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Bilawal Bhutto calls for 'Charter of Reconciliation' among all political parties

PPP chief warns of dictatorship if politicians do not focus on national reconciliation

GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH (INP): PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that all politicians and political parties should work on a 'Charter of National Reconciliation' to avoid fighting with each other and shun politics of foul language.



GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari speaking at a public gathering in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, Sindh on Sunday.

"Rather than playing dharna dharna, we should sit on the table and have a political dialogue to bring improvement in our system, democracy, and institutions through amendments," he said while addressing a large crowd in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, Sindh on Sunday.

The PPP chief's recommendation comes as the newly formed alliance of opposition parties Tehreek Tahafuz-e-Aam will launch a massive movement.

This alliance kicked off its protest movement against alleged rigging in the February 8 general elections

from Balochistan by staging two separate public gatherings in Pishin and Chaman on Saturday.

Without naming the multi-party confab, Bilawal described it as the "PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) 2" and added that the alliance was beating drums for alleged vote-rigging to cause "economic and political instability."

He reminded the parties of the result of such movements, warning them

of the risk of dictatorship in the country. "When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the PM of this country, some conspirators like 'nine stars' started a campaign and thought that they would oust Bhutto and come into power. But because of their campaign Pakistan had to bear dictatorship for 10 years and this risk exists today," he said while addressing a large crowd in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, Sindh

on Sunday. The country would not develop and democracy would be at the receiving end if politicians make such an environment and not focus on national reconciliation and are involved in politics of bad-mouthing.

While advising the politicians to "come to their senses", he called for dialogue between political parties. The PPP chief added that the party would try to provide relief to the people in the provinces ruled by them.

He also mentioned about the 'Charter of Democracy', saying that the party achieved 90% of its target under the agreement. The remaining 10 per cent was related to the judicial reforms, he said and hoped to do it with all parties, legal fraternity, and civil society.

Bilawal called for reviving people's trust in the national institutions. Every worker of the PPP wants

the implementation of the charter of democracy, he said.

President Asif Ali Zardari also addressed the people. He shunned the impression that Pakistan was a poor country and blamed the "thinking, understanding and soft-headed" of 'Babus in Islamabad'.

He said that such thinking has made Pakistan a poor state, reiterating that the country was not poor.

The country has everything, but lacks intellectual capacity, Zardari said and called for sitting together. "What is in power? Power is about people's service and we fight for it," he said and stressed the need for dialogue.

"If you cannot come to that point then withdraw. The PPP for the past 40 years have been fighting. Sometimes it withdraws, advances, sidesteps and takes a front step," the president said and called for thinking before taking any step.

President Zardari says PPP will continue to support govt to achieve economic stability

GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari says Pakistan People's Party will continue to support the government for economic stability and prosperity in the country.

He was addressing the public gathering on 45th death anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto in Larkana on Sunday.

The President said Pakistan is blessed with vast potential of minerals and natural resources and we will emerge from current economic crisis through exploitation of these resources.

Paying tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he said Bhutto family always sacrificed their lives for the country and people.

President Zardari thanked the people for supporting their confidence on Pakistan People's Party in general elections.

The President assailed the bureaucracy in Islamabad saying Pakistan was not a poor country but it had been made so by mindset of the 'babus' [officers] sitting in the capital. Zardari recounted how former prime minister Benazir Bhutto had appointed him as the chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party, despite doubts from some friends about his leadership capabilities.

The president emphasised that Pakistan's status as a poor nation was not predetermined, adding that despite Allah's provision of abundant wealth, the nation suffered from a lack of intellect. Zardari stressed the importance of cultivating a mindset that seeks to understand and address the country's challenges comprehensively.

We want supremacy of law & constitution: Sharif family afraid of Qaidi No. 804, says Umar Ayub

Independent Report

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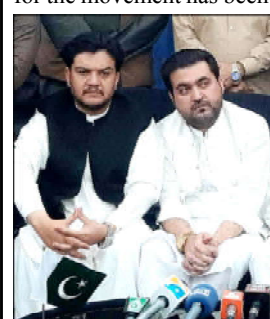
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A leader of Pakistan



started for protection of the constitution. He believed that the coming era of government is of PTI after the incumbent government of Form 47 would be winded-up. He claimed that the government formed through Form 47 would no more run.

The senior leader of PTI was addressing hurriedly called press conference before his departure from

Peoples Party (PPP), Sharif Khilji also announced to join the PTI after resigning from his party. Also present on the occasion were leaders of PTI including Akhuzada Hussain, Dawood Shah Kakar, Noor Khan Khilji, Muhammad Asif Tareen, Sardar Zainul Abidin Khilji, Barat Khan Khilji, Khursheed Kakar, Najebullah Kharoti, Siddiq Tareen and others.

JIT comprising police, army officers formed to investigate Bahawalnagar incident

LAHORE (INP): A six-member Joint Inquiry Team (JIT) comprising officers of police, military and local administration has been constituted to probe the Bahawalnagar incident wherein a faceoff broke out between some police officials and military personnel. The News reported on Sunday. The Punjab Home Department has formed the team and appointed Special Secretary Interior Attar-Rehman as its convener. The JIT also includes the Bahawalpur Division commissioner, DIG police special branch Punjab and officers of Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence and Intelligence Bureau.



GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH: President Asif Ali Zardari addressing a gathering on the occasion of the 45th death anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Iran warns Israel against retaliation, global powers urge restraint

US will not take part in retaliatory action against Iran, says White House

Monitoring Desk

JERUSALEM: Iran warned Israel and the United States on Sunday of a much larger response if there is any retaliation for its mass drone and missile attack on Israeli territory overnight, as Israel said "the campaign is not over yet".

The threat of open warfare erupting between the arch Middle East foes and dragging in the United States has put the region on edge as Washington said America did not seek conflict with Iran but would not hesitate to protect its forces and Israel.

Iran launched the attack over Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria on April 1 that killed top Revolutionary Guards commanders and followed months of clashes between Israel and Iran's regional allies, triggered by the war in Gaza.

However, the attack from hundreds of missiles and drones, mostly

launched from inside Iran, caused only modest damage in Israel as most were shot down with the help of the US, Britain and Jordan.

An Air Force base in southern Israel was hit, but continued to operate as normal and a 7-year old child was seriously hurt by shrapnel. There were no other reports of serious damage. "We intercepted, we repelled, together we shall win," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on social media ahead of a planned 1230 GMT meeting of the war cabinet to discuss a response to the attack.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said despite thwarting the attack, the military campaign was not over and "we must be prepared for every scenario". Israel's Channel 12 TV cited an unnamed Israeli official overnight as saying there would be a "significant response" to the attack. Iranian Foreign Min-

ister Amir Abdollahian said Tehran had informed the United States its attack on Israel would be "limited" and for self defence. He said Israel's neighbours had also been informed of its planned strikes 72-hours in advance.

Global powers Russia, China, France and Germany as well as Arab states Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates urged restraint.

"We will do everything to stop a further escalation," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters during a visit to China. "We can only warn everyone, especially Iran, against continuing this way."

Turkey also warned Iran it did not want further tension in the region.

The Islamic Republic's mission to the United Nations said its actions were aimed at punishing "Israeli crimes", but that it now "deemed the matter concluded".



KARACHI: Palestine Foundation stages a protest demonstration against Israeli genocide in Gaza at Karachi Press Club

CM Balochistan attends DA of ZAB

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti reached Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on Sunday.

