

Independent

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

Vol. XIV No. 149 Reg. mails-B / ID-445 Saturday June 29, 2024, Zil Hajj 22, 1445 A.H. Ph: 2158688, 2158997 Pages 4: Rs. 12

NA passes Finance Bill-2024 with majority vote

FM Aurangzeb says economy has achieved stability; Announces tax exemption for health, education sectors inputs; PPP supports govt in passing budget

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly on Friday passed the Finance Bill 2024 after a clause-by-clause consideration, incorporating specific amendments.

Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb moved the motion for consideration of the Finance Bill, 2024 to give effect to the financial proposals of the federal government for the year, commencing on July 1, 2024.

The motion was passed with majority vote which led to the passage of Finance Bill-2024 after clause-by-clause reading and adopting amendments after due process of voting.

All the amendments, presented by the opposition members, were rejected.

The total outlay of the federal budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 is Rs. 18,877 trillion. This budget out-

lines the government's fiscal policies and budgetary allocations for the upcoming financial year, reflecting a comprehensive plan to address various economic and social challenges.

The government has allocated Rs. 1,400 billion for the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) in its current budget, and an additional amount of Rs100 billion would be allocated under Public-Private Partnership, bringing the total to Rs1,500, the highest in the country's history.

In the budget grants amounting to Rs1,777 billion for the promotion of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit-Baltistan, merged districts of KP, Higher Education Commission, Railways, and IT sectors have been allocated.

To ensure equitable development in AJK, GB, and

merged districts of the KP, the government has allocated at 10 percent and around 11 percent for other sectors development including IT, telecom, science and technology, governance, and production sector.

The House also held discussion on the Charged Expenditure that included Demands for Grants and Appropriations for the financial year ending on June 30, 2025.

The House approved 133 demands for grants related to various departments and ministries.

According to the Rule 187 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in National Assembly 2007, not less than four days shall be allotted for the general discussion on the budget.

However, the National Assembly smoothly continued debate on the Fi-

nance Bill, 2024 for eight days.

The formal debate started on June 20, 2024 that continued till June 27, 2024. The House also discussed recommendations of the Senate.

Minister of Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb termed the budget 2024-25 as growth budget and said it was based on a well-thought-out strategy to boost the economic growth.

He said that the budget for the next fiscal year was aimed at narrowing the fiscal deficit by expanding the government's revenues and cutting unnecessary expenditures. Muhammad Aurangzeb reiterated the government's commitment to increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13 percent, which currently stands at a low 9.5 percent.

He said that the country had achieved macroeconomic stability. He highlighted that the economic indicators, including the

current account, fiscal deficit, inflation, and foreign exchange reserves, were stable and under control.

He outlined the government's plan to continue this economic stability into the next fiscal year, aiming to lead the country towards sustainable economic growth.

He also called for reconstructing and digitizing the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to ensure high GDP target. He said that the concept of non-filers would be eliminated from the tax system, making it mandatory for everyone to pay taxes.

The minister expressed the government's resolve to curb tax evasion and expand the tax net, particularly targeting retailers and the real estate sector. He said that the current account deficit had decreased, the fiscal deficit was under control, and the country had foreign reserves of \$9 billion, providing an import cover for two months.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif interacts with Chairman PPP, MNA Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in the National Assembly.

Elite class to be brought to tax net, vows PM

Questions KP govt's failure to establish CTD despite receiving Rs590 b funds

ISLAMABAD (INP): Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif on Friday hailed the approval of the budget 2024-25 in the National Assembly (NA), vowing to bring elite class and tax defaulters to tax net.

The remarks came during the prime minister's meeting with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb as he lauded the latter and his team preparing a "pro-people budget" that prioritises welfare of common man and promises to steer the country towards economic prosperity.

Talking to the finance minister, PM Shehbaz expressed his satisfaction over the active participation of all the treasury and opposition members in the budget session.

He also appreciated the efforts of the officers from ministries of finance, planning, other relevant ministries and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in preparation of the bud-

get. The government, he said tried its best to utilize all possible resources to provide maximum relief to the common man. He said the government provided relief to the salaried class, pensioners and workers.

The prime minister highlighted that a special attention was given in the budget to various important sectors such as health, education, agriculture and information technology.

He said the elite class and the tax defaulters would be brought to the tax net. It is not possible for the poor pay the taxes and the elites enjoy tax exemptions, he added.

Expressing satisfaction over the economic situation, the prime minister said the country's economy had now been put on the right path and that Pakistan's journey of prosperity had begun.

PM Shehbaz Sharif further said due to the business friendly policies of the government, the trust of the investors had been restored

on the government. He said the government was taking steps to bring reforms in the government departments and privatize the loss making State Owned Entities on priority.

APP adds: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday questioned the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for its failure to establish the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) despite receiving Rs590 billion during the last 14 years.

The prime minister, responding to a point of order raised by Sunni Ittehad Council member and former NA Speaker Asad Qaiser, highlighted that under the NFC, an additional one percent share was allocated for the KP province just to augment its efforts against terrorism. He said the last NFC Award was agreed upon in 2010 by the government of Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani when terrorism was at its peak and the KP province suffered the most, followed by Balochistan and other provinces.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal attending launching ceremony of Annual Sustainability Report 2023, jointly organized by the SDPI and CCCPK held at Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services (PIPS).

CPEC success story of resolve for continued Pak-China collaboration in diverse sectors, says Gillani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on Friday termed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a success story and said that the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Pakistan and China for 2nd phase underscored the will for continued collaboration in diverse sectors.

He expressed these views while addressing the launch of the Annual Sustainability Report 2023 in Islamabad. The event was jointly organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and China Chamber of Commerce Pakistan at Pakistan Institute

for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), a news release said.

"CPEC is a non-partisan agenda in Pakistan as all political parties stood with the government while having a detailed session with Liu Jian Chao, Minister of Central Committee of the International Department of Communist Party of China (IDCPC)" Chairman Senate remarked.

Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani also observed that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was the first which under the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari paved the way for the initiation of CPEC and economic cooperation between Pakistan and China and successive governments

continued their resolve to have CPEC completed. "We are now entering the 2nd phase of CPEC with consistency in our relations and commitments by all political forces in Pakistan" Chairman Senate said.

The PPP's founder Chairman Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Chinese leader Chairman Mao were the architects of strong brotherly relations between the two peoples. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and President Zardari, continued following the footsteps of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

In the meeting, the two sides also reaffirmed commitment to further strengthening the strategic partnership between the two brotherly nations, a Foreign Office press release said.



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar met with Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Malki, in the Federal Capital.

Tarar assures to form committee on journalists protection

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Friday assured the protesting reporters covering parliamentary proceedings of forming a committee on the protection of journalists and develop a mechanism in that regard in consultation with the provinces.

The reporters staged a walk-out from the National Assembly's Press Gallery to raise their concerns about the security of journalists facing violence across the country and observations on working environment in the Parliament House. The minister flanked by Press Information Officer

Mubashir Hassan came to the Press Gallery to hold negotiations with the protesting journalists.

Speaking on the occasion, Tarar said, "We have a very strong relationship with journalists. When the gates of Parliament House were closed for us, we used to sit with you and convey our voice to the people."

