

# Independent

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ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari address to the joint session of parliament Speaker of National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq presiding the session in Parliament House

Calls for steering country out of political crisis

## President calls for meaningful dialogue, consensus to take Pakistan forward

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday, stressing for turning a new page and making a fresh start, called for a meaningful dialogue, parliamentary consensus and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation to do away with the polarisation and overcome the challenges pervading the country.

"In my considered view, it is time to turn a new page... The challenges we face are not impossible to overcome. They just require the fundamentals of a meaningful dialogue and parliamentary consensus... We can effectively tackle our challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation," the president said addressing the Joint Session of the Parliament. Chaired by National Assembly Speaker

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the joint sitting was attended by members of the National Assembly and Senate, while in the galleries were provincial chief ministers and legislators, diplomats, and representatives from political parties.

The president's address was in pursuance of Article 56 (3) of the Constitution which marked the beginning of the first parliamentary year, following the general elections.

The address encompassed major national and international matters, and challenges from economy, poverty, social welfare, women empowerment and foreign policy to Kashmir and Palestine as well as climate change.

He said having given away his powers to the Parliament, his role was as a unifying symbol of a joint robust federation, where all people and provinces

should be treated as equal before the law.

As a new beginning, he said, the country needed to build its strengths by investing in people, focusing on public needs, and harnessing its resources to create pathways to inclusive growth. "We have little time to waste. The country needs to move on from the polarisation so common now to contemporary politics," he remarked and sought the role of two Houses of the Parliament in rebuilding public confidence in the parliamentary process.

Calling for resetting the political atmosphere with "more light than heat", he emphasised reforms to promote good governance and turn challenges into opportunities.

President Zardari said that by embracing the visions of the great leaders Q u a i d - e - A z a m

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, "we can effectively tackle challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation". The president emphasised that in order to align the country with the 21st Century requirements, it was imperative to move forward on reforms with good governance for the provision of optimal social entitlements to the citizens.

He said besides working on economic reforms, spurring jobs, reducing inflation and expanding the tax net, the Federal Government should also promote positive working relationships and effective coordination, within the constitutional framework, with the provinces.

"This is absolutely essential for promoting an in-

clusive national development agenda and rolling out policies that execute tangible action on the ground."

President Zardari stressed the government to intensify its efforts for attracting foreign direct investment, implementing comprehensive ease-of-doing-business reforms and simplifying the existing regulations to provide an enabling environment to both foreign and domestic investors.

At the same time, he also emphasised to diversify exports, enhance the competitiveness of domestic products in global markets, introduce value addition, and venture into new international markets. Similarly, the huge untapped potential in the agriculture, marine life, information technology and textile sectors should also be exploited to earn foreign exchange, he added.

## Pakistan, Turkiye vow to expand bilateral defense collaboration

COAS, Turkish general discuss matters of mutual interest; General Gürak lauds Pakistan's efforts in fostering regional peace; Both sides agree on forging deeper strategic ties.

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Metin Gürak met Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir in Rawalpindi on Thursday.

The discussion encompassed various topics of mutual interest, spanning defence, training, and initiatives aimed at bolstering regional peace and stability.

Both sides acknowledged the robust relationship between their nations and committed to expanding defense collaboration further. The Army Chief underscored the imperative of advancing existing military cooperation between their armed forces.

The visiting dignitary commended Pakistan's efforts in fostering regional

peace and stability, as well as the Pakistan Army's role in combating terrorism.

Earlier, upon arrival at GHQ, the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Army paid respects at Yadgar-e-Shuhada by laying a floral wreath. A well-presented contingent of the Pakistan Army rendered a guard of honour to the esteemed visitor.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Metin Gürak meeting with Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir

## Justice Hashim, Justice Ishtiaq appointed BHC, PHC CJs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Law and Justice on Thursday notified the appointment of Acting Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Ishtiaq Ibrahim, as PHC Chief Justice and Acting Chief Justice of Balochistan High Court (BHC) Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar as BHC Chief Justice.

The ministry, in its notifications, said that the appointments were made by the President of Pakistan in exercise of the powers conferred under clause (1) of Article 193 of the Constitution with effect from the date they would take oath of their offices.

Similarly, the Law Ministry also notified the appointment of three additional judges Justice Fazal Subhan, Justice Shahid Khan and Justice Dr. Khurshid Iqbal as the PHC judges.

## Interior Minister orders blocking SIMs issued on invalid, expired ID cards

ISLAMABAD (INP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to block all mobile phone SIMs issued on invalid and expired identity cards.

Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday visited the entire building of NADRA headquarters in Islamabad and inspected all sections including printing. Mohsin Naqvi instructed for setting up model NADRA offices across the country on the pattern of model police stations established in Punjab.

He said establishing model NADRA offices will improve service delivery and provide convenience to the public.

NADRA Chairman Lieutenant General

Muhammad Munir Afsar welcomed Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on his arrival at the National Database and Registration Authority Headquarters.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also presided over an important meeting at NADRA headquarters. During meeting Mohsin Naqvi directed that SIM cards issued on ineffective and expired identity cards should be closed as soon as possible.

The death certificate fee is being abolished for the convenience of the people, Mohsin Naqvi said.

He said that the establishment of model police stations in Punjab improved the image of the public along with convenience.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding Saudi Investment in Pakistan following the recent visit of Saudi Delegation.

## AJK PM, federal minister Amir Muqam discuss Kashmir situation

MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu Kashmir Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar Haq and Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan Engineer Amir Muqam held a detailed meeting at Jammu Kashmir House in the federal metropolis on Thursday.

They discussed mutual concerns, including the political and human rights situation in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), and ongoing development projects in Azad Jammu Kashmir.



The prime minister reiterated Pakistan's unwavering political, moral, and diplomatic support for Kashmiris' legitimate struggle for the right to self-determination.

He condemned the atrocities inflicted by Indian forces in IOJK and assured full support for timely completion of development projects in Azad Kashmir.

PM Haq congratulated Engineer Amir Muqam on his appointment as federal minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan. He highlighted Kashmiris' unconditional love for Pakistan and updated the minister on the progress of ongoing development projects in Azad Jammu Kashmir.

## Ambassador of the European Union calls on PM Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of the European Union Amb. Riina Kionka Thursday paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and discussed matters related to mutual concern.

The prime minister thanked the EU leaders for their congratulatory messages on his re-election and said he looked forward to working closely with the EU.

He said Pakistan enjoyed friendly and cordial ties with the EU and expressed satisfaction at the existing institutional mechanisms that were meeting regularly to exchange views on further strengthening cooperation.

The prime minister appreciated, in particular, EU's continued support to Pakistan through the GSP Plus scheme, which has now been renewed till 2027.

## Will personally monitor Saudi investment projects; no laxity to be tolerated: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that he would personally monitor the Saudi investment projects and warned against any laxity due to red tape or outdated procedures.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the matters related to the recent high-powered Saudi delegation and Saudi investment in different sectors, thanked Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for sending a high-level Saudi delegation that would usher new era of Saudi investment in Pakistan, trade partnership as well as business ties.

He lauded the relevant federal ministers, Special Investment Facilitation Council and relevant senior officers for their efforts for

## Rain lashes parts of federal capital

ISLAMABAD (APP): Rain lashed parts of the federal capital on Thursday's afternoon as per forecast of Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) indicating a westerly weather system affecting most parts of the country.

