

Pakistan seeks investment, not loans: PM

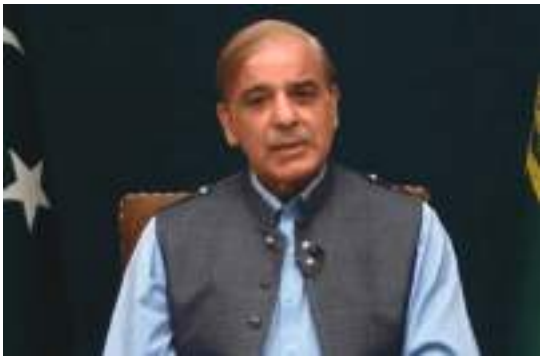
The premier appreciates Special Investment Facilitation Council, observes the forum playing an effective role, enabling Pakistan to realize growth potential

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has asked friendly countries that Pakistan needs the injection of critical investment in different projects, instead of loans that add to its debt burden, to rejuvenate the faltering economy.

Addressing members of the cabinet at a meeting last week, the premier appreciated the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), observing that the forum was playing an effective role in enabling Pakistan to realize its growth potential, especially by facilitating foreign investment into the country.

Shehbaz Sharif shared with the cabinet that he had told friendly countries that Pakistan required investment this time around, but not loans. The PM emphasized that youth potential



needed to be optimally harnessed through providing world-class training in income-generating skills. He also called for promoting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by inculcating a culture of entrepreneurship, incentivizing self-employment and supporting start-ups.

Pakistan is currently looking towards the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait along

with other nations to stimulate investment in mining, agriculture, industry, and energy sectors.

The prime minister said that by electing the present government, the people of Pakistan had reposed trust in its leadership and had high hopes that the government would provide them relief as well as put the economy on a sustainable and long-term development path.

Shehbaz called the new cabinet a balanced combination of youth and experience, which was well placed to cope with the multidimensional challenges and serve the nation. He recalled that the previous government led by him had also served people with great commitment and its biggest achievement was to protect Pakistan from the looming threat of default, which had been the real danger at the time he stepped into office.

At the meeting, PM Shehbaz laid down the roadmap of his government for improving the quality of life of Pakistan's people. Taking stock of the problems afflicting the national economy, he shared his deep concern over the challenges, especially the rising circular debt in electricity and gas sectors as well as energy theft and losses amounting to trillions of rupees.

Afghan govt says strikes violation of sovereignty

News Desk

KABUL: The Taliban government confirmed the strikes and rejected Pakistani claims that those attacks killed any militants. Criticizing the strikes as a violation of sovereignty, Zabullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson, claimed attacks killed five women and three children in the eastern border provinces of Khost and Paktika.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not allow anyone to compromise security by using Afghan territory," Mujahid said in a statement. "Last night at around 3am, Pakistani planes bombed the houses of civilians," said the IEA spokesperson. He added that the bombings resulted in the deaths of six civilians, including three women and three children in Paktika, with an additional two women losing their lives due to the collapse of a house in Khost province.

The Paktika province is located near Pakistan's South Waziristan district while Khost is situated near North Waziristan.

No intention of armed conflict with Afghanistan: Pakistan

Khwaja Asif says message needed to be sent that cross-border terrorism has become intolerable

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Asif has stated that his country does not desire an armed conflict with Afghanistan, following Islamabad's airstrikes on alleged terrorist hideouts across the border.

In an interview with international media, Asif emphasized, "Force is the last resort. We do not want to have an armed conflict with Afghanistan." He cautioned that Pakistan could block the corridor it provides to landlocked Afghanistan for trade with India if Kabul fails to curb anti-Pakistan terrorists operating on Afghan soil, questioning the rationale behind providing this corridor if Afghanistan treats Pakistan as an enemy.

Asif highlighted the surge in terror attacks in Pakistan since the Taliban regained

power in Afghanistan in August 2021. He noted that a message needed to be sent that cross-border terrorism has become intolerable. He expressed Pakistan's desire to convey to the de facto rulers in Kabul that the current situation is untenable. Regarding Pakistan's interactions with the Taliban, the defence minister stated that during a visit to Kabul in February 2023, he advised Taliban ministers to not let past "favours" from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) tie Kabul's hands.

