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Headline Inflation decelerates further to 17.3% in April Lowest inflation rate in two years - result of hard work done by PDM-led govt: PM

Shehbaz directs provincial govts to ensure reduction in petroleum prices and enforce official food item prices

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday, declaring the downward trend of inflation as a welcome news for the people, said that the inflation falling towards the lowest level in two years was a sign of improvement in the economy. "This is the result of the hard work done during the 16 month-long government led by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and continued by the interim government," he said in a statement issued by the PM Office.

The prime minister pointed out that the inflation rate had come down from the peak of 39% to

20% last month and then to 17% in the current month.

He said bringing down the inflation rate was the top priority of the government. "With the support of Allah Almighty, the people will get more relief in coming days after increase in the economic activities." He expressed the hope that the people might also get more relief by further cut in the petroleum prices which were on the downward trend in the international market. The prime minister directed the provincial governments to ensure that impacts of fall in the petroleum prices reach the common people, besides

taking special measures for the implementation of the rates of food items fixed by the Federal Government.

"With the blessings of the Almighty, the life standard of the people will further improve with further improvement in the economy," he said.

The government was trying its best to provide maximum relief to the people, the prime minister added. The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation came down to 17.3 percent during the month of April 2023 as compared to 20.7 percent recorded during March 2023, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Thursday.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Khazar Farhadov calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Positive results of PM Saudi Arabia visit to accrue within few months: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday said highly successful second visit of Prime Minister to Saudi Arabia within a month to participate in World Economic Forum, was historic and major development, which would eventually bring about extensive positive results within next few months.

Addressing a press conference along with Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, he said comprehensive planning by Saudi Arabia for investment in Pakistan was a turning point in the bilateral relations.

Tarar said that multiple meetings were held with the Saudi ministers on the sidelines of the WEF during the Prime Minister's visit. "In two days, 12 high-level meetings were held with ministers and major personalities of Saudi Arabia including ministers for fi-

nance, industries, investment, energy and climate change", he said.

The Saudi ministers expressed their commitment to work with Pakistan with regard to bilateral cooperation and investment on the special directives of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, he added.

Within a short span of just one month, the Prime Minister had two meetings with the Saudi Crown Prince that had a historic significance for the two brotherly countries.

He said immediately after Eidul Fitr, the Saudi Finance Minister visited Pakistan along with relevant ministers and extensive consultations were held regarding economic cooperation and investment.

On the directives of the Saudi Crown Prince, the Saudi ministers formulated a comprehensive programme for cooperation with Pakistan, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar and Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar held an important press conference.

Reforms in FBR govt's top priority for economic revival: Law Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law and Justice, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar Thursday said that as per the vision of the Prime Minister, it was the top priority of the incumbent government to introduce reforms in Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to address economic crisis.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is leading the entire reform process in this regard, he said while addressing a press conference here.

The minister highlighted that currently, tax cases pertaining to the recovery of more than Rs2700 billions were pending in courts, which should be concluded early. The parliament, he said, for the first time has legislated on tax tribunals in order to not only expedite the process but also make it efficient. Under the law, cases of Rs 20 million will go to the Commissioner while the cases above this will go to the Tribunal, he added.

Asif Zardari resigns as PPPP chairman

KARACHI (INP): President Asif Zardari has resigned from the chairmanship of the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP).

Sources say Asif Zardari has informed the Election Commission of Pakistan about his resignation from the presidency of the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians.

PM condoles over demise of UAE's Sheikh Tahnoun bin Mohamed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday expressed sadness over the death of Sheikh Tahnoun bin Mohamed Al Nahyan, the Representative of the United Arab Emirates' Ruler in Al Ain.

"Deeply saddened at the demise of His Highness Sheikh Tahnoun bin Mohamed Al Nahyan. Our thoughts and prayers are with the leadership and people of the UAE at this hour of grief," the prime minister wrote on his X timeline.

He said that the late Sheikh Tahnoun would be long remembered for his contribution to building stronger ties between Pakistan and the U.A.E.

He prayed to Allah Almighty to grant eternal peace for the departed soul.

Three terrorists gunned down in Tank IBO

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Security Forces on Thursday killed three terrorists including two ring leaders during a joint intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted in Tank District. According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), during the conduct of operation, after intense fire exchange, the three terrorists were successfully neutralized who were identified as, Terrorist Ringleader Azmat alias Azmat, Terrorist Ringleader Karamat alias Hanzla and Terrorist Rehan.

The killed terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area including recent abduction of District & Sessions Judge of South Waziristan District.



RISALPUR: Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir addressing graduation Ceremony of 149th General Duty (Pilot), 95th Engineering, 105th Air Defence, 25th A&SD, Eighth Log and 131st Combat Support Courses at the PAF Academy Risalpur.

Army well aware of constitutional limits, expect same from others: COAS

General Munir says Article 19 clearly defines boundaries within which freedom of speech and opinions exist; Those flouting Constitutional restrictions on freedom of expression "can't point fingers at others".

RISALPUR (APP): The army is well aware of its constitutional limits and expects others to prioritise upholding the Constitution as well, Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir said on Thursday.

"Those who blatantly disregard these limitations cannot point fingers at others," he said while addressing the passing out parade of the Pakistan Air Force. "Article 19 of the Constitution clearly defines the boundaries of freedom of expression."

The Army Chief was addressing the passing out parade of the Pakistan Air Force.

He said that the grow-

ing arms race was likely to disturb the balance of power in the South Asia region.

The COAS said, "Advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics and quantum computing are changing the use of air power as well as expanding its scope. However, without a strong air force, a country is at the mercy of any aggressor."

He said the Pakistan Air Force had always lived up to the expectations of the nation. It patrolled the airspace in all kinds of difficulties with unparalleled bravery and professionalism, a great example of which was demonstrated

before all in February 2019. The Army Chief, while addressing the passing out of cadets, said, "You are the center of our hopes, the guardian of the skies and the guarantor of regional unity. You are expected to lead a life adorned with the virtues of character, courage and competence."

Your conduct will be extraordinary not only for your personal ethics but also for the respected institution. You will never hesitate to sacrifice for the defence, honour and dignity of the motherland."

He said the military leadership expected that

the young cadets would always uphold the eternal tradition of the nation's best spirit, professionalism and bravery.

He said that the Gaza war was the latest example of the suffering that wars could bring. "Indiscriminate killing of elderly, women and children in Gaza is proof that violence is increasing in the world."

The Army Chief noted that India had illegally occupied the Jammu and Kashmir whereas the silence of the whole world on the ongoing Indian aggression in Kashmir could

not suppress the voice of freedom echoing there.

"We will continue to provide moral, political and diplomatic support to our Kashmiri brothers."

The COAS advised the cadets, "Always remember that truth is power while falsehood can never be powerful. Be like Rashid Minhas, Sarfaraz Rafiqi and MM Alam who gave their services and lives to protect the dignity of the dear country. Be committed to the responsibility you are being entrusted with and remain loyal to the State of Pakistan."

