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dailyindisb@gmail.com Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah www.dailyindependent.com.pk Gwadar

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NEC approves 13th 5-year National Development Plan, economic growth target for 2024-25

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Economic Council on Monday approved in principle the 13th five-year National Development Plan along with the annual economic growth targets for the financial year 2024-25 and macroeconomic framework for annual planning.

The NEC meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was informed that the key objectives of the plan included development of every part of the country, especially the less developed areas; increase in exports; promotion of the small and medium industry; social protection and poverty alleviation; increase in the capacity building of the work force; and a framework to protect from the impacts of climate change.

The NEC directed the Planning Ministry to ensure the positive role of the provinces in the national economy and to present a comprehensive framework to increase the exports.

The ministry was also directed to include the provinces in the consultation process to achieve the overall economic growth target of the country.

The prime minister emphasized that the government would ensure the best utilization of the existing resource for revival of the economy and prosperity of the people.

He further said that in all important decisions regarding the economy, the Federation would ensure consultation with the provinces and other stakeholders so that as a result of the collective vision for the development of the country, such decisions were made that were positive and involved the consent of all.

"The National Economic Council is the biggest forum for important decisions regarding the country's economy, which will be used for important decisions for the recovery of the economy," he added.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs meeting of the National Economic Council in Islamabad.

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi.

Governor KP praises CM Sarfraz Bugti's endeavours for welfare of people in Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhaw, Faisal Karim Kundi has praised the endeavours of Chief Minister Balochistan for welfare of the people of the province.

The Governor KP was speaking to Chief Minister Balochistan who called on him in Islamabad on Monday.

During the course of meeting, different matters of mutual interests came up for threadbare discussion.

While praising the efforts being made by Chief Minister Balochistan for the public welfare, the Governor KP expressed the hope that the incumbent provincial government would play active role for resolving the public issues while meeting their expectations.

On the occasion, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti invited Governor KP to visit Balochistan. While accepting the invitation of Chief Minister, Governor KP assured that he would visit Balochistan.

The Chief Minister informed the Governor KP that we are working to bring improvement in good governance, health and education sectors in Balochistan.

He said that we are determined to put the province on path of development and prosperity as per the vision of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

No water shortage, provinces given 100% share: Minister told NA

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Water Resources Musadik Malik informed the National Assembly on Monday that there is currently no water shortage in the country, and all provinces are receiving their full water share as per the agreed accord in the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) meeting.

Responding to a calling attention notice regarding a 29 percent water shortage observed in Sindh province during the early Kharif season and the diversion of flow into the Link Canal, he said that the IRSA meeting on May 13 decided that water would be provided to provinces according to their shares.

"At present, there is no shortage of water, and all provinces are receiving 100 percent of their water share as agreed in the accord," he said.

PM Shehbaz greets Modi on swearing in as Indian PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday felicitated Narendra Modi as he took the oath of the office of the Prime Minister of India.

"Felicitations to Narendra Modi on taking oath as the Prime Minister of India," the prime minister wrote on his X timeline.

Modi was sworn in as Indian PM on Sunday for a third term after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance won the general election with 293 seats - a much lower margin than predicted, contrary to the 234 seats won by the opposition.

Govt set to present FY2024-25 budget tomorrow

ISLAMABAD (APP): Amid challenges both at internal and external levels, the incumbent government is all set to present its first budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the Parliament on June 12 (Wednesday).

The budget will be presented by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb.

The budget had been formulated while considering the existing challenges being faced by economy at domestic and international fronts. Hence, mitigating the people's sufferings, transforming the agriculture sector, promoting information technology (IT), and boosting exports would be the main focus of the document, sources said.

In addition to fiscal management, revenue mobilization, measures for economic stabilization and growth, reduction in non-development expenditures, job creation and people-friendly policies for the socioeconomic prosperity of the country would feature in the budget.

Debt of soldiers, citizens to be repaid by relentlessly eliminating terrorism: PM

Attends Namaz-e-Janaza of Shaheed Captain Faraz Ilyas

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday attended Namaz-e-Janaza of Shaheed Captain Faraz Ilyas in Kasur who was martyred in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in District Lakki Marwat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The funeral prayer was attended by Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, IG Police Punjab and a number of senior military officers, civil authorities and residents.

The prime minister also met with the parents of shaheed captain and expressed condolences.

He announced to transform the native village of martyred officer as model village and renamed it as "Faraz Ilyas Shaheed".

He told the parents that the sacrifice of their son would not go in vain and prayed for the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude.

Under the Quranic teachings, a shaheed had an elevated place in Jannah, he said, adding that a large number of Jawans of armed forces had laid down their lives for the motherland.

The prime minister said that the nation was proud of its brave sons and the coward terrorists could not succeed in shaking their strong resolve.

Separately, on X account, the prime minister said that he was deeply saddened by the martyrdom of Pak Army personnel including a captain in a targeted attack in District Lakki Marwat.

"The sacrifices of our brave soldiers and citizens is a debt on us that we must repay by relentlessly eliminating terrorism from our nation. Heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families," he further posted.

Awareness seminar at BUITEMS:

Climate change posing serious threat to Balochistan, says Governor Mandokhail

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan, Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail has noted with concern that the changing climate is posing serious threat to Balochistan.

QUETTA: Provincial Advisor for Environment Naseem ur Rehman Mulakhail presenting a shield to Governor Balochistan Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail during a ceremony held on eve of World Environmental Day

The Governor said that "we have destroyed out environment by cutting trees and contributing to the environmental pollution". "It would take at least 300 years to restore Quetta in its actual condition."

These and similar other views were expressed by the Governor while addressing an awareness seminar on World Environment Day organized by the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS) on Monday.

The Advisor to Chief Minister for Environment, Nasimur Rehman, concerned high ups, environmental experts and others participated in the seminar.

Addressing the seminar, Governor said that while the climate change issue is taking heavy toll of the environment, therefore, there is a dire need to improve the environment and nature.

He said that improving nature and environment is vital for improving environment and prevention of the pollution.

He also stressed the need to make joint efforts for achieving the goal of "Green Balochistan". He urged the non-governmental organizations and other institutions to play their wholehearted part for improving environment.

The Advisor to Chief Minister for Environment and Climate Change and other experts also addressed the seminar.

CM Bugti assures to provide every possible facilities to zayreen during movement in Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has assured that the provincial government would provide every possible steps to the zayreen during their movement in the province.

The Chief Minister also assured that the hardships and issues of zayreen would be resolved on priority basis in the jurisdictions of Balochistan.

The Chief Minister was speaking to a representative delegation of Jafria Zayreen Group organizers who called on him along with the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhaw, Faisal Karim Kundi, in Islamabad on Monday.

During the course of meeting, matters about provision of facilities to the zayreen and other related issues were discussed.

Speaking to the members of delegation, Chief Minister assured that improvement would be brought in the traveling facilities to zayreen from Taftan border and Balochistan.

He also assured that number of immigration counters would be increased for facilitation of zayreen at the Taftan border on occasion of Ashura and Arbaeen.

He said that the provincial government would provide every possible facilities to the zayreen.

Meanwhile, there was consensus on running Pakistan House Taftan under the Public-Private partnership.

The delegation of Jafria Zayreen Group Organizers Association thanked the Chief Minister Balochistan on assurance made by him for resolving issues of zayreen and providing them the necessary facilities.

The members of delegation hoped that the hardships of zayreen would be removed by increasing number of immigration counters and running Pakistan House Taftan under public-private partnership.