The defence minister warned, "If they [TTP] can harm us, then we'll be forced to [retaliate]." He expressed hope that Afghanistan would meet the "single demand" of reining in the TTP, thereby preventing the need for future military strikes from Pakistan. Asif also alleged that Kabul was allowing the

TTP to operate against Pakistan to prevent its members from joining the Islamic State terrorist outfit's local chapter, known as IS-Khorasan Province. He referred to IS-KP as a major internal security threat for Afghanistan.

Despite China's silence on the cross-border fighting, Asif dismissed the lack of public support from Beijing, stating, "It's not necessary that the world must applaud us. What is in our interest is enough for us. We are protecting our interest, irrespective of whether someone applauds us or not." Accusing certain elements in the Taliban government for patronizing the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates, Pakistan carried out what it termed "intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations" in the border regions inside Afghanistan on Monday.

Attending political rally not crime: SC

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Granting post-arrest bail to five people accused of committing acts of vandalism in the wake of May 9, 2023, arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan, the Supreme Court has noted that it is not a crime to participate in a political rally.

A three-member bench led by Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and comprising Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Mussarat Hilali on Wednesday took up bail applications of the accused nominated under various laws including the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), 1997 for vandalizing Hamza Camp in Rawalpindi.

During the proceedings, Justice Mandokhail asked authorities as to whether they were aware of the circumstances under which charges of terrorism could be added to a first information report (FIR). "Recently, an incident of terrorism occurred in which officers were martyred [in North Waziristan].

The attack on Peshawar's Army Public School was an act of terror. The suicide attack on lawyers in Quetta [some years back] was an act of terror.

SHC issues notices on Covid workers' petitions

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Sindh High Court has issued notices to the Chief Secretary Sindh and Secretary Health seeking their replies against a petition demanding permanent appointment of contract health workers recruited as Covid vaccinators.

The petitions filed by the temporary workers belonging to different districts of Sindh were heard before a two-member bench headed by Justice Junaid Ghaffar.

SC rules 'ineptitude of ROs sabotage electoral process'

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) emphasized that returning officers (ROs) must uphold the fundamental right of individuals to contest elections, condemning any misuse of authority to sabotage the electoral process.

In an 11-page detailed judgment authored by Justice Irfan Saadat Khan, regarding the acceptance of the nomination papers of candidate Shaukat Mahmood, the SC highlighted the pivotal role of ROs in scrutinizing nomination pa-

pers for justice and the protection of fundamental rights. The three-judge bench, led by Justice Munib Akhtar, underscored that it is highly unbecoming for ROs to misuse their authority, depriving individuals of their fundamental rights and impeding the electorate's right to vote for their chosen candidate.

The judgment emphasized that ROs should not arbitrarily determine the cut-off period for scrutinizing nomination papers or impose office hours beyond the stipulated deadline set by the Election Commission of

Pakistan (ECP). "Elections are the bedrock of democracy," Justice Irfan Saadat Khan remarked, quoting Abraham Lincoln, adding that facilitating individuals to contest elections is essential within legal bounds.

Justice Irfan stressed that electoral laws should not serve as arbitrary barriers, and ROs must exercise discretionary powers in a rational and meticulous manner. The SC's detailed order serves as a reminder to ROs to uphold the integrity of the electoral process and safeguard individuals' democratic rights.

At least two killed, 22 injured in DI Khan attack

By Adam Khan Wazir

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: At least two people were killed and 22 others were injured when a car bomb exploded in the DI Khan district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday.



The incident took place near the Hathala police station of the district. Soon after the incident, a large contingent of security forces cordoned off the area and started an initial investigation.

The casualties were shifted to a nearby CMH hospital. Police officials said the car bomb targeted vehicles travelling between Tank and DI Khan.

There was no information regarding which force the

vehicles belonged to. The bomb disposal squad also initiated an investigation to determine the quantity and type of explosives used in the attack. In a major attack in December last year, at least 23 soldiers were killed when militants rammed an explosive-laden truck into a security forces post in DI Khan district.