Indian campaign of attacking, seizing Kashmiris' properties destined to fail: FO spox

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan on Thursday reiterated that the ongoing Indian campaign of attacking and seizing the properties of the Kashmiris in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) was destined to fail, just like its colonial strategies and harsh statements.

"Pakistan strongly condemns India's continued campaign of attacking and seizing the properties

of Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The reality is that the harsh statements and colonial strategies have been unsuccessful in quelling the determination of Kashmiris for freedom, and these measures are destined to face similar outcomes in the future," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said at her weekly press briefing here.

White paper: PTI calls for judicial commission to probe rigging in Feb 8 elections

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has issued a white paper on alleged rigging in the February 8 general elections, demanding the formation of the judicial commission to probe the "snatching of the 180 seats".

"We won the 180 seats in the [February 8] elections. Our seats were given to other parties through Form 47," said PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar while addressing a press conference alongside other party leaders in Islamabad on Thursday.

The PTI chief said they had filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the alleged rigging. "But the plea has not been fixed for hearing as yet," he lamented.

"We are issuing a 234-page white paper to bring it to the notice of the people as to how their mandate was stolen," Barrister Gohar said.

The PTI-backed independent candidates won the most National Assembly seats in the February 8 elections followed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

However, the PML-N with the support of the other parties including the PPP formed a coalition government in the Centre and later became the single largest party in the lower house of the parliament following the allocation of the reserved seats.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal in a meeting with key stakeholders to review Federal Public-Private Partnership Policy.

ECP reappoints Omar as secretary for two-year term

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday reappointed Omar Hamid Khan as its secretary for the period of two years.

A notification issued here said that Omar Hamid Khan, a retired BS-22 officer of the Secretariat Group, had been reemployed as Secretary for a two-year term in the public interest, in accordance with Rules 8 & 11 of the Election Commission (Officers and Servants) Rules, 1989. The development comes after the incumbent secretary, Asif Hussain, who was appointed in January of this year, resigned due to health issues. The notification regarding Hussain's resignation stated that the officer tendered the resignation 'on account of poor health condition.'

Ahsan spearheads strategic review of Federal PPP Policy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday chaired a meeting at the Planning Commission to review the Federal Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Policy.

The meeting was attended among others by Minister for Petroleum and Water Resources Musadik Malik, Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Professor of Economics & Strategy Dr Nadeem Javaid, Member Social Sector Rafiq Ullah Kakar and CEO of the PPP Authority (P3A) Malik Ahmad Khan besides consultants from the Asian Development Bank, a news release said.

The meeting, aligning with the Prime Minister's directives outlined during the approval of the Federal

PPP Policy 2023-2028, was aimed at a strategic review of the policy's operational framework.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to enhance the implementation mechanism and effectiveness of the PPP policy.

The agenda of the committee meeting focused on identifying areas for improvement within the Federal PPP Policy 2023-2028 and formulating strategies to enhance its implementation mechanism.

The meeting underscored the government's dedication to updating the PPP policy to reflect contemporary economic needs and demands, it said adding "The collective insights from this consultation are set to guide policy going forward, with an aim at enhancing the effectiveness in future PPP projects."



KARACHI: Pakistan Navy and US Navy Officers and Troops in a group photo on board PN Ship during Exercise Inspired Union 2024.

Pak-US Navies conduct bilateral exercise 'Inspired Union 2024'

KARACHI (INP): The bilateral exercise of Pakistan and US Navies 'Inspired Union 2024' was held at Karachi with an aim to enhance relations and interoperability between PN and USN through mutual exchange of professional experience and expertise in maritime domain.

The three-day exercise was participated by officers and personnel of United States Marine

Corps, Coast Guards, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Diving, Legal, Naval Construction Force, Civil Affairs and Medical teams.

Multiple discussions and practical evolutions on professional topics of mutual interest were conducted during the exercise. Commander CTF-52, also called on Commander Pakistan Fleet and Commander Coast.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Punishing evaders

The FBR's decision to block mobile phone connections of more than half a million individuals who did not file federal tax returns for the tax year 2022-2023 indicates that the agency is stepping up its campaign against evaders. The FBR has issued a legally binding Income Tax General Order to mobile companies to disable the SIMs of 450,000 individuals who had earlier filed tax statements but did not do so last year. It has identified the remaining more than 50,000 tax delinquents through third-party data on their expenditures and consumption patterns. The punitive action comes after the tax evaders' failure to respond to notices and repeated reminders. But is this enough to ensure tax compliance? The FBR's action appears to be largely limited to those whose names are already in its database. Many will justifiably ask what is being done to expand the tax base itself. Under the law, any person earning an annual income of Rs600,000 or more, or owning a 100cc car or a house is liable to file tax statements. However, less than 2pc of the population (4.5m persons) had filed their returns last year, down from 5.9m a year earlier. Besides, a very large number of filers do not show taxable income in their statements.

That the FBR has initiated action against non-filers amid reports that only 75 traders have registered themselves under the recently announced Tajir Dost Scheme, a voluntary tax compliance arrangement for retailers, underscores the difficulty in expanding a very narrow tax base. And yet, despite the tax agency's past failure to execute multiple effective initiatives to increase direct taxation to boost the nation's present tax-to-GDP ratio of below 9pc — one of the lowest in South Asia — we must keep our fingers crossed. Indeed, Pakistan's current political leadership is committed to implementing FBR reforms, digitising the tax system to plug leakages and eradicating corruption and massive tax exemptions to powerful business lobbies. The intentions are sound. But the government would need to go much beyond automation and an anti-corruption drive; a paradigm shift is needed to make the tax system equitable to attract private investment and spur economic growth.

In addition to bringing untaxed and undertaxed sectors such as real estate, agriculture, retail, and overseas remittances into the net, the government will have to curtail the number of indirect taxes and significantly reduce high tax rates if it wants to improve compliance. The abysmally low tax revenue as a ratio of the size of the economy is at the heart of one of the worst financial crises being faced by the country for the last two years. This problem cannot be tackled without broadening the tax net, and making the tax administration and regime conducive to investment and growth.

Peace pipe and war

F.S. Aijazuddin

The tripartite Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline project (IPI) should have had a normal maturity, had it not suffered from a genetic defect. Physicians term it a complex disorder, which has mutations in two or more genes inherited from parents.

The IPI project could not have had a simpler geopolitical justification. Iran has proven natural gas reserves of about 1,200 trillion cubic feet, enough to last 162 years. Its needy neighbour Pakistan has natural gas reserves of only 18 tcf, enough for the next 12-15 years. India's offshore reserves of natural gas are to its east (40.6 per cent) and to its west (23.7pc). It made sense for India to look westwards, even if it involved Pakistan as an undependable intermediary.

Economics cried out for such a project. International politics, however, proved the malevolent spirit determined to curse its future.

Initially, in 1995, Iran, Pakistan and India signed an agreement which made Iran responsible for 1,180 kilometres of the IPI pipeline, Pakistan 705 km and India 850 km. The pricing of the product had been agreed at \$4.937 per MBTU, linked to an average Japanese Crude Cocktail price.

The logical solution to ensure continuity of supply was for all three countries to have jointly owned the IPI project, through one corporate entity registered outside the three countries, with legal safeguards in place to prevent any of its members from renegeing on their obligations.