Naqvi hints at 'major surgery' in team after loss to India in T20 World Cup 2024

NEW YORK (INP): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has hinted at a 'major surgery' in the team after a poor performance against India in the T20 World Cup 2024.

Addressing a press conference in New York, after the Green Shirts' defeat, Mohsin Naqvi said the defeat against India was disappointing in every way. "It seemed that a minor surgery would suffice for the Pakistan cricket team, but after the extremely poor performance, it has become clear that the team needs major surgery," the PCB chairman said.

Naqvi said that he was well aware of what was happening within the team and the reasons for the defeat. The PCB Chairman mentioned that Pakistani cricket is currently at its lowest performance level. Our biggest challenge is to improve the team's performance.

KASUR: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif participates in the burial of Shaheed Captain Muhammad Faraz Ilyas who was martyred in Lakki Marwat.

President directs payment of compensation to 1500 affectees of Diamer-Bhasha Dam

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday directed the authorities concerned to ensure the payment of compensation worth Rs 4.7 million each to 1500 affectees of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam.

The president said this in separate meetings with Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Engineer Amir Muqam and Energy Minister Dr Musaddik Malik, according to a President House press release.

Highlighting the necessity of establishment of a medical college and hospital in GB, he instructed the relevant departments to take measures on priority for the purpose. Besides, he also directed for extending the scope of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) for the people of GB to provide them healthcare facilities.

A few days ago, the GB governor and the Members of GB Council had apprised the president of the issues faced by the GB people. The president had also assured them for the measures to help resolve the problems.

QUETTA: Provincial Minister for Communication and Works Mir Saleem Ahmed Khosa meeting with Provincial Minister for Livestock' and Dairy Development Bakht Muhammad Kakar

Six people killed in Gas Bowser accident on Motorway

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least six people were killed in an accident of a Gas Bowser on a Motorway near the Salt Range.

The spokesperson of Motorway Police said that due to brake failure Gas Bowser broke the middle wall on the road and hit the vehicle coming from the opposite direction resulting in both fell into the ditch.

Pakistan's enemies perturbed over its rapid progress under PM: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting and National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Monday said Pakistan's fast-track progress under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had stunned its enemies in contrast with their dreams of its downfall economically.

The disgruntled elements were fully perturbed as the prime minister had charted the country on path of progress and development, he said while addressing a press conference.

The minister said a so-called leader while being at the helm of affairs in 2018 had adversely affected Pakistan's relations with the brotherly countries thus causing serious problems on the diplomatic front.

On the other hand, the government led by PM Shehbaz Sharif had not only mended relations with the brotherly states, besides restoring the country's prestige in the global community, he added.

Tarar said the prime minister's historic visit to China was "highly successful", which had been marked by an unprecedented level of enthusiasm and mutual cooperation.

A multitude of issues, he said, were addressed during the visit, fostering the dawn of a new era in the bilateral relations of two countries which had been enjoying exemplary bonds for decades.

Their unparalleled friendship stood steadfast against all odds over the years, he added.

QUETTA: Provincial Ministers Mir Muhammad Sadiq Umrani, Mir Ali Madad Jattak and others addressing a ceremony for distribution of appointment orders on deceased quota in Irrigation Department

Govt. to make utmost effort to find sustainable solution to Chaman situation, assures Speaker BA

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Speaker Balochistan Assembly, Captain (Retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai has made a pledge that the provincial government is not negligent to the circumstances of Chaman and the issues being faced people there, and as such it would make utmost effort to find out sustainable solution to the situation.

However, the Speaker urged the people of Chaman to oust those elements from their ranks, which have violent behaviours.

In an official statement issued here on Monday, Captain (Retd) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai said that the people of Chaman are peaceful and patriotic, and they neither went against the state nor they incited the anti-state elements in Chaman.

He acknowledged that unemployment is a resolvable issue, however, the solution to all issues can be found through dialogue.

The speaker said that the people of Chaman have nothing to do with the current situation of Chaman.

He asserted that those elements making attempts to spoil situation in Chaman would not succeed in their nefarious designs.

Abdul Khaliq Achakzai said that the people of Chaman have recognized the elements who are playing with the lives of people just to keep their failed and outdated politics alive. However, the people of Chaman would foil nefarious designs of these elements, the Speaker provincial assembly believed.

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Approaching budget

The constitution of the National Economic Council to review and approve the macroeconomic budgetary framework, as well as proposed federal and provincial development spending plans for 2024-25, gives hope that the announcement of next year's budget will not be delayed beyond June 12. Considering that the Annual Plan Coordination Committee had firmed up its macro targets for FY25 at the beginning of this month, the delay in the announcement has been surprising, if not perplexing. Apparently, it was done to facilitate Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif undertake his China visit, which had many guessing about its purpose just ahead of the budget presentation. Rumour has it that the visit was undertaken in connection with IMF-dictated budget targets and programme goals concerning Chinese debt and power purchase agreements with Chinese companies.

That the government is making its budget in exceptionally challenging conditions is an understatement. The present macroeconomic environment is probably the most demanding any government has faced in years — despite the newfound economic stability under the IMF's short-term SBA facility. Macroeconomic conditions remain vulnerable to the slightest shock. Politically, too, the situation is tough. On the one hand, a court decision has, at least for now, deprived the fledgling government of an absolute majority in parliament. On the other, it must find a balance between stringent IMF demands and the public's expectations of relief. Caught between a rock and a hard place, the finance managers have repeatedly reassured the people that the burden of 'adjustments' to be made in the budget under an agreement with the IMF would fall on the affluent. Yet few have faith in those commitments, given the stern IMF conditions that would require drastic direct and indirect taxation and withdrawal of subsidies in the next budget, and a significant increase in energy prices at the beginning of FY25 to qualify for a new bailout.

In this context, the government's budget priorities are clear: economic stabilisation by containing the current account deficit in the balance-of-payments, and reduction in the budget deficit and borrowing requirements through primary budget surplus. Stabilisation is crucial for Pakistan to make its external debt payments on time, bring up its dwindling foreign exchange reserves to a safe level, and achieve debt sustainability by narrowing the gap between its income and spending by mobilising additional tax revenue and cutting public expenditure. It goes without saying that these goals require extensive policy reforms. Both the prime minister and finance minister have time and again expressed their commitment to carrying out the required structural reforms under the new IMF programme. The budget for the next year will be their first test. Many are sceptical of them translating their words into well-defined actions in the budget. Will they prove their doubters wrong?

In protest mode

Huma Yusuf

In a year of elections, some signs of democratic revival were inevitable. These have come in the electoral outcomes in India, Mexico and South Africa, where leaders have been held accountable at the ballot box. You can almost hear those who believe in due process breathing a collective sigh of relief after years of authoritarian creep. But what impact will these democratic stirrings have on public protest, and why does it matter?

In recent months alone, Pakistan has seen protests against inflation, food prices, border policies that hamper local trade, energy prices, alleged poll rigging, censorship, disappearances, etc. We are not alone. Indeed, we are living through a new age of protest.

A 2021 report on World Protests from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung think tank and Initiative for Policy Dialogue found that the number of protests worldwide had tripled between 2006 and 2020. The research found that 54 per cent of the protests recorded were triggered in response to "perceived failure of political systems or representation", while 28pc included demands for "real democracy".

The year 2022 saw even more protests — 11,000 across 145 countries — largely against high costs of living. In 2023, protests erupted in 83 countries, on proliferating matters as wide ranging as the Israel-Palestine war, cost of living crisis, climate justice, assaults on democracy, women's rights and government service provision.