The military's media wing said that the terrorists rammed the explosive-laden vehicle after their attempts to gain entry were "effectively thwarted".

The car bomb was followed by another suicide attack, leading to the collapse of the building, causing multiple casualties. Six terrorists were killed in the attack, said ISPR.

FBR demands court order compliance

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Following the suspension of its chairman's salary on court order, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued instructions to its field formations and subordinate organizations, directing strict adherence to all court orders and directives without delay.

According to official documents, the FBR's legal wing has dispatched a letter to heads of all Large Taxpayer Offices (LTOs), Regional Tax Offices (RTOs), Corporate Tax Offices (CTOs), and other field formations nationwide, expressing concern over delays in implementing court orders. The letter underscores that any future delays in implementing superior court directives will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Furthermore, chief commissioners and relevant officers of field formations and related offices will be held directly responsible for any failure to timely submit responses and para-wise comments in cases concerning sub justice tax matters in superior courts. The FBR will take disciplinary action against such officers for misconduct and negligence.

PIA plane grounded in Istanbul after technical fault

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight returning from Turkiye on Wednesday was temporarily grounded in Istanbul because of a technical fault in its landing gear.

According to sources, the landing gear of PIA's Boeing 777 scheduled to arrive from Turkiye to Pakistan suddenly malfunctioned on the taxiway before taking off.

The captain of flight PK-704 diverted the aircraft back to the boarding bridge as per the standard operating formulated for this situation. Later, the passengers were off-loaded and shifted to the airport's lounge.

A team of engineers left Karachi for Istanbul with spare parts for repair work. The passengers have been sent to Pakistan by a Turkish Airlines flight.

Arrangements are under way to bring some stranded passengers to Islamabad through an alternative flight. On Monday, another PIA's Boeing 777, which made an emergency landing at Muscat International Airport, returned to the country after the replacement of its engine.

The replaced engine -- removed from another Boeing 777 plane grounded at Jinnah International Airport -- was airlifted to Muscat on March 10 on a C-130 cargo plane. Carrying 392 passengers, flight PK-714 from Madina to Islamabad had to make an emergency landing at Muscat airport after one of its engines suddenly failed at an altitude of 35,000 feet.

LEAs kill terrorist, injure two in Panjgur IBO

News Desk

PANJGUR: Security forces killed a terrorist and injured two others during an intelligence-based operation in the Panjgur district of Balochistan, said the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Thursday.

The killed militant was

during its swift response to an attempted attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Colony.

According to an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) statement, a band of eight terrorists made an attempt to infiltrate Port Authority Colony in Gwadar. A swift action by security



identified as Chakar Liaquat. "During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and resultantly terrorist Chakar Liaquat was sent to hell, while two terrorists got injured," said the military's media wing. The ISPR added that weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed terrorists and further stated that he was "actively involved in numerous terrorist activities."

Sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the "security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country," said the ISPR. A day earlier, two soldiers embraced martyrdom as the Pakistan Army successfully eliminated eight terrorists

forces thwarted their efforts, the statement added. The ISPR said that a group of eight terrorists attempted to enter the Port Authority Colony but were successfully thwarted by security forces personnel.

"Own troops employed for security responded immediately and effectively engaged the terrorists, and in ensuing fire exchange, all eight terrorists were sent to hell," it read.

"A large quantity of arms, ammunition and explosives was also recovered," the ISPR added. It said that Sepoy Bahar Khan, 35, a resident of Dera Ghazi Khan district, and Sepoy Imran Ali, 28, a resident of Kharipur district, "fought gallantly, sacrificed their lives" and were martyred in the exchange of fire.

Airstrikes targeted terrorists, not Afghan civilians: FO

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office said on Thursday that the airstrikes by the Pakistan armed forces on targets in Afghanistan hit terrorists and not the local civilian population.

Addressing the weekly briefing, FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said Islamabad had provided Kabul with evidence of terrorists on Afghan soil a number of times, maintaining that the country will not tolerate terrorist activities on its territory.

"On March 18, an operation was conducted against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Gul Bahadur terrorist groups based on intelligence information," said Baloch.