In 2008, however, India signed two major agreements with the US on nuclear energy and military cooperation. As a consequence, the following year, India withdrew from the IPI project.

Since then, the Iranian

ans undeterred have completed their 1,172 km of the truncated pipeline from the South Pars gas field to the Iran-Pakistan border. Pakistan has yet to begin its section. The cost in 2012 was estimated at \$1.8 billion. Its new cost is open to the heavens. A few years later, Pakistan pleaded a weak force majeure when it formally informed Iran that, as long as Tehran is subject to US sanctions, it could not start work on its end of the pipeline.

This year, Pakistan's interim government approved the construction of a token 80 km to Gwadar — a lame attempt to forestall Iran's threat to invoke up to \$18bn of penalties for the delay. Iran has granted Pakistan until September 2024 to complete the remaining 625 km.

At the conclusion of the recent visit by the Iranian president Dr E. Raisi, a joint statement by both governments "reiterated the importance of cooperation in the energy domain, including trade in electricity, power transmission lines and [almost as an afterthought] the IP Gas Pipeline".

Pakistan, meanwhile, is searching for ways to wriggle under the forbidding door of US sanctions. At best, it can hope for a US waiver, which is rare but not impossible. The Pakistan Foreign Office maintains that Pakistan does not need a waiver. The petroleum minister contradicted this by admitting that it is "considering formally contacting the US government to request a waiver of sanctions".

The US has countered Pakistan's Janus stance through Donald Lu, the US assistant secretary of state named in the Imran Khan cipher case. He has testified that Pakistan has not yet applied for a waiver. He added that, even if granted, Pakistan would

find it difficult to secure funding from international donors.

Pakistan is trapped between two options: crippling sanctions or prohibitive penalties, between an American devil and the deep Caspian Sea. What was once touted as a pipeline of peace has been re-engineered into an instrument of war.

The Pakistani public stands confused by the government's unconscionable reticence. No meaningful information is available in the public domain about the present status of the IP project — important, because it promised to provide enough gas to generate up to 5,000 MW (one-fifth of our present thermal capacity).

What will be the final cost of the IP project, and the sources of its funding? (Iran initially had offered a loan of \$500 million.) Also opaque are the IP's achievable completion date, the price at which Iranian gas is to be supplied, safeguards and penalties for non-supply and non-off-take. A gas sales and purchase agreement was signed between Iran and Pakistan in June 2009, and an operations agreement in March 2010. Are they still operative? Factor in the downstream losses in defective transmission and dishonest distribution. In FY2022-23, 10 Discos averaged losses of 16.38pc.

In the mid-1970s, Iranian PM Amir-Abbas Hoveyda visited Islamabad. Passing some flowering roses in the Secretariat garden, his Pakistani hosts invited him to admire them.

He gave them a glance, and dismissed them with the aside: "Yes, it is all a matter of priorities." Had the President Raisi come to Islamabad last week to task us to determine our priorities? — Courtesy Dawn

Journalists in Gaza

Sa'adia Reza

"For nearly three months when I was still inside Gaza, every single day when the night came, I looked at myself and I said, 'I survived this day'." Palestinian journalist Youmna Elsid's words reflect what every journalist in the Gaza Strip experiences while reporting from the war-torn enclave.

In a span of around 200 days since Israel launched the attack on Gaza, at least 100 journalists have lost their lives, as per the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The committee notes that as of April 20, 16 journalists were reported injured, four were reported missing, and 25 were reported arrested. In other words, on average one journalist, if not more, has been killed every two days since war broke out on Oct 7 last year.

Given the unprecedented number, Gaza has become the most dangerous place for media workers and journalists; the deadliest war for reporters since CPJ started gathering data in 1992.

The Israeli restriction on international media in Gaza has forced civilians including journalists, content creators, freelancers and influencers to document the horrific atrocities of the war. No age has been young enough to report on the genocide, as proved by nine-year-old Lama Abu Jamous and 17-year-old Abboud who bravely continue to tell the world about the suffering of their people. These and many others have been the storytellers as tragedies in the Strip continue to unfold. More importantly, the content coming out of Gaza has served as a massive tool to counter the soft and biased narrative adopted by many Western media organisations.

However, in stark

contrast with other war zones, journalists in Gaza have zero protection against any casualties while they cover the genocide in high-risk zones in the face of disrupted communication, war-related trauma and hunger and starvation, and more importantly, the constant danger to their lives and families.

Palestinian journalists have time and again highlighted the vulnerability of media workers in Gaza, citing several incidents where they, along with their families, have been targeted. These include Al Jazeera's Wael al-Dahdouh's family which was killed in two air strikes, while he himself was critically injured. Several family members of Ali Jadallah, photojournalist at Turkish Anadolu Agency, were also killed when Israeli strikes hit their home early in the war.

But perhaps one of the most shocking examples of the plight of Gaza journalists emerged on Dec 15 last year, when Al Jazeera's cameraman Samer Abudaqa was killed in an Israeli drone strike while covering a bombing in Khan Younis. According to reports, Abudaqa bled to death over five hours, while he was denied emergency treatment as Israeli forces did not permit ambulances and rescue workers to reach him in time.

Reporting on war is never easy. But for those in Gaza, the trauma of human suffering, bloodshed, sheer mental exhaustion, and the fear that the next fatality they report could potentially be a loved one are inscapable. Moreover, the struggle to cover the war while, at the same time, trying to meet basic everyday needs — given the extremely limited supply of humanitarian aid — is a reality that's hard to imagine. Like all civilians in the Strip, journalists too have had

to battle against hunger, thirst, mental and physical pain, and, often times, forced to make a choice between putting down the microphone or camera and focusing on finding a means to survive.

Understandably, a few took off their press vest for good when the need for safety and scavenging for food and other necessities took precedence over the day-to-day reportage. Some, like photojournalist Motaz Azaiza, evacuated to try to campaign for a ceasefire and show the world the realities of the war from outside the Strip.

These are people who have witnessed first-hand the heart-breaking scenes of babies being killed, of decomposed bodies unearthed in hospital compounds, of houses crumbling under air strikes. They have heard the wails of grieving mothers, of people pleading to be rescued from under the rubble, the screams of children losing their limbs without anaesthesia. These are not the experiences that one can erase from one's memory easily, and the toll it took on their mental health is both profound and lasting.

The world owes these men, women and children whose powerful narrative and selfless desire to expose the truth has woken us to the situation in Gaza and let to global pro-Palestine protests. This is not the war they chose to report on, and certainly this is not the life they imagined for themselves. Yet, their motivation and determination to document a war that seems to have no end, is inspiring. To quote someone on social media, "not all heroes wear capes; some also come in press vests". — Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

WWF-Pakistan rolls out regenerative agriculture practices initiative

ISLAMABAD (APP): WWF-Pakistan, with catalytic funding from Laudes Foundation, launched the Regenerative Production Landscape Collaborative (RPLC) Pakistan to drive new business models and farming practices that holistically tackle current challenges faced by smallholder farmers and address the environmental issues resulting from unsustainable practices.