He said efforts were being made to solve the problems of journalists on priority. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was working to address the issues of journalist community. The minister paid tribute to the Parliamentary Reporters' Association (PRA) for upholding freedom of press.

Deputy PM Dar meets Saudi Ambassador

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Friday met with Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Malki and discussed bilateral cooperation and key areas of mutual interest.

In the meeting, the two sides also reaffirmed commitment to further strengthening the strategic partnership between the two brotherly nations, a Foreign Office press release said.

Afghan soil being used for terrorism in Pakistan, says Khawaja Asif

ISLAMABAD (APP): Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Friday said that the Afghan territory was being used for committing terrorism, bloodshed, and destruction in Pakistan.

Pakistan possessed concrete evidence that its enemies had sanctuaries in Afghanistan and would take counter measures to defend its citizens, he said while speaking in the National Assembly.

The defence minister recounted his visit to Kabul, during which he had conveyed to the Afghan authorities that fostering good relations would be

beneficial for both nations.

He urged the opposition not to do politicking on terrorism as it was a matter of national security and honouring the blood of martyrs. Khawaja Asif highlighted the adverse impacts of terrorism on the country's economy, alleging that some opposition members had links with the Taliban. Such people had facilitated the return of 6,000 terrorists of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to the country, he added.

The minister stressed the importance of national unity in combating terrorism and protecting Pakistan's sovereignty and security.

PML-N-led Punjab govt never abused power against opposition: CM Maryam

Nawaz Sharif directed authorities to install two air conditioners in Imran Khan's prison cell, instead of one, says Punjab CM

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said on Friday that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government never abused its authority against the opposition nor did it ever try to restrict facilities for its [jailed] political rivals.

CM Maryam was addressing the Punjab Assembly's (PA) session discussing Budget FY25 under the chair of Speaker Malik Ahmed Khan.

The opposition lawmakers resorted to ruckus during her address and chanted anti PML-N slogans, but she continued to



LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz speaking amid the noisy protest.

However, the daughter of PML-N supreme

blasted the former provincial government of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), saying: "They were

instructed the authorities that instead of one install two air conditioners in the prison cell of PTI founder Imran Khan—the former premier who is held at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

She said that PTI's trolls used to ridicule her for her public-friendly actions. "They take checking the price of roti at a tandoor as an insult and used to mock me." "Punjab is the only province that has reduced the price of roti. Instead of shouting slogans here, they [PTI lawmakers] should reduce prices [of roti] in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," she said.

CM Maryam stated that the ruling PML-N President Nawaz Sharif had

PM stresses collective efforts for national prosperity

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said that Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) played a vital role in country's economy and stressed the importance of collective efforts for the national development and prosperity. Chairing a meeting on the matters related to the FBR, he instructed the hiring of top lawyers to pursue various pending cases of the board in courts and tribunals.

The prime minister instructed that Customs Appellate Tribunals, along with Inland Revenue Appellate Tribunals, be established to expedite the resolution of tax-related cases.

He vowed presiding over the weekly review meetings on FBR's ongoing reforms and revenue.

The prime minister also directed to formulate a strategy for giving awards to meritorious officers of the FBR. During the briefing, it was mentioned that the process of establishing Appellate Tribunals in Inland Revenue had begun.



NEW YORK: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi addressing the special session of UN Chiefs of Police Summit at United Nations headquarters.

Mohsin Naqvi says Pakistan committed to peacekeeping partnership

NEW YORK (APP): Pakistan will work with the United Nations and all interested states to further develop the concept of peace enforcement.

This was stated by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, while addressing the UNCOPS Summit 2024 at the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The Interior Minister said Pakistan is proud of longstanding contributions to the UN peacekeeping. He said Pakistan is committed to peacekeeping partnership especially with the African Union and the OIC.

He said in today's dangerous time, the world faced threats of forced foreign interventions, suppression of freedom struggles, poverty, inequality, global tensions, military tensions and nuclear arms race.

Mohsin Naqvi said pre-

ventive diplomacy should focus on addressing the root cause of conflicts. He said the UN peacekeeping missions face increasing challenges from terrorist groups, tribal rivalries and threats to safety.

He said Pakistan agrees with the cause of series and broad-based future reflection of the UN peacekeeping. The Minister suggested that peacekeeping missions must be part of an overall political strategy, which seeks to address and resolve the cause of conflict and violence. He said the mandate of the UN peacekeeping must be responsive to the special circumstances or situations. He added that each mission should be provided with adequate human and material resources and advanced capabilities like radars and early warning intelligence.

NA approves pay hike for members amid opposition protest

ISLAMABAD (INP): The National Assembly has approved an amendment proposed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) regarding the salaries and benefits of its members, passing it by a majority vote.

PPP's Abdul Qadir Patel introduced the amendment in the House, aiming to increase the privileges of Members of Parliament. This amend-

ment to the Salaries and Allowances Act was incorporated into the Finance Bill.

Despite opposition resistance, the amendment passed, resulting in a significant hike in the traveling allowance for Assembly Members from Rs.10 per kilometer to Rs.25. Additionally, annual traveling vouchers have been increased from 25 to 30.

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PM spurned

An attempt by the prime minister, perhaps a tad belated, to mend fences with the PTI has been shot down before it could take flight. The PTI seems to be in no mood for any talks with the government until its incarcerated workers and leaders, including former PM Imran Khan, have been released by the state. In answer to PM Shehbaz Sharif's surprise offer for dialogue, made during the Wednesday session in the National Assembly, PTI lawmakers, one after the other, recounted the indignities they had been made to suffer by the state.

Their anger was justified; still, it was an unfortunate response to an otherwise positive development. It now seems the door has closed on the possibility of a quick political breakthrough. The acrid hostility between the government and opposition has festered for too long, and unless one side softens its position, a messy showdown seems inevitable.

In retrospect, the government's biggest folly was believing that the PTI would eventually break under the same repressive tactics used against its own leaders in the past. However, while these tactics were initially able to cut the PTI to size, the party endured.

Further, the Feb 8 election made clear that the Pakistani citizenry was rallying against the tactics employed by the state. This should have been signal enough for a new government battling for legitimacy to immediately launch the reconciliation process and prevent further victimisation of its political opponents. It chose not to.

To make matters worse, over the past few weeks, at least two different PML-N lawmakers signalled that the government was now considering 'extending' Mr Khan's detention, presumably through freshly fabricated cases. This seemed like a deliberately provocative act by a party that still does not realise it is on very thin ice.

The government should realise that intimidation, coercion and fear tactics have only worsened the political disequilibrium and precipitated even stronger feelings of social unrest. They have also weakened its moral position and emboldened the PTI to dictate terms.

If the prime minister is serious about turning a new page, he must ensure the release of all political prisoners forthwith and make sure the PTI is allowed to function just like any other political party. This simple gesture alone will earn him much-needed goodwill and help create an environment more conducive to talks. On the other hand, the PTI must not set rigid conditions that may preclude a meaningful dialogue. This country does not 'belong' to any particular political entity or political leader: people ascribing to all hues of political opinion should be given equal respect.

Talks must be welcomed and given a fair chance simply because no government can endure in Pakistan without first securing some guarantee from its opponents on political stability.