The spokesperson added that as per the latest reports, calm prevails on the Pak-

Afghan border and Islamabad wishes to jointly resolve all conflicts with Kabul. "We respect the sovereignty of Afghanistan," she maintained. Condemning the attack on hospitals in Gaza by Israeli forces, the spokesperson said targeting innocent children is nothing less than barbarism, adding that this act falls under the category of war crimes.

A statement issued by the FO said the target of the operation was the terrorists belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which along with TTP, was responsible for multiple terrorist attacks inside Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials. "The latest attack took place on 16 March 2024 at a security post in Mir Ali in North Waziristan and claimed the lives of seven Pakistani soldiers," it added.

FM underlines significance of economic diplomacy

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Wednesday stressed that in addition to conventional diplomacy, Pakistan needed to prioritize economic diplomacy in the current circumstances.

In this regard, he said all missions of Pakistan abroad should focus on attracting investments, the foreign minister said while interacting with officers of Pakistan High Commission in London, a press release said. The foreign minister said that Pakistan was blessed with significant natural as well as high quality human resources.

The country had all the potential to become a great economy provided a coherent approach was adopted to bring fiscal discipline and curtail external deficit, he added. "The only requirement of the day is to manage these resources in an effective manner," he stressed. The foreign minister said that all stakeholders, including line ministries, needed to work hand-in-hand with a team spirit to strengthen Pakistan both internally and externally.

Dar said that Pakistan was undergoing challenging times, however, the incumbent government was committed to provide relief to the common man, adding moreover, on international fronts, Pakistan was engaging with partners for mutual cooperation. On the occasion, the foreign minister advised the officers to work hard and diligently to bring long-term investments in the country and enhancement of trade. The foreign minister will be representing Pakistan in the First Nuclear Energy Summit, scheduled to be held in Brussels on March 21.

State in cipher case under IHC scrutiny

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has sought credentials of the state counsels appointed for former prime minister Imran Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the diplomatic cipher case, as per the order of a trial court.

The court has expressed surprise as to why the trial court did not provide private counsels to the PTI leaders, who were sentenced to 10 years in prison on January 30, just over one week before the February 8 general elections.

CM appeals citizens to join plantation campaign

Highlights importance of trees to combat hazards of smog

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz appealed to the people on the eve of the International Day of Forests to become a part of the Plant for Pakistan campaign. In a message, she said the earth provides

us life, food and livelihood, stressing that the planted trees should also be looked after.

"Plant a tree so that humans can breathe freely, the environment can be purged of the toxic air and the land of Punjab should be further beautified and become

green. Plant a tree and do away with the hazards of smog," she stated. She said free saplings were being distributed during the campaign and the students should lead it. For the first time, the plantation record will be maintained through QR code and GIS technology. "I appeal to

all the citizens of Punjab to plant trees. Children should plant trees in the name of their parents and parents in the name of their children."

The CM urged the industrialists, businessmen, laborers, farmers, doctors, and media persons to participate in the campaign adding that

the educational institutions should also join the initiative to give a new life to the homeland. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz inaugurated the campaign by planting a sapling. She said on the occasion that the reason behind climate change was the decrease in forests.

Gaza’s Shifa hospital a war zone as Blinken meets Sisi

Israeli forced war leads to famine to 2.3 million Palestinians, says UN

News Desk

CAIRO: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo on Thursday as part of talks with Arab officials to seek a ceasefire in Gaza, after Israel's prime minister told US Republicans there would be no let-up in the war against innocent civilians, as 2.3 million people at the verge of famine. In Gaza itself, Israel's offensive focused on the Al Shifa hospital, the only par-

tially working medical facility in the north of the Strip, for a fourth day, and local residents said they had seen buildings inside the complex in flames. Five months of war have created critical food shortages among Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians that in some areas now exceed famine levels, according to the United Nations. "We're pressing for an immediate ceasefire tied to the release of hostages," Blinken told the Arabic broadcaster Al Hadath.