Like other parts of the country, the rain of light to moderate intensity started in the afternoon and continued till night in parts of the city with occasional gaps, reducing the temperatures.

The PMD has forecast rain-windstorm/thunderstorm with few heavyfall/hailstorms for most places of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, Punjab, Islamabad and north Balochistan.

Snowfall was also likely on mountains in northern areas.

As per the synoptic situation, a strong westerly wave was affecting most parts of the country and likely to grip upper parts tonight.

## Badar Shahbaz appointed PM's media coordinator

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday appointed Badar Shahbaz, a member of the Pakistan Muslim League-N's media team, as his Media Coordinator.

"The Prime Minister has been pleased to appoint Mr. Badar Shahbaz as Media Coordinator to Prime Minister with immediate effect. The Prime Minister has further been pleased to desire that all relevant stakeholders shall extend full cooperation to the Coordinator in discharging the official business," according to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division on Thursday.

Badar Shahbaz also serves as Central Assistant Secretary Information of PML-N, besides being a key member of the party's media team. Badar Shahbaz had also served as coordinator to the prime minister during the previous 16-month government led by Shehbaz Sharif.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari being received by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif upon his arrival at Parliament House.

## Five customs officials martyred, two others injured in firing incident

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): At least five customs officials were killed as their moving vehicle was ambushed by unidentified terrorists near Saggu area here on Thursday.

According to the police control room, the Customs Intelligence vehicle was on its routine patrol within the limits of Darban police station when the armed assailants targeted it by opening fire indiscriminately, leaving five customs officials

martyred.

The moving vehicle collided with another vehicle coming from the opposite direction, resulting in injuring two persons including a child.

The attackers managed to escape after the incident.

As information was received about the incident, a heavy contingent of police and Rescue 1122 teams rushed the site and shifted the injured and the bodies to the hospital.

## Pakistan's economic reforms more important than size of new bailout package: IMF

Monitoring Desk LONDON: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is ready to support Pakistan and the package of reforms is now more important than the size of new programme, the global lender's Middle East and Central Asia director said on Thursday.

"I think what is important at this stage is to accelerate the reforms, double down on the structure of

## SC suspends ECP's re-polling order in PB-51

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court on Thursday suspended the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) order for re-polling in 12 polling stations of PB-51 Chaman on April 21. The three-member SC bench headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and comprising Justice Ayesha Malik and Irfan Saadat Khan also ordered the ECP to issue a new schedule for re-polling in the area after 10 days.



WASHINGTON: Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary and Ms. Elizabeth Horst, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of US State Department met Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb at World Bank Headquarters to underline the political will in Washington to strengthen Pak-US ties.

## 14-member Balochistan cabinet due to take oath today

Independent Report QUETTA: The Balochistan cabinet is due to take oath today (Friday) here.

The oath taking ceremony of the provincial cabinet will take place at 12:00 noon at the Governor House where Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar administer oath to the provincial ministers. According to the spokesmen for the provincial government, Shahid Rind, 14 ministers would be included in the provincial cabinet.

## Tarar condemns PTI for jeopardizing national interests, irresponsible statements

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, criticized Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Thursday, stating that individuals involved in last year's May 9 attacks are now jeopardizing national interests.

Speaking to the media, Tarar emphasized that those who undermined the country's interests were adversaries of Pakistan.

He expressed dismay at prioritizing political agendas and ego over national interests, highlighting the regrettable pattern

of PTI leadership disowning statements against the country's interests.

Tarar noted that PTI leaders were embroiled in corruption cases, lamenting that enemies of Pakistan struggle to accept investments in the country. He prayed for divine guidance for such individuals to speak in the country's favour. The minister condemned the actions stooping to anti-national levels, stressing that while criticism of the government and its policies is acceptable, criticizing Pakistan is intolerable.



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## IMF's projections

The next few years are likely to see Pakistan trapped in low-growth mode. International lenders maintain that economic growth in the country will remain subdued, hovering in the range of 1.8pc-3.5pc in the medium term because of plummeting investment, persisting fiscal and external imbalances, and a large state presence in the economy.

In its flagship World Economic Outlook 2024, released on the eve of the spring meetings of the World Bank Group, the IMF has predicted Pakistan's economy will grow by 2pc this year and 3.5pc in the next. The estimates are based on the Fund's recently concluded review of Pakistan's macroeconomic position under the \$3bn Stand-by Arrangement. Even these projections hinge on continued fiscal consolidation and a new IMF bailout. No wonder Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb is in Washington to lobby for a larger, three-year Fund programme of \$6bn-8bn to support planned economic reforms.

As stated by him, the country will request a three-year programme "to help execute the structural reform agenda". Referring to reduced market volatility and economic stabilisation achieved under the SBA, he said that market sentiment was more positive in the current fiscal year. "It's really for that purpose that we have initiated the discussion with the Fund to get into a larger and an extended programme," he explained. If approved, it will be Pakistan's 24th engagement with the IMF since 1958. Will this new programme break what the minister was reported to have referred to as the "chain of financial struggles and bailouts"? The fact is that Pakistan has never been able to complete a longer programme with the Fund because of a breach in policy goals thanks to political reasons. What will be different this time around? So far, the minister has shown an understanding of the issues that have dragged the economy down and his commitment to implementing long-delayed structural reforms without any proviso.

"If we do not go through the structural reforms, unfortunately, we will still be looking at another programme," he told an Atlantic Council meeting. He knows what needs to be done and said that Pakistan does not require "too many policy prescriptions". The problems are well-known and the country is aware of what is needed to stabilise the economy. The challenge is follow-through and implementation.

Unlike his predecessors, Mr Aurangzeb intends to discuss the programme's "growth aspects" with the IMF as well. But he has not elaborated on how he plans to grow the economy without breaching the programme policy steps that must focus on tough stabilisation reforms.

With the economy going through its worst crisis, the budget for next year is set to reveal how steadfast the government will be in its commitment to undertaking reforms, and how Mr Aurangzeb balances stabilisation with relatively faster growth.

### Shahab Usto

It was on Ashura, Aug 19, 2021, when nine-year-old Priya Kumari went missing. Just before her disappearance or abduction she had been happily helping her father — a syncretic Hindu who runs a sabel every year in Muharram in San-grar, a small town near Sukkur — serve sherbet to thirsty mourners. It is a curious case. For one, she "disappeared" from a place that was thro-ngeed with hundreds of people, and yet, reportedly, the police found little by way of evidence or even a witness. And for another, her tragedy touches upon every element that has rent apart society, ie, faith, gender, class, and abuse.

Faith: Priya, a Hindu girl, was targeted when she was engaged in religio-cultural services for Muslims. She symbolised a tolerant tradition that goes back centuries, ie, peaceful cohabitation of various communities in Sindh, and beyond. In defiance of an obscurantist mindset that has spawned violence against religious minorities, she and her father transcended

faith-driven fault lines. Her victimhood, therefore, not only exposes a corroded criminal justice system, but goes deeper into the conceptual recesses of a state caught between two conflicting philosophies. The state can either be viewed in terms of a benevolent democracy that accords equality before the law, and grants freedom of worship to every citizen, regardless of colour or creed. Or it can be seen as an ideological tool cast in the mould of a particular policy strand. Priya and many other individuals, groups and communities come under the latter.