Defying nature

Zubeida Mustafa

It seems that the guardians of our morality believe a major threat to Pakistan's existence comes from its transgender citizens. A considerable section of religious scholars is unable to explain how a small community of 10,478 (census 2023) vulnerable souls can pose a danger to some 240 million who constitute the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

With their lively imagination, they conjure up all sorts of hypothetical situations that they believe will destroy the moral fibre of the nation. It is strange that those who actually resort to both illegal and immoral actions escape the wrath of our religious scholars. When have they called a conference or uttered a word of condemnation when women are gang-raped, little girls sexually abused and murdered, and thousands of young women trafficked in an illegal multimillion-dollar trade with the connivance of the police? Does their silence on such matters indicate a tacit acceptance of these horrific crimes? But when there is talk of the constitutional rights of the transgender community, it throws them into a state of moral panic. Is this not bizarre?

In a convention held recently in Kara-chi, a section of the clergy lost no time in denouncing some provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, that has been in force for the last six years. To put the record straight, it must be mentioned that this Act has been approved by the Council of Islamic Ideology, while the Supreme Court accepted the principle of self-determination in matters of gender identity/expression in 2012 and Nadra has been issuing CNICs in accordance with the court's

ruling.

The aim, it seems, is to reverse the few gains the transgender persons had managed to win after a hard struggle. We saw some fundamentalist elements belatedly file a petition in the Federal Shariat Court challenging the 2018 Act and labelling it un-Islamic. In 2023, the court gave a verdict turning down the self-termination clause and requiring a transgender person's gender to be identified by a medical board. Transgender persons understandably consider this violative of their dignity.

Now, these elements are claiming that they had been 'deceived' and that the 'nation is a victim of a big "fitna"'. These are serious charges against the Supreme Court that had set the ball rolling for the transgender community at a time when internationally the trend had been to reform gender recognition laws. According to TGEU (Transgender Europe), "Self-determination is growing in popularity as a model. Gender self-determination means that a person can change gender marker and name on official documents through an easy administrative process. The change is based on the person's self-determined gender identity. No third party is required."

Since the government has mercifully appealed against the FSC verdict, these conservative elements are in a fix. They now want the government to withdraw its appeal. They even speak of launching a movement against the law protecting the rights of the transgender community. According to the participants of the convention, the Act is a guise to encourage homosexuality and obscenity.

These are trying times for the transgender community. A large number of them have been

singled out and killed since 2021, when the hate campaign against them reached fever pitch. They feel insecure, and this has hampered their progress. After the passage of the 2018 Act, the rights activists failed to sustain their campaign to create awareness about the transgender community. Social prejudice against them has still to be rooted out. Many religious parties have taken advantage of this situation and are whipping up hatred against non-binary people.

I feel sad and call up Bindiya Rana, the pioneer of the transgender movement in Pak-istan. She is depressed. "Three trans--gender persons have been murdered recently," she tells me. "And do you know who their killers were? They were her own siblings, who have no love for their sister." Bindiya feels that the Transgender Persons Act needs to be strengthened and not undermined. It should have a provision for punishing parents who abandon a transgender child before s/he reaches adulthood. But here are some conservative elements trying to make life more difficult for them.

I agree and point out that the real danger comes from bigotry and obscurantism. Those born with birth defects cannot hurt this country. Bindiya remains calm and has no harsh words for her tormentors, who reject her humanity. After all, she is God's creation, and what she has been denied is compensated by her generosity of spirit and sagacity. Bindiya reminds me of the words of the transgender protagonist of Arundhati Roy's book, Ministry of Utmost Happiness: "The word Hijra ... meant a Body in which a Holy Soul lives." -- Courtesy Dawn

Death-worth rule

Shahzad Sharjeel

Ask anyone what a human life is worth, and answers would range between 'priceless', 'incalculable', and 'more than all the gold in the world'. Incumbent nihilists would say 'worthless', and the philosophical-minded would lead you astray with gems like 'every breath is a transaction, decide the price and pay the cost'.

Philosophy and romanticism aside, this is a practical question that governments and organisations grapple with daily.

That one's life is not considered equal in worth to someone else's is an unsettling realisation and sounds unfair. But then, such is the nature of our existence. It was reported in the media recently that families of five foreign workers killed in a terrorist attack in Kohistan some months back would each receive a little more than half a million US dollars in compensation from the government. Going by the exchange rate, this would roughly equal a little less than Rs14 crore per family. Meanwhile, the family of the Pakistani driver who was also killed in the attack would get Rs2.5 m. The huge gap between the two amounts notwithstanding, both are insufficient because the victims and relations and emotions associated with them are irreplaceable. However, from another perspective, the driver and his family were shortchanged. Unfortunately, life is more complex than emotions; all else being 'unequal' applies more to it than the ceteris paribus so often referred to by economists.

It can take the authorities several years to process claims and determine compensation. Why? Because the con-

cerned bodies have the unenviable task of determining the 'worth' of each life lost. Economic and non-economic losses are considered. The former consists of losses in expected income in case of death or decreases resulting from disability. The non-economic losses include pain, trauma, and short-term psychological impacts. To assess economic losses, factors like the victim's age, academic qualification, means of livelihood, income at the time of death/disability, health condition, and life expectancy are all factored in to extrapolate their earnings from what is determined to be their expected working life.

Depending upon local laws and other factors, more or different factors may be thrown in or removed from the equation. Back to the incident in Kohistan, a 30-year-old driver earning, let us assume, Rs35,000 a month will not earn more than a 50-year-old engineer earning Rs5m a month possibly for the next 10 years, assuming 60 to be the age of superannuation for both. Of course, these formulae assume that the driver would remain that and will not branch out into entrepreneurship and that the engineer would retain his ability to construct hydropower projects for another 10 years. Hopefully, a clearer picture is beginning to emerge by now as to how your life may be worth more than mine when it comes down to hard-core, economic number crunching.

Before condemning this or that socioeconomic framework, let us bear in mind that even in the old tribal codes, still practised today, a chief's blood money is many times higher than that of his family members, whose lives are considered far dearer

than those of a tribe member.

Victim compensation is a specialised field; in developed economies, its calculation is entrusted to VC attorneys, and individual determinations are made by courts or boards of funds set up by governments in the aftermath of losses from calamities, disasters, wars, or acts of terrorism. One such VC fund was formed

in 2001 in the aftermath of the twin-tower attack in New York. Its initial ambit lasted till 2004. As more types of damages, losses, and trauma that could be covered under the fund came to the fore with time, new pieces of legislation were enacted to provide legal cover for the ongoing nature of claim filing and settlements. Currently, the fund's tenure extends to 2090.

In our local context, while laws, procedures, and protocols to deal with almost any eventually exist, implementation depends on officialdom's whims and political expedience. Every fire or rain deluge results in business and trade bodies exhorting the government to compensate for their losses. Why, one must ask, should the government pick up the tab for their decision to forego insurance? When moveable assets like vehicles are lost or damaged, do we ask the government to compensate for them? Either they are insured or they are not. Why should it be any different for other types of assets? Governments should incentivise the insurance sector and encourage employers to enlist their workforce. Faiz Ahmad Faiz rued the voiceless multitudes: "No plaintiff, no witnesses; the blood of the down-to-earth, sustains it." -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

Economy poised for growth in FY2024-25: Finance Ministry

ISLAMABAD (APP): The growth prospects for Pakistan are expected to remain encouraging during the upcoming fiscal year 2024-25 as the government's focus on key sectors is expected to propel the country onto a trajectory of sustained growth, according to a recent report released by the Finance Ministry on here Friday.