"That would bring immediate relief to so many people who are suffering in Gaza – the children, the women, the men." He said the US had drafted a resolution at the United Nations to that effect. Ceasefire talks resumed this week in Qatar, centred on a truce of around six weeks that would allow the release of 40 Israeli hostages in return for hundreds of Palestinians detained in Israeli jails. However, the main

sticking point remains that Hamas says it will release hostages only as part of an agreement that would end the war, while Israel says it will discuss only a temporary pause. "I think the gaps are narrowing, and I think an agreement is very much possible," Blinken told Al Hadath. "The Israeli team is present, has authority to reach an agreement," Blinken and Sisi together reviewed progress in the talks, Sisi's office and the US State Department said.

Sisi stressed the need for a truce to address the escalating humanitarian crisis and warned of the dangers of a military operation in Rafah, the last zone of relative safety for civilians where more than half the enclave's population is now sheltering, pressed against the Egyptian border. As concern over starvation in Gaza mounts, officials from 36 countries and UN agencies gathered in Cyprus to discuss ways to expedite humanitarian deliveries.

PTI, JI to struggle against alleged 'rigging'

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) on Thursday resolved to put up struggle against alleged "rigging" polls in the recently held general elections. According to details, the PTI delegation called on Haq. On this occasion, both parties had agreed to join hands for the supremacy of the law and constitution. The PTI and JI had expressed their resolve to uphold democracy. On this occasion, the country's political situation was also underscored. Prominent among those who attended the meeting were Asad Qaiser, Omar Ayub, Junaid Akbar, and Dr. Amjad Ali Khan. Haq on Friday warned against the privatization of state institutions. Expressing his thoughts, Haq took a jibe at the incumbent government, saying, "The government is holding talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on more slavery rather than securing the next tranche." "The privatization of state institutions is unfair to the masses. The country's economy cannot afford privatization," Haq said. He urged the global community to play a role in the Gaza ceasefire.

Delhi CM Kejriwal arrested

News Desk

NEW DELHI: New Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been arrested. According to Indian media reports, Kejriwal is accused of corruption in the liquor policy. According to Aam Aadmi Party leader Atishi, Arvind Kejriwal was arrested on Thursday in a liquor policy case. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) team visited Arvind Kejriwal's residence today in connection with the liquor policy case. The Enforcement Directorate team also seized 4 or 5 mobile phones and 2 tablets from the Chief Minister's residence.



WEST BANK: Children sit near rubble, in the aftermath of an Israeli raid, at Nour Shams camp, in Tulkarm, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank March 21, 2024.—MM photo

30 years on, allottees await promised land

KMC leased 2,300 plots for cottage industry cluster, but Sindh govt gave the land to Goth Abad Scheme

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A two-member bench of The Sindh High Court (SHC) headed by Justice Salahuddin Panhwar heard a petition of the victims of Landhi Cottage Industries cluster against the illegal possession of 2,300 plots allotted to them in 1993. The bench in its hearing on Thursday ordered the Board of Revenue to give details of land records of the said 2,300 plots. The petitioners' counsel, Usman Farooq Advocate, stated that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) had allotted more than 2,300 plots for cottage industries in Landhi in 1993. Since 1993, KMC failed to give possession of the said plots to its rightful owners. Allottees said that criminal elements forcibly occupied their land and set up cattle pens. The Sindh Board of Revenue representative told the court that this land was never allotted for cottage industries. The government counsel submitted



that the KMC had allotted the same piece of land to multiple individuals and businesses leading to unending litigation. Sindh government's lawyer stated that we have no record of any such scheme. Usman Farooq Advocate stated that the applicants should be given the same land that was allotted, not an alternative. The petitioners are entitled to the land they have paid for. The Board of Revenue wrongly allotted the land under the Goth Abad Scheme. In the Talat Ejaz case of the Supreme Court, it has been decided

that the Board of Revenue cannot cancel lease of the land once allotted. The court remarked that if the Board of Revenue and KMC sit and resolve the issues, many problems and cases will be resolved. The court sought the details of the land from the Board of Revenue within 15 days. The court directed the members of the Board of Revenue to inform the court in personal capacity about the land status. The court adjourned the hearing for three weeks while summoning the member Board of Revenue.