Gender: Priya's tragedy shows the threat to 'gender justice', which envisages the systemic removal of inequalities between men and women in both law and practice. She is among the countless children and women who are targeted for their gender, in different forms and to varying degrees. Thus, many of the better educated and more aware urban women are less vulnerable to extreme forms of gender crimes, though they may also face incidents of violence, abuse, or harassment. But the hotbeds of gender-

based crimes are largely located in the rural and tribal areas where a combination of feudal, tribal, and obscurantist elements continue to regulate rural life, aided by an ineffectual or complicit state machinery.

Even here, the ratio of gender-based crimes — forced marriages, 'honour' killing, domestic violence, kidnapping for ransom, etc — is relatively higher among the half-literate and poorer sections. Clearly, the state has been criminally negligent in enforcing the rights of these hapless women — largely on account of the substantial influence that the local feudal-tribal patriarchy exercises over social policy and governance. But can the state flout local and international laws — particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women that obligates states to protect women's rights — just to appease its local surrogates?

Class: Priya's plight also highlights the social angle of crimes against women. She comes from a poor family and is possessed of all the vulnerabilities that accompany indi-

and disempowerment. Statistically, a majority of sexually victimised children come from poorer and underprivileged classes. Perhaps the offenders are emboldened both by the victim's incapacity to bring them to justice, and the state's routinely tepid response. As a result, these 'ordinary' cases are left undetected, or invariably 'settled'.

Recently, we saw two instances of our lame-duck criminal justice system. In 2021, Nazim Jokhio, a wild-life activist, was brutally murdered near Thatta when he tried to stop the hunting of protected birds. His was, as they say, an open-and-shut case. But the powerful offenders were 'pardoned' by the victim's family out of desperation and helplessness. In August last year, Fatima Farro, a nine-year-old maid, died in mysterious circumstances in Ranipur, located near Khairpur. The investigation report (including the video footage of the crime scene) has attributed the cause of her death to the abuse and torture allegedly committed by her employer, an influential pir. But the prosecution remains to be con-

cluded, despite the lapse of many months. It is feared that the delay, even if not intentional, will be used to settle the matter out of court.

Abuse: Priya's case pertains to 'disappearance' or 'abduction', but abuse cannot be excluded. Child abuse is on the rise. Of the 2,227 abuse victims reported in 2023, more than half (54 per cent) were girls. Let's not forget that children, like women, enjoy multiple protections under general, special, and international laws. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular requires the state to ensure the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. But it is unfortunate that child abuse, like forced disappearances, is rampant and neglected — more so if the victim comes from a poorer background. In fact, most successfully prosecuted cases are those vigorously pursued by the victim's family; otherwise, they end up in the amnesiac entrails of our criminal justice system.

Priya is lucky that the media, civil society and political activists have kept

her case alive. Recently, the government constituted another JIT under public pressure. But will the new JIT bear fruit in terms of recovering her and ensuring justice for her? The answer hinges on many variables, including the victim-family's perseverance, the investigator's diligence, the suspect's clout, the prosecutors' capacity, and more importantly, the court's willingness to decide the matter expeditiously and justly.

In a curious way, Priya's unexplained disappearance, Fatima's unending prosecution, and the 'pardoning' of offenders by Nazim's family reflect respectively the incapacity, dysfunctionality, and discomfiture of the entire criminal justice system — the law, police, investigation, prosecution, and adjudication. Ergo, a perception is gaining ground that our legal order has lost its effectiveness, hence, legitimacy. Desperate people are taking the law into their own hands. 'Mob justice' and vigilantism are on the rise. Which raises the critical question: can a state see stability and advancement without an effective and legitimate legal order?

## Shifting gears

### Khurram Husain

After many years of extreme uncertainty and political instability, it now seems like things are finally starting to move.

Two developments this week point to this. First is the visit of the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, during which the talks seem to have focused in significant measure on some form of economic engagement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The language used by the Saudi foreign minister at the joint presser at the conclusion of the visit was also unusually bullish on the prospects of growing the ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The second development is Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's round of engagements in Washington, D.C., where he is attending the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

One thing he made clear in all his public engagements was the urgent need for a successor programme with the IMF as soon as the ongoing Stand-by Arrangement ended. He also made clear that talks on this had be-

gun, and outlined three key areas that will be targeted for "structural reforms": taxation, power and state-owned enterprises. His emphasis was on execution, indicating that he will press hard on the matters he commits to.

These are two very critical developments, although how far they are beneficial for the general populace remains an open question. For now, it is clear that the storms of uncertainty and the perilous brushes with default that have marked the preceding two years are now receding. This does not mean the country is in the clear. Any country that is busy negotiating a programme with the IMF cannot be described as being in the clear.

What it means is that sanity is returning, decision-making is beginning to articulate itself at the top, the correct priorities are being talked about by people who have clout and credibility within their own circle of peers, and foreign investors are beginning to look again at Pakistan's prospects. In short, it means the gears are shifting.

There is a temptation that some in government

are succumbing to. This is the temptation to declare victory. It is entirely premature for that at this point, and it is important to bear in mind that a country that is struggling to enter a long-term IMF programme cannot be described as a country that is in good health, or one whose authorities have much reason to celebrate. It means the bulk of the hard work lies ahead, and that the chances of failure are legion.

The finance minister said during one of his interviews in Washington that everyone knows what all needs to be done. The problem is in execution. He should have been asked what prevented preceding governments from executing the agenda he is chalking out, and what makes him so sure he will succeed where they failed. Sadly, this question never arose. Perhaps some TV anchors at home will pose this question to him upon his return.

But for now, without popping any corks or fueling undue optimism, it is possible to say that a direction is becoming visible. Three questions now arise. What exactly is the shape of the Saudi 'investment package' that we are

told totals \$5 billion? How far will the Saudi or perhaps more broadly, the Gulf interest in Pakistan go? And most importantly, will all this really be beneficial for Pakistan?

Or are we simply going to repeat an old story where the government of the day fetches dollars from abroad, whether borrowed or begged, and burns them in the furnace of the country's economic dysfunctions to produce a short-lived, feel-good, growth experience followed by a massive crash?

Twice we have repeated this story. First during the Pervez Musharraf years, and second in the years running from 2013 to 2017, when the third PML-N government of Nawaz Sharif ran the country. The problem is in execution. He should have been asked what prevented preceding governments from executing the agenda he is chalking out, and what makes him so sure he will succeed where they failed. Both these periods were unique in one sense: the country was on an IMF programme, yet it registered high rates of economic growth. These are two antithetical outcomes. Fund

programmes are designed to slow the economy to allow it to build reserves and fiscal buffers, while undertaking deeper reforms.

What happened in both these periods was that geopolitics trumped economics. The problem is in execution. He should have been asked what prevented preceding governments from executing the agenda he is chalking out, and what makes him so sure he will succeed where they failed. In the first period, it was the post-9/11 bonanza and its associated inflows that were used to power an economic boom, with which a dictator struggling to find his feet procured his legitimacy.

