 Sabre, shot down five Indian war planes in less than a minute during 1965 Pak-India war and altogether, downed nine war planes in the aerial fight.

MM Alam was the first ever fighter pilot for PAF, listed on top in the hall of famers' list at the PAF Museum in Karachi. Alam is considered as a national hero for Pakistan, most significantly, for his remarkable show of brilliance in the war of 1965 he was awarded the 'Sitara-e-Jurat' and also the BAR medal.

The war hero was born on July 6, 1935, in Calcutta, India and was the eldest of 11 siblings. No one in his family before him had been part of the military, and in fact, he joined the armed forces against his father's will.

In 1965, when India started war in the late mist dark night, Alam who was the first commanding officer of the first squadron of Assaults Mirage III, took his F-86 Sabre jet plane equipped with AIM-9 sidewinder missiles and fly over the skies of Sargodha to defeat the enemies who entered in Pakistani Air Space.

Here, MM Alam made the unforgettable history by knocking down nine Indian Fighter Jets 'Hawker Hunters' in air to air combat despite Hawker Hunter superiority over F-86. He shot down as he sets an unbeaten world record by downing five Indian aircraft in thirty seconds.



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister, Syed Murad Ali Shah talks with media persons during press conference regarding submitting of nomination papers at election commission office in Karachi

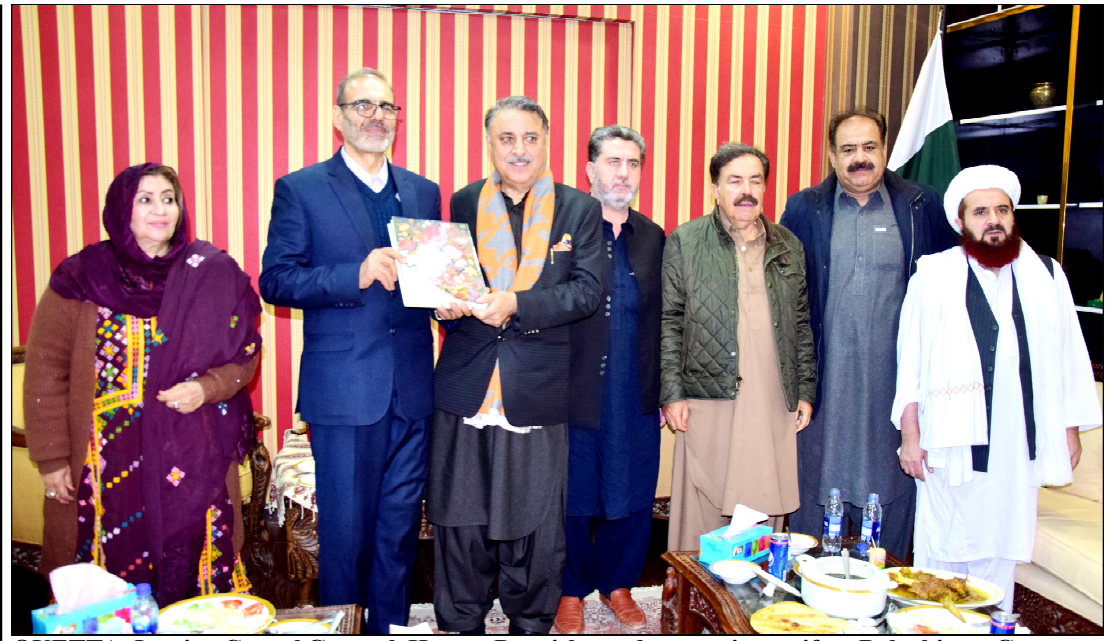
## Shehbaz Sharif issues Senate ticket to Talal

LAHORE (Online): President PML-N Shehbaz Sharif has issued Senate ticket of general seat Punjab to Talal Chaudhry.

PML-N leader Talal Chaudhry said in former twitter X I am grateful to Quaid Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab. I am very grateful to my party PML-N. They demonstrated confidence on me by issuing Senate ticket to me.

He stated I will try my best to come upto the confidence through my loyalty and performance.

This ticket is in the name of Jaranwala, in the name of love for Nawaz Sharif.



QUETTA: Iranian Consul General, Hassan Darvishwand presenting a gift to Balochistan Governor Malik Abdul Wali Kakar during Iftar Dinner Party hosted by Iranian Consulate

## Decision to make alliance with SIC was wrong: Barrister Ali Zafar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Barrister Ali Zafar has said that Sher Afzal Marwat had rightly said that decision to make alliance with the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) was wrong.

Speaking in a private TV programme, Ali Zafar said earlier the decision was made to forge alliance with the Shirani group. "We wanted reserved seats, but when the final negotiations were held, we could not make alliance with the Shirani group. The next option was MWM. They had one member in Parliament. At the last moment the decision was changed and the alliance was made with the Sunni Ittehad Council," Zafar said.

Zafar further said that the SIC did not contest the election nor did they give a list of reserved seats. Marwat was right when he said decision of making alliance with the SIC was a mistake.

He said some people met PTI founder in Adiala Jail and came out and announced joining the Sunni Ittehad Council. Why the decision was changed, Marwat and other people knew well.

"I think there was some miscommunication in this regard," Zafar added.

Marwat, in an interview with a private TV, had said that they made two wrong decisions for which they were paying a heavy price.

The first mistake was made when we contacted JUI Sherani group. He said he along with Asad Qaiser and Barrister Gohar was given the task. "We held several meetings with Sherani Sahib."

Marwat said in Balochistan and KP, the PTI founder was ready to make seat adjustment with Shirani group.

"After that we announced in the media that we had made an alliance with Shirani group. Then after three or four days, Shirani Sahib's party disappeared from the scene and batsman party came forward. Who brought the batsman party? Why did Shirani Sahib was removed? This is a question mark," he said. The second big mistake was the decision to join Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen. "Due to these wrong decisions we lost more than 80 seats," he added.

## Speakers call for global intervention over Kashmir to ensure peace

ISLAMABAD (APP): The speakers at a seminar on Saturday urged the international community to intervene in the Kashmir crisis to ensure Kashmir's right to self-determination to bring peace and tranquility to the region.

The event titled "From Amritsar Treaty to Abrogation: Kashmir's Journey for Self-Determination and Peace" which witnessed the participation of prominent scholars, youth activists and locals including women, was organized by Jammu Kashmir Peace & Justice Organization (JKPJO), said a press release.

The seminar, held in two sessions, shed light on the harrowing history and ongoing struggles of the Kashmiri people, highlighting the inhumane repercussions of the Treaty of Amritsar, signed on March 16, 1846 between the British East India Company, and Ranjit Singh, head of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab.

The speakers highlighted how this infamous agreement, orchestrated by colonial powers and regional actors, perpetuated decades of slavery, exploitation and marginalization under authoritarian Dogra rule.

Prominent Kashmiri leader, peace activist and Chairman of JKPJO, Tanveer-ul-Islam emphasized the importance of

comprehending this historical backdrop in framing the narrative of Kashmir's self-determination struggle.

Tanveer emphasized that the Treaty of Amritsar holds significance for scholars, researchers, and social scientists. It not only established Jammu and Kashmir as a unified state but also introduced a peculiar system where the people of Kashmir became subjects under a ruler's authority.

Transitioning into the second session, a notable gathering of civil society members, including luminaries such as Professor Shahid Hussain Mir, Prof. Sajid Hussain, senior journalist Khizar Hayat Abbasi, and Muhammad Yaseen Khan, attended the event.

They severely condemned the atrocities inflicted by Kashmiris, spanning from the oppressive Dogra rule to the recent revocation of Articles 370 and 35A by India.

Professor Shahid Hussain Mir eloquently delineated the centuries-long struggle of Kashmiris, highlighting the systemic discrimination and oppression faced under various rulers.

He poignantly recounted harrowing events such as the killings of silk factory workers in 1924 and the massacre outside Srinagar Central Jail in 1931, shedding light on the

deep scars etched into Kashmir's collective psyche.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman of JKPJO, Tanveer ul Islam delved into the aftermath of partition in 1947 and the subsequent human rights abuses perpetrated against Kashmiris.

He fervently appealed to the international community, particularly nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait to proactively facilitate dialogue and advocate for the fundamental rights of Kashmiris.

The seminar culminated with a resounding call to action for the international community to stand in solidarity with the oppressed Kashmiri people and work towards a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Participants expressed optimism that through collective efforts, the aspirations of the Kashmiri people for self-determination and peace would finally be realized.

The event underscored the urgent need for sustained attention to the Kashmir issue and emphasized the indispensable role of global solidarity in securing justice and freedom for the people of Kashmir.

## Pakistan day parade: President's bodyguards prepare with patriotism

ISLAMABAD (INP): The preparations are in full swing for a special parade marking Pakistan Day on March 23, with the enthusiasm of the armed forces.

The President's bodyguards, renowned for their precision and dedication, are gearing up for their participation in the parade, showcasing their deep-rooted patriotism.

Speaking about the importance of the event, Major Shah Zaman highlighted the unit's longstanding tradition of escorting every president since Pakistan's inception. He emphasized the meticulous preparations that span an

entire month for just one day of festivities.

This year, Major Shah Zaman revealed that 57 troopers and horses from their unit will partake in the parade, underscoring the magnitude of their contribution.

For Lieutenant Colonel Ayaz Ahmed, the parade symbolizes not only a moment of pride for their unit but also an opportunity to enhance their honor and that of their regiment.

Wajid Hussain, a dedicated horse caretaker, expressed his pride in being part of the team responsible for escorting the President of Pakistan on a buggy during the parade.



QUETTA: President ANP Balochistan Asghar Khan Achakzai talking with mediemen after submitting nomination papers of Aimal Wali Khan for Senate elections

## Two army officers among seven...

Continued from page 1

Syed Kashif Ali and Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar, having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced Shahadat.

Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other terrorist present in the area.