Supported by textile and food brands, RPLC Pakistan will be implemented in the Jhang and Sahiwal districts of Punjab and Barkhan and Lasbela districts of Balochistan. The initiative offers a demonstrable approach to landscapes that has already seen success in India, Brazil and Tanzania.

Speaking at the launch event, Director General, WWF-Pakistan, Hammad Naqi Khan shared that the initiative addresses the long-term challenges of unsustainable agricultural practices in Pakistan. Highlighting that agriculture faced major issues of excessive use of water, chemicals and pesticides impacting the crop and soil productivity, which was further aggravated by climate change, he noted that this has led to increasing

vulnerabilities of local communities and smallholder farmers. "To address these challenges, this initiative will enhance collaborative actions and develop innovative strategies which help farmers to develop climate resilience and improve the agricultural yield", he added. Addressing the workshop virtually, Head of the Fashion Programme at Laudes Foundation, Anita Chester said, "Laudes Foundation is incredibly pleased to see the RPLC launch in Pakistan supporting the local ecosystem towards sustainable and regenerative practices.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum, Musadik Masood Malik, along with Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, Federal Minister for Energy, Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Laghari, Federal Minister for Industry and Food Security, Rana Tanveer Hussain and Federal Minister for Privatisation and Board of Investment (BOI), Abdul Aleem Khan, convened a crucial Steering Committee meeting to assess preparations for the upcoming visit of Saudi Business Delegates.



ISLAMABAD: Google team calls on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

Enhancing digital payment ratio urged as 90% retail trade undocumented

ISLAMABAD (INP): The retailers expressing concern over the slow progress in documenting the retail trade due to stagnation of both the FBR-POS integration of tier-1 businesses and Tajir Dost drive to register small traders, have said that this slow progress is primarily due to lack of sustained consultation with the private sector, inconsistent policies and increasingly complex procedures. So, a clear five-year roadmap is the need of the hour instead of ad-hoc measures,

they added. They said that the share of digital payments can be gradually brought up to 50% of the retail trade's contribution to the annual GDP, estimated to be upwards of Rs12 trillion. Currently, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign reserves held by the central bank increased by \$ 25 million to \$ 8,006 million during the week under review. Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were recorded \$ 5,310 million, it added.

Pakistan's total liquid foreign reserves reach \$ 13.316 billion

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan reached US\$ 13,316 million while foreign reserves held by State Bank of Pakistan stood at \$ 8,006 million in the week ended on April 26, 2024. The SBP, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign reserves held by the central bank increased by \$ 25 million to \$ 8,006 million during the week under review. Meanwhile, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were recorded \$ 5,310 million, it added.

Government accelerating its transformation target towards digital economy: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja Thursday said that the government is trying to realize the opportunities presented by digital technologies in creating new jobs, expanding to new markets, driving innovation, and developing new economic sectors.

Talking to a Private news channel, she said that the present government is accelerating its transformation targets to the digital economy by focusing on empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and tech startups.

Zong 4G prioritizes users' well being with new SehatYab Partnership

ISLAMABAD (APP): Zong 4G Pakistan's leading mobile network operator, announced a groundbreaking partnership with SehatYab, a leading tele-health platform. This collaboration prioritizes user well-being by offering a comprehensive suite of mental health services accessible through the Zong 4G network said news release. SehatYab offers comprehensive online

mental health services in Pakistan for individuals and corporates, providing confidential consultations with qualified and the best psychiatrists, psychologists, and trainers. The Zong 4G and SehatYab partnership provides Zong 4G users with several valuable resources to support their mental health such as Free Online Self-Assessment Tests.

Rana Tanveer says: Govt to equip agri-sector with modern technology

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for National Food Security, Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain Thursday expressed the firm commitment of the government for providing all-possible resources to local farmers in order to boost per-care yield of all major and minor crops.

During his visit to National Agriculture Research Center (NARC), the minister said that agriculture is the backbone of the national economy, adding that the welfare of farmers and agricultural development were on the top priority of the current government.

The improving crop yield without quality seed supply is difficult, he said adding that the research field holds importance in every aspect of life. He said that agriculture sector will be equipped with research and modern technology and government will provide farmers with all-possible resources. Ensuring healthy, non-toxic fertilizers for the agricultural revolution through modern technology is a priority, he said adding that the federal and provincial governments, along with all institutions including research centers, must play their role in development of agriculture sector.

Rupee gains 01 pasia against US dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Rupee on Thursday gained 01 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 278.30 against the previous day's closing of Rs 278.31.

Asian Development Bank delegation visits FBR

ISLAMABAD (APP): Asian Development Bank (ADB) mission on Thursday visited Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and met the senior officials of the board who have been assisting in the implementation of the Domestic Resource Mobilization Program (DRM).

The mission was led by Senior Director ADB Tariq Niazi and included Senior Public Sector Management Specialist Laisasia Tora, Sana Masood and Farzana Noshab economist were also presented in the meeting, said a press release issued by FBR. The mission's objectives included discussion on structural and policy reforms under the DRM Program funded by the bank and showed satisfaction on the successful rolling down of the DRM Program and noted that significant achievements were made in the Sub-Program I of the DRM.

Directs Secretary to take early action CM GB takes notice of rising cases of flu, pneumonia, fever

GILGIT (APP): Chief Minister (CM) Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan has taken notice of the rising cases of flu, pneumonia, and fever in the region and directed the Provincial Secretary Health to take immediate action to contain the spread of these seasonal diseases.

The CM has been informed that a large number of cases of flu, pneumonia, and fever have been reported in various parts of the region, particularly in Gilgit and Diamer districts. The CM has directed the Health Secretary to take all necessary measures to control the spread of these

diseases and ensure that affected patients receive proper medical treatment.

The health secretary, in a briefing to the chief minister, informed that a total of 1321 patients have been treated for flu, pneumonia, and fever so far, while 2100 patients have been fully treated for pneumonia in various hospitals across the region. The secretary further informed that the department has taken necessary measures to control the spread of these diseases, including vaccination drives and awareness campaigns.

However, the CM has expressed concern over

reports of measles cases in some areas, particularly among children who have not been vaccinated. The CM has directed the health secretary to ensure that all children between the ages of six months and five years are vaccinated against measles and to launch an awareness campaign to educate parents about the importance of vaccination.

The CM has also directed the health secretary to ensure that all necessary medicines and injections are available in hospitals to treat patients suffering from pneumonia and other seasonal diseases.



GILGIT: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Haji Gulbar Khan giving away cheque of Entry Fees community share of the Khunjab National Park to the community representative.

Punjab's efforts against polio lauded

LAHORE (APP): An 18-member delegation of the Polio Oversight Board called on Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman at the Civil Secretariat on Thursday.

The delegates led by Polio Oversight Board head Christopher Elias appreciated the Punjab government's measures against the polio and reiterated to continue collective efforts until the complete eradication of the virus.

The Chief Secretary said that eradication of polio was a national

cause and Punjab would continue to play its role to achieve this goal.

He said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Punjab, the provincial government was trying to provide the best healthcare facilities across the province, adding that along with the anti-polio campaign, the routine immunization program was also being improved. The Chief Secretary thanked the international partners for providing support for polio eradication.