The members of provincial assembly, Mir Zohoor Ahmed Buledi, Ali Madad Jatak, Ubaidullah Gorgaji, Secretary Information PPP, Sarbuland Khan Jozgezi and other leaders were also accompanied by the Chief Minister.

They participated in the 45th death anniversary of the founding leader of PPP, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. They also paid rich tributes to him on his death anniversary besides offering fatiha for the departed soul.

Meanwhile, in a message issued on eve of his death anniversary, Chief Minister said that the parliamentary system of the country is because of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He said that Shaheed Bhutto had given the constitution to the country which guarantees basic human rights of every citizen. He said that Shaheed Bhutto had made the defense of country invincible. Shaheed Bhutto was the only leader of Pakistan on whom whole Muslim ummah had proud of. He said that we have prepared the public service as our manifesto by following the basic philosophy of democracy.

Pakistan concerned over ongoing developments in ME, calls for restraint

ISLAMABAD (APP):

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday said that Pakistan was watching with deep concern the ongoing developments in the Middle East (ME) and called upon all the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and move towards de-escalation.

"Today's developments demonstrate the consequences of the breakdown of diplomacy. These also underline the grave implications in cases where the UN Security Council is unable to fulfill its responsibilities of maintaining international peace and security," the Foreign Office

Spokesperson said in a press statement.

It was now critically urgent to stabilize the situation and restore peace, it was further stressed.

The spokesperson said that for months, Pakistan had underlined the necessity of international efforts to prevent the expansion of hostilities in the region and for immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

On April 2, Pakistan had pointed to the dangers of an attack on the Iranian consular office in Syria as a major escalation in an already volatile region, it was added.

PDMA issues advisory in view of risks of sky lightning during rains in Balochistan province

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued advisory for protection from the sky lightning during rains in the Balochistan province. According to the directives issued by PDMA on Sunday, it was mentioned that there are risks of lightning during rains in the province. The PDMA pointed

out that casualties are being reported due to lightning in the province.

It was also pointed out that lightning generally takes place at open and high places. Therefore, general public should adopt preventive measures to save them from lightning, it was advised. It was further advised to the citizens to avoid from taking shelter and sitting under trees during the lightning.



GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Safaraz Ahmed Bugti alongwith MPAs Mir Zohoor Ahmed Buledi, Haji Ali Madad Jattak and Mir Ubaidullah Gorgage coming to attend death anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

CM pledges to fight war of State against terrorism with political responsibility and under joint course of action

Chairs high level meeting on law & order; strongly condemns Noshki incident; decides to revisit security plan for curbing such incidents in future

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has reiterated his government's resolve to fight the war of State against terrorism with political responsibility and under joint course of action.

He asserted that the war against terrorism is not mere of the security forces, rather it is the war of State against peace enemies.

He stressed that this war has to be fought by the politicians, civil armed

forces, judiciary and media.

He said that we would fight the war against terrorism with political responsibility and joint course of action.

The Chief Minister was chairing high level meeting on law and order situation in the province here on Sunday morning.

The Inspector General of Police, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh, Chief Secretary, Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary Home, Zahid Saleem besides senior civil and military officials were in attendance.

The Commissioner Rakhshan Division and Deputy Inspector General of Police briefed the meeting about Noshki tragic incident.

While the meeting strongly condemned the Noshki incident, it decided to review and revisit the security plan in backdrop of the gory incident.

The Chief Minister on the occasion directed to ensure payment of financial compensation to the bereaved families of Noshki martyrs within week time.

Such an injection of capital is poised to not only pave the way for further foreign investments but also aligns with SIFC's mandate to spur economic growth.

Following this significant investment, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are expected to ink agreements aimed at strengthening investment within the mining sector.

Online adds: Saudi Arabia has decided to make investment of overall 7 billion dollars in Pakistan.

According to government sources a high level 100-member delegation of Saudi Arabia under Saudi foreign minister prince Faisal bin Farhan will arrive in Pakistan on April 16.

The delegation will include Saudi ministers for investment, water and agriculture, environment, industries, mineral resources and energy.



LAHORE: People carrying their luggage coming back from their home towns after spend their Eid-ul-Fitr holidays at Lahore Railway Station, in the Provincial Capital.

Daily Voice of Masses Independent

Monday April 15, 2024

Escalating tension between Iran-Israel

While Iran's use of hundreds of drones and missiles to directly target Israel overnight on Sunday in retaliation for an Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus set some major political and military precedents, but it has escalated tension between Iran and Israel and so in the region and world aggravating the conflict.

It was the single largest drone attack ever carried out by any country, and it was the first time Iran directly attacked Israel after almost a half-century of being archenemies.

Here's a look at what political, military and economic considerations Tehran might have factored in while deciding on the attack that has amplified fears of a larger regional war and that could also affect the direction of Israel's war on Gaza.

Pakistan has already issued a clear statement by highlighting the escalatory steps of 1st April by Israel and Pakistan has squarely put the blame of escalation to where it rightfully belongs. There's call for international community and UN especially UNSC to follow through internationally accepted norms and obligations is the right way to proceed for dialing back. Under the prevailing circumstances, rather amidst escalating tension, Pakistan calls for restraint and step back is the most pragmatic way forward.

Obviously, Pakistan continues to have a very clear and lucid stance towards Palestinian and Gaza issue and would like that the ongoing humanitarian crisis is not pushed back due to focus on these new developments.

Under all circumstances, Pakistan fully supports and stand by the Palestinians who are suffering from the brutal attacks and naked aggression by Israeli forces in Ghaza.

What Pakistan wants is that Israel must stop ongoing naked aggression against innocent Palestinians, rather the world community should also force it to do so putting an end to the war crimes.

While Iran has taken revenge of the April 1 Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus that had killed seven IGRC members, including two generals in charge of leading operations in Syria and Lebanon, along with six other people, it (Israel) and its allies and supporters must take cognizance of the situation and play role for bringing peace instead of taking any action against Iran. At the same time, critical importance of a strong defence and security apparatus in any country especially Pakistan which has multiple external threats, a strong and immoral enemy like India as well as externally sponsored terrorism in the country. It is also clear that nexus between Israel and India is meant to destabilise the region.

Amidst the external and internal security threats, strong Armed Forces are need of every country and so of Pakistan especially in view of the nefarious designs of India evident from its past moves.

This cannot be overemphasised than in the ongoing conflict in the region.

What's most important is that social media and vested political interests need to stop their heinous propaganda and think of Pakistan rather than playing in the hands of the enemy.

They must think and take care of the vested national interests of the country instead of their petty ones.

All the responses given by the countries have asked for cessation of hostilities rather than following jingoistic rhetoric or war mongering less the social media propaganda trolls sitting in and outside of Pakistan just to hurt Pakistan national interests.

Muhammad Amir Rana

Pakistan finds itself in the midst of a delicate balancing act with regard to its relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This became evident recently when, at the same time that it secured a \$2 billion deposit from Saudi Arabia — which will boost total Saudi deposits in the State Bank to \$5bn — Pakistan banned the Iranian-backed Zainebiyoun Brigade. Despite this move, President Asif Ali Zardari reassured his Iranian counterpart of Pakistan's commitment to cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including security. These developments highlight Pakistan's growing dependence on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states due to evolving regional security concerns and persistent economic challenges. This increased reliance, however, may come with a few strings attached.