The ISPR, in its statement, reaffirmed the commitment to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country saying such sacrifices of brave soldiers further strengthen their resolve.

President Asif Ali Zardari has strongly condemned the terrorist attack on security forces' post in North Waziristan.

In a message today, he commiserated with the bereaved families of martyred soldiers and officers of Pak Army.

He prayed for eternal peace of the martyred and patience for their families.

The President reaffirmed the unflinching national resolve to extirpate the menace of terrorism from the country.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has strongly condemned the cowardly attack of terrorists in North Waziristan.

In a statement today, he expressed deep grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of seven security forces personnel.

He said the nation salutes these brave soldiers and officers of Pak Army who sacrificed their lives in defense of the motherland.

sonnel including two officers in the incident.

The Prime Minister prayed for eternal peace of the martyred and patience for their families.

He said the entire nation is proud of these martyrs who have sacrificed their lives to thwart the nefarious designs of the terrorists.

In his condemnation message, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar paid tribute to the brave soldiers and officers of Pak Army who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the country.

Termining today's attack a cowardly act of terrorists, he said the sacrifices of our armed forces will always be remembered.

The Minister said the government is fully committed to root out the menace of terrorism and will spare no effort in this regard.

Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, while strongly deploring the terrorist attack in North Waziristan today, reiterated the national pledge to eliminate terrorism.

In a statement, he expressed deep grief and sorrow over the martyrdom of seven security forces personnel.

He said the nation salutes these brave soldiers and officers of Pak Army who sacrificed their lives in defense of the motherland.

## Real Madrid file complaint after latest racist insults towards Vinicius Jr

PARIS (INP): Spanish club Real Madrid announced Friday that it had filed a complaint regarding the racist insults made against Vinicius Jr before Atletico Madrid and Barcelona's midweek Champions League matches.

"Real Madrid C.F. has filed a complaint with the Official State Prosecutor over hate and discrimination offences pertaining to the racist and hateful abuse aimed at our player Vinicius Junior," said the club in an official announcement.

"Real Madrid condemns these violent attacks of racism, discrimination and hate... which have sadly been a recurrent and ongoing concern for some time."

The complaint comes in the wake of videos on social media showing racist chants aimed at Vinicius Jr by Atletico Madrid fans outside the Metropolitan Stadium before Wednesday's Champions League match against Inter Milan. On Thursday, the 23-year-old called on the Champions League and European football's governing body UEFA to take action against the supporters.

"It's a sad reality that happens even during matches where I am not present," Vinicius added in the message posted on X.

## Pakistan witnesses increment in major industries production

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a promising sign of economic recovery, Pakistan has seen a surge in the production of major industries for the third consecutive month in January, indicating a gradual revival in industrial output.

According to data from the Pakistan Institute of Statistics, major industries recorded a 1.84% increase on an annual basis and a 0.03% rise on a monthly basis in January. This follows a 3.43% increase in December 2023 and a 1.4% rise in November, signaling a sustained uptrend in industrial production.

The notable contributors to this growth include beverages, apparel, leather products, electrical appliances, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals, collectively witnessing a remarkable 59% increase. Notably, this surge in production comes after a 14-month decline, with major industries experiencing positive growth in August 2023 and September.

However, October saw a 4.08% year-on-year decline in output due to factors such as improved dollar supply, removal of import barriers, clearance of pending letters of credit, and increased foreign exchange reserves with the State Bank, stimulating economic activities.

Despite these fluctuations, January's production figures indicate positive growth in 10 out of 22 sectors,

including beverages (2.02%), apparel (28.06%), leather products (10.43%), wood products (26.97%), chemicals (19.23%), pharmaceuticals (16.58%), and machinery (161.93%).

However, the textile sector witnessed a contraction, with ready-made garments recording a negative growth of 28.06% in January. Similarly, the production of edible oil increased by 6.79%, while vegetable ghee production decreased by 9.24%.

In the petroleum products sector, there was a negative growth of 2.42% in January, primarily due to declines in kerosene (19.80%), batching oil (19.69%), solvents and naphtha (21.23%), and furnace oil (16.37%). However, petrol production increased by 4.01%, diesel by 0.76%, and LPG production by 2.75%. Iron and steel production saw a modest increase of 1.04% in January, while fertilizer production surged by 30.32%. Furthermore, the production of rubber products increased by 8.13%, and pharmaceuticals by 16.58%, with machinery manufacturing witnessing an impressive growth of 161.63%. This consistent growth in major industries production signifies a positive trajectory for Islamabad's economy, indicating resilience and potential for further expansion in key sectors.

## Conflict and climate crisis present fundamental threat to people living in conflict hit regions: Speakers

ISLAMABAD (APP): While highlighting the nexus between conflict and climate crisis, the speakers during an interactive dialogue held on the sidelines of the 55th session of the UNHCR have said that a holistic approach on the part of global community was required to tackle both issues simultaneously.

The interactive dialogue, which was arranged by International Action for Peace and Sustainable Development in collaboration with Kashmir Institute of International Relations, World Muslim Congress, International Muslim

Women Union and YCP, was attended and addressed by international law experts, journalists and rights activists from different parts of the world including Sardar Amjad Yousuf president IASPS, Robert Fantina from Canada, Dr. Waqas Ali Kousar, Sheni Hamid from UK, Catherine Constantinides from South Africa, Ahmed Qureshi, APHC leader Faiz Naqashbandi, Dr Shugufita, and others, received a press release here on Saturday.

The speakers said that the dangerous nexus between conflicts and climate

crisis has become an increasingly pressing concern for the world. They pointed that the effects of climate change were more visible in regions with heavy troops' concentration.

Referring to the presence of over 900,000 troops in the Indian occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the speakers said that the huge presence of military and their activities in the region not only exacerbate the environmental degradation but also impede efforts aimed at addressing the pressing environmental issues.

They said that de-

ployment of troops and military activities have not only adversely affected the lives of the Kashmiri people but it has also been the cause and consequence of habitat loss, deforestation, pollution in the restive region.

The expansion of military facilities, they said, has played a significant role in contributing to ecological problems. "Use of heavy weapons, explosive materials and mines in ecologically sensitive areas by the Indian forces has been the main cause of deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution", they said.



ISLAMABAD: Portraits of Founder of the Country, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and National Poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal have been erected at Parade ground ahead of March 23, Pakistan Day in the Federal Capital.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers are working on maintenance of a bridge on Colonel Sher Khan Shaheed Road near Pirwadhai stop, one side of the bridge was collapsed owing to the heavy traffic.

## Aseefa steps into political, presidential spotlight

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant move marking her entry into the political arena, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, the youngest daughter of President Asif Ali Zardari, is set to contest the upcoming by-election for the NA-207 Nawabshah constituency.

This announcement follows the vacancy of the seat after President Zardari's elevation to office, providing Aseefa with an opportunity to step into the political arena with her maiden election bid.

Scheduled to arrive in Nawabshah on Sunday, Aseefa will formally submit her nomination form for the by-election, symbolizing her debut in electoral politics and continu-

ing her family's rich political legacy.

Supporters and party members are gearing up to welcome her at Nawabshah Airport, where she will kick off her campaign amidst a rally towards Zardari House, underscoring her commitment to serving the constituency.

Simultaneously, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's impending assumption of the title of first lady of Pakistan adds another dimension to her burgeoning political career.

Following her father's inauguration as the 14th president of Pakistan, Aseefa is poised to become the second daughter or sister of a head of state in the nation's history to hold this

prestigious designation.

This rare occurrence deviates from tradition, as historically, the position of the first lady has been reserved for the spouse of a head of government or state.

Aseefa's journey to the forefront of politics has been characterized by her steadfast support for her father and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Over the past decade, she has been a vocal advocate for the party's political objectives, standing alongside Asif Zardari in various capacities.

Notably, her presence at her father's oath ceremony as president symbolized her unwavering commitment to the party's cause.

## Kashmiris determined to achieve freedom goal against all odds: Shabbir Shah

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior leader of All Parties Hurriyat Conference and Chairman of Democratic Freedom Party, Shabbir Ahmad Shah on Saturday has praised the grit and determination shown by the Kashmiris in their ongoing struggle against Indian occupation and tyranny.

According to Kashmir Media Service, Shabbir Ahmad Shah in his message from the infamous Tihar Jail in New Delhi said that the Kashmiris have been enduring Indian atrocities with courage for a long time, but their spirit of freedom is

alive and they are determined to carry on their just struggle against all odds.

He said that the resolve, courage, sincerity and brotherhood exhibited by the Kashmiri people in the face of Indian repression and nefarious designs was exemplary. Facing hardships and difficulties in the struggle for freedom is sign of living nations, he added. Shabbir Ahmad Shah lamented that the Indian forces' personnel have continued their repressive acts including arresting youth even in the holy month of Ramadan.

## Seminar on Islamophobia held at National Skills University

ISLAMABAD (APP): Under the chairmanship of Additional Secretary Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Muhyuddin Ahmad Wani, a seminar was held on Friday at National Skills University Islamabad on the occasion of International Day of Islamophobia commemorated on March 15 every year.

Joint Education Advisor Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and Director National Curriculum Council Secretariat Dr. Shafiqat Ali Janjua said that Pakistan is committed to dialogue and cooperation with the international community for the promotion of global values of tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among all countries and peoples.

Pakistan's initiatives are aimed at creating mutual understanding and promoting inter-faith harmony, he added.

He further said that the aim behind acts of Islamophobia is to increase inter-religious hatred and miss-understanding between the different civilizations.

"By associating Islam with extremism and terrorism wrongly leads to marginalization and stigmatization of Muslims," he added.

## Accused of misconduct IHC writes note to look into matter on administrative side in case of ATC judge Hasnat

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has written note to administrative committee to look into matter of Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain of Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) on administrative side who is accused of misconduct.

Justice Mian Gul Hassan Aurangzeb and Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir have written note to see the matter on administrative side.