"Pakistan's growth prospects are expected to remain encouraging. Budget FY2025 is gearing towards a shift to an era of sustainable and inclusive growth," said the Monthly Economic Update and Outlook for June released by the ministry. Aiming to this, the government is focusing on high-potential sectors like Infor-

mation Technology (IT), Small and Medium Entrepreneurs (SMEs), mines and minerals, tourism, exports and agriculture, it said.

"These sectors can pay rich dividends and lend support to the country's balance of payments position. Complementing this, fiscal discipline, effective implementation of home-grown growth program along with bilateral and multilateral cooperation will necessitate the sustainable potential growth path in coming years," the report maintained.

The monthly update says that fiscal year 2023-24 was going to end with an economic stabilisation path accompanied by im-

proved macroeconomic indicators.

"The subsiding inflationary pressures, stability in external accounts and exchange rate, fiscal consolidation and gradual recovery in industrial activities are restoring the confidence of economic agents thus facilitating economic growth," it said. Highlighting the performance of various economic indicators, the report said, the inflation outlook for June 2024 has slightly increased compared to the previous month but remains well below the levels of the same month last year. This rise is primarily due to higher prices of perishable items driven by Eid ul



ISLAMABAD: The Second meeting of the Committee to assess and facilitate the reconstitution of Board of Korangi Fisheries Harbour Authority (KoFHA) was held under the chairmanship of Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Federal Minister for Industries & Production Rana Tanveer Hussain was also present as members of the committee.

Minister chairs meeting to reconstitute BoD for KoFHA

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second meeting of the committee tasked with assessing and facilitating the reconstitution of the Board of Directors (BoD) for the Korangi Fisheries Harbour Authority (KoFHA) was held here Friday.

The meeting was chaired by the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, while Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Secretary Maritime Affairs Syed Zafar Ali Shah and other senior officers of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs were in attendance as committee members, said a

press release. The committee was formed to ensure that the reconstitution of KoFHA's Board of Directors complies with applicable laws; as the core focus of the committee lies in meticulously scrutinizing the Federal Government's selection of five Board members

During the first meeting, held on June 11, the committee meticulously reviewed the criteria and guidelines for the selection process. The discussions focused on ensuring that the nominated members would bring a diverse range of skills, experience, and expertise to the board, align-

ing with the objectives outlined in the KoFHA Ordinance and the SOE Act, 2023. In its second meeting today, the list was reviewed followed by threadbare discussion and would finalize the names after necessary consultation with stakeholders. Federal Minister Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh emphasized the importance of transparency and meritocracy in the nomination process. He added that we focus to reconstitute a Board of Directors that upholds the highest standards of governance and is equipped to drive KoFHA towards greater efficiency and success.

Weekly inflation falls by 0.73 pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed a decrease of 0.73 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on June 27, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 314.57 points as compared to 316.88 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 22.88 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16=100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group during the week ended on June 27, decreased by 0.80 per cent and went down to 306.62 points from last week's 309.10 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732-22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517, Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, decreased by 0.85 percent, 0.77 percent, 0.79 and 0.67 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 18 (35.29%) items increased, 8 (15.69%) items decreased and 25 (49.02%) items remained stable.



ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

At MWC 2024 Huawei redefines connectivity with 5.5G advancements

SHANGHAI (China) (APP): Li Peng, Huawei's Corporate Senior Vice President and President of ICT Sales & Service, delivered a keynote focusing on maximizing the value of 5.5G for carriers.

He highlighted the industry's readiness for large-scale commercial use of 5.5G through years of concerted effort in network, service, and business ecosystem preparation.

According to Li, business model innovation and capability integration are critical for carriers to achieve optimal return on investment in 5.5G. He emphasized the arrival of the mobile AI era, urging carriers to integrate net-

work, cloud, and AI capabilities to offer differentiated connected experiences. This shift, Li argued, moves beyond traditional traffic monetization to monetizing the user experience itself, thereby driving industry development.

Drawing a parallel with the aviation industry's evolution, Li underscored the importance of high-quality supply in stimulating new demand. He highlighted the need for the mobile communications industry to integrate advanced technologies as it transitions to 5.5G, aiming to meet new and latent user demands and accelerate industry growth.



FAISALABAD: Farmers using modern agricultural machine for seedling of rice crop in their field.

PTCL Group integrates advanced AI to achieve customer service excellence

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's largest telecommunication and ICT services provider, PTCL Group (PTCL & Ufone 4G) has collaborated with STech.ai to integrate an innovative AI-based platform that leverages advanced technologies, including Urdu-based Large Language Models (LLMs), Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Machine Learning (ML) to enhance its customer services system.

The platform aims to enhance quality management systems by providing enriched customer sentiment analysis and valuable insights, driving

PTCL's overall customer experience strategy, said a news release.

The strategic initiative underscores PTCL Group's commitment to excellence in customer experience. Customer-centricity is paramount at PTCL Group, which inspires the Group's commitment to excellence in both customer experience and services delivery. The company continuously invests, innovates, and refines its business processes. It leverages innovative technologies and customer feedback to enhance every interaction and ensures that each service touchpoint is seamless, reliable, and responsive.

PSX loses 83 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday shed 83.29 points, a slight negative change of 0.11 percent, closing at 78,444.96 points against 78,528.25 points on the last working day.

A total of 347,671,672 shares were traded during the day as compared to 283,542,503 shares the previous day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 11,899 billion against Rs 11,067 billion on the last trading day.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Seven ships, Wan Hai-316, Maersk Cairo, Express Athens, Alora, Southern Anoa, Gaschem Fuji and Clipper Barolo scheduled to load/offload Container, Rice, Chemicals and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminals and Bulk Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile two more ships, Afra Rossie and Samaisma scheduled to load/offload Furnace oil and LNG also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on during last 24 hours.

FCCI to sign MoUs to facilitate its members

FAISALABAD (APP): Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) will sign a series of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with different organizations to project this august trade body in addition to ensuring maximum concessions and facilitation for its ten thousand members.

Senior Vice President FCCI Dr Sajjad Arshad along with Vice President Haji Muhammad Aslam Bahali inked two separate MOUs with Sahil Hospital and Pure Gold Jewelers respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Sajjad Arshad said that Sahil Hospital would provide 15-20 % discount to FCCI members on laboratory tests, X-rays, ultrasound and other services.

"However, FCCI employees would be entitled for a discount of 20-35 % on these tests and services", he added.

He also signed an MOU with Pure Gold Jewelers and said that this organization would offer 100 % discount in labor charges on making of gold ornaments.

Rupee gains 03 paise against Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Rupee on Friday gained 03 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 278.34 against the previous day's closing at Rs 278.37.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market, however, were Rs 277.7 and Rs 280.6 respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 13 paise to close at Rs 297.68 against the last day's closing of Rs 297.55, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Punjab Governor says: Political parties should play positive role for development and prosperity of the country

Independent Report
LAHORE: A delegation of members of the Punjab Assembly, headed by the Parliamentary Leader of the Pakistan People's Party, Punjab Assembly, Syed Ali Haider Gillani, met Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan at the Governor's House, Lahore. During the meeting, the members of the delegation congratulated Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider on assuming the office of Governor.