In the second period, an elected government borrowed heavily from bilateral donors, especially China and the Gulf monarchies, to power a growth boom that clearly could not last, and whose bills would weigh heavily on the country for years thereafter, but nevertheless gave the government of the time enough material with which to portray itself as the party of growth and development.

It is critical that this story not be repeated one

more time. The temptation to see the dollar inflows that may perhaps be materialising soon (there is as yet no guarantee that this will happen, but the indications are there) as fuel for a short-lived growth boom must be resisted. It should be the success of the underlying reforms, especially the extent to which they enable investment, whether foreign or domestic, that should be the driver of the growth to come.

A liquidity-fuelled boom could well break the Imran Khan fever that has gripped the electorate and weighs so heavily on the shoulders of the current rulers. But this will be much the same folly as the dictator using a short-lived economic boom to procure for himself an equally short-lived legitimacy.

The finance minister is right to point to the deeper reform agenda as the key to unlocking the economy's potential. He is right to place the emphasis on execution, rather than endlessly discussing policy options. But it seems the most important constituency that needs to be persuaded of this may be his own cabinet members.

## Three to tango

### F.S. Aijazuddin

It takes three to tango in our part of the world. The US-Pakistan duo and the Saudi-Pakistan pair has become a threesome, choreographed by the US.

In 1950, prime minister Liaquat Ali Khan met US president Harry Truman in Washington, D.C. Three years later, in 1953, governor-general Ghulam Muhammad was hosted by King Ibn-e-Saud in Saudi Arabia. Since then, bilateral relationships between Pakistan and these countries, while shifting and erratic, have nevertheless maintained one golden vein of consistency: Pakistan has remained a poor supplicant and the richer two, patrons of the last resort.

US attitudes towards Pakistan have usually been determined by the policies of its presidents and by State Department mandarins. Occasionally, they would agree to disagree. The most notable occasion occurred in the 1970s during the Richard Nixon vs William Rogers bouts over contacts with China.

Saudi monarchs as a whole have remained partial towards Pakistan. Among them, the most unconditionally generous was King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz. It is said that he funded the 1974 Second Islamic Summit held in Lahore. He conceded its stage management to PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who acknowledged that concession by renaming Charing Cross as Faisal Square.

Few will be aware that in 1974 King Faisal gave \$100 million to be disbursed to any projects of PM Bhutto's choice. The money went straight into the projects, without deductions for middlemen. Half of that — \$50m — was given to the Mirpur Mathelo fertiliser project, which, even though it was not a joint venture, was re-

named Pak-Saudi Fertilisers Ltd.

Again, in January 1975, King Faisal gave \$10m for Pakistan's earthquake victims in the Karakorams. (The US pledged only \$25,000.) Such generosity did not go unpunished. King Faisal was shot four months later by his US-educated nephew Faisal bin Musaid Al Saud.

More recently, the Bin Abdul Aziz dy-na-s-t-y and Pakistan's inextinguishable Sharif family have shown that they enjoy an almost umbilical relationship. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has famously called Pakistan his second home. To the Sharif family, Saudi Arabia is their first haven.

In 2019, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited Pakistan during the tenure of PM Imran Khan. Their bromance appeared to yield the prospect of \$20 billion in investments. Deals were signed, sealed but remained undelivered. As Napoleon once advised: "Promise everything, deliver nothing."

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has received fresh assurances of financial support — this time \$5bn — from the same crown prince. During their recent meeting, the prince reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's resolve never to leave Pakistan's side and expressed his government's boundless affection for the nation.

He sent a high-powered Saudi delegation led by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah to grouch that commitment. The composition of the delegation underscored the seriousness of its mandate. It consisted of the Saudi ministers of water and agriculture, of industry and mineral resources, the deputy minister of investment, and senior officials from its ministry of energy and the Saudi Fund for General Investments. It

visited Pakistan this week, in the absence of four finance ministers.

The Saudis came just when Pakistan genuflects before the IMF for the 24th time.

In 2023, the IMF agreed to the Stand-by Arrangement of \$3bn, to rescue PM Shehbaz Sharif's government. The Saudis greased the rails with a reclaimable deposit of \$2bn to window-dress Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

This year, on March 13, ahead of the IMF mission's visit to Pakistan from March 14 to 18, the finance ministry cheerfully announced that it had "met all targets for successful completion of the programme".

Two days later, on the 15th, the IMF team expressed its displeasure over the ministry of finance's announcement "that it had materialised all structural benchmarks, quantitative and indicative targets even prior to scrutinising and completion of the review by the Fund staff".

According to one news report, the IMF review mission "grilled the finance ministry team in the maiden session of the review talks and everyone seemed clueless how to respond". Finance Minister Aurangzeb assured the IMF that "such an episode would never be repeated in future".

Shakespeare foresaw the IMF's seemingly open-ended commitment to Pakistan: "'Tis not enough to help the feeble up, but to support them after".

The fate of our application to the IMF will be known very soon, after April 20. The US will decide its next president at year end. Meanwhile, the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan continue to cavort in a three-party tango. To paraphrase the US singer Melody Gardot, Pakistan, on its own, may be "a bad walker [but] it can dance the tango".

### Ali Burhan Mustafa

The illicit global drug market, which is valued over \$400 billion, is second only to the counterfeit products market in terms of the world's main crime rackets. Cocaine, heroin, cannabis, and amphetamines are top sellers. Afghanistan leads in opium and heroin production, while Bolivia and Brazil are at the forefront of cocaine production. Mexico is a key player in cannabis and heroin circulation. The US is a leading market, which mainly receives drugs through Mexico. Canada is another market, to a smaller degree though.

The Golden Crescent, which includes Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, serves as a significant centre for opium and heroin trade, fuelled as it is by regional politics and a legacy of conflict. In Afghanistan, the grip of the Afghan Taliban over key drug-producing regions further complicates the issue. Meanwhile, the international pressure is on Pakistan to escalate its anti-drug campaigns. The ANF aims to stop poppy farming and drug trafficking. Besides prevention and global partnerships, the ANF runs Model Addicts Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres, which have been treating over 14,000 people since 2005 by combining enforcement with rehabilitation.

A recent study has focused on Pakistan's escalating drug overdose emergency, revealing that 700 people die each day due to drug overdose complications. Faced with around 7m regular drug users, 4m of whom favour cannabis and another 2.7m struggling with opioid addiction, Pakistan is grappling with a significant problem. Tackling this issue calls for a unified strategy that includes strict regulation, improved medical training, and a thorough revision of public health initiatives.

Centres for the treatment of drug addiction in

mon. Additionally, the recent World Drug Report of 2022 points to a worldwide uptick in the use of substances such as cannabis and amphetamines, which coincides with a rise in health emergencies, including hepatitis C and HIV, particularly among individuals who use drugs via syringes. This situation underscores the critical need for widespread public health strategies to address the alarming level of substance abuse in the country.

Founded in 1957, the Pakistan Narcotics Control Board has been pivotal in the crackdown against illegal drugs. It joined the interior ministry in 1973 and went through several transformations before emerging as the Anti-Narcotics Force in 1995. In Afghanistan, the grip of the Afghan Taliban over key drug-producing regions further complicates the issue. Meanwhile, the international pressure is on Pakistan to escalate its anti-drug campaigns. The ANF aims to stop poppy farming and drug trafficking. Besides prevention and global partnerships, the ANF runs Model Addicts Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres, which have been treating over 14,000 people since 2005 by combining enforcement with rehabilitation.