However IHC accepted bail plea of Aamir Masood Mughal in terrorism case.

## Modi govt outlaws 2 more pro-freedom parties in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): Modi-led Indian government continuing to suppress the Kashmiris' just struggle by banning pro-freedom parties in occupied Jammu and Kashmir has outlawed two more organizations, Jammu and Kashmir including Peoples Freedom League and Jammu and Kashmir Peoples League, as well as extended ban on Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) for another five years.

The JKLF headed by jailed leader Muhammad Yasin Malik was first banned in March 2019, said a press release.

## Residents gather for suhoor, celebrating Ramadan with family

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the spirit of Ramadan, the streets of twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad echoed with the laughter and chatter of families and friends gathering for suhoor.

The city's diverse food points witnessed a bustling scene as residents indulged in a variety of delectable dishes, including the renowned nihari, barbecue, chicken karahi, and halwa puri, all emblematic of the Garrison city's rich culinary heritage. As dawn broke, families flocked to their favorite food spots, eager to partake in the pre-dawn meal before beginning their fast. Amongst the throngs of people, the atmosphere was filled with joy and camaraderie, as residents expressed their delight in celebrating Ramadan with loved ones.

Talking to APP, Abdul Mateen, a local resident, commented, "There's something special about coming together with family and friends for suhoor during Ramadan. It's not just about the food; it's about the

## AJK leaders condemn ban on various pro-freedom organizations

ISLAMABAD (APP): All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu Kashmir and Pakistan chapter leaders on Saturday strongly condemned the ban on Jammu and Kashmir National Front, Jammu Kashmir People's League and Jammu Kashmir People's Political League by the fascist Modi government.

AJK leaders Mahmood Ahmad Saghar, Sheikh Abdul Mateen and Imtiaz Wani in a joint statement issued in Islamabad said that banning a political organization on fabricated charges has exposed the real face of fascist India under Modi. They said that anyone who raised his voice for the right to self-determination of the Kashmiris was suppressed on one pretext or another. The Hurriyat AJK leaders said that Kashmiris are making unprecedented sacrifices against the illegal Indian occupation, and vowed that New Delhi cannot suppress the spirit of freedom by killing or arresting innocent people.

## Campaign against institutions case: Court approves bail after arrest of journalist Asad Toor

ISLAMABAD (Online): Special court has approved bail after arrest in respect of journalist Asad Toor in launching campaign against the institutions case.

The bail after arrest plea of journalist Asad Toor came up for hearing before special judge central Islamabad Hummayun Dilwar Saturday.

Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha counsels for Asad Toor appeared in the court.

Syed Ishaq Hussain Shah special prosecutor of FIA also appeared in the

court.

Investigation officer of the case appeared in the case along with record. Counsel Hadi Ali Chattha filed Supreme Court observation in the court.

Upon it the court inquired from investigation officer and special prosecutor FIA is this observation correct.

FIA special prosecutor replied yes the observation is correct. The court while approving bail ordered him to file surety bonds worth Rs 5000.



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters watching and playing cricket at Faizabad interchange.

## Traffic crossing soil barrier on Margallah Avenue, mega project starts at E-11 and culminates at GT Road in Sangjani, the completion of D-12 to E-11 portion was due in the last month.

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"By associating Islam with extremism and terrorism wrongly leads to marginalization and stigmatization of Muslims," he added.

## Syed Ali Ahmed 34th Death Anniversary being commemorated on March 21

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 34th death anniversary of the esteemed activist of the Kashmiri freedom movement and former President of Azad Jammu Kashmir, Ghazi-e-Millat Col. (Retd) Syed Ali Ahmed Shah is set to be commemorated across Azad Jammu Kashmir on March 21.

The occasion aims to reaffirm the commitment to furthering the departed leader's mission of liberating Occupied Kashmir from Indian unlawful hold.

The Kashmir Press Club in Mirpur, the late leader's native city, will host a significant ceremony at 10:00 a.m. on March 21 under the auspices of the Syed Ali Ahmed Shah Memorial Society. The event will feature Quran Khawani to honor the departed soul, followed by a special function to pay homage to the revered Kashmiri leader.

Moreover, various programs have been scheduled across AJK to commemorate the death anniversary, including visits to the late leader's mausoleum for prayers and offerings of fateha for the departed soul and other martyrs of Jammu & Kashmir.

These gatherings also seek to invoke prayers for the swift success of the Kashmir freedom movement, emphasizing the enduring legacy of Syed Ali Ahmed Shah in the pursuit of Kashmir's liberation.

## AJK leaders condemn ban on various pro-freedom organizations

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ISLAMABAD: A vendor selling vegetables during holy fasting month of Ramadan at Sasta Ramzan Bazar Abpara in the Federal Capital.



## Punjab Governor says: Foreign direct investment, local investors should be encouraged in Pakistan

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Establishment Division Ahad Khan Cheema met Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman. During the meeting, ways and means to increase foreign direct investment and local investment were discussed. Speaking on this occasion, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that foreign direct investment and local investors, especially new investors, should be encouraged in Pakistan. The Punjab Governor said that the officials of the government departments should serve the people and treat them with courtesy. Governor Punjab said that the federal government should play a vital role to meet the needs of finance in the universities of Punjab. He said that during the three-and-a-half-year tenure of the previous

government from 2018 to 2022, reducing the education budget led to an increase in the number of out-of-school children and reduction in the budget of many universities led to deficits. On this occasion, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahad Khan Cheema vowed to make his best efforts for boosting the economy of the country. Earlier, newly appointed Commissioner Bahawalpur Nadir Chahta, called on Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman at Governor House Lahore. In the meeting, Governor Punjab expressed good wishes to the Commissioner Bahawalpur on assuming office. Speaking on the occasion, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that serving the people and providing them with basic facilities

should be a priority. He said that the district administration should take steps to control artificial inflation in the holy month of Ramazan. Governor Punjab said that Bahawalpur Division is an excellent city in terms of cleanliness. He said that Bahawalpur division is one of the most important divisions of South Punjab, adding that steps should be taken to maintain its beauty, improve its educational institutions and bring improvement in all departments. Meanwhile, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman paid tributes to the security forces personnel for foiling the terrorist attack on a security check post in North Waziristan. Paying homage to the martyred army personnels, he said that the sacrifices of the security forces in the war against terrorism are unforgettable.



LAHORE: Member National Assembly Muhammad Usman Owaisi calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## CM KP condemns attack on security forces check post in North Waziristan

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Saturday condemned attack on security forces check post in the Mir Ali area of North Waziristan. Expressing his grief, the Chief Minister extended condolences to the families of the five personnel, including a Lieutenant Colonel and a Captain, who lost their lives in the attack. He empathized with the bereaved families and prayed for the highest ranks for the martyrs and patience for the survivors. The Chief Minister also conveyed his best wishes for the speedy recovery of the injured personnel. Security forces' personnel exhibited bravery in confronting the terrorists, sacrificing their lives for the nation, said Ali Amin Gandapur. He hailed the sacrifices made by the security forces, emphasizing the nation's solidarity with them in the fight against terrorism. Asserting that such cowardly acts will not deter the morale of the security forces, the Chief Minister reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring peace and security in the country. Ali Amin Gandapur vowed that the sacrifices of the security forces for the nation's peace would not go in vain.

## Maryam orders expediting Ramazan package

LAHORE (APP): On the direction of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, digital monitoring of the "Ramazan Nigheban Relief Package" is ongoing. The distribution process to 2.832 million families under the "Ramazan Nigheban Relief Package" has been completed and its digital monitoring has also been undertaken. Assessing the Ramzan Nigheban Package report which was submitted to the CM on Saturday, she directed to expedite the distribution process to the needy families, adding that transparency should be maintained in the distribution process of "Ramazan Nigheban Package" under any circumstance. On the direction of CM, the campaign against price hike has been accelerated across the province. It has been informed in the report issued by the Industries department that Price Control Magistrates launched 1271 crackdowns against the profiteers. Random checking has been undertaken at 773,000 sites in 15 days and 23,000 profiteers have been apprehended. A fine exceeding Rs62.2 million has been imposed on profiteers while 1,682 FIRs have been registered and 4,858 people have been arrested. The CM said, "we cannot let the poor people remain at the mercy of profiteers" adding that the recent trend in the reduction of prices is satisfactory and she would not allow hoarding at any cost.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Economics Affairs and Establishment Division Ahad Khan Cheema meeting with Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman.

## Senate elections 13 candidates submit nomination papers from KP

PESHAWAR (APP): A total of 13 candidates have submitted their nomination papers for general seats, the Provincial Election Commission said here Saturday. Elections for 7 general, 2 technocrats and scholars and 2 reserved seats for women will be held on April 2, Provincial Election Commission said. The list of those who submitted nomination papers will be published tomorrow on Sunday, the Provincial Election Commission said. Scrutiny of nomination papers will be done by March 19 and appeals against acceptance and rejection of papers can be filed till March 21 and appeals will be decided by March 25. Provincial Election Commission said. So far 8 candidates have submitted nomination papers for 2 Technocrat seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Among them, Azam Khan Swati, Qazi Mohammad Anwar Advocate, Waqar Ahmed Qazi, Khalid Masood have also submitted nomination papers for Technocrat, Provincial Election Commission said. Likewise, Ayesha Bano also submitted her papers for Senate elections along with Azam Khan Swati and Syed Irshad Hussain have submitted their papers for the Senate Technocrat seats, the Provincial Election Commission said. Irfan Saleem, Talha Mehmood, Dilawar Khan, Faisal Javed, Mirza Muhammad Afridi and Azhar Qazi Mashwani have also submitted papers for general seats, the Provincial Election Commission said.