Tensions are soaring in the Middle East as the Israel-Hamas conflict threatens to escalate in the larger region. The US has restricted staff travel in Israel, fearing

Iranian retaliation for a suspected Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Damascus. In this context, clipping the wings of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its principal subsidiary, the Quds Force, has become essential for the US, Israel, and its allies in the Gulf. The Quds Force employs all semi-conventional warfare tactics, including sophisticated techniques of guerrilla warfare and militancy. It operates through its regional proxies, the Iraqi Hashd al-Shaabi, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, the Pakistani Zainebiyoun, and Yemen's Houthis. The Zainebiyoun Brigade is believed to have been involved in supplying weapons to the IRGC in the Middle East. Last month, reports emerged of alleged Zainebiyoun members of Pakistani origin being apprehended in international waters for carrying weapons to be given to the IRGC in the Middle East. In another incident, the death of a Pakistan-origin commander in Syria affiliated with the group paved the way for Pakistan to ban it.

Pakistani law-enforcement agencies are believed to have sufficient proof of

the Zainebiyoun Brigade's involvement in sectarian violence in the country and recruitment for the Iraq and Syria conflict, but the government had not acted earlier because of circumstances linked to the alleged presence of Baloch insurgents on Iranian soil. The loyalty of its members, who prioritise ideological affiliations over national ties, also remains a major challenge for security institutions.

The involvement of a section of Shia youth in transnational political activism and militancy goes back to before the 1979 revolution, with figures such as Arif al-Husayni playing key roles. The Brigade has acknowledged ties with the Quds Force since around the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, and its formation was announced in 2014 during the conflict in Syria. It has recently pledged its readiness to follow orders from the IRGC. The insurgent Sunni Baloch group, Jaish al-Adl, has been a longstanding source of tension between Iran and Pakistan, though labelled as a terrorist organisation by both countries. Jaish al-Adl has intensified its operations against the Iranian security

forces, which is building pressure on Pakistan to act against it. Iran says Jaish al-Adl is a Saudi proxy operating from Pakistani soil.

Iranian drone and missile attacks in Balochistan in January this year and Pakistan's tit-for-tat response aggravated tensions between the two countries. Though immediate diplomatic efforts eased immediate tensions, mistrust continues to lurk beneath the surface. Jaish al-Adl has continued attacking the Iranian security forces, while recruitment for the Zainebiyoun has also continued. Meanwhile, Iranian government has not taken any concrete action against the Baloch insurgents on its soil. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline remains a major reason for Pakistan's tolerance of some key security issues with Iran. The pipeline was an old idea, but implementation began much later, when Asif Ali Zardari was nearing the completion of his first term as president. Iran has built its part, but Pakistan is hesitant to proceed at its end, due to pressure from Saudi Arabia and the risk of debilitating US sanctions.

The US has continu-

ously signalled to Pakistan not to pursue the project. If Pakistan fails to fulfil its commitment to building the pipeline, it could face a hefty fine, potentially having to pay \$20 billion. The last interim government had tasked a company with building Pakistan's portion of the gas pipeline. However, the changing situation in the Middle East and Pakistan's internal economic situation may delay construction.

Apparently, the combination of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari is a feasible way to maintain a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Sharif's family is considered close to the Saudi camp, while the Saudis have doubts about the PPP leadership's credentials on sectarian matters and their approach to Iran. Prime Minister Sharif has secured a commitment from the Saudi crown prince to accelerate the implementation of the massive \$5bn plan. President Zardari has invited his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi, on an official visit to the country to ease tensions.

Iran will remain a tough diplomatic, political, and

security challenge for Pakistan. It remains to be seen how President Zardari copes with the challenge, especially if the conflict in the Middle East escalates and leaves few choices for Pakistan's closest allies in the Gulf. Meanwhile, an IMF bailout for Pakistan is also seen to be linked to how the latter country conducts its relations with Iran.

A concerning scenario could emerge if the Middle East crisis worsens and forces Iran to utilise the full potential of its alleged proxies in the region, including in Pakistan. This could have security ramifications, as pro-Iranian organisations could launch large-scale anti-Israel, anti-US, and anti-Saudi protest movements in support of Iran. Other religious parties would likely be forced to choose sides, potentially disrupting the sectarian equilibrium the country achieved after a long struggle. One can recall the first Gulf War in 1990-91, when the power elites and the masses were divided into opposing camps.

Pakistan's real test ahead is to remain neutral and maintain its relationships with both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Will Iran react to Israel?

Abbas Nasir

Will Iran be provoked by Israel or exercise restraint?

This is obviously a question that many in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and beyond are asking as Israel desperately tries to suck in more players to escalate and widen the Gaza conflict so that Western support to it, which was showing signs of waning, is galvanised again.

Even Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's place of residence, has seen mass demonstrations in recent weeks, calling for his resignation and fresh elections. The number of demonstrators seems to be rising daily and includes those who are angry at his handling of the hostage crisis.

When the current conflict erupted, Netanyahu was facing corruption charges and, despite attempts to legislate his way out of trouble by tweaking the judicial system in the name of 'judicial reforms', it looked like he was going to end up in court, even prison. Many saw the Hamas attack as a godsend

for him.

At this stage, Netanyahu and Israel's strategy is clear. They want to continue their long-drawn-out ethnic cleansing with unqualified Western material support, following Hamas's shocking daylong attack on Oct 7 last year, which killed about 1,200 Israelis, including some 400 security personnel.

Hamas also took about 240 Israelis back to Gaza as hostages in order to swap them for several thousand Palestinian prisoners, many being held without charge on 'administrative orders' in Israeli jails. A little over half of those hostages have been released, but over 130 remain captive in Gaza.

For over six months, Israel may have been carrying out a relentless pogrom in Gaza, with the death toll of children alone running at nearly 13,000 among the nearly 34,000 Palestinians killed so far, but it is beginning to realise its military campaign now has an end date slapped on it by its Western allies.

The West's waning support doesn't owe itself to any sudden awakening of the conscience, but is

dictated by domestic politics, such as President Joe Biden's desperate need for Muslim votes in states such as Michigan, and the support of countless progressive Americans who are outraged by the Gaza genocide and say they are unsure if they'll vote for him in this November's presidential election.

In contrast to its support over six months, recently the US has briefed journalists about 'tough and candid discussions' during a phone call between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu, particularly over Israel's planned invasion of camps in Rafah, currently home to some 1.7 million displaced Gazans.

Over several months, Israel has tried to provoke Hezbollah, seen as an Iranian proxy in Lebanon, in the north, but failed to draw it into a full-fledged confrontation. It has attacked not just south Lebanon and Beirut and hit Hezbollah targets, including commanders, but has also bombed targets in Syria, which forms part of the 'axis of resistance' along with Iran, Hezbollah and Yemen.

However, all these

blatant acts of provocation failed to draw Hezbollah and Syria into the Middle East conflict because the 'axis' powers possibly saw through Israel's tactics and chose restraint, so the focus remained solely on Israel's brutality in Gaza, which was slowly but surely beginning to change Western attitudes.

The US has remained a staunch ally, offering unconditional support to Israel's 'right to self-defence' (a term that normally applies in the context of external aggression) against forces in areas under its own occupation, and has supplied unprecedented levels of arms, ammunition, fighter jets and bombs.

But adding to domestic political compulsions has been the recent killing of around half a dozen Western aid workers in a targeted strike on three vehicles belonging to the global relief organisation World Central Kitchen, which resulted in international anger and opprobrium; even Western governments sounded concerned and expressed unease at Israel's continuing military campaign.