Speaking on this occasion, Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan said that all political parties including the opposition should play a positive role for the development and prosperity of the coun-

try. Governor Punjab further said that good governance and improving the quality of education in universities is a priority. He said that all resources would be utilized for the welfare of the people. He further said that he was committed to provide the facilities of higher education to the backward tehsils of far flung districts of Punjab. Punjab Governor said that the sub-campus of major universities in the backward tehsils of Attock District would be established in the shortest possible time.

Parliamentary Leader of Pakistan People's Party in Punjab Assembly, Syed Ali Haider Gillani said that People's Party has always

believed in the politics of reconciliation for stability in the country. The delegation comprised Sardar Raees Nabeel, Malik Wasif Mazhar Ran, Mian Kamran Abdullah Mudal, Qazi Ahmed Saeed, Amir Ali Shah, Inam Bari, Sardar Habibur Rehman Gopang, Shazia Abid, Neelam Jabbar and Nargis Faiz Malik.

Earlier, Secretary Home Punjab, Noor Ul Amin Mengal called on Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan at Governor House Lahore. During the meeting, Secretary Home Punjab briefed the Governor Punjab regarding the peace and order plan during Muharram in Rawalpindi Division, especially in Attock district.



GILGIT: Fateh Ullah, Chairman Board of Investment Gilgit-Baltistan addressing a post budget press conference along with Finance Minister Engr. Muhammad Ismail.

Larkana police crack down on kidnapers, rescue two victims in joint operation

Independent Report
LARKANA: In a successful operation, the Larkana Range Police, led by DIGP Nasser Aftab, in collaboration with the Shikarpur Police and Sindh Rangers, rescued two kidnapped individuals, Gulzar Phulpoto and Asif Sethar, from the Gharhi Tegho area. The operation was conducted based on intelligence reports of the presence of criminals and kidnapped individuals in the area. The police teams

worked tirelessly to ensure the safe recovery of the victims. DIGP Larkana Nasser Aftab has commended the Shikarpur Police for their role in the operation and issued commendation certificates to the team.

This operation is a significant blow to the kidnapping syndicates operating in the region, and the Larkana Police have proven their commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the citizens.

Uzma warns anti-state elements for creating chaos in name of religion, politics

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab Information Minister Uzma Bukhari Friday warned the anti-state elements who were involved in lawlessness to destabilize the country and said that government would adopt zero-tolerance policy in that regard.

Talking to a private news channel, she clarified the issue of restoring a hundred-year-old Gurdwara, adding no discussion was held so far in that regard but some anti-state groups were misleading the people.

The minister said law would come into action if there was a threat of damaging public property or harming the people, adding, anti-state elements were playing every tactic to tarnish the image of the country but would not succeed.

The provincial government would not allow anyone to spread violence and fan anarchy, she added.



LAHORE: Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan in a group photo with delegation of MPAs, headed by the Parliamentary Leader of the PPP, Syed Ali Haider Gillani at the Governor's House.

KP to start Water Resource Accountability for Pak Prog.

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur presided over the meeting with officials of the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Drainage, International Water Management Institute.

In the meeting, detailed considerations and important decisions were made on issues related to the protection of water reservoirs in the province, better management and efficient use of available water resources.

The decision was taken to start the Water Resource Accountability for Pakistan Program

(WRP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the support of the British Government. This program will provide technical support to the provincial government for the conservation of water resources, their better management and wise use. By implementing the program, reliable data related to underground, surface and rain water will be collected in the province. As a result of this support, the implementation of the Provincial Government's Water Act and Water and Agricultural Sector Reforms Agenda will be ensured.

Under the program, the International Water

Management Institute will provide technical assistance to the provincial government in six different sectors in Pakhtunkhwa. These areas include water accounting and productivity assessment, early draft warning system, water resource management information system, irrigation demand management, water allocation system and capacity building.

This program will be initially started in Charsadda and Mansehra district which will later be extended to other districts of the province. For this purpose, MoUs will be signed between the relevant provincial departments.

Anti-polio campaign officially launched in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur here on Friday officially launched the campaign by administering polio drops to children to be started from July 1, 2024.

The five-day anti-polio campaign will continue from July 1 to July 5 with the Anti-polio campaign in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being launched in July 2024.

Under the campaign, anti-polio drops will be administered in six complete districts of Swabi, Swat, Tank, North Waziristan, South Waziristan Lower, and South Waziristan Upper.

Similarly, this campaign will also be conducted in specific union councils of five districts, including 22 union councils of Dera Ismail Khan, three of Peshawar and one each of Karam, Bannu and Lakki Marwat. Under the campaign, a total of 1299000 children have been set as the target of anti-polio vaccination, said the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Health Dept. KP lifts ban on MTI

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Department has decided to lift the ban on the decisions of the Board of Governors of the Medical Teaching Institution.

A formal letter has been issued by the Health Department to the chairmen of the Board of Governors of all MTIs. On March 8, the Chief Minister had banned the Board of Governors of Medical Teaching Institutions from taking important decisions. As a result of the formation of new boards, the ban on taking important decisions has been removed.

Minister for minority affairs meets journalists, Sikh pilgrims

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora visited the Lahore Press Club.

A large number of Sikh pilgrims from India were present on the occasion while former President of Chandigarh Press Club Punjab, India, and Secretary General of Indian Journalists Union, Balender Singh Jammu, and various Indian journalists were also present.

President of Lahore Press Club Arshad Ansari, Member Governing Body Imran Sheikh, Rana Shahzad and Syed Badr

Saeed etc. welcomed the distinguished guests. Ramesh Singh Arora said that he was very happy to come to Lahore Press Club while religious minorities in Pakistan, especially the Sikh community, have complete religious freedom and protection. Sikh pilgrims from India are provided with best facilities and perform their religious rituals without any hindrance. He further said that the facilities that the minorities get in Pakistan are not available to any minority including Muslims in India. "We are living a prosperous and peaceful life in Pakistan."



GILGIT: Rescue 1122 staffer busy in lifting car from the ditch after road accident at Nalter Express way.

NADRA Chairman visits Central Police Office

LAHORE (APP): National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) Chairman Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar visited the Central Police Office here on Friday.

Director General NADRA Lahore Sohail Jahangir, AD Rizwan Ali, and Major Nadeem Gondal accompanied him.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar and senior police officers welcomed the NADRA Chairman. A smart police contingent presented a salute to the NADRA Chairman on arrival. The NADRA Chairman visited the Police Martyrs' Memorial and offered prayers for the souls of the martyrs. Chairman NADRA, Lt Gen

Muhammad Munir Afsar paid rich tributes to the sacrifices of the Punjab Police martyrs.

During a meeting with IG Punjab, discussions were held to further enhance strategic partnership, data information sharing and mutual cooperation in cyber security and other professional affairs. The IG Punjab said that NADRA's data sharing in identification of criminals and terrorist elements, verification of citizens, policing issues is highly commendable.

Chairman NADRA, Lt Gen Muhammad Munir Afsar indicated to further expand cooperation with Punjab Police in the process of eradication of crimes and identification of miscreants and criminals.