CM's aide says: Peshawar to be made drug free

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Advisor to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Zakat and Ushar, Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Mashal Azam Yousafzai said here Thursday that Peshawar would be made drug-free and measures would be taken to prevent begging and drug addiction. She said this while presiding over a meeting that was also attended by Commissioner Peshawar.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister, Ali Amin Gandapur administers oath of newly elected Cabinet and Governing Body of Peshawar Press Club (PPC) during oath taking ceremony held at PPC in Peshawar.

JUI-F rejects political victimization of govt employees in Tank

Independent Report
TANK (APP): Former MPA Mehmood Ahmad Khan Bettani on Thursday blamed PTI Tank's selected representatives for initiating retaliatory actions against government employees, burying their rights, policy in the process. He claimed that workers and supporters of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) were never intimidated by such tactics, asserting that transfers and postings were part of the job, whether in Chitral, Peshawar, or even outside

the country. He made these remarks in a statement, refuting the notion that JUI, during its tenure, ever resorted to vindictive measures.

He emphasized that no party, including PTI, should view political transfers as retribution. He further expressed the confidence that such actions would only strengthen JUI's resolve, stating that their workers would not retreat.

Mehmood Bettani vowed to resist such political transfer and postings

Illegal appointments: Court delays indictment of Parvez, others

Independent Report
LAHORE (APP): An anti-corruption court on Thursday once again delayed the indictment of former chief minister Punjab, Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, and others in the Punjab Assembly illegal appointments case. The court delayed the indictment due to the absence of Chaudhry Parvez Elahi. The Adiala jail officials did not produce the former chief minister before the court due to medical reasons. They submitted a medical report stating that Elahi received injuries after falling in the jail washroom, and doctors advised him rest.

Minister assures addressing local govt's demands

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Minister for Local Government, Arshad Ayub Khan, met with members of the Village Council, Neighborhood Council and Tehsil Mayors on Thursday to discuss their demands and issues.

On the assurance of the provincial minister to resolve their issues, the Village Council, Neighborhood Council and Tehsil chairmen have postponed their protest for a conditional two weeks. During the meeting, the presented their demands, urging for amendments in business rules and the revival of their funds to manage office and daily affairs.

The minister stated

that Chief Minister Ali Amin Ghadapur wanted their issues resolved, hence they were in negotiations. He mentioned that the government would ask the Finance Department to ensure equal distribution of funds among village and neighborhood councils in all districts. He assured that operational and developmental funds would be provided in the budget this time.

The minister mentioned that executive summaries had been sent to the Cabinet regarding development grants, and amendments would be made in the Rules of Business in consultation with local government members.



LAHORE: Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Leader, Malik Ahmad Khan Bhachar talking to media persons outside Punjab Assembly in Lahore.

BINP-A golden window of opportunity for unemployed graduates

Independent Report
PESHAWAR (APP): The Prime Minister's Bilkaitir Naujawan Internship Programme (BINP) 2024 offers a monthly stipend of up to Rs.40,000 along with professional training lasting from six months to one year in a public sector entity to 60,000 unemployed graduates and postgraduate students.

This initiative has brought immense joy to the deserving recipients, who view it as a great blessing.

"Rs30,000 to Rs40,000 per month stipend plus technical training for six months to one year to an unemployed graduate or diploma-holder means a lot for internees

besides providing them launching pad to excel in practical life", Ehtisham Qaiser, 24, who clinched BS 4 years degree in Urdu Literature told APP while filing the BINP form in the University of Peshawar campus.

"Why should I miss such a great opportunity when the federal government is showering its blessing on me", said the motivated graduate with a smile on his face when asked.

"I think it is a great opportunity for fresh-graduate and postgraduate students of Pakistan including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who will not only get first-hand

experience by remaining among the top professionals in various public sector organizations but will also financially support their families in the wake of price hike," said the Nowshera born citizen who clinched BS Urdu literature degree with distinction from Govt College Peshawar.

"Most of my classmates have applied for availing the great opportunity and he came to the university campus to submit my online application today," he said.

Like Ehtisham, a large number of eligible students qualified recently from universities and colleges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

including UET Peshawar, Agriculture University, Govt Colleges, Islamiya College Peshawar and the University of Peshawar have welcomed the Prime Minister Internship program and started filling applications forms online. The unique paid internship program would help 60,000 graduates of Pakistan in the transformation of their professional careers.

People from every walk of life have appreciated the landmark program and termed it a milestone of injecting fresh blood as internees that would certainly create positive effects on the overall performance of the

organization and polish the talent of selected internees.

"I welcome the PM BINP as it would boost up the careers of hundreds of thousands of educated youth," said Professor Dr Naveed Farooq of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

He stressed that the students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Mardans take full advantage of the golden opportunity and apply it online. He said the paid internship would not only groom the graduate and postgraduate students in shaping their careers but would also help him to move into a knowledge-driven society.

International News

US can't support Rafah assault, Blinken tells Israel

Monitoring Desk
ASHDOD: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he has still not seen a plan for Israel's planned offensive on the southern Gaza city of Rafah that would protect civilians, repeating that Washington could not support such an assault.

Blinken and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met in Jerusalem for two-and-a-half hours, after which Israel repeated that the Rafah operation would go ahead despite the US position and a stark UN warning that it would lead to "tragedy".

"We cannot, will not support a major military operation in Rafah absent an effective plan to make sure that civilians are not harmed and no, we've not seen such a plan," Blinken told reporters.

"There are other ways, and in our judgment better ways, of deal-

ing with the ... ongoing challenge of Hamas that does not require a major military operation in Rafah," he said, adding that it was the subject of ongoing talks with Israeli officials.

US Democrats press Biden to prevent Israeli assault on Rafah

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's administration faced renewed pressure from his fellow Democrats to influence Israel not to launch a full-scale invasion of Rafah, the city where almost half of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million people have taken refuge.

Fifty-seven of the 212 Democrats in the House of Representatives signed a letter calling on the administration to take every possible measure to dissuade Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's government from an all-out assault on the city near the Egyptian border. "We urge you to invoke existing law and policy to immediately withhold certain offensive military aid to the Israeli government, including aid sourced from legislation already signed into law, in order to preempt a full-scale assault on Rafah," said the letter, dated Wednesday.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the letter, which was led by Representatives Pramila Jayapal and Madeleine Dean.

Biden's support for Israel in its war against Hamas has emerged as a significant political liability for the president, particularly among young Democrats.



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro delivers a speech during a rally in Bogota.

Colombia cuts diplomatic ties with Israel

Monitoring Desk
BOGOTA: Colombian President Gustavo Petro said his country will sever diplomatic ties with Israel, whose leader he described as "genocidal" over its aggression in Gaza.

"Tomorrow (Thursday) diplomatic relations with the state of Israel will be severed... for having a genocidal president," Petro told a May Day rally in Bogota, referring to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Petro has taken a critical stance on the Gaza assault. In October, just days after the start of the crisis, Israel said it was "halting security exports" to Colombia after Petro accused Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant of using language about the people of Gaza similar to what the "Nazis said of the Jews."