I have tried hard to

ascertain the time of the WCK strike that killed seven Western aid workers on April 1 so as to ascertain whether the Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on the same day was a diversionary tactic. In any case, the two attacks served two different purposes.

The one major consequence of the WCK killings was that the relief organisation suspended its operations in Gaza. That fitted perfectly with Israel's policy of depopulating the Strip through mass killings and widespread destruction of its infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals, libraries and universities, and by preventing food aid from reaching the Palestinians.

The thousands of Palestinians who were being served hot meals by WCK must be going hungry again.

The outrageous Israeli air attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus was an act of extreme provocation designed to force Iran and its influential Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps into retaliating. Any retaliation by Iran, which the West sees

as the bane of its existence, would pull not only Israel but likely the US and other Western military powers into at least an aerial campaign against it.

This would serve Israel's cause no end, as on the one hand, it can continue its Gaza genocide and the land grab in the West Bank through more and more settlements, displacing thousands of additional Palestinians, and on the other, the West's attention will be diverted to, and remain focused on, its favourite hate figures, ie, the Iranian clergy, and not on Israel's mass murder.

As these lines are being written, the US has stated it will unequivocally support Israel in case of Iranian aggression, while calling on Tehran to desist. It has to be seen whether Tehran decision-makers can take a step back and think through the regional consequences before deciding on their course of action.

Or will the slight of the consulate attack and the killing of a senior IRGC commander force their hand? Any violent reaction would only be a bailout for an under-pressure Israel.

World of 2035

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

What will the world look like about a decade from now? Given that geopolitics, geo-economics, and technologies are evolving rapidly, the future is uncertain. However, there are trends that give us a clue regarding the direction of global geopolitics. Today, we are transitioning from a world order to disorder: major power rivalries are intensifying, global military expenditure is rising steeply, unilateralism is ascendant while multilateralism is in decline, and xenophobia is embedding itself in almost every country.

Four theatres of global contestation are contributing to the global disarray: Indo-Pacific (US-China competition), Europe (Russia-Ukraine war), Middle East (Palestine conflict, Israel-Iran tensions), and the Indian Ocean, where major powers including the US, UK, France, Australia, China and India want to enhance their presence. American maritime strategist Alfred Mahan had rightly predicted in the 19th century that the future of the 21st century would depend on whoever dominated the Indian Ocean.

Shifting alliances are being formed, essentially along three broad categories: the US, Europe and Australia have an informal broad alignment against Russia, China, and Iran. For some countries, such as India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and other middle powers, the preferred option is to exercise strategic autonomy. Across these two broad categories, multi-alignments are emerging to pursue common interests, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which has expanded to include

other countries, including Iran and Saudi Arabia; QUAD, a platform created by the US, Australia, India and Japan to contain China; and I2U2, which has brought together India, Israel, the US, and UAE for economic cooperation, but has been halted, for now, by the Gaza war. For its part, China is engaged with over 100 countries in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and six economic corridors, including CPEC.

These shifting alliances will be affected by six cross-cutting trends: (i) emerging technologies, such as AI platforms, multi-role drones, big data, and semiconductors, which are currently at the centre of the US-China tech war; (ii) climate change, which can spell havoc for countries with low fiscal space through extreme weather and food insecurity; (iii) de-dollarisation, an option many countries have begun to explore; (iv) rare earth elements, which are required for advancing technologies — such as smartphones, digital cameras, semiconductors, etc — and that are evoking stiff competition between China and the US, Europe, and Japan; (v) non-traditional security threats, including energy politics, cyberwarfare, disinformation campaigns and warfare; and (vi) resurgent terrorism as concerted international response wanes.

Global contestations, shifting alliances, and the six trends that will shape the world in the coming decade will all play out in the high-risk areas of potential global conflict, including the South China Sea, Ukraine, Middle East, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. The probable nature of conflict will be hybrid, with countries using every tool of national

power at their disposal to achieve their goals, including kinetic options (military strikes, use of proxies), economic instruments (sanctions, lucrative aid packages, coercion through the international monetary system) and information tools (propaganda, media, entertainment industry).

Consequently, power potential will also change. The US is a waning power, but the instruments of its national power are largely intact and can sustain it through the next decade as a leading superpower. It is also taking steps to recover ground lost to China in high-tech industry and the manufacturing sector. China is a rising power, and is interested in continuing its peaceful rise to become fully industrialised, for which it will resist involvement in major kinetic conflicts. Russia is seeking to revive its lost glory, but its energies are likely to be consumed by the conflict in Europe. India is also a rising economic power, though its geopolitical profile will be constrained by ideological politics, the North-South divide, restive minorities, and agitated farmers.

The UN would remain sidelined in matters of peace and security, but stay relevant for sustainable development and climate change. The OIC is not likely to dent the future in any major way. Asean will continue as a success story of regional integration. Europe is a resilient continent but the focus of global attention will remain on Asia in the coming decade.

The world of 2035 appears to be even more fragmented and polarised than it is today. Only countries exhibiting economic resilience and societal harmony will stand a chance against the mighty winds of change.

Polls apart

Muna Khan

An old, rickety house in upstate New York has served as a landmark since I began visiting family here in 2017. It is hard to miss because it has a massive Trump sign, painted in the colours of the American flag, with the years '2016', '2020' and now '2024' next to his name. I am unaffected by its presence, but the folks I know who live here see it as a sign of all that is wrong with politics.

They are distressed by an April 3 poll by the Wall Street Journal placing Trump in the lead in six of the seven most competitive states. These states tend to determine the election outcome. The poll reported on "voter dissatisfaction" with the economy and "deep doubts" about President Joe Biden's capabilities.

I have since been listening to fears about Trump's return and how folks will migrate to Canada. Funnily enough, I first heard that in 2004, when George W. Bush was re-elected, the data shows around 10,000 Americans became permanent residents in Canada following Bush's re-election, and dipped after Barack Obama was elected in 2008. The data for Trump showed a 350 per cent increase in search for "how to move to Canada" when he won, and around 9,000 made good on their promise and migrated in 2017.

On the subject of data, there is plenty to show the US economy has done well under Biden. Unemployment and inflation are low and economic growth "is growing faster than expected", reported Politico in January. Yet Biden's age gets a lot of media time, like Hillary Clinton's emails got in

2016. I am not here to suggest Biden being 81 is a non-issue, but it does seem to distract from the economic strides made by his administration, the very thing respondents expressed dissatisfaction about. Where are they getting their information then, or should the media be reporting on the economy (boring) and not Biden's latest gaffe (fun and gets clicks which gets advertisers).

Biden has had missteps and falls, but beyond confusing people or places, he has not threatened to derail democracy like the other guy; the one who is not exactly a spring chicken at 77. The one who faces a slew of criminal charges, attempted an insurrection, and has vowed to deport just about everybody. Why are more people willing to believe he is a better candidate to manage the economy than the guy who is actually doing it?

I have often wondered why people's memories are short, but I am now sure the media helps create this amnesia. It does so partly because the business model favours clicks over context, assumes audiences want this and not that, and believes it must remain objective.

Since I began reading academic material on journalism, I have learned how problematic objectivity can be. It often pits the oppressed with the oppressor for the sake of balance over informed — that is, factual — storytelling. Imagine families of disappeared sharing the same media space with the powerful men often responsible for doing the disappearing. How is that fair?