Barrister Gohar denounces Donald Lu’s statement

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Thursday denounced Donald Lu's statement. Speaking to the media outside Adiala Jail in Islamabad, Khan said: "Whatever Donald Lu has said is a lie. There is a need to launch a probe again in this regard." "Former ambassador Asad Majeed should give his opinion on the statement of Donald Lu," he said. "We have full confidence in the courts," he added. Khan said: "The PTI founder had said that the current government can run maximum for five months." Meanwhile, PTI leader Ejaz Chaudhry asserted that the rulers were looking to push the country to the verge of default. Expressing his thoughts in Lahore, Chaudhry said: "Those who are responsible for the economic woes and political instability in the country will not be forgiven."

PTI issues ‘white paper’ on rigging

News Desk

LAHORE: The PTI released a list of more than 40 polling stations across various National Assembly constituencies, alleging that the preliminary Form 45 results were manipulated there -- causing the reversal of victories for the party-backed candidates. On social media platforms, the party shared a report titled 'Whitepaper on Rigging' which contained scanned copies of the "original" Form 45s alongside the allegedly tampered or forged versions. "A thread highlighting the forgery committed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)," the PTI wrote in the first of a series of posts on microblogging platform X.

METRO MATTERS

MQM-P urges to minimize loadshedding

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan's (MQM-P) delegation visited the regional office of the K-Electric in Bahadurabad and held a meeting with the authorities. During the meeting, they discussed various issues, including unofficial load shedding, areas with poor recovery where load shedding needs to be reduced, and the scarcity of water supply to residents due to the absence of electricity at water pumping stations. The delegation member Asia Ishaq demanded that water pumping stations be exempted from loadshedding, while told the officials to stop unofficial loadshedding. Asia said the importance of keeping the entire area free from loadshedding, especially during Sehri and Iftar in the month of Ramadan. The delegation from MQM Pakistan included Asia Ishaq, Arshad Vohra, Amer Moeen, along with members of the Provincial Assembly, Sharjeel Jamal, Sikander Khatoon, and Quratulain Shaam. The electric authorities listened attentively to the issues raised by the delegation and assured them of addressing these issues promptly. They also assured the delegation of changing the timing of load shedding at water pumping stations.

Fire erupts at ojha campus’s OPD at Dow Hospital

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A blaze broke out at the OPD of Dow University Hospital's Ojha Campus, prompting fire brigade vehicles to rush to the scene and extinguish the fire. No casualties have been reported as a result of the incident. According to details, a fire broke out at the OPD block of Ojha Campus at Dow University Hospital in Karachi. Upon receiving information about the fire, police, rangers, and fire brigade teams reached the scene. The fire brigade's four vehicles extinguished the fire while carrying out rescue operations. A spokesperson for Dow University stated that a fire had erupted in the garbage dump near Karachi University, which initially engulfed dry date palm trees and then affected the surroundings of the hospital's OPD section. However, no casualties were reported as a result of the incident. The university spokesperson mentioned that the estimate of financial damage will be assessed later.

Bank employee robbed of Rs5m

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Masked robbers riding in a car snatched 5 million rupees from a private bank employee and fled the scene in the Ban Qasim area. SHO Ban Qasim, Valiat Ali Shah, reported that the bank employee, Alimuddin, was alone when he was leaving the bank with 5 million rupees in cash. Near Ban Qasim Chowk, four masked robbers intercepted him and snatched the bag containing the cash. The police did not find any CCTV cameras at the location where the incident occurred. He further explained that the bank employee was supposed to deposit Rs5 million in the Port Qasim branch of the bank. It is highly alarming that such a large amount of money was taken by the employee alone. SHO Ban Qasim stated that a day before the incident, he had instructed the bank manager to provide security if anyone carried more than 500,000 rupees in cash. However, despite the instructions, the bank management did not act upon the police's directive. He added that when the police obtained information from him regarding the identity of the robbers, the bank employee informed them that all four robbers were masked, making it impossible for him to identify their faces. The robbers were riding in a white Toyota Corolla. Nevertheless, the police are gathering further information about the escape routes of the robbers. Close circuit cameras are being searched along these routes to trace the vehicle used in the robbery.