A recent study has focused on Pakistan's escalating drug overdose emergency, revealing that 700 people die each day due to drug overdose complications. Faced with around 7m regular drug users, 4m of whom favour cannabis and another 2.7m struggling with opioid addiction, Pakistan is grappling with a significant problem. Tackling this issue calls for a unified strategy that includes strict regulation, improved medical training, and a thorough revision of public health initiatives.

Centres for the treatment of drug addiction in

Pakistan face substantial challenges. Both public and private facilities struggle with inadequate infrastructure, a lack of skilled professionals, and weak enforcement of sound management practices. Although we live in the 21st century, Pakistan still has not recognised drug addiction and rehabilitation as an official speciality in psychiatry, while the absence of qualified health strategies to address the alarming level of substance abuse in the country.

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Centres for the treatment of drug addiction in





ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding Power Sector.

## PM orders for boosting privatization, outsourcing process of power Discos

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the relevant authorities to accelerate the process of privatization and outsourcing of the power distribution companies (Discos). Chairing a high-level meeting regarding power sector here, the prime minister said the assistance of private sector experts and globally accepted models should be taken to improve the management affairs of the distribution companies (DISCOs). He also directed to prepare and present a comprehensive plan in the next meeting to improve the power system in the country. The prime minister said reforms in the power sector would help reduce the country's circular debt. He also vowed not to allow electricity thieves and other elements to harm the country's treasury. In the meeting, the recommendation and measures with respect to prevent the power theft, reorganization of National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) and new projects of the electricity transmission were presented.

The meeting was told that Matiari-Rahim Yar Khan transmission line and Ghazi Barotha-Faisalabad line will be constructed to ensure the power transmission from Southern part of the country. The meeting was further informed that a comprehensive strategy had been evolved for the reorganization of NTDC to bring reforms in the power transmission system and to minimize the government's circular debts. The prime minister directed to complete all the reforms' initiatives within the stipulated time. The meeting was attended by the federal ministers Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Sardar Awaiz Khan Leghari, Dr Musadik Malik, Abdul Aleem Khan, Ataullah Tarar, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, former power minister Muhammad Ali, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Jehanzeb Khan, Member of National Assembly Bilal Azhar Kayani, Engineer Qamar ul Islam, Rana Ehsan Afzal, Salman Ahmed and other concerned officials.

## Prudent policies, reforms poised to result in sustainable economic growth: Governor SBP

**Independent Report**  
KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Jameel Ahmed highlighting country's substantial improvements in macroeconomic outlook hoped that time bound reforms will put the economy on the path of sustainable economic growth. Governor SBP expressed the views during his meetings with key international investors during multiple events organized by leading global banks and financial firms, including JP Morgan, Citibank and Jefferies, on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington DC, said a statement issued here.

He informed the participants about the substantial improvement in Pakistan's macroeconomic outlook achieved over the past year as a result of a prudent monetary policy, backed adequately by fiscal consolidation and beginning of the implementation of key structural reforms. Governor referring to sharp decline in inflation over the past year from a peak of 38 percent in May 2023 to the two-year low of 20.7 percent in March 2024 explained that the deceleration in inflation is broad-based, reflecting the combined impact of monetary tightening, fiscal consolidation, ease in import supplies, improved agriculture output and base effect. "More importantly, core inflation declined markedly, reaching 15.7 percent in March, after persistently staying above 20 percent throughout last year," he added. The governor informed the participants that the external sector has also stabilized, as reflected in the sharp reduction in the current account deficit (CAD) to \$1 billion during Jul-Feb FY24 from \$3.8 billion in the same period last year. In addition to stabilization policies, improved agriculture output has contributed to higher food exports.

## FPCCI waives off 50% membership fee of women chambers

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Thursday announced waiver off 50% membership fee for women chambers. President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh in a statement issued here said that the country and society cannot progress without the full role of women, adding the initiative of reducing membership fee was important for women empowerment.

"We have fulfilled our promise, for which the full credit goes to the leadership of United Business Group (UBG), who had promised this during the election campaign," he added. Ikram said that Pakistani women were extremely talented and the chamber was striving to empower them in the economic field. "If Pakistan is to progress, we have to make our women educated, skilled and empowered to business women," he added.



WASHINGTON: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb interacted with representatives of Deutsche Bank.

## ICCI pledges to have a female president soon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has pledged to have its first female president soon followed by other chambers across the country. The facilitation centers for women home-based workers would be established in all the provincial capitals. This was disclosed by the Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Nilofar Bukhtiar during the Eid Milan and Award Ceremony held here Thursday.

## KP Govt decides to establish Gem Processing & Export Centre

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to develop gemstone sector as formal export sector and for this purpose the gemstone cluster at Namak Mandi would be developed in the shape of Gems Processing & Export Centre. The Gem Export Center will be redesigned and shifted to a spacious and suitable building equipped with all international standards. In this regard, a high-level meeting was held on Thursday in the committee room of the Industries Department here at Civil Secretariat, Peshawar with Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commerce and Technical Education Abdul Karim Tordhir in the chair.

Besides, Secretary Industries, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Special Secretary Muhammad Anwar Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) Javed Iqbal Khattak, Executive Director of Federal Export Development Fund (EDF) Samiullah Khan and Director Zafar, PDA and Local Government Officers, representatives of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) Gemstones Association and officers of other relevant departments also attended the meeting.

## MoU signed for skilled manpower in AJK: PM lauds initiative

MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu Kashmir Prime Minister, Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq Thursday termed signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between state-run TEVTA and NAVTTC as a significant development. He emphasized the importance of talented and educated individuals, particularly the youth, leveraging this opportunity for skill development. The AJK PM highlighted that the MoU would contribute to

reducing unemployment in the region. The signing ceremony, held at Jammu Kashmir House in the federal metropolis and Executive Director NEVTTTC Aamir Jan and TEVTA Chairman Chaudhry Farid Ahmed present on the occasion. Senior Minister Col. (retd) Waqar Ahmad Noor, Minister TEVTA Sardar Amir Altaf, Chief Secretary Dawood Muhammad Burich, Chairman NEVTTTC Ms. Gulmina Bilal, and other officials attended the event.

## Finance Minister rules out rupee devaluation in talks with IMF

ISLAMABAD (Online): Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has ruled out any further significant rupee devaluation ahead of talks with International Monetary Fund. Speaking at roundtable meeting with Bloomberg team in Washington, he said there is no reason for rupee devaluation as Pakistan has solid foreign-exchange reserves, stable currency, rising remittances and steady exports.



HYDERABAD: Farmers are busy in their works to earn their livelihood for support their families, at a field located near Tando Jam near Hyderabad.

## Country prepared to become tech hub: Shaza Fatima

LAHORE (APP): State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Thursday said that the country was prepared to become regional tech hub and IT leader. She said this while addressing a press conference along with Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) Secretary General Deemah Al Yahya at a local hotel. She said, "Youth is our asset and we have strong connectivity," adding that Pakistan had partners like Saudi Arabia and other countries which wanted to strengthen this sector. The State Minister said that recently Saudi Arabia foreign minister and representative of Investment Ministry visited Pakistan, adding that country's IT sector was also highlighted during meetings with the delegation from Saudi Arabia.