The intersectionality of protests is also increasing. Take, for example, the global protests against Israel's atrocities in Gaza. Climate change activists aligned with the pro-Palestine protest movement early on, arguing that climate justice has to be underpinned by basic human rights and security and freedom from occupation.

Climate activists have been pointing out the immense climate toll of the war: greenhouse gas emissions from war activities, plus the significant emissions expected from future reconstruction activities. They have also accused Israel of carrying out ecocide, for example, by razing olive trees that have stood on the land for centuries. Given the West's current focus on tackling climate change, the disregard for these issues in Palestine is highlighted as further proof of double standards, an argument that resonates with the core messaging of pro-Palestine protests.

More powerfully, the two movements have identified that many financial institutions or corporates that fund or facilitate the fossil fuels sector are the same that facilitate the Israeli defence sector or Israeli companies that operate in or profit from settled areas. By joining forces, the groups have been able to share tactics and intensify pressure on economic institutions.

Similarly, global women's rights and feminist movements have aligned with pro-Palestine protesters given the excessive impact of the conflict on women and children, who account for at least half the lives lost in Gaza since October. Beyond the death toll, women have also been subject to sexual violence, inadequate healthcare, miscarriages and lack of nutrition. Allyship with Gazan women is becoming a feminist imperative.

Will this epic year of elections reduce some of this protest activity or intensify it? Will there be a coalescing of demands or further diversification? The growing intersectionality of protests has been a fascinating development, forcing disparate groups to engage with each other and find common ground, a refreshing development in polarised times.

But in the context of vibrant democr-acies, multifaceted protests are less ef---f---ective in holding democratic gov--ern-ments to account or effecting policy chan-ge. As I recently wrote in relation to pro-Palestine prot-ests on US camp-uses, the most effective protests are the ones with local, relevant and tailored demands.

The activist community must consider how the gradually shifting political landscape will affect protest movements, because the ultimate goal must be to keep the spirit of protest and accountability alive. And as much as we live in an age of protest, we also live in an age of crackdowns, and the threat from authoritarianism and censorship continues to loom large, including in 'democratic' contexts.

For lasting, positive change, protest activity is essential. As political scientist Erica Chenoweth has pointed out, civil disobedience is the most effective way of changing political trajectories, with protests twice as likely to achieve their goals than violent means or any form of conflict. Chenoweth also found that it takes around 3.5pc of a population actively participating in protests to effect meaningful political change. In all scenarios, that means we should remain ready to take to the streets (literally or metaphorically), and remain open, once we're there, to talk to each other rather than across each other. -- Courtesy Dawn

Unlocking potential

Neda Mulji

Not even 10 per cent of the 531 companies listed on the PSX offer formal training to their employees. These companies have a collective annual turnover of over Rs8 trillion. It wouldn't take much to calculate the impact on productivity if they were to invest in their employees' learning and development opportunities. Learning and development (L&D) helps employees identify their strengths, unlocks thinking potential, and opens lines of communication.

Employees can hugely benefit from simply being heard as they sit for conversations with a workplace coach or mentor. Typical questions that a workplace coach may ask are: what skills can help you do your job better? How can you develop these skills, and what are your priorities for career growth? Ongoing reflection with a mentor or coach not only motivates but can also help align the employee with the company's goals and strategy, as well as drive individual career growth.

Most employees strive for significance — to be seen and valued for their work. An employer's motivation to value employees comes from what they can bring to the table in terms of teamwork, capability, efficiency and productivity. Often, employees complain about churning the same wheel, but lots can change if they take action to drive innovation within their teams.

A McKinsey report on successful L&D strategy by Nick van Dam points out key elements of employee development that are beneficial to companies. Besides building individual capabilities and retaining talent, companies create their own 'brand ambassadors'. This results in a value-based culture where employees embody the company's reputation and competitive advantage. Brand ambassadors are not just driven by data analytics on productivity, but also the perceived significance of their work, loyalty to the company and ownership of their role.

To be successful, L&D opportunities need to incorporate programmes that are sustainable. From in-person, on the job training and collaboration with colleagues to coaching and mentoring, these programmes can be delivered online. Online training is often viewed with suspicion, as it has been historically considered inferior to in-person interaction. However, studies have shown that online training is a 'safer' place giving opportunities for self-expression and individual work to employees who may not be comfortable speaking in public or in a face-to-face set-up.

Those with full schedules during the day are more receptive to online sessions that they can attend sitting at their desk or at home, rather than clearing their calendar for a physical meet-up. Online learning is often also easier to monitor if followed by assessments that gauge learning impact and key takeaways. In fact, online training programmes are all the more necessary in Pakistan to empower professionals to use technology and digital tools with greater ease in this fast-evolving era of learning management systems.

Ninety-one per cent of Fortune 500 companies offer mentoring and coaching programmes. This correlation between investment in employee development and the companies' success is not coincidental. An increasing number of global companies are looking towards investment in professional development, particularly reskilling and coaching as a way of increasing produc-tivity. Not only does L&D target goals, it also ensures a continuous learning culture so that employees are able to respond to the fast-changing work and external environment.

Development opportunities have come to be recognised as a deciding factor for the 'employer of choice'. The 'millenials' are increasingly choosing companies that can commit to their gro-wth. Most employees choose to stick with a company that caters to their well-being, keeping them enga-g--ed in the company's values, goals and te--amwork as opposed to reporting on day-to-day tasks.

Investing in emplo-yees not just saves the company the costs associated with a high turnover, it also ensures that skills are not misdirected, with employees stuck in roles not suited to their ability. It helps employers make conscious decisions for placement, promotion and professional development. It also ensures that employees stay motivated, learn how to manage themselves and rise up to challenges as a team. The employee engagement that results from these efforts helps safeguard and promote the company's reputation with its customers.

Understandably, many companies avoid the costs of training employees for fear of losing them to competitors, but the price of avoiding training will always be higher. As Henry Ford once said, "The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay." -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

SBP cuts down policy rate to 20.5% amid easing inflationary pressures

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday slashed the policy rate by 150 basis points to 20.5 percent owing to subsiding inflationary pressure and ease in inflation expectations amid tight policy stance that was also supported by fiscal consolidation and administrative measures by government.

"The reduced policy rate of 20.5 % will be effective from June 11, 2024," the SBP said in its monetary policy statement issued after the meeting of Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

The MPC found decline in inflation since February broadly in line with expectations and May out turn better than earlier anticipation and assessed that underlying inflationary pressures were subsiding as reflected by continued moderation in core inflation and ease in inflation expectations of both consumers and businesses in the latest surveys.

The committee viewed some upside risks to the near-term inflation outlook associated with the upcoming budgetary measures and uncertainty regarding future energy price adjustments noting that "the cumulative impact of the earlier monetary tightening is expected to keep inflationary pressures in check."

While reviewing key development, the MPC noted that the real GDP growth remained moderate at 2.4% in FY24 as per provisional data, reduced current account deficit helped improve the foreign exchange reserves to around $9 billion despite large debt repayments while the government has also approached the IMF for an Extended Fund Facility Programme, which was likely to unlock financial inflows that would help in further building up of FX buffers.

The committee noted that international oil prices have declined, whereas non-oil commodity prices have continued to inch up.

The committee terming it an appropriate time for reducing the policy rate on basis of recent developments, noted that the real interest rate was still significantly positive which was important to continue guiding inflation to the medium-term target of 5 to 7 %.