International News

Russia warns it can take unspecified measures in response to US drone flights over Black Sea

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Russia's Defense Minister ordered officials to prepare a "response" to U.S. drone flights over the Black Sea, the ministry said Friday, in an apparent warning that Moscow may take forceful action to ward off the American reconnaissance aircraft. The Russian Defense Ministry noted a recent "increased intensity" of U.S. drones over the Black Sea, saying they "conduct intelligence and targeting for precision weapons supplied to the Ukrainian military by Western countries for strikes on Russian facilities."

"It shows an increased involvement of the U.S. and other NATO countries in the conflict in Ukraine on the side of the Kyiv regime," the ministry said in a statement.

It noted that "such flights significantly increase the probability of incidents involving Russian military

aircraft, which increases the risk of direct confrontation between the alliance and the Russian Federation." "NATO members will bear responsibility for that," it added. The ministry said that Defense Minister Andrei Belousov has directed the General Staff to "make proposals on measures of operative response to provocations."

On March 14, 2023, a Su-27 fighter jet of the Russian air force intercepted and damaged a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone, causing it to crash into the Black Sea. The incident marked the first direct clash between the Russian and U.S. forces since the Cold War.

The Pentagon and U.S. European Command said after the incident that two Russian Su-27 aircraft dumped fuel on the MQ-9, which was conducting a routine surveillance mission over the Black Sea in international airspace.

The Russian Defense

Ministry said then that the U.S. drone was flying near the Russian border and intruded into an area that was declared off-limits by Russian authorities.

Russia has declared broad areas near Crimea off-limits to flights. Ever since Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and long before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Moscow has accused U.S. surveillance planes of flying too close to its borders while ignoring the notices issued by Russia.

Friday's Russian statement follows a Ukrainian attack on Sevastopol over the weekend with U.S.-made ATACMS missiles, which killed four and injured about 150, according to Russian authorities.

Russian officials have claimed that the U.S. was directly involved in the attack by providing intelligence and targeting and warned to take retaliatory measures.

Kenya's young protesters plot next moves after dramatic tax win

Monitoring Desk
NAIROBI: After their stunning success in forcing the government to shelve \$2.7 billion in tax hikes, young Kenyan activists are setting their sights higher, taking aim at ingrained corruption and misgovernance.

Protesters say the finance bill that President William Ruto abandoned on Wednesday was only a symptom of the problems plaguing a country where many young people have few job prospects despite strong economic growth.

The movement has little precedent in its mass mobilisation of Kenyans across ethnic and regional divisions while rejecting any kind of political leadership.

Protests in Kenya have historically been led by elites, often ending in power-shar-

ing deals that yielded few tangible benefits for demonstrators. Protesters now face the challenge of maintaining unity and momentum while pursuing broader, less immediate goals.

They will also have to decide how to respond to Ruto's offer of dialogue, made on Wednesday but without specifics. Writer and activist Nanjala Nyabola said most of those involved in the recent protests were motivated by legitimate, strong grievances against the government.

"Until those grievances are addressed, it's unlikely that they're going to be willing to make concessions." How the diffuse and leaderless movement, which largely organised via social media, pursues its objectives remains an open question.

Oil edges higher amid crisis in Middle East

Monitoring Desk
NEW YORK: Oil prices rose about one per cent on Wednesday despite a surprise jump in US gasoline supplies, as investors worried that a potential expansion of the fighting in Gaza could disrupt crude supplies from the Middle East.

Brent crude futures rose 22 cents, or 0.3pc, to \$85.23 per barrel by 1835 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures settled 7 cents higher at \$80.90 a barrel.

Cross-border strains between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have been escalating in recent weeks, stoking fears of an all-out Israeli-Hezbollah war that could draw in other regional powers, including major oil producer Iran.



A woman carries a child as she evacuates with others from the Tuffah neighbourhood, in the east of Gaza City.

Democrats scramble to limit damage after Biden's wobbly debate showing against Trump

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden's allies scrambled to contain the fallout on Friday from his faltering performance at the first 2024 US presidential debate after he struggled to stem a barrage of attacks and false claims from his Republican rival Donald Trump.

The Biden campaign had hoped that a strong debate would quell concerns among voters that the 81-year-old Democratic incumbent is too old to serve a second four-year term.

Instead, a hoarse Biden stumbled over his words

and lost his train of thought at times, especially early in the debate.

One Biden donor, who asked for anonymity, called his performance "disqualifying" and predicted that some Democrats would revisit calls for Biden to step aside in favour of another candidate before the party's national convention in August.

Panicking Democrats exchanged messages wondering whether Biden would consider stepping down. One senior Democratic strategist said there would be calls for Biden to step down.

Bolivian President Luis Arce denies conspiracy after failed coup

Monitoring Desk
LA PAZ: Bolivian President Luis Arce on Thursday denied conspiring with his former army chief, who was arrested after deploying troops and tanks to the heart of the capital La Paz, where they tried to break down a door of the presidential palace.

Fourteen civilians who opposed the coup were wounded by gunfire, according to the authorities. Some had to be hospitalized

and operated on, Luis Arce told the press.

Authorities paraded handcuffed detainees in front of the media on Thursday, announcing 17 arrests including ex-army chief Juan Jose Zuniga, and riot police kept close watch over government buildings a day after the botched coup.

Tensions in the Andean nation have been rising in recent weeks over surging prices.

Russian satellite breaks up in space, forces ISS astronauts to shelter

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: A defunct Russian satellite has broken up into more than 100 pieces of debris in orbit, forcing astronauts on the International Space Station to take shelter for about an hour and adding to the mass of space junk already in orbit. US space agencies said. There were no immediate details on what caused the break-up of the RESURS-P1 Russian Earth observation satellite, which was declared dead in 2022. US Space Command, tracking the debris swarm, said there was no immediate threat to other satellites.

US soldier charged in Japan over minor's rape

Monitoring Desk
TOKYO: Japan's government is calling for stricter oversight of US troops stationed in the country after a soldier was charged with the alleged sexual assault of a Japanese teenager in Okinawa. Prosecutors in the southern island region charged the US soldier in March, top government spokesman Hayashi told reporters on Tuesday.

Palestinians flee as Israeli forces return to Gaza's north

Monitoring Desk
GAZA STRIP: Palestinians fled eastern Gaza City on Thursday under heavy bombardment as the Israeli military issued an evacuation order for the area it had previously declared clear of Hamas fighters.

The flare-up in the northern Gaza Strip's Shujaiya district, which witnesses and medics said caused numerous casualties, comes as fears grow of a wider regional conflagration involving Israel and Hezbollah, a Hamas ally.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, on a visit to Washington to discuss the Gaza conflict and ways to avoid broader conflict in the Middle East, warned Hezbollah that fighting on a massive scale would send Lebanon

"back to the stone age". With cross-border tensions between Israel and Hezbollah rising, Gallant said, "We do not want war, but we are preparing for every scenario." In Gaza, fighting has ground on despite comments by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the "intense phase" of the war — now nearing its 10th month — was winding down.

The civil defence agency in the Hamas-run territory and medics said Israeli strikes overnight and early on Thursday killed at least five people in Gaza City and another in Beit Lahia, also in the north.

The Israeli military said it had "attacked terrorists who were in a school complex in Khan Yunis" in the south.