On the first day of class, I always tell students it is impossible not to have personal likes, dislikes, biases. Journal-

ists are human. Journalism is rooted in values. I will never support a policy that is racist, sexist, anti-women, anti-children, anti-poor, anti-science. I oppose whatever is masquerading as democracy these days. I dislike climate change deniers too. Does my transparency mean I cannot practise journalism? On the contrary, I tell students that knowing our biases allows us to practice journalism better, because we work harder to ensure we have been fair.

The elections in the US are six months away but the focus is already on polls. It looks like the media has not learned from its mistakes. We saw this in Pakistan too, when many in the media wrote the PTI off, didn't take voter sentiment into account, and had to eat humble pie on election day. When you cover elections like you would a horse race — who's leading, who's behind — you are not helping audiences make informed decisions. Especially if you are reporting a candidate's falsehoods without challenging them because you're worried you will be seen as partisan or you're scared you'll lose their subscriptions. That's lazy journalism. And it's denying the truth about what is at stake.

I don't have any stakes in the US elections. It will not matter whether Biden or Trump throws drones or sanctions at us. But I think we can learn a lot from how their media covers this election, even if it is a 'what not to do'. I hope that includes calling out leaders that threaten Pakistan's stability, which includes the economy, which can be gauged by numbers. People lie. Math doesn't.

Pakistan economic growth forecast to rise 2.8% in FY2025, ADB reports

ISLAMABAD (INP): In Pakistan, growth is forecast to rise at 1.9% in FY2024 (ending on 30 June 2024) and 2.8% in FY2025, up from the 0.2% contraction last fiscal year. Gwadar Pro stated on Sunday quoting Asian Development Bank (ADB) economic forecasts report for Asia April 2024. According to the report, the shift back to positive growth will come from a recovery in both agriculture and industry. However, domestic demand will remain constrained by the surge in living costs and tight macroeconomic policies. Growth is projected to remain subdued in FY2024 and pick up in FY2025, provided economic reforms take effect. Real GDP is projected to grow by 1.9% in FY2024 driven by a rebound in private sector investment linked to progress on reform measures and transition to a new and more stable government. An expansion in private consumption and a rise in workers' remittances from a move toward a market-determined exchange rate should buttress growth. However, low confidence, to support recovery in industrial output in the latter half of the year. Construction will remain weak due to elevated construction costs, higher tax rates on property transfers implemented in the FY2024 budget, and rationalization of public investment to consolidate the fiscal position. Growth in services is projected to strengthen in FY2024 as recovery in agriculture and industry benefit services. If reforms are implemented, growth is forecast to restart gradually this fiscal year and improve slightly next year. Inflation is projected to moderate somewhat this year, and more next year, under stabilization policies. Improving women's financial inclusion is critical to strengthen growth.



FAISALABAD: Women are buying clothes on a stall at Sunday weekly bazaar in the city.

Central bank needs to review credit policies in SMEs favor: Anjum Nisar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Businessmen Panel (BMP) of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), Mian Anjum Nisar has said that the central bank needs to review its credit policies by fixing a special quota to finance the small and medium enterprises, as only the large industries have been availing government's all major concessional export loaning facilities, with very limited financing is left for the SMEs which are the backbone of the economy, contributing around 40 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP). In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that the government with a view to help grow the businesses will have to take solid measures to strengthen the industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries. He said the government will have to make a visible reduction in markup rate to help grow the businesses, particularly the SME

sector, as Pakistan needs millions of jobs annually. Mian Anjum Nisar said that we need to highlight the critical role of Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in driving sustainable economic development in Pakistan. With an estimated 5.2 million businesses, the SME sector was a cornerstone of our economy, fostering employment, growth, and export diversification, he added. He observed that despite their significance, more than 5 million SMEs face a significant credit gap, receiving limited credit, far below the neighboring countries. The State Bank of Pakistan is committed to increasing SME credit share to 17% by 2023. To achieve this, we must advocate for targeted and fixed SME allocations in concessional financing schemes, particularly those aimed at the export-oriented sector. The FPCCI former President said that the State Bank of Pakistan has launched various policies for the promotion of SME finance.

Locals demand restoration of train

SARGODHA (APP): Social circles and traders have demanded railways authorities to restore the Sandal Express train in the larger interest of people of the area.

Talking to APP here on Sunday, traders including Chaudhry Muzammil of Sargodha, Muhammad Yaseen of Jhang, Muhammad Noman of Khanewal and Muhammad Atta of Multan said that the Sandal Express used to run from Sargodha to Multan via Shaheenabad, Sillanwali, Shah Nikdur, Shah Jewna, Jhang, Shortkot and Khanewal but railway authorities suspended it operation three years ago

due to unknown reasons. They said they would send and bring their goods by the train at a cheaper fare, and now they had to bear an extra burden of fare by road. They demanded railways authorities to restore the train as early as possible for the interest of traders, commuters and other people.

Tanveer Ahmed, a resident of Shah Nikdur, who used to travel daily from Shah Nikdur to Sargodha by the train, said the train was the best and cheaper source of travel for daily commuters, and now, after the suspension of the train operation he had to commute daily by bus or van.



LAHORE: People are buying steel crockery in Sunday weekly bazaar at Shadman area, in the Provincial Capital.

FBR completes preparations for action against tax evaders

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has completed preparations for action against tax evaders.

According to FBR sources, within a few days, final notices will be issued to tax evaders, traders, and industrialists, who will also be sent notices. Their assets, and extravagant expenditures, do not match their tax data; some traders' tax is only a few thousand while their annual income runs into billions. Sources say that many have purchased multiple plots and are also running businesses outside, sometimes allowed to pay their taxes, they turn their black money white.

Lists of most traders and industrialists have been made, including Akbari, Shah Alam Market, Azam Cloth Market, Anarkali, Liberty Market Road, and Gulberg. Ferozpur Road, Model Town, and all other plazas are included.

SNGPL imposes Rs 132,000 fine on eight consumers

MULTAN (APP): Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL) has imposed a fine Rs 132,000 on eight different consumers for illegal use of gas.

Official sources told on Sunday that two consumers were using domestic gas meters on a commercial basis. Their connections were cut by the department team. Similarly, another four consumers were offering illegal connections to some other homes. Action was taken against another two consumers for violations.

The team imposed a fine of Rs 132,000 on the consumers. The SNGPL administration also vowed to continue action against the illegal consumers.



CHINIOT: Farmers harvesting wheat crop starting from 1st of Besakh Month.

PAJCCI commend Railways over increasing its revenue, suggests launching of cargo trains

PESHAWAR (APP): Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has commended Pakistan Railways over increasing its annual revenue to highest peak of Rs. 66 billion in nine months of current year and has suggested for launching of cargo trains to further piling up of earnings.

In a press statement issued here on Sunday, Coordinator PAJCCI KP, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said it is appreciating development that Pakistan Railways has increased its annual revenue to record height. The phenomenal jump in earnings reflect revival of people's confidence on Railways in the wake of better management decisions taken by Chairman Mazhar Ali Shah and GM, Amir

Baloch for provision of improved travelling facilities, opined Zia who is also Member Advisory Committee of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Pakistan Railways. He said Railways is safest and cheapest travelling facility in the country but due to some management loopholes, travelers had diverted to buses and other mode of travelling.

If such decisions were kept on taking, more people will prefer travelling in trains and revenue will increase with passage of time, he opined. Coordinator PAJCCI also suggested Pakistan Railways to focus on launching of cargo trains from Karachi to Peshawar for facilitation of business community especially

those dealing in Pak-Afghan trade.