## 8 dead, 1215 injured in 1122 road accidents in Punjab

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: At least eight persons were killed and 1215 injured in 1122 road accidents in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours. Out of these, 522 people with serious injuries were shifted to hospitals, while 685 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by rescue medical teams, thus reducing the burden of hospitals. Furthermore, the analysis showed 636 drivers, 36 underage drivers, 170 pedestrians, and 409 passengers were among the victims. The statistics show that 265 accidents were reported in Lahore which affected 295 persons placing the provincial capital at top of the list followed by Faisalabad 87 in with 89 victims and at third Multan with 70 accidents and 66 victims. According to the data 1024 motorbikes, 54 autorickshaws, 112 cars, 21 vans, 9 buses, 24 trucks and 72 other types of vehicles and carts were involved in the accidents.

## CM's aide says: KP making efforts to organize KP Cricket Premier League

PESHAWAR (APP): Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jahan on Saturday expressed that he will leave no stone unturned to organize Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cricket Premier League in the province this year. Talking to a delegation of the management of Kashmir Premier League here, the advisor said that steps would also be taken to play Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches in the province. He said that efforts would also be made to host international cricket matches in the province. He said that soon after assuming charge of his portfolio, he has issued instructions for completion of construction work at Arbab Niaz Cricket Stadium as per international standards as soon as possible. It has a worth to mention here that the organizers of the concerned League have organized Sindh and Kashmir Premier Leagues successfully and now their delegation has met with the Advisor on Sports regarding the expected holding of Premier League in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During their meeting with the Advisor on Sports, they gave briefing on the holding of KP Premier League and essential arrangements.



GILGIT: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan presiding over the meeting regarding Mines and Minerals.

## Ministers highlight Ramazan package progress, steps to check price hike

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bukhari said on Saturday that for the first time in the country's history a step had been taken to provide Ramazan hampers at doorstep of more than 6.4 million families in Punjab. Addressing a press conference along with Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yaseen here at DGPR, she said that flour, sugar, rice, gram flour and ghee were included in Ramazan hampers. She said that the "Nigheban Ramazan package" and model bazaars were running simultaneously to facilitate the maximum number of people. She said model bazaars had been set up in 15 districts of Punjab where model bazaars were

not set up previously, adding that agriculture fair price shops had been established in 25 districts of Punjab. Azma Bukhari said that essential items were available in these model bazaars at 25 percent less rate than the open market. She said that price control magistrates were discharging their duties in field after getting training and they were being monitored through a dashboard. She said, "Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz believes in mitigating the sufferings of the people." Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yaseen said that there was no single complaint related to the quality of items included in Ramazan hampers.

## Minister celebrates Sikh Nanak Shahi calendar commencement

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Minority Affairs and Chairman Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, participated in a special ceremony held at Gurdwara Janamsthan Nankana Sahib to mark the beginning of the Nanak Shahi calendar of the Sikh religion. The event was attended by a significant number of Sikh leaders from various countries, including Pakistan, as per a press release issued here on Saturday. During the ceremony, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, alongside other Sikh leaders, unveiled the new Nanak Shahi calendar and extended congratulations to the Sikh community on the commencement of the 556<sup>th</sup> year of the Nanak Shahi calendar. Addressing the gathering, he emphasized that all religious minorities in Pakistan enjoy equal rights and highlighted the efforts of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) government in implementing a five percent quota for religious minorities in government jobs. The minority affairs minister underscored the historic significance of a Sikh being appointed as a provincial minister and a Sikh woman being appointed as the general secretary of the Parbandhak Committee.

## CM condoles with bereaved families of martyred soldiers

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah while strongly condemning a terrorist attack on a check post in North Waziristan has condoled with the bereaved families of martyred soldiers. According to a Spokesman for the CM House Sindh, the Chief Minister expressed his deep sorrow over the martyrdom of five army soldiers. The CM Murad said that the martyrs were our national heroes and valuable assets of the country. He said that the terrorists would never succeed in their nefarious designs. He said that such elements would be eradicated very soon. The entire nation is with the Pakistan Army, he added.

## Court seeks report on red notices to Moonis Elahi through Interpol

LAHORE (Online): Court has sought report regarding issuing of red notices to former Federal minister Moonis Elahi through Interpol Police on next hearing. Judge Tanvir Ahmad Sheikh of Special Court Lahore issued written order of FIA Money laundering case against Moonis Elahi. The court summoned report on next hearing the serving of red notices to Moonis Elahi through Interpol. It has been said by the court in written order FIA Lahore presented report about freezing properties of Moonis Elahi.

## Minister chairs meeting on roads repair and rehabilitation program

LAHORE (APP): The Communication and Works Department has launched roads repair and rehabilitation programme under 'Sarkain Bahal—Khushal Punjab' slogan throughout the province. A meeting in this regard was chaired by Minister for Communication and Works Shoaib Ahmed Bherth at the Planning and Development offices, here on Saturday. Chairman P&D Board Barrister Nabeel Javed Anwar, Secretary C&W Sohail Ashraf, Secretary P&D Dr Asif Tufial, Member IDP

P&D Dr Abid Bodala and officers of Communication and Works Punjab attended the meeting. The secretary C&W presented a comprehensive plan for 'Sarkain Bahal—Khushal Punjab' programme, outlining the repair and rehabilitation of 590 arterial and collector roads across the province. All these roads would be completed in six months time period. Minister Bherth, emphasizing the magnitude of the endeavour, revealed that a staggering 11,496 kilometers of roads would undergo repair and rehabilitation.



KARACHI: Senate elections candidates of Peoples Party (PPP) for Senate Candidacy are sitting with Provincial Election Commissioner or Returning Officer for submitting of nomination papers at election commission office in Karachi on Saturday, March 16, 2024. Sindh Chief Minister, Syed Murad Ali Shah also present on this occasion.

## PPP finalises candidates for Senate seats from Sindh, other provinces

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has finalised candidates for the Senate seats from Sindh, other provinces and Islamabad. According to final list issued by In-charge Bilawal House Media cell Surrender Velasai, Syed Kazim Ali Shah, Ashraf Jatoti, Masroor Ahsan, Nadeem Bhutto, Sarfraz Rajar and Dost Ali Jessar will be PPP's candidates for 6 general seats while Quratul Ain Marri and Rubina Qaimkhani for two reserved seats for women, Barrister Zameer Ghumro and Sarmad Ali for two reserved seats for Technocrat and Poonjo Bheel on one reserved seat for non Muslim from Sindh province. Aimal Wali Khan and Jan Muhammad Buledi will be joint candidates with ANP and NP respectively while Mir Changaiz Khan Jamali and Sardar Umer Gorgaj for general seats from Balochistan provinces while Bilal Mandokhel on Technocrat and Ishrat Brohi and Kiran Baloch will be the candidates on reserved seats for women.

## Police solves blind murder case, killers arrested

MULTAN (APP): Police on Saturday claimed to have solved the blind murder case of a person and arrested three outlaws including central accused within short time period. According to details, a citizen named Ghulam Farid informed Makhdoom Rasheed police that unknown outlaws allegedly killed his son Saleem Akhtar near Chah Fida Mouza Gharyala. Police registered the case and started search for the accused. CPO Sadiq Ali took notice of the incident and formed police teams for the arrest of the accused.

## Student killed in road mishap

BUREWALA (APP): A student was killed after motorcycle went uncontrolled and collided with tractor trolley near Gaggi Mandi Sheikh Fazil road here Saturday. According to details, a student named Muhammad Afaq resident of 375/EB was going to home from school. Suddenly the motorcycle went uncontrolled and collided with a tractor trolley near Gaggi Mandi Sheikh Fazil road. As a result, the student died on the spot. Police handed over the body to heirs after necessary action.

## IGP, prosecutor general Punjab jointly chair meeting

LAHORE (APP): Prosecutor General Punjab Farhad Ali Shah visited Central Police Office on Saturday and met IGP Punjab Dr Usman Anwar, and both jointly chaired a meeting, which was attended by all regional police officers (RPOs), city police officers (CPOs), district police officers (DPOs), district public prosecutors through video-link. Deputy Prosecutor Generals Sultan Akbar Chatta, Arshad Ali Farooqui, Ahmad Saeed, Usman Iqbal, Abdul Qudus, District Public Prosecutor Lahore Imtiaz Cheema were present in the meeting. It was decided in the meeting that direct coordination between the Central Police Office and the Prosecutor General Punjab would be made more effective. The prosecutor general Punjab and IGP Punjab signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) about the working standard operating procedures (SOPs).



HYDERABAD: A large number of people breaking fast (Iftar) during the holy month of Ramazan ul Mubarak arranged by sohni dharti youth council at Hyder Chowk.

Viable approaches can double agri sector's contribution to economy: PBF

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) Vice President Jahan Ara Wattoo has said that Pakistan's agriculture sector has great potential and its current contribution of US \$ 03 billion to the economy can be doubled with viable approaches encompassing all the aspects of this vital sector as well as the concerns of the stakeholders.

Addressing a workshop here Saturday, she said that in order to realize the full agricultural potential, there is a dire need to control cartels in the commodity markets thus enabling the crop component of the agri sector to yield tangible results. She cited that the government is pinning high hopes on cotton growers and when it declared an indicative price of Rs 8,500 per 40k, it led to a strong revival of crops, and production doubled in a matter of one season. However, as soon as cotton started arriving in the market, the price crashed to Rs 6,500 per maund as the market cartels robbed the farmers of their hard-earned money. "We observed the

same phenomenon in the maize crop and its price dwindled to half of its pre-sowing value. In a production cycle with very high costs, price slides like these leave farmers crippled for years. For urea alone, the growers paid more than Rs 120 billion to black marketers this season, as the urea bags were being sold in the market at four different prices," she maintained.

Jahan Ara added that other agri puts such as diesel, electricity, water and cropping/farming labour are also very costly, while the growers by and large have to pay 22 percent bank markup, and after these massive expenses, the prices collapse leave most of the farmers under heavy debts for years. PBF Chairman (South Punjab) Malik Suhail Talat said, "Agriculture does not fit into calendar years; it is all about continuity. Decisions made in 2024 regarding what to sow and what not to sow will define 2025. For the last decade or so, maize has anchored agriculture. With its price crashing, each farmer will now have to decide whether to continue.