Turkey welcomes removal from a key money-laundering watchlist, hoping to boost foreign investment

Monitoring Desk
ANKARA: Turkey on Friday welcomed a decision by an international watchdog to remove it from a so-called "gray list" of countries that have not fully implemented measures to fight money laundering and terrorism financing.

The announcement by the Financial Action Task Force in Singapore could bolster foreign investments in Turkey, which is trying to rebound from a deep economic downturn.

"We succeeded," Turkish Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek wrote on the social media platform X, as the decision was being announced.

Vice-President Cevdet Yilmaz said: "With this development, international investors' confidence in our country's financial system has become even stronger. The decision will have extremely posi-

tive consequences for the financial sector and the economy."

Being on the watchdog's gray list can scare away investors and creditors, hurting exports, output and consumption.

It also can make global banks wary of doing business with a country.

FATF President T. Raja Kumar, who is finishing his two-year term, said Turkey was taken off the gray list because of the "substantial progress" that it has made.

Christophe Deloire, the head of media freedom group Reporters Without Borders, has died.

He was 53. Kumar said a FATF team visited Turkey in May and confirmed that the country had taken "substantive steps" to improve its anti-money laundering regime, addressing all the items in its action plan.

Upcoming monsoon rains to cause devastating floods: Romina Alam

Relief camps established in vulnerable areas should be widely advert

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Romina Khurshid Alam on Friday stressed that the upcoming monsoon rains could lead to devastating floods, whereas relief camps established in vulnerable areas should be widely advertised to ensure access for potential victims.

The Coordinator to PM on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination made these remarks while chairing the meeting

of task force on global warming and heat waves here.

Romina emphasized the importance of utilizing all available media platforms, including digital, electronic, radio, and mosque loudspeakers to effectively communicate information about the relief camps. She highlighted the urgent need for protective measures against the severe threats of heat waves and floods to food, health, and the economy along with the need for collaborative ef-

orts to face these calamities, stating that "hazards cannot be stopped but can be handled".

Furthermore, she urged the authorities to address the pressing issue of tree cutting and the dumping of trees in nullahs, as these actions can lead to damage to bridges during floods in KPK and Kashmir. The decisions made in the earlier two meetings of the task force held on 7th and 14 June were reviewed in detail. She said, "The departments contributing in

my efforts to overcome socio-economic impacts are my team and assured of Ministry's all possible support at all levels so as the country's disaster vulnerability is lessened through coordinated efforts among the federal and provincial departments including national and provincial disaster management authorities, health, education, agriculture, water and energy departments." She said well-coordinated disaster risk mitigation or prevention measures are required.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Senate Standing Committee for Climate Change, Sherry Rehman posing for a group photograph along with participants during the seminar titled "Building Resilience by Strengthening the Community (BRSC)-II Project".



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme, Senator Rubina Khalid, meets KfW Development Bank mission, headed by Dr. Patrick Rudolf, at BISP Headquarters Islamabad.

AOA gathers in Istanbul to promote human rights, good governance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Wafaqi Mohtasib, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi said that Ombudsman Institutions constitute a global fraternity which can play an effective role in improving the quality of life for the common man through better governance.

Addressing the 25th Annual meeting of the Board of Directors (BoD) of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) as its current President in Istanbul (Republic of Turkey), he said that the objectives and purposes of the establishment of the

Ombudsman Institution has a direct bearing on the realization of the overall goals, principally the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and good governance in all spheres of life.

Qureshi emphasized the need for greater sharing of experiences and best practices to the mutual advantage of all stakeholders. "The commonly shared objectives are worth striving for and we should make a conscious effort for their realization", he observed.

He expressed the con-

fidence that such exchanges amongst the Ombudsman Institutions would lead to further refining and streamlining the systems and procedures for addressing maladministration, bureaucratic bottlenecks and systemic issues.

He thanked the Board of Directors (BoD) for expressing confidence and trust in Pakistan's contribution in promoting the cause of Ombudsmanhood to realize the ultimate objectives of good governance and the rule of law besides the inviolability of human rights.

BISP, KfW join hands to educate masses on mother, child health

ISLAMABAD (APP): Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and KfW Development Bank will join hands to disseminate awareness about mother and child health in line with Benazir Nashonuma initiative.

This was discussed during a meeting of Chairperson BISP, Senator Rubina Khalid with the KfW Development Bank mission at BISP headquarters on Friday.

Chairperson BISP, Senator Rubina Khalid, emphasized the critical link between the health of mothers and the health of their children. She highlighted BISP's commitment to designing and implementing health initiatives aimed at combating malnutrition and

stunting among women beneficiaries and their children under Benazir Nashonuma.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Patrick Rudolf, Head of Division in Health, KfW Frankfurt, Anna Berzovskaja, Portfolio Manager in Health and Social Protection, Dr. Matthias Nachtnebel, Technical Advisor, Dr. Masuma Zaidi, Senior Sector Specialist, KfW Pakistan, Additional Secretary Dr. Muhammad Tahir Noor, and DG NSER/CCT Naveed Akbar.

Chairperson Rubina Khalid proposed collaborative initiatives with KfW to raise awareness about nutritious food and the benefits of breastfeeding for newborns.



ISLAMABAD: Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami hold a protest against the highly inflated electricity bills, at sector I-9 in the Federal Capital.

Preparations underway for pilgrimage to holy shrines in Iran, Iraq

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the mourning days of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S) approach, preparations are in full swing for the visits to the holy shrines in Iran and Iraq.

"The Iranian Headquarters of Arbaeen has taken various measures to welcome visitors from other countries, with a special focus on the friendly and brotherly nation of Pakistan," the Iranian Embassy said in a statement on Friday.

In the Sistan and Balochistan province, the Iranian Arbaeen Headquarters has once again provided necessary facilities to receive visitors at the common borders of Iran and Pakistan.

This initiative would ensure a smooth and hospitable experience for the pilgrims.

The pilgrims of Imam Reza's (RA) shrine would be able to undertake their

pilgrimage during the holy month of Muharram.

The embassy said, "Those interested in visiting the holy shrines from June 27 to July 8, can travel to Iraq via Iran with a valid double-entry visa."

"Additionally, those planning to participate in the Arbaeen Procession from July 9 to August 22, can travel to Iraq through Iran with an Iranian double-entry visa, provided they possess a valid Iraqi visa," it added.

To accommodate the high number of pilgrims at the common borders, the Iranian Arbaeen Headquarters advised the Pakistani pilgrims to first obtain an Iraqi visa before applying for an Iranian visa.

"This can be done at any of the five Iranian missions located in Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and Quetta," the embassy said.

Humid weather to continue; rain likely at isolated places: PMD

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) on Friday forecast mainly hot and humid weather in most parts of the country during the next 24 hours.

However, rain-wind-storm/thundershower was expected at isolated places in Kashmir, northeast Punjab, Pothohar region, Islamabad, upper Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, southeast Sindh, northeast/south Balochistan, the PMD added.

Light rain/drizzle was also likely at isolated places in coastal areas of Sindh.

According to the synoptic situation, "a low lies over the north Arabian Sea and adjoining areas of southeast Sindh and is likely to persist during next 24-30 hours". Weak monsoon currents were penetrating in upper/central parts of the country.

PML-N leader terms political stability vital for achieving economic strength

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Leader, Syeda Nosheen Iftikha Friday stressed the need of political stability to achieve economic strength and urged the opposition to work collectively with the government for strengthening the country by setting aside personal agendas.