She further said that Digital Foreign Direct Investment conference would be organized at the end of this year, adding that World Economic Forum, Digital Cooperation Organization and Pakistan would host conference every year to bring investment in the country for IT sector, manufacturing, software and telecommunication sides as well. She further said that these initiatives and the policies of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif aimed at supporting private sector would yield positive results to put the country on road to progress. Shaza Fatima said that the incumbent government was working on various policies and legislation whether it was related to data protection, cyber security, cloud policy to create feasible environment for growth of IT, tech and telecom sectors. She said, "Pakistan is a founding member of

## PTCL posts 14 % revenue growth

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) has announced its financial results for the first quarter of 2024 posting 14 per cent revenue growth Year-on-Year basis to Rs 49 billion, mainly driven by strong performance in the consumer segment led by fixed broadband, mobile data, and wholesale & business solutions. The announcement was made during a board of directors meeting on Thursday. PTCL continued its strong performance throughout Q1, 2024 and achieved revenue of Rs 26 billion for this quarter, which is 13% higher than last year, mainly driven by growth in fixed line and business solutions segments, said a news release. Flash Fiber, PTCL's premium Fiber-To-The-Home (FTTH) service, continues to show tremendous growth with the highest Net adds share within the FTTH market (since Dec'23) and now stands as the leading FTTH service provider in Pakistan. This phenomenal growth has been possible through the aggressive expansion of PTCL Flash Fiber and dedicated customer experience throughout the country.

## PSX loses 43 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Thursday lost 43.20 points, a slight negative change of 0.06 percent, closing at 70,290.12 points against 70,333.32 points the previous trading day. A total of 440,314,409 shares valuing Rs.24,362 billion were traded during the day as compared to 442,096,653 shares valuing Rs.16,034 billion the last day. Some 359 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 166 of them recorded gains and 174 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 19 remained unchanged. The three top trading companies were Energycio PK with 33,241,232 shares at Rs.4.55 per share, K-Electric Limited with 29,877,440 shares with Rs.4.43 per share and Pak Refinery with 28,448,438 shares at Rs.29.27 per share. Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.81.10 per share price, closing at Rs.8,380.10, whereas the runner-up was Hallmark Company Limited with a Rs.52.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.748.00. Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.52.50 per share closing at Rs.7,547.50.



LAHORE: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja and Ms. Deemah Al-Yahya, Secretary General Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) cutting ribbon to inaugurate 24th ITCN Asia 2024 at Expo Centre.

## Zong business revolutionizes digital landscape for CGCMS through recent partnership

ISLAMABAD (APP): Zong Business, Pakistan's leading telecom operator has joined hands with China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) is a key subsidiary of China Energy Engineering Group Co., Ltd., a prominent state-owned enterprise, said a news release issued here on Thursday. CGGC specializes in

ambitious goals without hindrance. Founded in 1970, China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) is a key subsidiary of China Energy Engineering Group Co., Ltd., a prominent state-owned enterprise, said a news release issued here on Thursday. CGGC specializes in various sectors including water conservancy, power generation, infrastructure construction, and real estate development, encompassing design, construction, investment, and operation services. CGCMS' expertise combined with Zong 4G's proficiency in network architecture, security,

those in peri-urban and remote areas, the platform provides a level playing field to showcase their talents and products. Businesses registered with regional commerce chambers and women entrepreneurs receive distinctive identity badges. This spotlight feature enhances visibility and credibility, promoting trust among consumers. SAARCBAZAAR proudly pioneers a first-of-its-kind reporting mechanism for NTMs and NTBs. An open database system ensures prompt resolution of potential trade issues through formal channels. "SAARCBAZAAR is more than an e-commerce platform; it's a gateway to economic prosperity. By connecting businesses, celebrating diversity, and addressing trade barriers, we aim to transform the SAARC region." - Zohaib Mushtaq, Project Co-ordinator, SAARCBAZAAR



SIALKOT: A person filling water in pot at water filtration plant with petrol pump style water nozzle at Mubarak Pura.

## SAARC BAZAAR – A way Forward for South Asian Businesses

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD / SAARCBAZAAR: Empowering Trade, Fostering Growth, and Celebrating Diversity. [WWW.SAARCBAZAAR.COM](http://WWW.SAARCBAZAAR.COM), the innovative e-commerce platform designed to revolutionize trade within the SAARC region, is now officially live. With a vision to connect global consumers by providing a 100% free-of-cost, user-friendly e-commerce portal that bridges traders across the SAARC region, including MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) and entrepreneurs, particularly women who own home-

based industries, SAARCBAZAAR is strategically positioned to capitalize on this growth by fostering regional economic integration and empowering businesses and consumers alike. The SAARC region, projected by the World Bank to be the world's fastest-growing region in 2024 with a 6% output growth, is poised for a significant economic leap. SAARCBAZAAR goes beyond commerce by highlighting the rich cultural heritage and tourist attractions of each SAARC country. Explore the best of art, cuisine, and history while conducting business. Businesses from all corners of the SAARC region can now showcase their products, services, and source materials effortlessly. The platform facilitates direct connections between traders, manufacturers, and consumers with just a click. SAARCBAZAAR serves as an invaluable resource for accessing up-to-date economic data, news, and information on trade events and exhibitions within the SAARC region. It is committed to fostering self-employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. For women entrepreneurs, especially

those in peri-urban and remote areas, the platform provides a level playing field to showcase their talents and products. Businesses registered with regional commerce chambers and women entrepreneurs receive distinctive identity badges. This spotlight feature enhances visibility and credibility, promoting trust among consumers. SAARCBAZAAR proudly pioneers a first-of-its-kind reporting mechanism for NTMs and NTBs. An open database system ensures prompt resolution of potential trade issues through formal channels. "SAARCBAZAAR is more than an e-commerce platform; it's a gateway to economic prosperity. By connecting businesses, celebrating diversity, and addressing trade barriers, we aim to transform the SAARC region." - Zohaib Mushtaq, Project Co-ordinator, SAARCBAZAAR

## Mobilink Bank registers solid start to year by doubling its revenue in Q1 2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's leading digital microfinance institution, Mobilink Bank, has reported a staggering 97% increase in revenue during Q1 2024 compared to the same period last year, marking a powerful start to the year. The Bank's Profit before Tax (PBT) also witnessed 110% growth, said a news release. The substantial increase in the revenue and PBT underscore the Bank's robust financial performance, heightened customer & stakeholder confidence, and the positive momentum within the country's economic and business environment at the outset of the year. Mobilink Bank is part of the VEON group, a global digital operator that provides converged connectivity and digital services to nearly 160 million customers in six dynamic markets that are home to 7% of world's population. Mobilink Bank champions financial inclusion and works to advance the growth and sustainability of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly those owned and run by women. The Bank leverages microfinance and fintech to foster access to finance.

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QUETTA: Deputy Commissioner Quetta Lt (retd) Saad Bin Asad presides over the meeting of Poultry Farms and Shopkeepers Association.



## Tarar for enhanced collaboration between public, private sector to ensure rapid economic dev.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday stressed the need for enhanced collaboration between the public and private sectors to fast track the process of economic development of the country.