KARACHI: Affectees of Income Tax Employees Cooperative Housing Society are holding protest demonstration for acceptance of their demands, held at Karachi press club.



RAWALPINDI: Citizens waiting in queues for purchasing subsidized flour on Stadium Road in the city.

Minister Shafay visits model bazaar at Johar Town

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Industry and Commerce Chaudhry Shafay Hussain Saturday visited Model Bazaar Johar Town to review prices, availability and quality of essential items.

While expressing indignation over absence of Punjab Food Authority staff in the Model Bazaar, he ordered to further improve the system of Model Bazaar for the convenience of the public and also directed to increase the onion stalls immediately.

The provincial minister checked the weight and quality of the bags at the flour stall and checked the quality of meat at the fresh chicken sale center. He observed the process of supplying the items to the elderly in the senior citizen camp.

The minister also reviewed the process of redressal of complaints in the complaint cell and monitoring process in the office of the Model Bazaar.

Gold rates decline by Rs.1,050 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs.1,050 and was sold at Rs.227,500 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs.228,550 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs.900 to Rs.195,045 from Rs.195,945 whereas the price of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs.179,616, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs2,600 and Rs.2,229.08 respectively.

Sri Lanka records 2.3 pct negative GDP growth in 2023

COLOMBO (Xinhua/APP): The GDP growth rate of Sri Lanka for the year 2023 was estimated as a 2.3 percent negative growth rate, the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) said in a statement on Friday.

Overall, agricultural activities expanded by 2.6 percent, while industrial and service activities contracted by 9.2 percent and 0.2 percent, respectively, in the year 2023, the DCS said.

The three major economic activities of the economy—agriculture, industry, and services, contributed their shares to the GDP, at current prices, by 8.3 percent, 25.6 percent and 59.9 percent respectively.

The "taxes less subsidies on products" component accounted for a 6.2 percent share of the GDP in 2023.

However, the GDP for the fourth quarter of 2023 registered a 4.5 percent positive growth, the DCS highlighted.

Textile exports earn \$11.145b for Pakistan in 8 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan earned \$11,145.661 million from exports of textile products during the first eight months of the current financial year (2023-24), the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported here on Saturday.

The exports of the textile product, however, witnessed a nominal decline of 0.65 percent during July-February (2023-24) when compared to the exports of \$ 11,218.644 million during July-February (2022-23).

The textile commodities that witnessed positive trade growth included raw cotton, the exports of which grew by 353.78 percent, from \$12,286 million last year to \$55.752 million this year.

Likewise, the exports of cotton yarn increased by 48.18 percent, from \$ 505.015 million last year to \$ 748.307 million this year and towels by 3.64 percent, from \$ 666.497 million to \$ 690.745 million.

The export of bed wear also surged by 2.08 percent from 1,834.903 million to 1,873.008 million.

The textile commodities that witnessed negative growth include cotton cloth, exports of which declined by 8.71 percent, from \$1,380.075 million to \$1,259.897 million; cotton carded or combed by 32.55 percent, from \$0.970 million to \$0.654 million; yarn other than cotton yarn by 18.06 percent, from \$29,562 million to \$24,224 million, and knitwear by 5.69 percent, from \$ 3,078.882 million to \$ 2,903.541 million.

Likewise, the exports of tents, canvas and tarpaulin by 10.72 percent, from \$86.332 million to \$77.080 million, ready-made garments by 2.99 percent, from \$ 2,380.837 million to \$ 2,309.663 million. The exports of art, silk and synthetic textiles also decreased by 10.88 percent declining from \$273.080 million to \$243.361 million, made up articles by 1.62 percent, from \$484.765 million to \$476.921 million whereas the exports of all other textile materials also went down by 0.60 percent.



Bukhari said along with Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yaseen addressing a press conference.

2.8 mln ration bags delivered under Ramzan package

LAHORE (APP): On the directives of the Chief Minister Punjab, the provincial government is striving to provide relief to people during the holy month of Ramazan as district authorities delivered more than 2.8 million ration bags to deserving families across the province under the Nigehban Ramazan package.

These details emerged during a briefing by officials at a meeting chaired by Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman at the Civil Secretariat here on Saturday. The meeting reviewed the provision of ration bags and price control measures. The administrative secretaries of industries, agriculture, Chairman PITB, DG Punjab Food Authority,

DIG Special Branch and officers concerned attended the meeting while all divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners participated through video link. Officials briefed the Chief Secretary that 319,000 ration bags were provided to deserving people yesterday. They said that imported onions were available at a price of Rs.95 per kg in the 10 agriculture fair price (AFP) shops established in Ramazan bazaars in Lahore, while the sale of imported onions in Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Sargodha and Gujranwala would start from today.

The chief secretary said that the delivery of ration bags at the doorsteps of deserving families was a big challenge.

Rates of vegetables, fruits soar in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): The rates of vegetables and fruits soared as the wave of inflation could not be reduced in Peshawar.

The price of vegetables, fruits and live chicken continues to increase and the people are worried about the Holy month of Ramazan.

"We are witnessing an increase in the rates of vegetables and fruits and are compelled to buy because of the Holy month of Ramazan," a housewife told APP during a visit to the vegetables and fruits markets.

She said that the shopkeepers and vendors have official rates issued by the concerned quarters of the district administration but I do not know why they are not following the rate. The butchers are selling the meat as Rs. 1000 per kg while the official rate is 750 per kg, she added. However, the district administration officials have tried their level best to control the prices according to the official price list but so far they have failed. Sales of onion 260, tomato 160, garlic 650 and ginger 610 per kg while potato 90, kachalu 240, green pepper 340, capsicum 320, brinjal 160, cauliflower 120, okra 340 rupees are being sold per kg.

LCCI stresses facilitating taxpayers amidst economic challenges

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Kashif Anwar has penned a letter to Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to highlight critical issues, being faced by taxpayers and stressed facilitating them by abolishing additional tax burden.

A copy of the letter was also sent to Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, and the Chairman of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), according to LCCI spokesman here Saturday.

LCCI President said that recent amendments introduced by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) through SRO 350(1)/2024, dated 7th March 2024 which perceived as disproportionately impacting tax-compliant entities and hindering private sector expansion.

He said that the electronic return filing requires commissioner approval through the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) if sales surpass five times the capital and non-submission of balance sheet within thirty days. It will create undue hardships for the compliant taxpayers and force them to move out of the tax net.

The SRO also states that the individuals, association members, or directors of single-shareholder companies would be mandated to undergo biometric verification at a National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) e-Sahulat Centre during the month of July every year. The taxpayer, who fails to comply with this requirement, would not be able to file his electronic return without the prior approval of the Commissioner.

He said that under the provisions of the same SRO, failure on the part of the seller to submit a return by the stipulated deadline would result in adjustments being made to the buyer's return.

The Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) would subsequently eliminate invoices from the non-compliant seller and correspondingly deduct input tax credit from the buyer's return.

He also pointed out the SRO 1842(1)/2023 dated 21.12.2023 which says that a retailer whose deductible withholding tax under Section 236H of the Income Tax Ordinance.

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Balance of China's loans to small businesses totals 70.9 trln yuan

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): The balance of loans for micro and small businesses from Chinese banks totaled 70.9 trillion yuan (about 10 trillion U.S. dollars) at the end of 2023, according to a China Banking Association report.

With the popularity of automated banking services and online banking services, the number of over-the-counter transactions exceeded 491 billion last year, up 9 percent year on year, the report said.

The banking sector had some 41,700 customer service personnel at the end of 2023, it said.

This year, China's banking industry.

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari has called upon the Government to immediately initiate deliberations with the business leaders in connection with the forthcoming budget 2024-25 to make it business-friendly.

In a statement issued by ICCI, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari said that owing to the existing high inflation rate, the trade deficit is on the rise and the hardships of the business community have multiplied. Hence the situation demands that the Government should start deliberations with the business leaders, and incorporate their suggestions in the budget documents to ease their problems which in turn will benefit the masses, he said.

He expressed the hope that the sitting government as per its election manifesto will pay heed to the issue on a priority basis and formulate long-term policies in the best interest of the business community and ultimately the common man.

The President ICCI added that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is a visionary leader and is well aware of the difficulties of the entrepreneurs.

The President ICCI added that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is a visionary leader and is well aware of the difficulties of the entrepreneurs.

EU allocates 500 mln euros for ammunition production

BRUSSELS (Xinhua/APP): The European Commission on Friday announced the allocation of 500 million euros (about 544 million U.S. dollars) to boost ammunition production as part of its support for the European defense industry.

In a statement, the commission said this would allow the European defense industry to increase its ammunition production to two million shells a year by the end of 2025.

Its annual production capacity for 155 mm shells reached 1 million per year in January.

To assist the European industry in increasing its ammunition production and readiness.

PHNOM PENH (Xinhua/APP): The World Bank has approved an additional 35 million U.S. dollars credit to Cambodia for improving climate-resilient rural roads in three provinces, its press release said on Saturday.

The credit will support the Cambodia Road Connectivity Improvement Project (RCIP), which aims to improve climate-resilient road access to markets, health services, and schools across Kratie, Kampong Cham, and Tboung Khmum provinces.

Improving climate-resilient roads WB approves additional \$35m credit to Cambodia

The three provinces have a population of over 2 million people, of whom 80 percent live in rural areas, the press release said adding that the RCIP was approved in July 2020, with financing of 100 million U.S. dollars. This additional credit will help pay for higher than anticipated project costs, mainly for road works contracts, it said, adding that high inflation and price increases of key inputs, including fuel and bitumen, over the past three years have resulted in higher costs than estimated in 2019 before the approval of the original project.

Currently, road rehabilitation works have been underway across 130 km of targeted national and provincial roads, and 142 out of 270 km of targeted rural roads, the press release said.