Israel, one of the main providers of arms to

Colombia's military, then said it was "halting security exports" to the South American country as the diplomatic feud escalated.

Bogota subsequently demanded Israel's envoy leave the South American country.

Petro, Colombia's first leftist president, has also asserted that "democratic peoples cannot allow Nazism to reestablish itself in international politics." In February, he suspended Israeli weapons purchases after dozens of people died in a scramble for food aid in the war-torn Palestinian territory — an event he said was "called genocide and recalls the Holocaust."

Colombia's armed forces, engaged in a decades-long conflict with leftist guerrillas, rightwing paramilitaries and drug cartels, use Israeli-made weapons and aircraft.



A Palestinian woman walks past the ruins of a house destroyed during Israel's military offensive in Gaza City.

Death toll from south China road collapse rises to 48

Monitoring Desk
GUANGDONG: The death toll from a highway collapse in southern China's Guangdong province has risen to 48 as rescue work continues, state media said on Thursday.

Heavy rains caused a stretch of road from Meizhou city towards Dabu county to cave in at around 2:10am local time on Wednesday, according to state news agency Xinhua.

Vehicles careened into the nearly 18-metre-long gash in the tarmac and plummeted down the steep slope below. Guangdong, a densely populated industrial powerhouse, has been hit by a string of disasters attributed to extreme weather events in recent weeks.

The storms have been much heavier than expected this time of year and have been linked to climate change.

Khamenei opposes Arab-Israel ties

Monitoring Desk
TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday efforts underway to forge a normalisation of ties between Israel and Arab countries will not resolve the crisis in the Middle East.

"Some people think that by forcing neighbouring countries to normalise their ties (with Israel) the problem will be solved," said Khamenei.

"They are wrong," Khamenei's remarks came after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington is nearly ready with a security package to offer Saudi Arabia if it normalises relations with Israel.

Saudi Arabia had been in talks over a potential normalisation with Israel but they were paused when the Gaza crisis broke out. Regional tensions have soared since the start of the Israeli aggression, drawing in Iran-backed groups in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen.

The Islamic republic backs Hamas, but has denied any direct involvement in the group's attack on arch-foe Israel.

Iran does not recognise Israel and has made support for the Palestinian cause a centrepiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

UK to vote in local elections as Tories brace for big losses

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Millions of voters in England and Wales will cast their ballots on Thursday in an array of local elections that will be the last big test before a UK general election that all indicators show will see the Conservative Party ousted from power after 14 years.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will hope he can point to successes, notably in a couple of key mayoral races, to douse talk that the Conservative Party will change leader again before the United Kingdom's main election, which could take place as soon as next month.

More debris in Gaza than Ukraine, says UN

Monitoring Desk
GENEVA: Gaza stands filled with more debris and rubble than Ukraine, the UN stated on Wednesday. The mammoth task of clearing it has been made all the more costly and dangerous in the face of the sheer amount of asbestos and unexploded ordnance.

Six months into the Israeli aggression, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has estimated the amount of debris in the Gaza Strip, at 37 million tonnes in mid-April, or 300 kilogrammes per square metre.

"Gaza has more rubble than Ukraine, and to put that in perspective, the Ukrainian front line is 600 miles (nearly 1,000 kilometres) long, and Gaza is 25 miles (40 km) long," said the head of the UNMAS programme in the Palestinian territories, Mungo Birch.

However, the

UNMAS says the volume of rubble is not the only problem.

"This rubble is likely heavily contaminated with UXO (unexploded ordnance) but its clearance will be further complicated by other hazards in the rubble" Birch told journalists in Geneva.

"There's estimated to be over 800,000 tonnes of asbestos, for instance, alone in the Gaza rubble." The carcinogenic mineral used in construction requires special precautions when handling.

It is generally estimated that 10 to 15 per cent of the munitions fired do not explode on impact and therefore manifest a lasting danger for civilian populations.

Birch stated he is optimistic that the UNMAS, which works to mitigate the threats posed by all types of explosive ordnance, will become the coordinating body for mine action in Gaza.

Biden blames China, Japan and India's economic woes on 'xenophobia'

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that "xenophobia" from China to Japan and India was hobbling their growth, as he argued that migration has been good for the US economy.

"One of the reasons why our economy's growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants," Biden said at a Washington fundraising event for his 2024 re-election campaign and marking the start of Asian American, Native

Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

"Why is China stalling so badly economically, why is Japan having trouble, why is Russia, why is India, because they're xenophobic. They don't want immigrants. Immigrants are what makes us strong."

The International Monetary Fund forecast last month that each country would see its growth decelerate in 2024 from the year prior, ranging from 0.9 per cent in highly developed Japan to 6.8pc in emerging India.

More than 120,000 take part in May Day protests across France, dozens arrested

Monitoring Desk
PARIS: French police said they arrested 45 people in Paris and that 12 officers had been injured during traditional May Day protests, though the demonstrations were far more subdued than last year. Riot police used tear gas and batons to disperse some of the demonstrators.

Police put the number of protesters in the French capital at about 18,000, though the hardest-hit CGT union put the figure at around 50,000.

PM for enhancing bilateral cooperation with Azerbaijan in various areas

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday stressed the need to work together with Azerbaijan to enhance trade and investment, energy cooperation, defence, connectivity, education and cultural exchanges, and people-to-people contacts.

The prime minister said that he intended to send a high level ministerial delegation to Baku for enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Pakistan, he said, was also prepared to convene the Pakistan-Azerbaijan Joint Commission meeting at an early date where both sides could discuss matters related to cooperation in various fields.

The prime minister was talking to Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov who called

on him. The ambassador briefed the prime minister on the current state of bilateral relations, highlighting the recent inauguration of flights between Baku and Karachi, in addition to the flights already operating between Baku and Islamabad as well as Baku and Lahore. He said that the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan was also expected to visit Pakistan later this month. He also briefed the prime minister on various institutional mechanisms and their upcoming meetings later this year.

While admiring the beauty of the city of Baku, Prime Minister Shehbaz said that he wanted to replicate the beautification of Baku in Islamabad and suggested that both cities could explore enhanced cooperation through sister city agreement

among them. He emphasized that Pakistan attached great importance to Azerbaijan as the two countries enjoyed excellent brotherly relations. He conveyed his greetings for President Ilham Aliyev and fondly recalled their telephonic conversation on Eidul Fitr.

He also recalled his interactions with the leadership of Azerbaijan during his visit to Baku in June 2023 and reiterated his invitation to President Aliyev to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his earliest convenience. The prime minister congratulated Azerbaijan on being selected as the host city for the COP 29 Summit meeting that would be held in November 2024 and said he looked forward to receiving the Minister of Ecology of Azerbaijan next week.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, Australian High Commissioner in Pakistan Neil Hawkins and his wife cutting the cake on Australia Day in Spring during a vibrant reception, to mark the enduring ties between Australia and Pakistan at Australian High Commission in Federal Capital.

Planning Minister directs NHA to complete infrastructure projects without any delay

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister of Planning Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal here on Thursday directed the National Highway Authority (NHA) to expedite construction work on the existing projects related to the infrastructure while removing the bottlenecks without any delay.