ISLAMABAD: The Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi calls on the Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain.

TCP imports 6,572,430 metric tons of wheat from 2020 to 2023: NA Informed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan informed the National Assembly on Monday that the Trading Corporation of Pakistan Limited (TCP) imported 6,572,430 metric tons of wheat during the period from 2020-21 to 2022-23.

During the question hour in the house, the minister said that the TCP imported wheat based on the instructions of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) and the federal cabinet.

Jamal Kamal clarified that the TCP did not import any quantity of wheat during the year 2023-24.

He explained that TCP acts as the sole medium for purchasing wheat for food security purposes, while its storage and distribution are managed by the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

The minister dispelled any rumors regarding the export of wheat flour, stating that such reports are baseless and no such decision has been made.

He said that it was decided last year that the private sector would be responsible for importing wheat, and TCP would not engage in wheat imports. However, he said that TCP can only import wheat under a mandate given by the government.

Regarding sugar, the minister clarified that decisions related to the import and export of sugar are made by the Sugar Advisory Board, and no decision has been made yet regarding sugar imports.

Country holds surplus electricity, ready for 24-hour supply: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Energy Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari informed the National Assembly on Monday that the country has surplus electricity and we are ready to provide 24-hour power supply to feeders with zero losses.

Speaking at the National Assembly forum, he said, "The system has enough generation and transmission capacity to meet the electricity demand, and we are ready to provide electricity 24-hours to consumers. However, this is not possible without controlling line losses and power theft."

The minister said that the country cannot afford to increase the circular debt further.

"We don't provide electricity to feeders with high line losses because this adds to the losses in the power sector, which cannot be borne by the country's economy," he added. The minister stressed that unless distribution companies, with the assistance of provincial governments, change their course and control their losses, "load shedding will continue on these high-loss feeders."

SARGODHA: A vendor selling seasonal fruits near Shaheen chowk.

Women export display centre to be set up at Faisalabad: FWCCI

FAISALABAD (APP): The Faisalabad Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FWCCI) will establish a Women Export Display Centre at Faisalabad in collaboration with the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) to facilitate 'Access to Market' for women products.

These products, particularly handmade articles, are high in demand in traditional and non-traditional markets abroad, said Mrs. Rubina Amjad, President FWCCI and Chairperson of FPCCI Standing Committee on Think Tank.

She was addressing the participants in a symposium on 'Digital Transformation of Women Businesses in Pakistan', organized by Think Tank Committee in collaboration with the FPCCI here today.

She said that Pakistan's export volume can go further high if we are able to facilitate and fetch best prices for women products, particularly handmade products, in international markets.

She said that as founder and current President of Faisalabad Women Chamber and now Chairperson of FPCCI Think Tank Committee, her main emphasis is that women dong business or start-ups must be facilitated and equipped with digital transformation that offers a pathway to overcome traditional barriers and achieve sustainable growth. By embracing digital tools and strategies, women entrepreneurs should enhance their competitiveness and market base in this planet of more than 200 countries, she added.

Pak sees 62.3% surge in IT exports; report

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has witnessed a remarkable 62.3% increase in IT exports in April this year compared to the same period last year, according to a recent report by the BBC.

The surge in IT exports is attributed to the policy reforms and business-friendly policies introduced by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), PTV reported.

The stability of the local currency and the decision to allow freelancers to deposit foreign earnings into local bank accounts have been key factors in this growth, the report read. It further stated that the State Bank of Pakistan's relaxation of the retention limit for IT companies from 35% to 50% has also contributed to the increase.

Talal Chaudhary says:

Centre constitutionally authorized to levy taxes for greater national interest

FAISALABAD (APP): Central leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Talal Chaudhary said that federal government was constitutionally authorized to levy taxes and nobody could stop it from exercising this right.

Talking to media persons at Jaranwala here, he strongly condemned the statement of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister and said that taxes were the lifeline of a government and the government was determined to collect and spend taxes for the uplift of the country and welfare of the masses. He termed the statement of the KP Chief Minister irresponsible and unconstitutional and said that a major portion of taxes collected by the federal government is distributed among the provinces to launch their projects from this pooled money.

Jazz ranks leading cellular mobile operator

ISLAMABAD (APP): Jazz was ranked as the leading cellular mobile operator in Pakistan, topping multiple categories in the Pakistan.

The QoS survey, carried by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) out in 16 cities of Pakistan during the first quarter of 2024, assessed the performance of Cellular Mobile Operators (CMOs) in accordance with the Cellular Mobile Network Quality of Service (QoS) Regulations 2021, said a news release issued by the company.

KE introduces live App for providing easy access to income tax certificates

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the fiscal year closes and citizens prepare to file their taxes, K-Electric has introduced a quick and new service for customers to download their tax certificates through the KE Live App in just four simple clicks.

These include sales tax for our industrial or commercial customers, advance income tax for residential accounts, and withholding tax certificate for net metering customers, said a press release issued on Monday.

The initiative is an extension of KE's efforts to digitize its services to bring in more efficiency and customer-centricity in its processes and leverages technology and innovation to bridge the gap between the customer and the company. Sharing his comment on the features, spokesperson KE stated "We're pleased to expand the portfolio of services on the KE Live App, which reduces the need for customers to physically visit our centers by offering them a digital solution at their fingertips. Customers can also apply for new connections, change of name requests, and get real-time updates on their power supply from any location."

AJK PM vows to use tax money for people's welfare

MIRPUR-AJK (APP): Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq on Monday pledged to use tax money to improve the lives of the common man.

Speaking at a reception in Dheerkot, the AJK PM said his government's goal is to provide good governance and ensure that tax money would be spent on people's welfare.

The government has made significant progress, turning a 16 billion rupee loss into a 32 billion rupee profit.

A significant portion of 19 billion rupee, had been utilized for road development without any corruption.

The AJK PM emphasized the need to end politics based on caste, class and tribe.

He expressed hope that development works will be expedited soon, stressing the importance of tolerance, wisdom and strong institutions.

The government had collected an amount of 11 crore rupee taxes annually and the AJK PM warned that failing to fulfill the state responsibilities would be a sheer violation.

He advocated for peaceful resolution of all genuine issues.

He was of the opinion that protest is not the solution of any problem. The AJK PM reiterated his belief in the slogan "Kashmir Banega Pakistan" and urged an end to civil war.

The event was also attended by various government ministers.

LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafique presides over the special meeting. Punjab Minister for Agriculture Syed Ashiq Kirmani is also present.

CM directs expansion of promising Saffron cultivation initiative

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has directed the Agriculture Department to collect detailed data on agricultural lands across the province and prepare for saffron cultivation on suitable lands by the upcoming season.

Yar Muhammad Khan Niazi, the Chief Minister's Focal Person for Digital Media, reported that the pilot saffron planting by the KP Agriculture Department has shown promising results.

With seed and input costs around Rs 3.2 million per acre, the tentative annual return is estimated at about Rs 6.8 million. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has 127,950 acres of potential saffron-growing area, capable of producing 255 tons of stigma, which could generate an annual economic return of billions of rupees. The investment in saffron farming in KP will be phased over short (4 years), medium (7 years), and long-term (10 years) periods. Over a decade, this initiative could create around 3.6 million direct jobs, employing 4 laborers per kanal.

The Chief Minister emphasized the need for the effective utilization of available agricultural land to make it a significant source of income for the provincial government.

He instructed the Agriculture Department to undertake saffron cultivation directly, rather than leasing the lands, while also encouraging farmers to cultivate saffron on suitable lands.