Addressing the First Pakistan Semiconductor Summit, he said that the Special Investment Facilitation Council had been set up to attract investment in Pakistan and ensure 'ease of doing business'. He said it was main thrust of the government policy to encourage innovation and investment in the country.

He said that Pakistan, as the fifth largest democracy in the world, was endowed with great natural resources and its biggest resource was its human resource. "We are blessed with a huge population of youth which constitutes 68 per cent of its population". That is a huge potential which we can offer to the world, he added.

He said Pakistan was strategically located at the crossroads of the world which was a source of pride for the nation.

He said that the Gov-

ernment of Pakistan as a policy encouraged innovation and investment in the country which this summit was offering precisely - a collaboration between public and private sector.

He said that the federal cabinet meeting on Wednesday had approved a public private partnership policy framework to eventually facilitate investment in the country.

He said that the job of the government was not only to regulate but also facilitate investment. He said unfortunately sometimes governments forget their primary responsibility as a facilitator which hampered the investment.

He said that the government could fulfil this responsibility through collaboration between public and private sector and by ensuring 'ease of doing business'.

He said that Pakistan has been producing 50,000 engineering graduates every year and it has the best engineering universities in the world. "Our engineering graduates are well placed globally but unfortunately we are not able to reap the benefits of the semiconductor in-

dustry. It is \$ 550 billion industry at this moment with the projection of \$ 1 Trillion by 2030."

Tarar said that Pakistan had great potential to deploy its human resource in this industry.

The minister said that he was proud to inform that Shehbaz Sharif during his stints as chief minister of the Punjab had attached great importance to vocational training and skill development. From day one, the priority of the PML-N was skill development of the youth.

"The manifesto of the political party that I represent, highlights the importance of enhancing skills and placing importance on skill development, on setting up institutes where skills training is imparted to youth and this is the way forward", he remarked.

Expressing gratitude to Founder and CEO of GS Microelectronics (GSME) Farhat Jahangir, he said he had done a great job by organising this summit to bring public and private sectors together and bringing members of esteemed universities of Pakistan under one roof for optimum collaboration.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the European Union, Riina Kionka calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

## UNHCR Country Representative calls on federal minister for SAFRON, discusses Afghan refugee's issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR's) Country Representative Ms. Philippa Candler on Thursday called on Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Engr Amir Muqam here at his office. During meeting, the minister acknowledged continued support of UNHCR towards the Afghan Refugee's issues in Pakistan for the last 45 years. He said that Pakistan is generously hosting millions of Afghans and providing protection, livelihood, education and health facilities to them. "Cur-

riched and updated information will help in their better management and would also benefit the country of origin in their resettlement and reintegration on their dignified return. The minister said that the verification of URMF has been extended till 30 April 2024 and we hope that UNHCR will mobilize and add more resources to complete verification of URMFs. Engr Amir Muqam said that it is matter of great pleasure to share that British Registration Certificates to the children of registered PORs families have resumed at Proof of Registration (PoR) card.

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## Romina for climate diplomacy to address environmental degradation challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Coordinator on Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam Thursday emphasized on climate diplomacy to address the climate challenges including global warming, melting of glaciers, urban deforestation, heat waves, endangered rare species and carbon credits.

She stated this in a meeting with Danish Ambassador Jakob Linulf who called on her here, a news release said.

The both sides agreed on closer collaboration, knowledge sharing and designing of joint activities on climate change.

The coordinator underscored the equitable distribution of funds to developing countries for fighting against the climate crisis.

"It is now or never to deal with climate crisis to save our future generations which will otherwise suffer heavily if attention is not paid at this point of time," she underlined.

Romina stressed upon regionwise solutions of climate as few countries had drought issues while others had flooding challenges.

The Danish ambassador while extending his felicitations to PM's coordinator on assuming responsibility on such an important subject applauded the proactive role and her vision to address the climate challenges.

The coordinator thanked the ambassador for extending help to Pakistan during 2022 floods.

The both sides reiterated their resolve to deepen cooperation on climate change. Romina expressed her gratitude for visiting and also extended invitation to her Danish counter-part to formalize the cooperation on climate.

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Gulzar Khan called on Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON Engr. Amir Muqam at his office.

## CM Gilgit Baltistan calls on Federal Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Gulzar Khan on Thursday called on Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and States and Frontier Regions Engr Amir Muqam here in his office. Federal Secretary Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Rafique Jawad Malik and Inspector General Gilgit Baltistan Afzal Mahmood Butt were also present on the occasion, said a press release.

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan congratulated Engr Amir Muqam as as-

suming charge as Federal Minister of Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Engr Amir Muqam thanked the Chief Minister and said that he will soon visit Gilgit-Baltistan to discuss issues with people.

The minister said that the problems of people of Azad Jammu Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan would be resolved on priority.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Gilgit-Baltistan will not have any problem of wheat shortage and federal government will ensure its smooth supply.



ISLAMABAD: Ms. Jane Marriott, British High Commissioner to Pakistan called on the Minister for Federal Education & Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui in his office. Secretary Education Mohyuddin Wani and the Country Director British Council James Hampson are also present.

## US celebrates transformative achievements in KP with govt, int'l donors collaboration

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a demonstration of collaborative efforts as development stakeholders, the United States (US) government, represented by Consul General Moore and US Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director Somvongsiri, in conjunction with pivotal allies, on Thursday commemorated a sequence of groundbreaking accomplishments within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region.

USAID reaffirmed its unwavering dedication to enhancing livelihoods and promoting enduring development in the area, said a press release issued here.

Mission Director Somvongsiri commended the outstanding progress stemming from its strategic alliance with the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and fellow international contributors.

Somvongsiri remarked "USAID is committed to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Together, along with our international and local partners, we have laid the groundwork for a brighter future, and I am optimistic for what lies ahead. Our dedication to working hand in hand towards our shared goals and sustained impact remains stronger than ever."

The United States, through USAID, has spearheaded transformative infrastructure projects, significantly bolstering the province's energy capacity and connectivity.

Landmark projects such as Gomal Zam Dam and Golen Gol Hydro-power project, coupled with the augmentation of Tarbela dam, have added 253 megawatts to the national grid, marking a significant step towards energy self-sufficiency.

## Tandoor owners launch protest on price reduction

ISLAMABAD (APP): Following the directives of Punjab government, the federal capital has slashed the prices on 'Roti' and 'Naan' and started selling essential commodity at affordable rates to facilitate the common man.

However, Tandoor owners and Nanbais are protesting over price reduction of 'Roti' and 'Naan' in different areas.

The district administration has set the new prices at Rs 16 and Rs 20 for a standard serving size of 120 grams.

Despite discussions that held between officials and the Nanbai Association, a complete strike was also observed in different localities against price cut.

Talking to APP, Muhammad Naveed, a Tandoor owner, expressed concerns over high cost of living in the capital and rent of shops besides commercial gas charges for baking Roti and Naan.

## DC calls for intensive anti-polio drive in ICT

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Thursday reviewed arrangements for a seven-day anti-polio campaign in the federal capital.

Talking to APP, ICT's Spokesman, Dr Abdullah Tabassum said that the campaign would start on April 29 which aimed to ensure administered the anti polio drops every child under the age of five years.