Governor Tessori visits longest man in Asia

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori visited Nasir Somroo, a prominent figure in Asia's long stature, who is currently undergoing treatment at the hospital. According to details, Nasir Somroo has been admitted to a private hospital in Gulistan-e-Jauhar for the past four days due to difficulty in breathing. Upon reaching the hospital, Governor Sindh inquired about the treatment facilities from the doctors attending to Nasir Somroo. Governor Sindh stated that Nasir Somroo is a national asset, and every effort should be made to ensure his well-being. He also provided financial assistance to Nasir Somroo. Nasir Somroo expressed gratitude to Governor Sindh for his continuous monthly financial support. Member of the National Assembly, Farhan Chishti, was also present on the occasion.

Millions of rupees worth of alcohol seized

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, conducted a joint operation and confiscated alcohol worth approximately 14 crore and 56 lakh rupees. Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, and Pakistan Customs Intelligence Joint Maritime Information and Coordination Center conducted a joint intelligence-based operation in the northern Arabian Sea, during which 4104 bottles of alcohol were seized. The seized alcohol is valued at nearly 14 crore and 56 lakh rupees. The confiscated items have been handed over to Pakistan Customs for further legal action. According to the Director General of Public Relations (Navy), in the context of the current security situation where criminals are engaged in tarnishing Pakistan's image due to their nefarious activities, the successful joint operation by Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, and Pakistan Customs reaffirms the commitment to ensuring the security of the country's maritime and land borders.

Sharjeel accuses PTI of lying to save politics

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Senior provincial minister of Sindh, Sharjeel Memon, has stated that the Saifur drama was staged, and it wasn't just Donald Lu, but Asad Majid also rejected the claims of PTI. In his statement, Sharjeel Memon said that the PPP fabricated false statements to save politics, hired lobbyists to distort Pakistan's image, and attempted to discredit Pakistan. He stated that during Donald Lu's statement, PTI's slogans made a mockery of Pakistan worldwide, and those who support the Congress Member Palestinians also support PTI. Sharjeel said that the deception to put PTI on the throne had begun before 2018, and the irregularities in the unofficial census of 2018 are evidence of the fraud. He further said that there were irregularities in the constituencies in 2018, and even European observers admitted to the lack of transparency.

Delay in appointment of IGP Sindh

By our correspondent

KARACHI: There is a delay in the appointment of IG Sindh by the federal government. According to sources, the Sindh government had recommended Ghulam Nabi Memon for the position of IG Sindh two weeks ago. Ghulam Nabi Memon has previously served as Additional IG Karachi and IG Sindh. The Sindh government wants to appoint Ghulam Nabi Memon as IG Sindh instead of Raja Raffat Mukhtar. The delay in the appointment of IG Sindh has raised concerns for Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, who has expressed his concerns to the federal government.

Stepfather sets 8-year-old girl on fire

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A case has been registered against the stepfather of an 8-year-old girl for setting her on fire by pouring petrol in Landhi's 36-B area of Karachi. According to SSP Korangi, Hasan Sardar, the suspect Tariq had set Vania, his wife Rabia's daughter from a previous marriage, on fire by pouring petrol on her on February 16. Hasan Sardar stated that more than 25 percent of the innocent girl's body was burnt due to the fire. The girl's mother hid the matter from the police due to fear of her husband. The girl was initially treated at a local hospital and later shifted to Indus Hospital. According to the complainant, the suspect Tariq had married her two years ago and they have a son together. The woman's previous husband, Amjad, has an 8-year-old daughter from her previous marriage who lives with them. According to the woman complainant, on February 16, when her daughter returned from tuition, her husband Tariq began beating her. When the mother tried to save her daughter, the husband started beating her too and then set the daughter on fire by pouring petrol. She managed to save the girl with great difficulty and rushed her to the hospital for treatment.