He said Railways should also cater to transportation of loose cargo being sent by exporters and importers within the country.

By focusing on plying of cargo trains, Railways can triple its annual earnings from existing one besides providing relief to people especially business community who have to pay exorbitant rates to truck owners for transportation of goods.

Zia said in the wake of increase in prices of petroleum products, fare for transportation of goods from port city (Karachi) to Peshawar through heavy vehicles has increased manifold, inflicting huge burden on business community of the country.

Economic growth linked to durable regional peace

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former president Iftikhar Ali Malik has advocated the cause of achieving durable peace in the region, a prerequisite to economic growth, prosperity and development for all countries of South Asia.

Talking to a delegation of traders led by Muslim Khan Bunerri from KP here Sunday, he said South Asia has long been plagued by instability and conflicts that have hindered the region's progress and potential. One of the major concerns contributing to this instability has been the presence of terrorist sanctuaries on Afghan soil, which have posed a severe threat not only to

neighboring countries including Pakistan, he added. He said counterterrorism cooperation and collaboration closely with regional and international stakeholders, especially Pakistan, to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries can help eradicate the breeding grounds for extremist elements and bring about much-needed stability. About economic integration, he said, "We must embrace economic integration initiatives within the South Asian region and enhanced economic cooperation can create an environment conducive to peace, prosperity, and development for all."

He believed that by taking these steps,

Prices of most capital goods fall in China

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): Most of the capital goods monitored by China's statistics authorities registered price decreases from late-March to early-April, official data shows.

Of the 50 major goods classified in nine categories, including seamless steel tubes, gasoline and fertilizer, 26 saw price declines, 20 reported heightened prices, and 4 remained unchanged, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Hog prices increased 0.7 percent to 15.3 yuan (about 2.16 U.S. dollars) per kg during this period, the NBS said.

The figures, released every 10 days, are based on the survey of nearly 2,000 wholesalers and distributors in 31 provincial-level regions across the country.



MULTAN: A worker preparing khas for the air cooler at his workplace.

Large scale structural changes vital in power sector: Chairman PIAF

LAHORE (INP): Chairman Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Faheemur Rehman Saigol has stressed the need for large scale structural changes in power sector, controlling line losses of DISCOs by using modern technology, and customer-oriented business approach, as the public chequer has incurred a loss of over Rs400 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23 by the power distribution companies.

Quoting the media report, he observed that the performance of distribution companies (DISCOs) throughout 2022-23 remained very poor, and the expected power sector reforms were not achieved. Given the ongoing poor performance, it is apparent that, under the existing circumstances,

the current DISCO setup is unlikely to be able to deliver the desired results.

Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that no significant improvement has been witnessed on part of some DISCOs in this regard. During FY2022-23, the overall actual losses of DISCOs were 16.38% against the actual loss of 16.69% in FY 2021-22. The actual T&D losses are much higher than the allowed T&D losses for FY 2022-23, which is 12.21%.

He said that unfortunately, the majority of DISCOs have not adhered to the NEPRA given targets, except FESCO, GEPCO, and K-Electric which have managed to keep their losses below the levels or equal to targets set by NEPRA. However, other DISCOs have exceeded these limits.

Price controller revises bread loaf rates

RAWALPINDI (APP): The controller of prices and supplies/ Deputy Commissioner has revised the rates of open market loafs (Naan-Roti) in the city. Following the Punjab Price Control of Essential Commodities Ordinance 2023 (V of 2024), the price controller issued a notification regarding the rates.

According to the notification issued on Sunday, the unit price for 100g Roti Tandoori (per loaf) will be Rs. 16.0 and that of 120g Naan (per loaf) will be Rs. 20.0.

The notification intimates that new prices for mentioned essential commodities for the open market will come into force with immediate effect in revenue limits of the district. No person or shopkeeper shall charge or cause to be charged the prices of the aforementioned items offered for sale.

Punjab CM felicitates PM over improving economic indicators

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, while paying tributes to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on improving Pakistan's economic indicators, said on Sunday that under the vibrant leadership of PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's economy had once again started treading on the path of progress.

The fruits of economic progress during the tenure of PML-N government are prominently coming to surface, Maryam said adding that "the common man would be provided relief with reduction in electricity rates and price-hike. Big international financial institutions including IMF, ADB had acknowledge Pakistan's economic policies."

She said, "Owing to PM Shehbaz Sharif's economic policies, the

investors' confidence is enhancing. For the first time in the history, 100 index Stock Exchange has crossed its 70 thousand psychological barrier."

The chief minister said, "Good news are awaiting Pakistanis and their is a strong likelihood of reduction in inflation rate up to 12.2 per cent next year. For the first time, Rs 500 reduction occurred in the price of 20-kg flour bag and there is further possibility of Rs 300 reduction in the flour price according to market indicators."

"The Economic & Social Survey of Asia & Pacific Region termed Pakistan's economic indicators excellent. In the UN Report, Pakistan's economic progress has been predicted in the next fiscal year. The growth rate would increase from 2 per cent to 2.3 per cent during the current and next financial year in Pakistan."



MULTAN: Labourers off-loading watermelons from a delivery truck at the fruit market.

Increase in taxes hurt cars' sale, purchase business: APCDA

MULTAN (APP): All Pakistan Car Dealers Association (APCDA) demanded of government to reduce duties, taxes, registration and transfer fees on cars also increased manifold. A good number of dealers have left the profession.

They demanded of government to pay focus on condition of car dealers and reduce prices of the cars. Different measures on part of the government could help improve business of car's sale purchase. They also called for reforms in excise and taxation department.

rising inflation. The high fees including duties, taxes, register and transfer fees on cars also increased manifold. A good number of dealers have left the profession.

They demanded of government to pay focus on condition of car dealers and reduce prices of the cars. Different measures on part of the government could help improve business of car's sale purchase. They also called for reforms in excise and taxation department.



LAHORE: People are buying vegetables in Sunday weekly bazaar at Shadman area, in the Provincial Capital.

'Asia has consequential position in the world'

LAHORE (APP): Kyrgyzstan's Honorary Consul Meher Kashif Younis has said that Asia holds a consequential position in the world due to its large population, strategic locations, rich mineral resources and diversity. Presiding over a workshop on "Importance of BRICS for Pakistan" organized by Gold Ring Economic Forum here Sunday, he added that Pakistan, as an important partner in the region has sought membership in order to align with this trend. With its abundant natural resources, strategic location and fifth-largest world population, Pakistan's absence from BRICS could have repercussions in the future

if not addressed. He said Pakistani leadership should consider BRICS while assessing ground realities. He said BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) can pave the way for sustainable development and growth in the region. New doors for trade and investment will be opened under the supervision of developed countries like China and Russia.

He said the individual who coined BRICS has predicted that these nations' economies will dominate the world by 2050. He said a golden opportunity has been presented to these advancing countries under the leadership of this group.

Agricultural emergency unit established to help farmers in view of rains

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh government has set up an Agricultural Emergency Rapid Response Unit to help the farmers in view of the rains in the province and the leaves of all the employees and officers of the agriculture department have been cancelled.

On the directives of the Sindh Agriculture Minister Sardar Muhammad Baksh Mahar, the leaves of all the officers and employees of the Sindh Agriculture Department have been

cancelled and the staff has been instructed to remain alert. A spokesman for the Sindh Agriculture Department said that the DG Agriculture Head of Agriculture Emergency Rapid Response and DGs of Research, Engineering Wing and On Farm Management Wing will be part of the team.