In this regard, the deputy commissioner chaired a high-level meeting which was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, and Health Department representatives, to bolster the anti-polio campaign.

Deploying a ground-level strategy, the DC directed the healthcare workers and polio teams to ensure door to door campaign. Additionally, polio teams would cover public places and bus stands, leaving no child unvaccinated.

Memon issued clear directives mandating the immunization of every child under the age of five, emphasizing the dual doses of polio drops as a crucial step towards a polio-free Pakistan.

Underlining parental responsibility, he stressed the importance of collective action in advancing the nation's aspiration for a polio-free future.

## Court adjourns reference against Sindh CM

ISLAMABAD (APP): An Accountability Court on Thursday adjourned hearing of the Nooriabad Power Project reference against Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah till June 26.

Accountability Court Judge Nasir Javed Rana heard the reference wherein CM Murad Ali Shah and others appeared before the court.

The defence lawyer adopted the stance that the trial could not be proceeded in the references in light of the directions of the top court. The reference was transferred to another court but later it was returned to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

## IHC bar seeks inquiry regarding judges' letters

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) on Thursday moved a constitutional petition to Supreme Court of Pakistan seeking interrogation pertaining to the letters of IHC's judges.

The petitioner prayed the court to ensure a transparent inquiry related to the allegations and after this actions should be taken against the responsible.

It said that if the matter was related to Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) then the court could send the recommendations to the council. The petition said that the IHC's judges have mentioned serious incidents in their letters.



ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaisar Sheikh, former Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chief Justice of the Federal Shariat Court Iqbal Hameedur Rehman, High Commissioner of Bangladesh Ruhul Alam Siddiqui and others cutting cake to celebrate the 53rd Independence and National Day of Bangladesh.

## Tirmizi lauds Consulate's efforts to address needs of Pakistanis stranded at Dubai Airport

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Faisal Niaz Tirmizi on Thursday acknowledged the collaborative efforts undertaken by the Pakistan Consulate General, Dubai in response to the recent rains.

"We have mobilized swiftly to address the needs of our fellow Pakistanis, with a particular focus on those stranded at the Dubai Airport. Led by Hussain Muhammad, Consul General, and his dedicated team, we have been on the ground, helping and supporting those in need. Our commitment to serving our community remains unwavering, and we stand ready to extend further aid as required. "Together, we are stronger, and together, we will overcome any challenges that come our way," Ambassador Tirmizi said according to a news release.

During his visit to the Dubai Airport on Thursday, Consul General

Hussain Muhammad distributed food items, medicine, milk for children and other necessary items among the Pakistani families waiting there due to delayed flights.

He spoke to the authorities of airlines concerned in view to expedite flights departures and mitigate issues confronted by the stranded passengers, mostly en route to Karachi, Pakistan.

"These are more than 60 passengers who will be departing via two different flights today", the consul said. A separate team of the Consulate General also paid a courtesy visit to Pakistani cricket players Misbah-Ul-Haq, Abdur Razaq, Umer Gul and Kaman Akmal waiting at the Dubai Airport due to their delayed flight en route to Houston, United States.

The Community Welfare Wing of Pakistan's Consulate General in Dubai coordinated with Social Centre Sharjah.

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## CDA to start free Yoga classes for Islamabad residents

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Sports and Culture Department of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) plans to launch complimentary yoga sessions for Islamabad residents at the Multipurpose Ground in Sector F-6 Markaz and Mehran Gate near Baradri in F-9 Park, from May 2.

Yoga classes will be divided into two shifts: morning sessions, which will run from 6 am to 8 am, and evening sessions.



ISLAMABAD: PM's Coordinator on Climate Change & Environmental Coordination Romina Khurshid Alam in a meeting with the Danish Ambassador H.E. Jakob Linulf at her office.

## Terrorism case: ATC confirms bail of PTI leaders, Raja, Tahir Sadiq others

ISLAMABAD (Online): Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) Islamabad has confirmed the bail of PTI leaders Raja Basharat, Maj (Retd) Tahir Sadiq and Umar Sultan in the cases registered against them in police station Ramna Islamabad under terrorism clauses. Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra has remarked when the man becomes proclaimed offender then the basic rights remain no more.

The judge Tahir Abbas while reprimanding the lawyers on lack of preparation in the case remarked you are just playing with your clients. You are taking things as routine matter. Whosoever appears in my court he comes here prepared.

He gave these remarks during hearing of bail before arrest plea here Thursday.

Raja Basharat, Tahir Sadiq and Umar Sultan appeared in the court along with their counsels while prosecutor Raja Anwar too appeared in the court.

The counsel for the petitioner told the court when the bail plea was rejected the situation was different at that time. Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra while addressing counsel remarked he should tell the court about situation in writing.

Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra remarked if there is no reason for dismissal of first bail plea then the bail will not be granted.

## Funeral prayer of Lady Head Constable offered

ISLAMABAD: The funeral prayer of Lady Head Constable Rubina Shehbaz was offered at Police Lines Headquarters. DIG Security Division Awais Ahmad Malik, senior police officers, law enforcement department officials and a large number of police officials offered the funeral prayer. Lady Head Constable Rubina Shehbaz was posted at the security division of Islamabad Capital Police. She suffered a road accident and could not survive and was reunited with his real Creator.

A smart contingent unit of the police force presented a guard of honor, and the DIG Security division draped the coffins with flower wreaths.

The DIG Security division condoled with the family of the deceased and said that Islamabad Capital Police stands with the bereaved family and will take care of them in every possible way. He also issued orders to the senior police officers to provide full support to the family of the deceased.



ISLAMABAD: Motorcyclists on the way at Islamabad Highway during light showers that exasperated the Federal Capital.

## Entrepreneurship curriculum introduced in FDE schools

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has introduced an entrepreneurship curriculum in schools working under the ambit of the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE).

The official sources told APP that as per the declaration of the education ministry, from the next academic session, students from grades 6 to 10 will have an opportunity to venture into the world of entrepreneurship.

This curriculum reflects the successful model implemented in Gilgit-Baltistan in the last two years, they informed.

The curriculum is carefully designed to develop entrepreneurial skills in students, equipping them with the necessary tools and mindsets for innovation and creativity.

According to the declaration, unlike traditional assessment-based learning, this curriculum will focus on project-based learning. This will help the students to apply the theoretical knowledge to real world scenarios, it added. The sources further stated that to ensure the successful implementation of this initiative, training will be provided to 200 teachers in FDE (ICT). Meanwhile commenting on this declaration, the Secretary Education said that introducing entrepreneurship

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## Delegation of CUST students visits the Safe City Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: According to the details, following the special directives of the Independent Report ter, Data Hub Unit, Dispatch Control Center, E-Challan System, and the "Pucar-15" helpline.

The delegation was also apprised of the functionality and benefits of the Safe City cameras in the city.

The modern cameras of Safe City are playing a crucial role in ensuring the safety of the city, preventing crimes and safeguarding the lives and property of citizens. 42% of crimes are resolved through the Safe City Command and Control Center. Face recognition cameras have been installed at the entry and exit points of the city which are playing an important role in identifying suspicious elements, he maintained. The delegation acknowledged the modern technical system of the Islamabad Capital Police and its benefits.

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