Talking to PTV news channel, she said that political stability and social harmony were two essential elements which would only ensure progress of the country, adding, if there

was a conflict in society then no policy could yield positive results.

The PML-N leader said the credit of bringing the economy of the country on the right track went to PML-N leadership, adding, it was hoped that situation would further improve in the coming months and inflation would be reduced. She also lauded that the government had presented a highly balanced budget with its limited resources to strengthen economy and open new doors of development.

PBM launches first-ever Business Facilitation Centre under WISE project

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a historic move, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM), in collaboration with Islamic Relief (IR) has introduced its first-ever Business Facilitation Centre under Women Initiative for Skill Enhancement (WISE) project, in a ceremony held here on Friday.

Regional Program Coordinator-Asia from Islamic Relief Worldwide, Haney Masood inaugurated Business Facilitation Centre in the presence of PBM Directors Muhammad Hussain and Saima Wadood along with the trainers and trainees of the Women Empowerment Centre.

The initiative has sketched the outline of three months training to at least 120 poor and deserv-

ing girls in various trades including digital marketing, art and craft, stitching and beautician at Women Empowerment Centre of PBM.

Speaking on the occasion, Regional Program Coordinator, Islamic Relief Haney Masood appreciated the PBM's efforts to support the deprived populace of the country.

He said the WISE project focused on uplifting marginalized women by equipping them with marketable skills that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

On the occasion, PBM's Director Administration, Muhammad Hussain expressed his gratitude to Islamic Relief for extending their generous support and cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Youth Program Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan addresses to the Concluding Ceremony of International Conference on Uplifting Mental Health of Vulnerable Segments of Population.



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Edu ministry partners with CERP to enhance teaching quality

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has collaborated with CERP to fulfil the goals of the National Institute of Excellence in Teacher Education (NIETE) program and to address the urgent need for high-quality teachers' training and development in Pakistan.

The signing ceremony in that regard was attended by the Federal Minister Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui and Federal Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, held here Friday.

As per the collaboration, NIETE aims to uplift teaching standards through rigorous training programs that utilize technology and modern pedagogical methods. This partnership will also help mitigate educational disparities and resource constraints, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes.

The program focuses on integrating digital literacy, retraining teachers, and improving the quality of learning through digital infrastructure and innovative technologies.

CERP, with its distinguished expertise in conducting impartial evaluations, will measure and validate the benefits of the project to both teachers and students.

Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool said, "Education plays a formative role in adding value to Pakistan's human capital development. It starts with not only bringing more children into the classroom but ensuring that once they get there, the quality of education is of a high standard."

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Amb. Masood Khan calls for stronger US-Pakistan security, economic partnerships

WASHINGTON (APP): Pakistan need sophisticated small arms and communication equipment to combat the growing terrorism, Ambassador Masood Khan has said, while calling for stronger US-Pakistan security and economic



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present were policy makers, scholars, intelligentsia, corporate leaders, members of think-tank community and Pak-American community leaders.

"Pakistan and United States should continue to invest in the reset of their relationship, maintain strong security links, enhance intelligence cooperation, resume sales of advanced military platforms and sustainment of Pakistan's US-origin defence equipment," he said.

The ambassador said that prospects of Pakistan-United States ties were bright, adding "We share values, our security and economic interests are interwoven, and it is the aspiration of our two peoples that strengthen our ties."

NA passes amendment to Elections Bill-2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Assembly on Friday passed an amendment to the Elections Act, 2017 (The Elections (Amendment) Bill, 2024).

The bill was moved by Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Azam Nazeer Tarar.

Briefing the lawmakers, he said the amendment was aimed at expediting the settlement of petitions pertaining to elections of the National Assembly, the Senate, provincial assemblies, and local governments.

He explained that due to the workload on serving judges, the proposed amendment seeks to restore the original provision of Section 140, making retired high court judges eligible for appointment as members of election tribunals.



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar exchanging views with Donald Blome, Ambassador of United States to Pakistan during meeting held at Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

partnerships. "This is crucial for regional security and opposing the rising tide of terrorism that also threatens the interests of the US and its allies," Khan, the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., told the Annual Pakistan conference titled, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Assessing the US-Pakistan Relationship" on Thursday.

The well-attended conference was organized by the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute in partnership with the International Academy of Letters USA. Among those

BEOE advises emigrants to reach out only valid OEPs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The officials of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) have advised the foreign job-seekers to only reach out the valid Overseas Employment Promoters to avert any loss of time, money and their energies.

An official source told APP here on Friday, there were only 2,577 Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP) licenses were valid as more than 5048 licenses had been pronounced invalid.

Out of the invalid OEPs, licenses of some 670 were cancelled on various grounds while 805 were expired and rest of them had surrendered.

They said all the foreign job-seekers must visit to the official web-page of

the bureau regularly to get fresh and valid information and protect themselves from unauthorised OEPs.

The officials said that the BEOE was mandated to regulate emigration under the Emigration Ordinance, 1979, promote Emigration of Pakistani citizens and look after the interest and welfare of the emigrants.

Among other functions, the BEOE had been advising the federal government on emigration policies and procedures, monitoring and supervision of Overseas Employment Promoters through 7 Protectorates of Emigrants Offices, processing of Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP) licences and giving pre-departure briefing to emigrants.

24th Arab radio, TV festival begins in Tunis

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 24th Arab Radio and Television Festival commenced last Wednesday in the Tunisian capital of Tunis.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA) organized by the Arab States Broadcasting Union in collaboration with Tunisian radio and television institutions and the Arabsat Foundation, the event saw participation from representatives of the union's member bodies, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as representatives from Arab production companies, private news agencies, foreign Arabic-speaking radio and television stations, and private radio and television networks, along with international radio and television unions. During the initiation ceremony, the president of the Arab Radio and Television Union and CEO of the Radio and Television Authority, Mohammed bin Fahd Al-Harithi, honored several distinguished guests, including former advisor to the Radio and Television Authority Saad Al-Jaris, as well as several media figures and academics in the field of Arab radio and television.

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ISLAMABAD: Traffic wardens issue fine tickets to the motorcyclists without helmet in middle of a road at Blue area, in the Federal Capital.

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Ministry of Hajj, Umrah holds first meeting for Umrah Season 1446 AH

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has recently held a meeting with Umrah companies and institutions to prepare for the upcoming Umrah season 1446H.

According to Saudi Press Agency (SPA) Vice Minister of Hajj and Umrah Dr. Abdulfattah bin Sulieman Mushaat emphasized the ministry's commitment to achieving excellence through collaboration with all partners and sectors.

The focus is on enhancing the private sector's services and prioritizing visitors' and pilgrims' comfort and safety to the Two Holy Mosques.

Cooperation between the ministry and Umrah

companies and institutions is vital to ensure high-quality services for pilgrims worldwide he added.

The meeting aimed to strengthen the partnership with the private sector and align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals. Participants discussed empowering more pilgrims, improving their experience through innovative services, developing electronic platforms, and facilitating the licensing process for Umrah services throughout the year.

The meeting addressed initiatives to enhance service quality and the digital experience and ensure compliance with standards through digital monitoring and tracking of pilgrims.



ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to PM on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Romina Khurshid Alam chairing a meeting of task force on global warming and heat waves.