He further said that the field assistants of the Department of Agriculture will go door to door to provide information about safety measures to the farmers.

Syedal Khan Nasar vows to raise forceful voice for real issues of public in Senate

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Deputy Chairman Senate, Syedal Khan Nasar has vowed to raise forceful voice for the real issues being faced by the masses of Balochistan in Senate.

The Deputy Chairman Senate was speaking to local media persons here at his residence on Saturday night.

It was his first media interaction after becoming Deputy Chairman Senate.

Syedal Khan Nasar said that the people of province are facing issues of health, education, unemployment and others, and by the grace of Allah, he

would take up the real issues of people in Senate and other forums.

He also pledged to play his part for making legislation in the Upper House.

To a query, Syedal Khan Nasar said that whatever development works were carried out in the country including Balochistan were done during the era of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

He said that a lot of development works were done in Balochistan. The work on mega projects of roads, Kachhi canal, Reko dik and others were also

done in the era of PML-N, he added.

The Deputy Chairman Senate said that the PML-N's Quaid, Nawaz Sharif gave government to the nationalist party despite getting heavy mandate in elections in 2013, which had never thought of it (government) in the dream even.

He believed that there would be lot of work during next one and two years of PML-N-led government in the country.

He said that PML-N has steered the country out of financial crunch, and would do so in future too.



HASSANABDAL: Federal Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif Mehmood addressing the Sikh pilgrims at Gurdwara Panja Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi Mela.

UN chief 'condemns' Iran's attack on Israel

NEW YORK (INP): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned Iran's attack on Israel following Syria Embassy attack.

UN chief in a statement said: "I strongly condemn the serious escalation represented by the large-scale attack launched on Israel by the Islamic Republic of Iran this evening. I call for an immediate cessation of these hostilities."

"I am deeply alarmed about the very real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation. I urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid any action that could lead to major military confrontations on multiple fronts in the Middle East." "I have repeatedly stressed that neither the region nor the world can afford another

war."

Iran launched explosive drones and fired missiles at Israel late on Saturday in its first direct attack on Israeli territory, a retaliatory strike that raised the threat of a wider regional conflict, as the U.S pledged "ironclad" backing for Israel. Sirens wailed in Israel heard distant heavy thuds and bangs from what local media called aerial interceptions of explosive drones. Authorities said a 7-year-old girl was critically injured.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said he would convene a meeting of leaders of the Group of Seven major economies on Sunday to coordinate a diplomatic response to what he called Iran's brazen attack.

Adil Raja loses crucial stage of defamation case to Brig Rashid Naseer

ISLAMABAD (APP): Controversial Youtuber Major Adil Raja has suffered a crushing blow as a UK High Court Judge rejected all his applications including his application to stay a defamation trial progressing against him by former senior military officer Brigadier Rashid Naseer.

The judge ruled that Mr Raja had published words which were seriously defamatory of Brigadier Naseer in nine publications on social media sites YouTube, Facebook and Twitter/X.

Deputy High Court Judge Mr Richard Spearman KC ruled that Adil Farooq Raja should pay £5,000 to the now retired Brigadier for the rejected application to stay the defamation trial and the judge also ordered Adil Raja

to pay a further interim payment on account of costs in the sum of £5,000 for the failed security for costs application. Adil Raja, the defendant, has until 17 April 2024 to pay this money.

With help from his lawyer and PTI UK leader Mahtab Anwar Aziz who also represents PTI activist Shayan Ali, Adil Raja appeared before the court remotely by video link and argued that the case of Brig Rashid Naseer should be stayed on a number of grounds but the court rejected all his arguments which included allegations that Pakistan was an authoritarian state in which the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) controlled the Judiciary and the Government and allegations of election rigging in Pakistan.

Over 230 candidates vie for 23 vacant seats of NA, PAs: ECP

ISLAMABAD (APP): A total of 239 candidates were vying for 23 vacant seats in both national and provincial assemblies during the upcoming by-elections slated for April 21, an official of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said.

A total of 239 candidates will contest in the by elections, with 50 of them competing for vacant National Assembly seats. Notably, the first lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has already been elected unopposed for NA 207, he said.

He said that a total of 23 candidates were vying for the vacant seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, while 154 candidates were seeking their fortunes in Punjab. In Sindh, Zubair Ahmed Junejo secured his seat unopposed on PS-80.

Twelve contenders are in the running for the empty seats in the Balochistan Assembly. The Commis-

sion has schedule to commence printing the ballot papers for the by-elections upon the finalization of candidate lists by the relevant returning officers on March 30, he added.

He stated that necessary election materials had been provided to provincial election commissioners. Additionally, district Returning Officers and Returning Officers are fulfilling their duties according to the established election schedule. He said close coordination has been maintained by the Ministries of Interior and Defense as well as provincial law enforcement agencies. On March 13, the Commission announced the schedule for by-elections across 23 National and Provincial Assembly seats. These elections encompass six National Assembly seats, twelve Punjab Assembly seats, two seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Repatriation efforts continue as illegal Afghans return home

ISLAMABAD (INP): The repatriation of Afghan nationals from Pakistan continues at a steady pace, with significant progress made as of April 13, 2024. A total of 535,940 illegal Afghans have now returned to their homeland, marking a significant step in the ongoing efforts.

Over the past ten days, from April 3 to April 13, a total of 8,581 Afghan citizens have made the journey back home. Among them, 3,127 men, 1,972 women, and 3,482 children have returned.

In a coordinated effort, 310 families have been safely repatriated to Afghanistan, utilizing 287 vehicles for their journey.



GARHI KHUDBAKHSH: President Asif Ali Zardari, Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Safaraz Ahmed Bugti, President PPP Balochistan Mir Changez Khan Jamali and others offering Dua on eve of death anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Death toll from lightning in country reaches 26 as one more person dies

QUETTA (INP): The death toll from lightning reached 26 in the country on Sunday when one more person lost his life after he was struck by lightning in Garhi Yasin area of Shikarpur.

The body was shifted to a local hospital where the person was identified as Zulfikar Ali Jakro. On Saturday, at least 25 people were killed in Punjab and Balochistan when they were struck by lightning.

In Punjab alone, 17 people fell prey to the deadly strikes as confirmed by a spokesperson for the Provincial Disaster Management Authority

(PDMA). Lightning struck people in several areas of the province namely Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Rajanpur, Lodhran, Bahawalpur, and Bahawalnagar.

Heart-wrenching accounts emerged from the Faqeer Wali area near Haraonabad, where a father and his two sons lost their lives, while the mother and another son sustained injuries. Rescue 1122 confirmed nine fatalities in Faqeer Wali. In another incident, a family of four, a man his wife, and their two children perished in Rahim Yar Khan.

Govt committed to providing complete religious freedom to people of all faiths: Khawaja

ATTOCK (APP): Federal Minister for Defense, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, has said the present government is committed to providing complete religious freedom to people of all faiths living in the country. He was talking to newsmen after participating in the Bhog ceremony in connection with the Baisakhi festival at Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hassanabdal on Sunday.

In his address, he expressed that the Sikh Marriage Act had been passed in 2018, and now it would be implemented soon after

the approval of the provincial cabinet. He said that around six gurdwaras across the country would be open and handed over to the local Sikh community for the observance of rituals. Earlier, speaking at the Bhog ceremony, Khawaja Asif said that the Pakistani people and government were proud to host the Sikh pilgrims on their holy land. "The present government believes in the freedom of the minority and would extend all its resources for the better preservation of their sacred places" he added.