Health minister visits Pak Children's Hearth Foundation, reviews facilities

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique on Monday visited the Pakistan Children's Heart Foundation and the hospital under construction in the University of Lahore (UoL) and reviewed the medical facilities there.

Chairman Farhan Ahmed briefed the minister regarding the working details of the Pakistan Children's Heart Foundation.

Chairman University of Lahore Owais Rauf, Medical Superintendent Dr Zahid Parvez, Dr Ali Nasir, Dr Arsal, Professor Uzmi, and others were present.

Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique said that the capacity of cardiology departments in Jinnah Hospital, Mayo Hospital, Ganga Ram Hospital, and hospitals in Wazirabad as well as Faisalabad was being increased. The number of children born with heart disease in Pakistan was unfortunately increasing every year, he said, adding that government cardiology hospitals were trying to increase the number of surgeries. The minister said that Nawaz Sharif was going to build a state-of-the-art cardiology hospital in Sargodha, and in this regard, Pakistan Children's Heart Foundation was with them.

ABBOTTABAD: Fire fighters extinguishing fire at dairy farm warehouse building during rescue operation after fire broke out incident due to electric short circuit, in Abbottabad

Man kills wife over domestic dispute

PESHAWAR (APP): A man shot dead his wife over domestic dispute in the vicinity of Pahari Pura police station, police said on Monday.

Pahari Pura police said the incident occurred in Gul Abad No-2, Pahari Pura where a man shot dead his 27-year-old wife.

The brother of the deceased woman told police that his sister, Shazia was married to Shah Saud.

He alleged that Shah Saud shot dead Shazia with the consent and help of his brother Shah Khalid.

The police shifted the body to hospital for post-mortem and started investigation after registering a case against both the accused.

Measles under control in Punjab: Minister

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare, Khwaja Imran Nazir said on Monday that the measles situation in the province was under control, with a significantly lower number of confirmed cases and fatalities compared to other provinces.

Speaking to a private news channel, he stated that while measles cases in Punjab were fewer than in other provinces, the vaccination campaign was intensified to protect children from infectious diseases. Khwaja Imran said out of over 10,000 suspected cases reported, 2,700 were confirmed, representing a 25% ratio, whereas only 28 deaths were confirmed with the disease, as per the National Institute of Health.

The minister emphasized that every child's life was precious and that the government was taking measures to ensure their safety.

He clarified that a 2-3% death ratio was natural in every disease, and the measles ratio was even lower.

The Punjab government is utilizing digital monitoring and clustering to combat the disease, with Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz focusing her attention on the issue. The minister said clustering analysis had identified Bahawalpur, Jhang, and Chaniot as the most affected areas, while the rest of the districts had routine patients.

Bus crushes youngster to death

MULTAN (APP): A bus crushed the youngster to death near the Niaz petrol pump on Khanewal Road Multan.

According to Rescue 1122, a youngster named Muhammad Aziz (21) son of Muhammad Sharif, resident of Block W New Mulan, was heading to his destination.

KP govt taking measures to enhance educational facilities, females' literacy: Minister

Independent Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Education Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Khan Tarakai on Monday said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has unveiled a series of revolutionary initiatives aimed at increasing female literacy rate and educational facilities for women, particularly in merged areas.

Addressing a briefing session organized by the Merged Districts Education Foundation, he highlighted the urgent need to expand access to education and control dropout rates, especially among girls.

He emphasized the launch of community-based education centers under the supervision of the Foundation, including the Sabaon Schools Program and Middle School Program, to swiftly establish schools and address immediate educational needs. During the briefing, Managing Director of the Foundation, Mian Ainullah, informed that the foundation was operating as many as 207 community-based education centers in the province.

ANF seizes over 262 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country seized over 262 kg drugs and arrested six accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday.

He informed that 1.2 kg heroin was recovered from the possession of a female passenger going to Bahrain at Islamabad Airport.

1 kg heroin was recovered from a passenger going to Dubai at Karachi Airport while 63.6 kg hashish and 72 kg opium were recovered from two suspects rounded up near Ravi Toll Plaza Lahore.

MUZAFFARABAD: University students protesting at Azadi Chowk for the release of poet Ahmed Farhad.

Relief Commissioner Punjab briefed about Monsoon Contingency Plan 2024

LAHORE (APP): Relief Commissioner Punjab Nabil Javed chaired a meeting about Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) measures in the committee room on Monday in which construction and restructuring of the PDMA Punjab Complex was discussed. Director General PDMA Irfan Ali Kathia, Secretary Board of Revenue Shafqatullah Mushtaq and other officers attended the meeting.

The DG briefed Relief Commissioner Nabil Javed about PDMA's initiatives and briefed about the Monsoon Contingency Plan 2024. DG PDMA Irfan Ali Kathia said that the probability of monsoon rains this year was higher than before, adding that preparations had been completed in anticipation of monsoon rains and possible floods. He said that warehouses of PDMA would be established in Rawalpindi, Bahawalpur, Sargodha, Rajanpur, and Jhang. Nabil Javed issued instructions to remove encroachments from rivers and canals.

International News

UN Security Council set to vote on Gaza ceasefire deal today after US call

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON: The United States announced on Sunday it has requested a UN Security Council vote on its draft resolution backing a plan for an "immediate ceasefire with the release of hostages" between Israel and Hamas.

Diplomatic sources said the vote is planned for Monday, but has not yet been confirmed by South Korea, which holds the Security Council presidency for the month of June.

"Today, the United States called for the Security Council to move towards a vote... supporting the proposal on the table," said Nate Evans, spokesman for the US delegation, without specifying a vote date.

"Council members should not let this opportunity pass by and must speak with one voice in support of this deal," Evans said. The United States, a staunch ally of Israel, has been widely criticized for having blocked several UN draft resolutions calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

US President Joe Biden on May 31 launched a new push for a ceasefire and hostage release deal, separate from the United Nations.

Under the proposal, Israel would withdraw from Gaza population centers and Hamas would free hostages. The ceasefire would last an initial six weeks, with it extended as negotiators seek a permanent end to hostilities.

The United States is placing primary responsibility for accepting the proposal on Hamas, specifically calling on the Palestinian militant group to accept the document in the latest version of the draft text.

That version, which was distributed to member states on Sunday and was seen by AFP, "welcomes" the new ceasefire proposal while stating, unlike in previous versions, that Israel has already accepted.

The draft resolution "calls upon Hamas to also accept it, and urges both parties to fully implement its terms without delay and without condition."

In response to requests from several member states, the latest text clearly lays out the proposal.

This includes a first phase with an "immediate, full, and complete ceasefire," release of hostages taken by Hamas, and "exchange of Palestinian prisoners" plus "withdrawal of Israeli forces from the populated areas in Gaza."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives at Cairo airport, Egypt.

US, Saudi Arabia close to finalising security treaty, says WSJ

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON: The Biden administration is close to finalising a treaty with Saudi Arabia that would commit the US to help defend the Gulf nation as part of a deal aimed at encouraging diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Israel, the Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday, citing US and Saudi officials.

The possible deal, widely telegraphed by US and other officials for weeks, is part of a wider package that would include a US-Saudi civil nuclear pact, steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state and an end to the Israeli aggression in Gaza, where months of ceasefire efforts have failed to bring peace.

Approval of the treaty, which the WSJ said would be known as the Strategic Alliance Agreement, would require a two-thirds majority vote in the US Senate, a threshold that would be difficult to achieve unless the treaty were tied to Israeli-Saudi normalisation.