He made these remarks, while chairing a meeting, in which he reviewed the progress of the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) and portfolio of NHA.

According to press statement issued by the ministry, the meeting was attended by the Secretary Ministry of Communication, Secretary Planning Ministry, Chairman

NHA and other relevant stakeholders. During the meeting, the minister was given a detailed briefing over PSDP (2024-25) and the existing portfolio of NHA. The minister directed the relevant stakeholders to remove the obstacles in the construction work on existing projects. Meanwhile, the minister in another meeting reviewed the Federal Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Policy.

The meeting was attended by the Minister of Petroleum & Water Resources, Musadik Malik; Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh; Professor of Economics & Strategy, Dr. Nadeem Javid; Member Social Sector, Raffi Ullah Kakar; CEO of the Public Private Partnership Authority (P3A), Malik Ahmad Khan; and consultants from the Asian Development Bank.

The meeting, aligning with the Prime Minister's directives outlined during the approval of the Federal PPP Policy 2023-2028, aimed at a strategic review of the policy's operational framework. This initiative is part of a broader effort to enhance the implementation mechanism and effectiveness of the PPP policy. The agenda of the Committee meeting was focused on identifying areas for improvement within the Federal PPP Policy 2023-2028 and formulating strategies to enhance its implementation mechanism.



ISLAMABAD: Delegation of Abacus Consulting calls on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

Maryam determined to provide safe environment for US investment

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif said that she will provide a safe environment for United States' investment in Punjab.

US Ambassador Donald Bloom met Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, on this occasion Bloom congratulated her on being elected as the first woman Chief Minister of Punjab. The American Ambassador appreciated the efforts of the Chief Minister Punjab for speedy implementation of people-friendly projects.

He stated: "Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's special interest in public welfare projects is commendable. America wants to work more with the Punjab government for poverty alleviation and economic development".

On this occasion, the Punjab Chief Minister added that the economic relations between US and Pakistan span decades. They will provide a safe environment for the US for investment in Punjab, and will welcome America's cooperation in the fields of agriculture, industry, and IT.

Maryam Nawaz also stated that there is potential for investment in Punjab, only a stable government can bring Pakistan out of the economic crisis, and the government's economic policies are reducing inflation.

The Chief Minister of Punjab further said that a comprehensive strategy has been formulated to provide quality education, health facilities and low-cost roti to the people.

Anti-polio drive continues in ICT: 60% target achieved till 3rd day

ISLAMABAD (APP): A five-day anti-polio drive continued in the Federal Capital and on the third day of the drive, health officials reported a significant progress, reaching 60.07% of their goal.

A total of 461,125 children in the city have been immunized against the crippling disease, with 290,841 of them receiving the vaccine during the current campaign.

To ensure widespread coverage, special polio teams are working at schools and public places, as well as going door-to-door to administer anti-polio drops.

WSSC keeps Swat clean amid rainfall

By Haroon Siraj
SWAT: WSSC Swat has successfully provided a people-friendly environment to local citizens by promptly cleaning streams and streets during the recent rainfall. Despite the heavy rain and hailstorm, WSSC officials and workers played an excellent role in maintaining a clean environment.

According to details, General Manager (GM) Operation WSSC, Zeeshan Pervez, devised an effective strategy in anticipation of the forecast. The WSSC operation continued in various areas of the city during the rainfall, focusing on street and stream cleaning, and collecting all dirt to keep the city clean.

During the operation, with the help of heavy machinery, WSSC officials lifted all dirt from the main roads, enabling traffic flow and maintaining the city's beauty even during the recent spell of rains. Local citizens appreciated the efforts of WSSC officials and appealed to the district administration and city local government to reward the department officials with certificates and cash rewards.

PTA conducts successful raid in Khairpur against Illegal SIM issuance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Zonal Office Lahore, in collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle, Thursday conducted a successful raid against franchisee of a mobile phone company in Khairpur Tame Wali, Distt Bahawalpur against Illegal SIM Issuance.

The franchisee was found to be involved in the illegal issuance of SIMs that were also found to be used in grey trafficking and fraudulent activities, said a news release issued here.

During the raid, 470 suspicious active SIM cards, nine BVS devices, one BISP device, a laptop containing approximately 4000 fingerprints that were being used to activate the SIMs illegally, were seized.

Additionally, one individual was apprehended by the FIA team, against whom FIR has been registered.

The FIA is actively pursuing further investigation into the matter.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Portugal Frederico Silva visiting an Exhibition of Fine Art and Exquisite Crafts organized jointly by Lok Virsa and Nomad at Art Gallery of Lok Virsa in the Federal Capital.

IHC reserves verdict in plea seeking Bushra Bibi's shifting to Adiala Jail

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday reserved its verdict in a petition seeking the shifting of former first lady Bushra Bibi from Banigala to Adiala Jail Rawalpindi.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb reserved the verdict after hearing arguments from the respondents.

At the outset of the hearing, petitioner's lawyer Usman Riaz Gul informed the court that his client was sentenced in toshakhana reference and irregular 'nikah' case. The chief commissioner Islamabad declared the Banigala residence of Bushra Bibi as sub-jail under the Prison Act and she was shifted there.

The lawyer said that the chief commissioner's notification was not issued on the recommendations of Superintendent Adiala Jail.

Neither the provincial government nor the Inspector General Prisons issued such instructions, he said.

He adopted the stance that the notification of the chief commissioner regarding declaring Banigala house as sub-jail was illegal and prayed the court to set it aside. He also argued that it was the provision of the trial court to decide the place for an accused's sentence.

Justice Miangul Hassan remarked that 141 women arrived in Adiala Jail after Bushra Bibi and whether they were also shifted to their homes.

The court said that how the residence of a prisoner could be declared as sub-jail without his/her consent.

The state counsel adopted the stance that there was a threat to the life

Detection teams imposed Rs 17.61m fine on power pilferers: IESCO

ISLAMABAD (APP): Detection teams of Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has imposed Rs 17.61 million fine on power pilferers in all six circles of the company during the ongoing anti power theft and recovery drive launched on the directives of the government and minister for power division.

IESCO chief Dr Muhammad Amjad Khan said that the IESCO teams with the collaboration of FIA and police were taking all measures to eliminate the menace of power theft.

Sharing the details, Dr Amjad that IESCO detection teams apprehended 227 electricity thieves who were using direct power supply during April. Similarly, meters of 19 consumers were found tampered, he said. The teams charged 353,893 units besides imposing fine of Rs 17.61 million imposed on relevant customers. Some 230 first information reports (FIRs) have also been registered and police arrested 85 power pilferers.

U Bank inks MoU with National Science and Technology Park

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant stride towards fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Pakistan, the National Science and Technology Park (NSTP) at National University of Science and Technology and U Microfinance Bank Ltd (U Bank) have reached an understanding to collaborate for NSTP's flagship programmes, including Hatch8 Incubation Programme and Rising Stars Startup Competition.

Engr Javed Mahmood Bukhari, Rector NUST, and Mohamed Essa Al Taheri, President and CEO U Bank, signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in a recent ceremony.