LAHORE: An artisan busy making small wooden items to attract customers at his workplace.

# Iran Air could be banned from Europe if Tehran sends missiles to Russia, US warns

G7 warns Iran not to give Russia ballistic missiles for Ukraine war

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: G7 nations are prepared to respond with severe new penalties that could include a ban on Iran Air flights to Europe if Iran proceeds with the transfer of close-range ballistic missiles to Russia, a senior US official said on Friday. "Our message today is, if Iran proceeds with providing Russia with ballistic missiles, the response from the international community will be swift and severe," the official told a small group of reporters.

The United States joined G7 allies in issuing a statement warning the Islamic Republic not to proceed with the transfer in the aftermath of a Reuters report that Tehran has provided Russia with a large number of powerful surface-to-surface ballistic missiles for use in its invasion of Ukraine. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said one option under consideration "would have the effect of ending flights from Iran Air, its flagship state-owned carrier, into Europe - point being, this is not business as usual."

The official said that while the United States had not been able to confirm that the transfer has already taken place as Reuters reported, there clearly was an effort by Tehran to advance negotiations with Moscow on the missiles. UN Security Council restrictions on Iran's export of some missiles, drones and other technologies expired in October. However, the United States and European Union retained sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile program amid concerns over exports of weapons to its proxies in the Middle East and to Russia.

Ballistic missiles would be a powerful new weapon for Russia to use in its war in Ukraine. The United States has said Iran has already provided Russia with drones, guided aerial bombs and artillery ammunition that Moscow has used to attack Ukrainian targets. Washington has been on high alert for a year about what it has described as an unprecedented Russian-Iranian defense partnership that will help Moscow prolong its war in Ukraine as well as pose a threat to Iran's neighbours.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter Kim Ju Ae attend a military demonstration in North Korea.



Israeli forces detain a Palestinian man near the Damascus Gate as he attempts to attend the prayer of Ramazan at Al-Aqsa mosque.

## Biden praises US senate leader speech calling for Israel elections

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden praised Friday a speech by the US Senate leader urging new elections in Israel, saying many Americans shared concerns about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the Gaza war. The call by Democratic Senate majority chief Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking elected Jewish American in history, was the most strident rebuke of Israel yet by a senior US official since Hamas's Oct-7 attacks. "He made a good speech, and I think he expressed serious concern shared not only by him, but by many Americans," Biden said when asked about the speech after a meeting with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar at the White House. Biden told reporters in the Oval Office that Schumer had contacted his staff to say he was going to make the comments, and added that he was "not going to elaborate on the speech."

## Al Shabaab lays siege to hotel in Somalia; 3 killed

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOGADISHU: Three people were killed in an hours-long siege claimed by Al Shabaab fighters at a popular hotel near the presidential palace in the Somali capital Mogadishu on Thursday. Armed fighters stormed the SYL hotel in a hail of bullets before security forces announced they had brought the situation under control after more than 13 hours. It broke a relative lull in violence by the Al Qaeda-linked group, demonstrating its continued ability to strike despite a major military offensive against them.

## India to begin voting on April 19 in world's largest election

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: India will begin voting in phases starting April 19 to elect a new parliament, the country's election authority said on Saturday, the world's largest election in which nearly one billion people are eligible to cast ballots. The election pits two-term strongman Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his regional allies against a bickering alliance of two dozen opposition parties, with surveys suggesting a comfortable win for Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata party (BJP). A victory would make Modi, 73, only the second prime minister after Jawaharlal Nehru, India's independence hero and its first prime minister, to win a third straight term. Modi and his party have been in campaign mode for months before the dates for the vote were announced. The prime minister has been flying around the country almost every day, inaugurating new projects, making announcements, taking part in religious events and addressing public and private meetings. In his speeches, Modi has been showcasing economic growth during his two terms which has resulted in India becoming the fastest growing major economy in the world at present, investment in infrastructure as well as welfare programmes for the poor.

## Two killed in shelling of Russian border city Belgorod, governor says

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: Two people were killed and three wounded in a Ukrainian missile strike on the Russian border city of Belgorod, the regional governor said on Saturday, as Russian citizens vote through Sunday in a three-day presidential election. In a statement on the messenger app Telegram, Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said that the city had been struck by missiles fired from a Vampir rocket launcher system. He said that vehicles and buildings had been damaged both in Belgorod and in surrounding villages.

## Jail terms of up to seven years for 12 who stormed Hong Kong legislature in 2019

**Monitoring Desk**  
HONG KONG: A Hong Kong court on Saturday sentenced 12 people to jail terms from more than four years to nearly seven years in a high-profile rioting case linked to the storming of the city legislature during a pro-democracy protest in 2019. The incident was a pivotal moment in the months-long protests that embroiled the China-ruled city in the boldest populist uprising against Chinese Communist Party rule since the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing. Protesters broke into Hong Kong's legislative council building on July 1, 2019, smashing windows and streaming inside as public anger mounted over an extradition bill that would have allowed authorities to send people to mainland China for trial. Those sentenced by district court Judge Li Chih-cho included actor Gregory Wong, 45, who was jailed for six years and two months after pleading not guilty.



Presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye greets supporters after he was released from prison in Dakar, Senegal.

## North Korea's Kim rides car given by Putin, oversees drills

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un publicly rode in a car given to him by Russian President Vladimir Putin in "clear proof" of the strengthening friendship between the two countries, state media reported on Saturday. Pyongyang and Moscow have forged closer ties since Kim met Putin in Russia in September and vowed to deepen military relations. They deny Western accusations that North Korea is supplying Russia with artillery shells and missiles used in Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Kim's ride on Friday in the Russian Aurus limousine is "clear proof of the DPRK-Russia friendship, which is developing in a comprehensive way on a new high stage," the leader's sister Kim Yo Jong said, according to state media KCNA, using North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Kim Jong Un oversaw air warfare drills on Friday and urged "realistic" preparation for combat, KCNA said, after joint annual drills involving South Korea and the United States wrapped up this week. "Only realistic training directly related to warfare can prepare soldiers as real combat fighters," Kim said, according to KCNA. The South Korea-US joint drills were the first since Pyongyang in November scrapped a 2018 inter-Korean military pact aimed at de-escalating tensions.

## Hamas proposes new six-week ceasefire in Gaza

**Monitoring Desk**  
GAZA STRIP: Hamas has proposed a new six-week truce in Gaza and prisoner swap on Friday, a day after Pales-tin-ian president Mahmud Abbas appointed Moham-med Mustafa, a long-trusted adviser on economic affairs, as prime minister. "The agreement is for a six-week ceasefire and a prisoner exchange," a Hamas official said after weeks of so far fruitless mediation efforts, adding that the group would want this to lead to "a complete (Israeli) withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a permanent ceasefire". On the other hand, 69-year-old Mustafa who has replaced Mohammed Shtayeh now faces the task of forming a new government for the Palestinian Authority, which has limited powers in parts of occupied West Bank. The White House welcomed the appointment, calling on him to deliver "credible and far-reaching reforms". Mustafa has served as deputy prime minister for economic affairs, held a board seat at the Palestine Investment Fund and worked in a number of senior positions at the World Bank. In Israel's military offensive in Gaza Strip, at least 31,490 Palestinians have been killed and 73,439 wounded in past five months.

## Blinken says US working to 'bridge remaining gaps' on Hamas-Israel deal

**Monitoring Desk**  
VIENNA: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that Washington was working "intensively" with its partners "to bridge the remaining gaps" for a deal to free hostages held by Hamas and secure a ceasefire in Gaza. "Yes, there has been a counter-proposal put forward by Hamas. I obviously can't get into the details of what that involves, but what I can tell you is we're working intensively with Israel, with Qatar, with Egypt, to bridge the remaining gaps and to try to reach an agreement," Blinken said during a visit to Vienna. Hamas has proposed a new six-week truce in Gaza and an exchange of several dozen Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, an official from the militant group told AFP on Friday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Israel would send a delegation to Doha for another round of talks on securing the release of hostages in Gaza. "I think it reflects the sense both of possibility and of urgency to get an agreement, to get a ceasefire, to get the hostages back, to get even more humanitarian assistance in," Blinken said when asked about a possible Israel military offensive on Rafah, Blinken said the US had not seen such plans, reiterating that Washington wants a "clear and implementable plan" to ensure civilians are "out of harm's way".

## US aid chief to announce \$25 million in humanitarian assistance for Haiti

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: US aid chief Samantha Power is set to announce \$25 million in humanitarian assistance for Haiti on Friday, according to a statement seen by Reuters in advance, as the Caribbean nation faces a long-running political and humanitarian crisis. The announcement of further aid, first reported by Reuters, comes as gang violence has spiraled in Haiti, fueling a humanitarian crisis, cutting off food supplies and forcing hundreds of thousands from their homes. The additional assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development will go toward immediate food assistance, essential relief supplies, relocation support and emergency health care, Power said in the statement. Psycho-social support, safe drinking water and protection for the most vulnerable, including women and girls, will also be part of the aid, Power said. "Over the past weeks, violence by organized criminal groups has escalated dramatically and worsened what is already a dire humanitarian situation in Haiti," Power said in the statement. "The untenable violence serves only to delay the democratic process while upending the lives of millions. We urge all actors in Haiti to stop the violence and make the necessary concessions to allow for transparent, inclusive, and credible elections, unimpeded delivery of aid,

## Putin vows to 'punish' Ukraine for attacks that mar presidential election

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine on Friday of aiming to disrupt Russia's presidential election by shelling its territory and using 2,500 armed soldiers to try to pierce his country's borders, and vowed to punish Kyiv for its actions. The first day of the election was also marred by disruptions, including dye being poured into ballot boxes, a Molotov cocktail thrown at a polling station in Putin's home town, and reported cyber attacks. Millions of Russians cast their ballots across the country's 11 time zones at the start of the three-day election, which is almost certain to hand Putin six more years in the Kremlin.