The draft treaty is modelled loosely on Washing-ton's mutual security pact with Japan, the newspaper cited US and Saudi officials as saying.

In exchange for the US commitment to help defend Saudi Arabia if it were attacked, the draft treaty would grant Washing-ton access to Saudi territory and airspace to protect US interests and regional partners, the newspaper reported.

Italy's PM Meloni comes out on top in EU vote, strengthening her hand

Monitoring Desk

ROME: Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's arch-conservative Brothers of Italy group won the most votes in the European parliamentary election over the weekend, results showed, boosting her standing both at home and abroad. With 96% of the ballots counted, Brothers of Italy won 28.8%of the vote, more than four times what it took in the last EU election in 2019 and exceeding the 26% it secured in the 2022 national ballot, when it rose to power. "I am proud that Italy will present itself to the G7, to Europe with the strongest government of all. This is something that has not happened in the past but is happening today, it is a satisfaction and also a great responsibility," Meloni said early on Monday from the party's headquarters. The opposition centre-left Democratic Party came in second with 24%, while another opposition group, the 5-Star Movement.

US, Poland launching group to help Ukraine counter Kremlin disinformation

Monitoring Desk

WARSAW: The United States announced Monday that it is setting up an operation in the Polish capital to help neighboring Ukraine counter Russian disinformation.

The U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center, which works to highlight disinformation by what it considers hostile states, said in a statement that the U.S. and Poland have jointly launched a Ukraine Communications Group.

International investors grab 'majority' of Aramco shares

Monitoring Desk

RIYADH: Oil giant Saudi Aramco said on Sunday that international investors had snatched up the bulk of shares sold in its latest offering, which was set to raise $11.2 billion.

The secondary offering was expected to provide a short-term boost to Saudi Arabia's finances as the Gulf kingdom builds large-scale projects including resorts and stadiums, part of a reform drive to prepare for an eventual post-oil future.

"The majority of the shares constituting the institutional tranche of the Offering was allocated to investors located outside of the Kingdom," the company said in a statement before the Saudi bourse reopened on Sunday.

Aramco ended trading on Sunday at 28.60 Saudi riyals ($7.63) per share, after opening at 27.95 riyals, giving it a market capitalisation of around $1.85 trillion.

Sources close to the situation said that around 58 per cent of shares were allocated to international investors, up from around 23pc for the company's initial public offering in 2019 which was the biggest flotation in history.

The sources said around 70pc of orders outside the local market came from the European Union and the United States, while others came from Japan, Hong Kong and Australia.

Aramco, the mostly state-owned jewel of the Saudi economy, announced on May 30 that it would sell 1.545 billion shares, or approximately 0.64pc of its issued shares, on the Saudi stock exchange.

It was widely seen as a test of foreign investor interest more than halfway through the kingdom's campaign known as Vision 2030, whose ambitions are reflected in so-called giga-projects such as NEOM, a planned futuristic megacity in the desert.

Putin set to visit North Korea, Vietnam, Vedomosti reports

Monitoring Desk

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit North Korea and Vietnam in the coming weeks, Russia's Vedomosti newspaper reported on Monday, with an official telling Reuters the Vietnam visit was planned for June 19-20 but has not yet been confirmed. Putin's visit to Pyongyang is being "actively prepared", Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexander Matsegora confirmed to the newspaper.

The newspaper reported that Putin could visit Vietnam as early as June and most likely immediately after his visit to North Korea. An official in Vietnam told Reuters the dates of the Hanoi visit had been agreed, but the agenda was still under discussion. Energy, military cooperation, settlement of payments and an agreement in the education field are among the main issues expected to be discussed, the official said.

Vedomosti quoted Russia's trade representative in Vietnam as saying last month that the most pressing trade issue between the two countries was banking support for settling payments.

Vietnam's foreign ministry did not reply to a request for comment.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited Russia last September for talks with Putin.

He toured Russia's Vostochny Cosmodrome space launch centre in Russia's Far East and Putin promised to help North Korea build satellites. The Kremlin has said Russia wants to build a partnership with North Korea "in all areas" but has not confirmed the date of the visit.

South Africa's Ramaphosa to miss G7, focus on finding partners to govern

Monitoring Desk

JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will not attend this week's Group of Seven (G7) summit in Italy, his spokesperson said on Monday, as his party rushed to find partners to govern the country.

Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) is holding talks with a wide range of other parties, saying it wants to form a national unity government after losing its majority for the first time since the end of apartheid in last month's election. Diplomatic sources had said Ramaphosa was due to take part in the G7 summit from June 13-15 at the invitation of Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the G7 and wants to broaden the gathering beyond the usual seven industrial democracies.

Macron calls snap legislative elections

Monitoring Desk

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday announced he was dissolving parliament and called snap legislative elections after the far-right trounced his centrist alliance in EU polls.

The first round of elections for the lower house National Assembly will take place on June 30, with the second round on July 7, Macron announced in an address to the nation.

The outcome of the EU elections, he acknowledged, is "not a good result for parties who defend Europe". Macron noted that, including the top scoring National Rally (RN), far-right parties in France managed to take almost 40 per cent of the vote in the EU elections in France. "Far right parties... are progressing everywhere in the continent. It is a situation to which I cannot resign myself," he said.

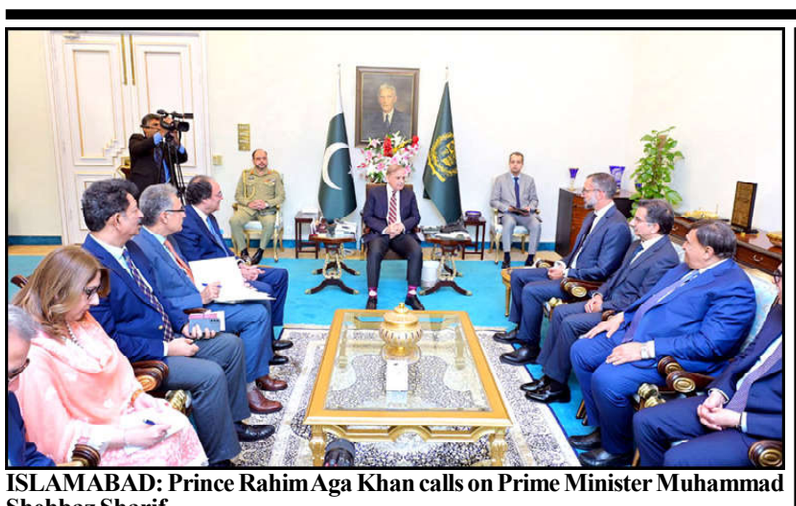
"I decided to give you the choice... Therefore I will dissolve the National Assembly tonight.

"This decision is serious and heavy but it is an act of confidence.

Mexico ruling party wins lower house super-majority but falls short in Senate

Monitoring Desk

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's ruling Morena party and its allies have won a super-majority in the lower house of Congress but not the Senate, the party's president said on Sunday, falling just short of the two-thirds majority needed in both houses to change the constitution. Preliminary results from the June 2 vote.



ISLAMABAD: Prince Rahim Aga Khan calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

PM invites AKDN to invest more in Pak tourism sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday invited the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) to increase its investment in Pakistan's tourism sector.

He extended the invitation in a meeting with Chairperson Executive Committee of Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development Prince Rahim Aha Khan, who called on him along with a five-member delegation.