The Sikh religion fa-

mous Baisakhi celebrations, to mark the advent of the order of the "Khalsa by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh Ji, were observed at Gurdwara Panja Sahib here today. Around ten thousand Sikh yatraes—among them over 2400 Indians and others from other parts of the world, including Pakistan, India, Canada, and the United Kingdom participated in the festivities. Baisakhi processions called Nagar Keertan were taken out on the premises of Gurdwara Panja Sahib with traditional performances and religious rites.

No lasting peace in region without Kashmir settlement: APHC

SRINAGAR (INP): The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has said that lasting peace in the region is not possible till settlement of the lingering Kashmir dispute as per the Kashmiris' aspirations.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC spokesman, Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas, in a statement issued in Srinagar said the Bharatiya Janata Party regime cannot hide the reality about occupied Jammu and Kashmir through its propaganda machinery during the Lok Sabha election process.

He said India is misleading world by propagating that peace is returning to IIOJK while the ground reality of Kashmir is that the BJP regime, with the help of Indian army, police and National Investigation Agency, has intensified its efforts to harass Kashmiris and colonize Kashmir since 5 August 2019 and create an atmosphere of fear and terror in the territory.

He said the Indian BJP government's policies in IIOJK have put peace.

Earthquake shakes Mingora and adjoining areas

SWAT (INP): An earthquake shook Mingora city and surrounding areas in Swat district on Sunday.

After the earthquake, panic spread among the people, prompting them to come out of their houses and shops. According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre, Islamabad, the earthquake registered with a magnitude of 4.0 on the Richter scale.

The Centre defined that the earthquake's region as Hindu Kush Region, Afghanistan and its epicentre was 217km deep.

World Bank approves \$1b loan for Dasu Hydropower Project

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan received a much-needed boost for its energy sector as the World Bank approved a \$1 billion loan for the 2,160-megawatt Dasu Hydropower Project. This critical infrastructure project aims to provide Pakistan with affordable and reliable electricity.

The loan approval comes after some delays, with initial reports suggesting a May approval. However, government sources now confirm the World Bank's board greenlit the financing in June. This represents the third major investment by the World Bank in the Dasu project, highlighting its significance for Pakistan's energy future.

Pakistan's current energy woes stem largely from the high cost of electricity generated using imported fuel. This burden is felt across the country, with domestic consumers, factories, and even institutions like mosques and hospitals resorting to installing solar panels to escape the expen-

994 electricity thieves held; over Rs 88m recovered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The administration had managed arrest of 994 accused under special campaign launched against electricity theft in Rawalpindi division while over Rs 88 million were recovered from them, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Engineer Aamir Khattak.

He informed that 1186 FIRs were registered since 7 September 2023 and all available resources were being used to prevent electricity theft. He directed the authorities to ensure 100 percent electricity theft recoveries in all districts of the division.

Canada sacks Indian staffers working at its diplomatic missions in India

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Ties between Canada and India have deteriorated further as the former has dismissed dozens of Indian staffers from its network of missions in India, "the official said.

The spokesperson, however, said that the high commission expressed its sincere gratitude for the resilience, dedication, and service of its local staff in India. After the murder of top Khalistani Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged that India was behind Nijjar's assassination, which prompted India to order 41 ambassadorial staff members of Canada to leave the country. Last week, Trudeau had once again taken up the issue of the killing of Nijjar by the Indian intelligence agencies on Canadian soil last year and asserted that his government stood up to defend the rights and freedoms of all Canadians. "I will say that the principle that anyone who comes to Canada from anywhere in the world has all the rights of a Canadian to be free from extortion.

Celebrations of Khalsa Janumdin & Vasakhi Mela conclude

LAHORE (APP): The celebrations of the 325th Khalsa Janumdin and Vasakhi Mela concluded at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdal.

According to a press release issued here on Sunday, Sikh pilgrims from all over the world including India, ambassadors from Australia, Nepal and other 10 countries attended the event. They thanked the government of Pakistan and the Evacuee Property Trust Board administration for decorating the Gurdwara Panja Sahib in a beautiful manner and providing accommodation to the pilgrims. Addressing the main ceremony, Federal Minister for Defense Khawaja Muhammad Asif welcomed the guests. While congratulating them, he said

that minorities in Pakistan have complete religious freedom and their places of worship and property are safe. "Measures are being taken for the welfare of non-Muslims," he added.

Senator Sardar Guldeep Singh, Secretary Board Farid Iqbal, Additional Secretary Shri Rana Shahid Saleem, Administrator Karachi Muhammad Asif Khan, Deputy Administrator Hasan Abdul Yasir Asghar Monga, Asher Younis MPA, Baba Girpal Singh, Sardar Sawant Singh Dr. Mampal Singh and other political and religious minority leaders participated in the ceremony. Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, Pradhan of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs.

Buner IBO martyr laid to rest in native town

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Buner intelligence-based operation (IBO) martyr was laid to rest in his native town with full military honor on Sunday.

On April 13th during an intelligence-based operation against terrorists in Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Lance Havaldar Mudassar Mehmood, age 35 years, resident of Rawalpindi district had embraced martyrdom while gallantly fighting against the terrorists.

A large number of senior officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army, relatives of the martyr and local people participated in the funeral prayer, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

"These sacrifices of our martyrs strengthen our determination in the war against terrorism and our love for motherland. Armed forces of Pakistan will continue to fight alongside the nation until the last terrorist is eliminated from the country," the ISPR said.

Police arrests accused involved in child abuse case

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) has successfully apprehended an accused who was allegedly involved in child molestation case and obtained his physical remand from the relevant court to carry out further investigations.

A public relations officer said on Sunday that, on April 10, 2024, the Kirpa police team received information from a plaintiff who stated that my 10 years old son was sexually assaulted by an accused named Imdad Hussain.

Upon receiving the information, the Kirpa police team registered case no. 161 under section 376-PPC.

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Canada sacks Indian staffers working at its diplomatic missions in India

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Ties between Canada and India have deteriorated further as the former has dismissed dozens of Indian staffers from its network of missions in India, "the official said.

The spokesperson, however, said that the high commission expressed its sincere gratitude for the resilience, dedication, and service of its local staff in India. After the murder of top Khalistani Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged that India was behind Nijjar's assassination, which prompted India to order 41 ambassadorial staff members of Canada to leave the country. Last week, Trudeau had once again taken up the issue of the killing of Nijjar by the Indian intelligence agencies on Canadian soil last year and asserted that his government stood up to defend the rights and freedoms of all Canadians. "I will say that the principle that anyone who comes to Canada from anywhere in the world has all the rights of a Canadian to be free from extortion.

World Bank approves \$1b loan for Dasu Hydropower Project

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan received a much-needed boost for its energy sector as the World Bank approved a \$1 billion loan for the 2,160-megawatt Dasu Hydropower Project. This critical infrastructure project aims to provide Pakistan with affordable and reliable electricity.

The loan approval comes after some delays, with initial reports suggesting a May approval. However, government sources now confirm the World Bank's board greenlit the financing in June. This represents the third major investment by the World Bank in the Dasu project, highlighting its significance for Pakistan's energy future.

Pakistan's current energy woes stem largely from the high cost of electricity generated using imported fuel. This burden is felt across the country, with domestic consumers, factories, and even institutions like mosques and hospitals resorting to installing solar panels to escape the expen-