The shadow of the Ukraine war fell across the election, with what Putin said was repeated shelling of Russia's western regions and an attempt by Ukrainian proxies to cross into Russian territory in two Russian regions. "These enemy strikes will not remain unpunished," a visibly angry Putin said at a meeting of Russia's Security Council, which includes military and spy chiefs as well as the most powerful civilian state officials. Putin said there had been four attacks on the Belgorod region and one on Kursk by armed Ukrainian proxies numbering about 2,500. He said they had 35 tanks and 40 armoured vehicles and that 60 per cent of the soldiers were killed.

Ukrainian officials said earlier on Friday that Russian armed groups based in Ukraine who are opposed to the Kremlin carried out the attacks in the Belgorod and Kursk regions. Amid the Ukraine war, the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two, Putin, 71, dominates Russia's political landscape and none of the other three candidates on the ballot paper presents any credible challenge. More than 114 million Russians are eligible to vote, including in four regions of Ukraine that its forces only partly control, but which it has claimed as part of Russia. Ukraine says the staging of elections there is illegal and void.

## Indian navy intercepts Somali pirates on cargo ship Ruen

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: An Indian navy warship has intercepted the hijacked Ruen cargo ship and demanded the Somali pirates on board surrender, a navy spokesperson said on Saturday. The pirates who allegedly hijacked the Maltese-flagged bulk cargo vessel on Dec 14 opened fire on the navy ship in international waters.

## 22 migrants drown off Turkiye

**Monitoring Desk**  
ISTANBUL: Twenty-two migrants, including seven children, drowned after a boat capsized off the Turkish coast on Thursday night. Two people were rescued by the Turkish coastguard and another two managed to make it out of the water on their own, officials said. The victims' nationalities were not yet known.

The boat capsized off Turkiye's largest island, called Gokceada, which is located in the Aegean Sea off the coast of the north-western province of Lemnake, near Greece's Ennos island. "The Turkish coastguard found the bodies of 22 people, including seven children," the governor's office said in a statement.



Members of an electoral commission check documents of voters at a polling station during the Russia's presidential election.

## Trudeau says he mulls quitting his job

**Monitoring Desk**  
OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose Liberals are trailing badly in the polls, said on Friday he thought about quitting his "crazy job" every day, but insisted he would stay in office until the next election. That vote must be held by October next year and recent surveys of public opinion show the Liberals would be crushed by the right-of-centre Conservative-led opposition. Pollsters say voters are tiring of Trudeau, who took office in Nov 2015. "I could not be the man I am and abandon the fight at this point," he told French-language broadcaster Radio-Canada in a lengthy interview.

## India's top political donor faces fraud, tax evasion probes

**Monitoring Desk**  
MUMBAI: India's largest known political donor is a lottery company which has been the subject of fraud and tax evasion probes, according to data published weeks before elections. The election commission published late on Thursday a list detailing buyers of electoral bonds, a controversial funding scheme that has helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party build an immense campaign war chest dwarfing its rivals.

Electoral bonds account for the lion's share of political donations in India, but the Supreme Court ruled them illegal last month, saying the scheme violated the right of voters to know who was financing their representatives. Nearly \$165 million of the bonds issued between April 2019 and January of this year, or around 11 per cent of the total, were bought by a company helmed by Santiago Martin, dubbed the "Lottery King" by Indian media.

## French govt 'weathered' 48-hour cyber attack

**Monitoring Desk**  
RENNES: A cyber attack of "unprecedented intensity" against the French government claimed by pro-Russian hackers this week failed to stop state operations running, a minister said on Friday. The attack came just months before Paris hosts the Olympics Games. The 48-hour effort, which started on Sunday, "hit 800 administrative centres at once", but "at no moment were communications down... every civil servant was well-informed in real time and it did not destabilise the functioning of the state".

## Thailand's flourishing cannabis culture to end as government seeks ban

**Monitoring Desk**  
BANGKOK: Thodsapol Hongtong is enjoying a smoke with his friends at the "Green Party", a venue where recreational cannabis enthusiasts meet in the Thai capital Bangkok to chat and have a good time. But it's a pastime that may be coming to an end. The 31-year-old influencer who runs his own cannabis shop regularly touts recreational marijuana as good for the country's economy on his online platform "Channel Weed Thailand". The booming cannabis sector could be worth \$1.2 billion by next year, according to the estimate by the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce.

"Where (else) in the world can we lie around on the beach and enjoy a joint," Thodsapol told Reuters, taking a puff from his bong. But the Thai government is looking to stamp out cannabis culture with a ban on its recreational use to be rolled out by the end of the year. Medical use will still be permitted. Thai Health Minister Cholnan Srikaew, in an interview with Reuters last month, described recreational marijuana as a "misuse" of cannabis that has a negative impact on Thai children and could lead to other drug abuses. Recreational cannabis flourished in Thailand after the country became the first in Asia to fully decriminalise the substance in 2022.

## UN passes Pakistan's resolution calling for combating Islamophobia

UNITED NATIONS (INP): A resolution presented by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations to combat Islamophobia has been successfully passed by the world peace body, signalling a collective effort to address the growing concerns surrounding the issue on a global scale.

The resolution, spearheaded by Pakistan, garnered widespread support from member states, underscoring the urgency and importance of combating discrimination and violence against Muslims. It specifically calls for action to end the ongoing violence targeting Muslims in the context of Islamophobia.

A key aspect of the resolution is the request for the UN secretary-general to appoint a special envoy tasked with combating Islamophobia. The resolution underscores the need

for concerted efforts to counter Islamophobia, recognising it as a threat to international peace and security.

By addressing the root causes and manifestations of this phenomenon, the international community aims to foster a climate of mutual respect and harmony.

The resolution received overwhelming support, with 113 member states voting in favour of its adoption. Significantly, there were no votes cast against the resolution, highlighting the unanimous consensus among participating nations on the importance of addressing Islamophobia.

However, it is noteworthy that 44 countries, including India, chose not to participate in the voting process. This decision raises questions about the stance of these nations on

combating Islamophobia and their commitment to promoting religious tolerance and inclusivity on the global stage.

Meanwhile, on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, UN chief António Guterres appealed to maintain peace and order in Ramadan in his address to the General Assembly.

António Guterres said sectarian rhetoric is defaming communities. "We must unite to fight intolerance and bigotry," he stated.

He further said that social media platforms were fuelling hate speech, calling for an end to harassment based on religion.

"We cannot continue to fight hate and bigotry. Today's terrorist incident in New Zealand shows that we must stand together and root out anti-Muslim bigotry," Guterres stressed.



NEW YORK: A view of panel discussion on climate change hosted by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations in collaboration with the Islamic Relief Worldwide and UNICEF.

## PUC escalates efforts to foster interfaith dialogue, harmony on global scale

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Saturday said the council is set to escalate its efforts on a global scale to foster interfaith dialogue and harmony.

Addressing international media in connection with the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia', he emphasized that Islamophobia poses a grave threat to Muslims worldwide.

Ashrafi urged world powers to accelerate initiatives to eradicate Islamophobia, labeling it as a toxic barrier hindering interfaith harmony.

He called upon the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other international bodies to champion initiatives aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination while nurturing a cul-

ture of love, tolerance, and coexistence.

He stressed that Islam embodies peace, love, and tolerance, emphasizing the teachings of Allah Almighty and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Ashrafi lamented the incitement of non-Muslims against Islam, attributing it to misinformation and hatred propagated against Islamic teachings.

Recognizing Islamophobia as a crime, Ashrafi highlighted the designation of March 15 as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia' by the United Nations, a milestone achieved through collaborative efforts involving Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other entities.

Ashrafi emphasized the urgency of addressing global anti-Muslim sentiment, branding discrimina-

tion as a significant threat to world peace.

He underscored the need to clarify the distinction between Jihad and terrorism through dialogue, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which fueled widespread misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the Western world.

The PUC, Ashrafi said, pledged to intensify its global endeavors for interfaith dialogue and harmony, culminating in an upcoming international conference, themed 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' in Islamabad after the holy month of Ramadan.

He informed that the conference would be comprised all faith leaders as the invitations will be tendered to Imam of Khana-e-Kaba, Grand Imam of Palestine, Sheikh Al-Azhar, Pop Francis, Bishop of Canterbury and many more.



BEIJING: Ambassador of Pakistan to China H. E. Mr. Khalil Hashmi and Dean, School of Journalism Tsinghua University, Mr. Zhou Qingan inaugurated the new office of Pakistan Culture and Communication Centre, Beijing, China.

## UN moot calls for strong political will to deal with climate threats

NEW YORK (INP): A Climate moot, hosted by Pakistan at the United Nations has called for prioritizing welfare of women and children and urged to demonstrate a stronger political will to deal with the threats posed by climate change.

The panel discussion on climate change was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations in collaboration with the Islamic Relief Worldwide and UNICEF in New York.

The speakers agreed that urgent steps need to be taken to work out modalities for the mobilization of resources to cater to the growing financial needs for the success of the adaptation and resilience strategy.

The panel discussion on "From Rhetoric to Reality in Building Climate Resilience: Adaptation, Loss and Damage" was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations in collaboration with the Islamic Relief Worldwide and the UNICEF.

The panelists included climate and sustainable development experts, representatives of civil society and international non-governmental organizations, members of the UN-based diplomatic corps and faith-based organizations.

They urged the governments to prioritize the welfare of children and

threats posed by this phenomenon.

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The panelists included climate and sustainable development experts, representatives of civil society and international non-governmental organizations, members of the UN-based diplomatic corps and faith-based organizations.

They urged the governments to prioritize the welfare of children and

women who happen to be most adversely impacted by the climate change events.

In his keynote address, Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, underscored Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change, despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions.

He highlighted the severe impact of extreme weather events on Pakistan, including floods, glacial melting, and desertification, emphasizing the urgent need for climate resilience measures.