President and CEO U Bank apprised the Rector of various innovative fin-

Bilawal extends solidarity to journalists, media professionals on World Press Freedom Day

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has extended sincere solidarity to journalists and media professionals worldwide on World Press Freedom Day.

Emphasizing the paramount importance of press freedom, he reaffirmed his party's staunch support for the invaluable role of a free and independent press in fostering democracy.

According to a press release by the Media Cell Bilawal House, he underscored that press freedom is not merely a cornerstone of democracy, but also vital for nurturing transparency, accountability, and the proliferation of diverse ideas within society. He urged that safeguarding and upholding this fundamental right should be the responsibility of every democratic government and

party. Bilawal Bhutto said that historically, the press in Pakistan has served as a watchdog, uncovering injustices, exposing corruption, and amplifying the voices of the marginalized.

Expressing concern over challenges such as censorship, fake news, and violence faced by journalists, he urged media organizations to uphold journalistic integrity, impartiality, and professionalism in their reporting. He reiterated the party's unwavering support for press freedom, grounded in democracy and liberty principles.

He underscored the 1973 Constitution's guarantee of freedom of expression, including press freedom, a legacy of Quaid-e-Azam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. "Under his leadership, reforms liberalized media policies, fostering greater independence," he noted.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Ulema Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi addresses press conference.

CDA accelerates efforts to address water shortage ahead of summer

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Water Management Wing of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has intensified its efforts on several projects to mitigate water shortages in the federal capital before the onset of the summer season.

"The authority has instructed the relevant departments to expedite all repair and maintenance work, addressing issues such as leakages and replacing old and rotted pipes at the Simly Water Filtration Plant and Main Distribution Line," an official told APP.

He said that timely repairs and maintenance by the Water Supply Wing had not only saved eight lakh gallons of water per day but also improved water pressure in the pipelines. Similarly, addressing complaints related to leakages from old and deteriorated pipes in water supply lines across different sectors of the federal capital would enhance water availability for the residents, he said.

Turkmenistan to expand science and education cooperation with CUI

ISLAMABAD (Online): The ambassador of Turkmenistan and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps to Pakistan, Atadjan Movlamov in a meeting with the Rector, COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) Prof. Dr. Sajid Qamar held here called for expanding cooperation in science and education sector.

The ambassador was accompanied by the Third Secretary, Mr. Eldar Permanov.

Prof. Qamar warmly received the envoy, with the formal meeting attended by CUI's Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration, Prof. Dr. Saqib Gulzar along with Head of the International Office, Dr. Hammad Omer.

IGP Islamabad holds meeting with CIA senior officers

ISLAMABAD: According to details, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi held a meeting with CIA officers at the Central Police Office (CPO), a public



relations officer said. He said that, he reviewed the performance of CIA officers on assigned tasks.

He issued directives to strengthen crackdowns on criminal elements.

He emphasized on accelerating actions against car and motorcycle thefts and other crimes in an organized manner, with eliminating crimes being our top priority from the federal capital.

NH&MP starts weekly road safety awareness campaign

ISLAMABAD (INP): National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) on Thursday started a special weekly road safety awareness campaign on the directions of Inspector General (NH&MP) Salman Chaudhry.

The campaign has been carried out in all operational zones of Motorway Police to create awareness about traffic rules and road safety among the general public for safe travel on National Highways, said a press release issued here.

Additional IsG and DIsG are monitoring the road safety campaign. In the first phase of this campaign, the officers briefed 350,000 commuters travelling without fastening the seat belts and backlights.

The commuters were thoroughly sensitized about the importance and benefits of seat belts and backlights. Legal action was taken against 127,000 vehicles violating these traffic rules.

During the weekly campaign, a fine of over 111 million rupees was imposed on violating these traffic rules of seat belts and back lights. During the weekly road safety campaign, more than 8,00,000 social media users were benefited by the campaign carried out by the National Highways and Motorway Police social media platforms.

Speaking on the occasion, IG, Salman Chaudhry said that the top priority of the Motorway Police was to save precious lives by creating awareness among the youth about traffic rules.

DG Passport visits regional passport office

ISLAMABAD (Online): On the instructions of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, DG Immigration and Passports Mustafa Jamal Qazi made a surprise visit to the Regional Passport Office Doko Mongtial, Rawalpindi on Thursday. He directed the installation of screens in the veranda of the passport office for the convenience of applicants and fans for those standing in line to deposit fees.

DG Passport expressed satisfaction over the cleanliness arrangements and the activation of all counters, said a press release.

In Court of Abdul Baseer Judge Banking Court Hazara Division Abbottabad

ZTBL Havelian Branch Abbottabad (Plaintiff)
Versus
(1) Muhammad Qurban S/o Taj Muhammad, R/o Bandi Majohan P/o Bodla Tehsil Havelian District Abbottabad (Defendant)

Whereas the ZTBL Havelian Branch Abbottabad has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs. 355752/- etc due against you under Section-9 of Financial institutions (recovery of Finances) Ordinances, 2001 and dated (04-04-2024). You are hereby summoned to obtain leave to defend the suit within 30 days of the publication of this proclamation. In default where of the plaintiff will be entitled to a degree for the said sum and cost of suit cost to funds etc from the date of institution of suit till realization of entire amount.

Next date of hearing is 08-05-2024.

sd/ JUDGE Banking Court Hazara Division, Abbottabad.

In Court of Abdul Baseer Judge Banking Court Hazara Division Abbottabad

ZTBL Balakot Branch Mansehra (Plaintiff)
Versus
(1) Kaleem Ullah Khan S/o Khan Badshah Resident of Jagir Balola P/o Garhi Habib Ullah Balakot District Mansehra (Defendant)

Whereas the ZTBL Balakot Branch Mansehra has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs. 917020/- etc due against you under Section-9 of Financial institutions (recovery of Finances) Ordinances, 2001 and dated (04-04-2024). You are hereby summoned to obtain leave to defend the suit within 30 days of the publication of this proclamation. In default where of the plaintiff will be entitled to a degree for the said sum and cost of suit cost to funds etc from the date of institution of suit till realization of entire amount.

Next date of hearing is 07-05-2024.

sd/ JUDGE Banking Court Hazara Division, Abbottabad.

In Court of Abdul Baseer Judge Banking Court Hazara Division Abbottabad

ZTBL Havelian Branch Abbottabad (Plaintiff)
Versus
(1) Mukhtar Mehmood Jadoon S/o Sher Afzal Khan, resident of Khankheil, Tehsil Havelian District Abbottabad (Defendant)

Whereas the ZTBL Havelian Branch Abbottabad has instituted a suit for the recovery of Rs. 1029285/- etc due against you under Section-9 of Financial institutions (recovery of Finances) Ordinances, 2001 and dated (04-04-2024). You are hereby summoned to obtain leave to defend the suit within 30 days of the publication of this proclamation. In default where of the plaintiff will be entitled to a degree for the said sum and cost of suit cost to funds etc from the date of institution of suit till realization of entire amount.

Next date of hearing is 08-05-2024.

sd/ JUDGE Banking Court Hazara Division, Abbottabad.