The prime minister also congratulated Prince Rahim Aga Khan on receiving the Nishan-e-Pakistan Award from the Government of Pakistan.

He expressed gratitude to Prince Rahim Aga Khan for establishing various social welfare projects in less developed and remote areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral.

He said setting up of various welfare projects in Pakistan's education, health, agriculture, tourism, IT and other sectors was commendable. The establishment of a software technology park and solar power plants organized by the Aga Khan Development Network in Hunza were also highly commendable, the prime minister said.

He also expressed his appreciation for the establishment of the microfinance banking center of Habib Bank Limited in Gilgit under the auspices of Aga Khan Development Network.

MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH: Saudi officials welcome the Hajj pilgrims from different countries on their arrival.

Over 0.255 mln tonnes plastic bottles discarded per annum in country, Senate told

ISLAMABAD (APP):The Senate session during a motion tabled by the Opposition benches on Monday was informed that over 0.255 million plastic bottles were being discarded per annum in the country choking and polluting its natural water bodies, drains, rivers and the ocean. Senator Mohsin Aziz of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) moved the motion demanding the House to discuss the need to ban manufacturing or use of 500 ml plastic bottles for drinking water as the same causes environmental hazards, chokes drainage system in the cities and is a source of pollution. Senator Mohsin Aziz while explaining the motion said the non-degradable one-time use plastics particularly bottles of 500ml and smaller in size have drastically degraded and damaged the scenic and pristine natural beauty of the country's iconic water bodies and rivers in the past four decades. The rivers, lakes, drains, tourist sites and water bodies were overflown by plastic waste and plastic bottles comprised a major chunk of it including 500ml and below, he said. The Senator noted that the developed and developing states recycling plastic waste were promoting on-source segregation to ensure effective recycling of the plastics. "It's a non-degradable material that cannot decompose for centuries. There are 13 billion plastic bottles used globally. The developed country implementing recycling and responsibly managing plastic waste are reporting satellite images of plastic islands in its territories indicating colossal scale of plastic waste," he added.

According to estimates, by 2035 there would be more plastic bottles captured in fishnets of local fishermen of Pakistan than fish due to increased plastic pollution in the ocean.

QUETTA: MPA Zarak Mandokhail meeting with Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Lango

CM meets Maulana Attaur Rehman, inquires about Maulana Fazlur Rehman

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti met the senior leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), Maulana Attaur Rehman at the Quetta airport.

The Chief Minister met Maulana Attaur Rehman, the younger brother of JUI-central Ameer, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, at the departure lounge of Quetta airport before departing for Islamabad.

Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti inquired about the JUI-central Amee from Maulana Attaur Rehman and extended best wishes for him.

Also present on the occasion were the leader of National Party, Mir Kabir Ahmed Muhammad Shahi besides other leaders of JUI.

Digital agriculture census to be conducted in August:

Provincial Minister Revenue calls for putting agriculture sector on modern lines, increasing income sources

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Provincial Minister for Revenue, Mir Muhammad Asim Kurd has underlined the need to put agriculture sector on modern lines in the province.

He also stressed the need to increase sources of income so as to meet the shortage in this regard.

The Minister for Revenue was addressing awareness building workshop on 7th agriculture census – 2024 organized by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the Balochistan Agriculture College, Quetta here on Monday. The Chief Statisticians, PBS, Dr. Naeemuz Zafar (SI) and other federal and provincial high ups were present.

Mir Muhammad Asim Kurd said that there should be arrangement of food for the people in proportion with the increasing population.

He pointed out that the crisis of wheat and other food stuff was created due to the flashfloods in Balochistan last year.

Besides, the cattles were also perished along with agriculture because of the drought situation in province in the past, he added.

He noted with concern that the agriculture is affecting due to depletion of underground water table.

The Minister Revenue stressed that we would have to promote agriculture and livestock in proportion with the population.

He said that the province is facing resources constraints, and the development and non-development budget is equal.

Referring the forthcoming agriculture census, he said that collection of data is necessary to make assessment of the needs in agriculture and other related sectors.

Earlier, during the briefing, it was informed that the 7th agriculture census would be conducted in the month of August this year.

It was informed that the data of agriculture, livestock and agriculture machinery would be collected in the digital agriculture census.

The digital agriculture census would also determine that which crops are cultivated in which districts, it was further informed.

Govt implementing measures to control iron smuggling on border areas: Ali Pervaiz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Economic Affairs Ali Pervaiz on Monday informed the National Assembly that the government is implementing measures to control iron smuggling at Taftan border area. During the question hour in the House, the minister said that all out resources would be utilized to protect the production of the country's local industries including the iron industry.

The minister said that monitoring on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border has been tightened to prevent iron smuggling on bordering areas.

Ali Pervaiz said that the only way to escape the clutches of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) program is through reforms, quoting the examples from countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and India.

To another question, he said that appeals involving amounts over Rs 20 million would be decided by appellate tribunals instead of the Commissioner of Income Tax, adding that artificial intelligence and other methods are being used in the selection of audits.

Ali Pervaiz said that minimum wage should be reviewed considering the current inflationary period, adding that he would convey members' views on revising the minimum wage in the upcoming budget.

PM greets Israr on election as Oxford Union president

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday congratulated Pakistani student Israr Khan on his election as the President of the Oxford Union. Israr Khan has been elected Oxford Union President for Hilary Term 2025 with 617 first preferences, winning by a significant margin over Izzy Horrocks-Taylor's 393 first preferences.

Hailing from Balochistan province, Israr Khan is pursuing a DPhil in Law at Regent's Park College and served as the Union's Chief of Staff.

"I join the people of Pakistan in extending heartiest congratulations to Israr Khan for being elected.

Ishaq Dar to embark on two-day visit to Jordan

ISLAMABAD (Online): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar will embark on a two-day visit to Jordan today to participate in the high-level conference on prevailing situation in Gaza.

The conference titled "Call for Action: Urgent Humanitarian Response for Gaza", has been jointly organized by King Abdullah-II of Jordan, President of Egypt Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, and Secretary-General United Nations Antonio Guterres.

Stern action to be taken against those keeping private gunmen wearing Levies uniform: DG

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Director General of Levies Force in Balochistan, Naseebullah Kakar has warned that stern action would be taken against those keeping private gunmen wearing Levies uniform in the province.

According to an official press release issued here on Monday, the Director General Levies said that a letter has been issued to Deputy Commissioners of all districts. In the letter, it has been conveyed to the Deputy Commissioners to take action against those who keep private guards clad in the Levies uniform.

He said that we would not allow anyone to defame the uniforms of forces at all. Nor we would allow anyone to take law in one's hand, the Director General Levies further warned.

He said that the forces are responsible for protection of life and property of the masses and all of them including Levies and police are ready to perform and control any emergent situation.

He asserted that we would not let anyone harm the province and country.

QUETTA: MPAAli Hassan Zehri meeting with IGP Balochistan Abdul Khaliq Sheikh

QUETTA: Activists of Muslim League hold protest outside QPC.

Salik attends symposium on Saudi Arabia's Hajj arrangements

MAKKAH AL MUKARRAMAH (APP): Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Monday attended a daylong annual symposium organized by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to share its elaborate Hajj arrangements for serving the guests of Allah Almighty in the holy land.

The minister was accompanied by Director General (Hajj) Abdul Wahab Soomro, Director (Hajj) and other senior officers of the Pakistan Hajj Mission and the ministry.

The 48th Grand Hajj Symposium, titled "No Hajj without permission," was an initiative of the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and was attended by ministers and religious scholars from various countries.