Ambassador Akram commended the collaboration between the Government of Pakistan, the UN, and development partners in developing the Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework (4RF) to address the aftermath of the 2022 floods.

## CM Maryam welcomes PM's economic road map, terms it revolutionary

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif welcoming the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's economic road map has termed it a historic and revolutionary initiative measure.

Hailing the Prime Minister's economic road map, she said that vision of Shehbaz Sharif for promotion of foreign investment was admirable.

Maryam Nawaz said

that the PM's economic road map includes reduction in inflation and poverty which will benefit the common man.

She said that it was out goal to achieve more production through low-cost agricultural intervention in the agricultural sector.

For the development and stability of the economy, everyone has to work together, she added.

## Security tightened around Adiala jail amid threats

RAWALPINDI (INP): The security has been tightened around Adiala jail amid safety concerns where the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder Imran Khan has been incarcerated.

According to the details, an extra force has been deployed around the Adiala jail and barbed wires have been placed all around due to the security concerns.

## PPP finalises candidates for Senate seats from Sindh, other provinces

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has finalised candidates for the Senate seats from Sindh, other provinces and Islamabad.

According to final list issued by In-charge Bilawal House Media cell Surrender Velasai, Syed Kazim Ali Shah, Ashraf Jatoi, Masroor Ahsan, Nadeem Bhutto,

Sarfraz Rajar and Dost Ali Jessar will be PPP's candidates for 6 general seats while Quratul Ain Marri and Rubina Qaimkhani for two reserved seats for women, Barrister Zameer Ghumro and Sarmad Ali for two reserved seats for Technocrat and Poonjo

Bheel on one reserved seat for non Muslim from Sindh province.

Aimal Wali Khan and Jan Muhammad Buledi will be joint candidates with ANP and NP respectively while Mir Changaiz Khan Jamali and Sardar Umer Gorgaj for general seats from Balochistan provinces while Bilal Mandokhel on Technocrat and Israt Brohi and Kiran Baloch will be the candidates on two reserved seats for women. Rubina Khalid from KPK, Faiza Ahmed Malik from Punjab and Rana Mehmooodul Hassan (Islamabad) will be the PPP candidates, Surrender Velasai stated.

## PTI dissociates itself from 'overseas protests' outside IMF, WB offices

ISLAMABAD (INP): After back-to-back protests led by overseas Pakistanis in the United States (US), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan dissociated itself from the ongoing protests overseas, clarifying that his party did not have any part in it in the recent demonstrations outside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) headquarters.

"If overseas Pakistanis are making up something, then it would be their own decision," Barrister

Gohar said Saturday while speaking to media outside Adiala Jail — Rawalpindi post-hearing of 190m NCA scandal case against PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi. It is noteworthy that several PTI workers from overseas chapter staged protests outside the IMF and WB headquarters in Washington against alleged irregularities in the 2024 general elections in Pakistan. Yesterday's protest in US was attended by former premier Khan's ex-chief of staff Shahbaz Gill and PTI spokesperson in the United States, Sajjad Burki.



ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome meeting with Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House.

## Samiullah demands action against anti-social elements

INDEPENDENT REPORT CHAMAN: The President of Chaman District Bar Association, Samiullah Khan Achakzai has demanded of the concerned district administration to take stern action against the anti-social elements so as to avert any untoward incident in Chaman.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the President, Chaman Bat expressed deep concern over the increasing incidents of dacoity and robbery during the holy month of Ramadan and stressed the need to ensure security measures on the basis of intelligence based operation in advance to cope with any untoward incident.

He said that the area

SHO of police is aware of the suspected persons and dens in his respective area of jurisdiction.

He said that it is top-most responsibility of the area police to take steps for prevention of crimes. In this regard, the administration has to adopt zero tolerance policy against the crimes, adding he stressed.

He said that no compromise can be made on protection of life and property of the people, but unfortunately, our administration becomes active only after loss precious lives.

The President Chaman Bar also asked the administration to prepare concrete strategy together with all stakeholders and ensure law and order before it's too late.

## New office of Pakistan Center for Cultural Studies inaugurated at Tsinghua

BEIJING (APP): On the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the opening of the Pakistan Center for Cultural and Communication Studies at Tsinghua University, Pakistan Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashimi and Dean of the School of Journalism at Tsinghua University, Zhou Qingan inaugurated the new office of the Pakistan Center for Cultural and Communication Studies.

Before the unveiling ceremony, Ambassador Hashimi met with Peng Gang, Vice President of Tsinghua University, where he commended the high education standards of the University appreciating its top rankings in Asia and the world.

The Ambassador also thanked the Vice President for Tsinghua University's consistent contribution to the China-Pakistan ties as a seat of learning for Pakistani students and as a partner in cultural and research endeavors with counterpart institutes in Pakistan.

Later, the Ambassador visited the School of Journalism of Tsinghua University and inaugurated the new office of Pakistan Culture and Communication Studies. The Ambassador exchanged views on various possible initiatives to strengthen cooperation between the School of Journalism and the Pakistan Embassy to bolster China Pakistan ties in the fields of media and culture. The School of Journalism of Tsinghua University and the Pakistan Center for Culture and Communication Studies together with the Quaid-i-Azam university, Beijing Foreign Studies University and Communication University of China will jointly organize a three-week "China-Pakistan Cultural Corridor Caravan Class" this summer. This caravan class will cross the Karakoram and Hindu Kush Mountains, researching, teaching and writing along the route of ancient Chinese monks in the mountains of northern Pakistan.

## Pak Army improves mobile infrastructure in Waziristan

WANA (INP): Pakistan Army was committed to improve the communication infrastructure in South Waziristan which was facing various challenges over the years. In collaboration with mobile phone companies, Pakistan Army has installed 19 mobile phone towers in the area in less than one year time.

The local people besides communicating with each other, can now easily access the relatives living in other cities and abroad.

Improvement in communication infrastructure has also benefited the businessmen helping them to further spread their business network and get better products by contacting other businessmen.

Availability and better service of the mobile network will also play key role in economic development of the area. Local students, businessmen and other people belonging to different walks of life have hailed.

## Quettaites not to be left on mercy of profiteers, vows Commissioner

INDEPENDENT REPORT QUETTA: The Commissioner Quetta Division, Muhammad Hamza Shafiqat has stated that the people of Quetta would not be left on mercy of the profiteers and stern action would be taken against them.

He said that the action is being taken by the price control teams against the profiteers all over the city.

He said that all out relief would be taken to provide relief to the masses especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

It may be mentioned here that the price control teams headed by the assistant commissioners and special magistrates have been formed to take action against those involved in the profiteering and hoarding in Quetta. The teams are conducting raids in different parts of Quetta.

Several shopkeepers have been arrested on charges of profiteering in Quetta.

While several shops were sealed, hundreds of others were issued warning by the administration.

## Pakistani killed, wife, daughter got injured during knife attack in Germany

BERLIN (INP): A 58-year old Pakistani was killed while his wife and daughter got injured in Germany during a knife attack in Germany, reported on Saturday.

The sad incident appeared in the city of Ulm in the southern German state of Baden-Wurttemberg when a mentally ill German entered the house of Pakistani-born family and stabbed 58-year Faheem with a knife.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Army Soldiers taking part in a rehearsal for Pakistan's Day parade in Federal Capital, ahead of Pakistan Day celebrations.

## Gwadar North Free Zone: Water supply project 60% completed

GWADAR (INP): A project to establish a water supply network in the Gwadar North Free Zone is nearly 60 percent complete. This significant development aims to address the immediate needs of companies eager to commence operations within the current year.

The project is divided into two parts. The first segment, being overseen by the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), extends from the dams to the outer boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone.

The second segment, soon to be initiated by the China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC), will run from the inner

boundary wall of the Gwadar North Free Zone to the designated areas for factories.

Following a competitive bidding process, GPA awarded the contract to Saleh Techno Company.

This company is in the process of installing water pipelines from two primary sources: dam water, including from the Sawar and Shadi Kor dams, and a newly constructed, Chinese-funded 1.2 MGD desalination water plant.

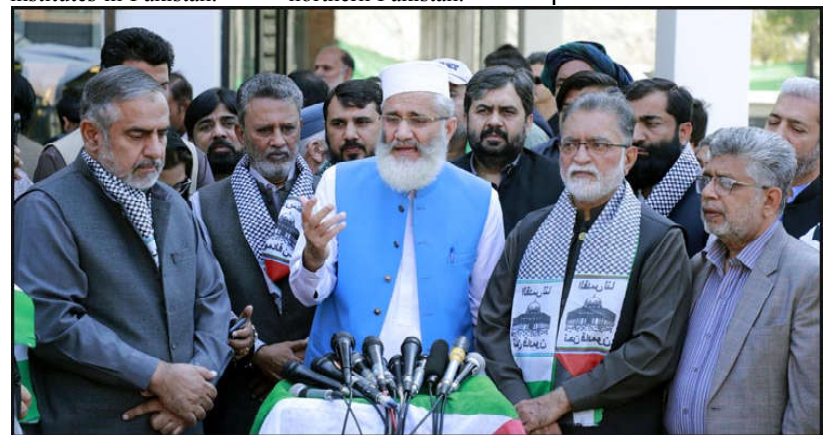
A GPA official told Gwadar Pro that the cost of laying the water supply network from both dams to the boundary of the Gwadar North Free Zone is Rs 110 million, with an

estimated completion date in the first week of May.

Chairman of GPA, Passand Kunal Buledi, has played a crucial role in securing approval for water and power projects within the government's 2023-24 budget.

In addition to the water supply project, GPA has also approved funding for electricity supply from the Deep Sea Port Grid Station to the North Free Zone.

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs has reallocated these funds to the Ministry of Energy for the development of the distribution network, Gwadar Pro reported on Saturday.



LAHORE: Amir Jamaat-e-Islami Sirajul Haq talking with media men.