The symposium is a primary platform for intellectual leadership and knowledge exchange, fostering deeper understanding, appreciation, and comprehension of the spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions of the Hajj rituals.

Speakers highlighted the Kingdom's achievements in serving pilgrims, showcasing pioneering projects and developments in the two Holy Mosques.

They emphasized the cultural and civilizational role the Kingdom undertook to serve Hajj pilgrims, consolidating the principle of peaceful intellectual dialogue on issues concerning the Hajj season.

The symposium aimed to establish unified principles of collective work for the Islamic world in responding to suspicions about faith, nation, and culture.

Chairperson BISP visits Payment Campsites in Sindh to check facilities

ISLAMABAD (APP):Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Rubina Khalid made significant visits to the Benazir Income Support Programme payment campsites in Bachal Shah, Sukkur, and Babarloe, Khairpur on Monday.

The purpose of these visits was to personally monitor the payment disbursement process and to inspect the arrangements and facilities provided for women beneficiaries receiving their Kafaalat and Taleemi Wazaif stipends, said a news release.

During her visit, Rubina Khalid interacted with the women beneficiaries, listened to their concerns, and personally guided the needy and elderly women in receiving their cash amounts. Recognizing the need for efficiency, she directed the officials to increase the number of Point of Sale (POS) agents at the campsites to reduce the waiting time for the beneficiaries.

Following her inspections, Chairperson Rubina Khalid addressed the media, emphasizing the commitment to transparency in the disbursement process as directed by President Asif Ali Zardari.

"We have established these payment campsites to ensure transparency in the mechanism of payment disbursement," she stated. "We are heading towards a better payment mechanism and soon we will be able to open bank accounts for these beneficiaries for direct payments, minimizing human involvement." She also highlighted the importance of skill development and technical education for BISP beneficiaries to help them overcome poverty.

QUETTA: Provincial Minister PHE Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran presiding over meeting of WASA Board of Directors

CPEC cooperation to focus on industry, agriculture, IT in next phase: Ahsan Iqbal

BEIJING (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Prof Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that in the next phase, the focus of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) cooperation, will be on industry, agriculture and information technology.

In an interview with the Global Times in Beijing, Ahsan Iqbal, who accompanied Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on his five day China visit, emphasized that the focus of cooperation under CPEC, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative will be on industry, agriculture and information technology in the second phase.

Ahsan Iqbal cited the recent successful launch of a Pakistani satellite into space using a Chinese rocket as an example, saying, people used to say that the relationship between Pakistan and China was higher than the Himalayas.

"Now we are also cooperating in space technology. Our cooperation has reached space, even higher than the sky," he added.

Abbasi warns stern action against timber mafia

QUETTA (APP): Assistant Commissioner Bela Ali Shah Abbasi on Monday held a meeting with transporters and forest department officials regarding the deforestation in Lasbela.

The meeting was attended by transporters and forest department officials.

Talking to the meeting, Assistant Commissioner Ali Shah Abbasi issued strict orders concerning deforestation, stating that trees are the adornment of the land and must not be wasted under any circumstances.

He vowed to take stern action against the timber mafia, with no leniency towards anyone.

Enemy cannot shake our firm resolve by cowardly actions,: Ali Hassan Zehri

Independent Report

QUETTA: Provincial Advisor for Industries and commerce Mir Ali Hasan Zehri has expressed deep sorrow and anger over the martyrdom of the security personnel in the barrage attack on the convoy of Pakistan Army in Lakki Marwat. In his statement, he strongly condemned the incident and said that the spirit of the nation will not be weakened by such cowardly acts.

He paid tribute to the sacrifices of all martyred security personnel including Captain Muhammad Faraz Ilyas in the incident and said that every single drop of blood of the martyrs will be counted. The whole nation is standing by the side of the army until the end of terrorism from the country. Terrorists will never succeed in their evil intentions.

Provincial Advisor for Industry and commerce Mir Ali Hassan Zehri further said that Pakistani nation is fighting terrorists with determination and courage alongside its security forces and very soon these cowardly terrorists will be brought to their end.

He said that the entire nation is with its security agencies until the elimination of terrorists from the country and will not hesitate to make any sacrifice for this purpose. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri expressed his condolences to the families of all the martyrs, including Captain Muhammad Faraz Ilyas, and prayed that Allah Almighty grants the martyrs a high place in His mercy and gives patience to the bereaved.

He said that the determination of the security forces and the nation will not decrease until the end of the last terrorist. Pak forces and other security forces are vigilant day and night in the defence of the homeland and stand like a leaden wall in front of the terrorists and give a full response to any such action.

Smart robot service launched in Madinah to assist pilgrims

ISLAMABAD (APP): A smart robot service has been launched in Madinah to assist pilgrims visiting the Prophet's Mosque.

The robot, a project from the Ministry of Health branch in Madinah province, is positioned in the courtyard next to the Prophet's Mosque. The service aims to display and broadcast educational messages, guidance, and health instructions for the safety and awareness of pilgrims in over 96 languages from around the world.

Meanwhile, the volunteer and awareness teams of the Health Ministry branch of Madinah continue their fieldwork with 220 male and female volunteers and over 12 teams working around the clock to serve the guests of Allah. They provide health and emergency services during the Hajj season at the Prophet's Mosque and its access roads.

Samina Zehri says

Brave security forces determined to end scourge of terrorism

Independent Report

QUETTA: The entire nation is standing by the side of the army until the end of terrorism from the country; Terrorists will never succeed in their evil intentions.

These views were expressed by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri while expressing deep sorrow and regret over the martyrdom of 7 security personnel including Captain Muhammad Faraz Ilyas in a landmine explosion near a security forces vehicle in Lucky Marwat area. In her condemnation statement, she said that cowardly enemies cannot shake our firm resolve with such actions. All the martyrs are heroes of the nation and the entire nation and their families are proud of the eternal sacrifice of the martyrs for the country. She further said that anti-national elements and cowardly enemies do not have the courage to come forward and fight, that's why they attack in secret. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the determination of the security forces and the nation will not decrease until the end of the last terrorist. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that those who sacrificed their lives for the protection of the homeland proved that the protection of the Pakistani homeland is in strong hands and any enemy of Pakistan can't see with the naked eye.

She said more that brave soldiers and officers of Pakistan Army sacrificed their lives for the survival of the country, for which the nation pays tribute to the martyrs. The courage, perseverance and patience of the families of the martyrs is a source of strength for the nation and the security forces. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the Pakistani nation is fighting the terrorists with determination and courage.

Senators condemns operation at Shibli Faraz's house

ISLAMABAD (APP): Lawmakers in the Senate while condemning operation at Shibli Faraz's house on Monday called for appropriate action against the concerned officials besides referring the matter to the House Privilege Committee.

Speaking on a point of order, PTI Senator Saifullah Abro said that the House should not only condemn the act but also hold inquiry into the matter.

All officials of the civic agency should be made accountable for their action, he added.

QUETTA: National Party Central President MPA DR Abdul Malik Baloch addressing on condolence reference ceremony organized by NP and BSO.

Bilawal expresses deep sorrow over Neelum river tragedy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has expressed deep sorrow over the tragic loss of lives following a tourist vehicle's fell into the Neelum River.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell at Bilawal House, he expressed deep shock upon hearing the news of the Neelum Valley accident. He extended his heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and prayed for their strength during this difficult time. "I share the grief of the families who lost their loved ones in this tragic accident.

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