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Congress accuses Modi of ‘crippling’ with tax case

News Desk

MUMBAI: India's main opposition Congress party accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday of crippling it before the upcoming general election by freezing its accounts in an income tax case. A part of the Congress' bank accounts was frozen last month pending a tax case that dates back to 2018-19, the party has said previously. Earlier this month, a tax tribunal dismissed its appeal to pause recovery of 1.35 billion rupees (\$16.32 million) in income tax from its bank accounts. On Thursday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said all accounts belonging to the party had been frozen, leaving it with no access to funds for campaigning. "20 percent of India votes for us and we can't even pay two rupees for anything. It has been orchestrated to cripple us in the elections," Gandhi said

at a press conference. General elections are scheduled to be held in seven phases starting next month, with most opinion polls predicting an easy win for Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Congress, which leads a rag-tag bunch of bickering opposition parties in alliance for the general elections, is seen as Modi's main challenger. "We can do no campaign work. Our leaders cannot fly from one part of the country to the other. Forget about flying, they cannot even buy a rail ticket," Gandhi said about the tax case, which he said had caused all the party's bank accounts to be frozen. The BJP was quick to deny Gandhi's charges, saying the Congress was guilty of tax evasion and had to face action because of that. A spokesperson for India's Income Tax department did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

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Enemies disguised as friends

In our journey, distinguishing foes from allies is paramount, for camouflaged adversaries pose a formidable challenge. The human tendency to trust can often lead to betrayal by those perceived as friends, a bitter reality that echoes through the ages. Among the haunting specters of human existence, deception remains a perennial nemesis, lurking in the shadows of trust. Recent events underscore the gravity of this reality, as sinister plots aimed at tarnishing the nation's reputation unfold. From the insidious exploitation of missing persons' narratives to providing sanctuary to terrorists under the guise of political refuge, the specter of betrayal looms large. Most recently, the failed attempt by the banned terrorist outfit, BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army), to assault the sanctity of the Gwadar Port Authority Complex stands as a stark reminder of this threat.

However, in a testament to unwavering vigilance, security forces swiftly foiled the nefarious designs of these enemies within our midst. The resolute action led to the elimination of all eight terrorists involved in the attempted attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex. Yet, amidst the triumph of justice, the nation mourns the loss of two valiant security personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our sovereignty. As we confront the grim realities of betrayal and deception, let us heed the lessons of the past and remain ever vigilant.

Our collective resilience and unwavering resolve serve as bulwarks against the machinations of those who seek to undermine our nation's security and prosperity. In the face of adversity, unity and vigilance shall prevail, guiding us towards a future fortified by truth and solidarity.

The slain terrorists were involved in multiple terrorist activities in the region. Confirmation has been received regarding the involvement of terrorists affiliated with the banned organization "Baloch Students Organization Azad" in the attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex. According to BSO-Azad spokesperson, the deceased terrorist Kareem Jan was a resident of Turbat, whose whereabouts had been unknown since May 25, 2022, and he was killed during the Gwadar attack. Previously, terrorist Imtiaz Ahmed, also listed as a missing person, was often associated with various political movements and efforts to portray innocent civilians. It is pertinent to remember that Imtiaz Ahmed was also killed during a security forces operation. Abdul Wadood Sattokzai, whose sister had been tirelessly advocating for her brother's missing status since August 12, 2021, was also killed in the Mach attack.

Elements engaged in politics over missing persons are spreading disorder and misinformation in the country at the behest of external forces. Remember, incidents of missing and forced disappearances are not based on reality, the true face of which resembles terrorists like Kareem Jan, Imtiaz Ahmed, and Abdul Wadood.

The country will not permit hostile elements to undermine economic progress and efforts for peace and stability in Balochistan through such cowardly attacks. Organizations in Balochistan are gambling with the future of innocent Baloch youth. Incidents of disappearances and enforced disappearances do not reflect reality, the real truth of which is terrorists like Kareem Jan, Imtiaz Ahmed, and Abdul Wadood. The country will not allow hostile elements to undermine economic development and peace efforts in Balochistan through such cowardly attacks.

Apex committee meeting insights

Under the astute leadership of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, a pivotal session of the Apex Committee on Special Investment Facilities convened to deliberate on foreign investment prospects and economic conditions. Attended by esteemed dignitaries including Army Chief General Asim Munir, former Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar, and eminent cabinet members, the meeting served as a forum for comprehensive analysis and strategic planning. Provincial Chief Ministers, Maryam Nawaz, Sarfraz Bugti, Murad Ali Shah, and Ali Amin Gandapur, among others, lent their voices to the discourse, embodying a spirit of collective engagement and cooperation.

The deliberations commenced with insightful briefings by the National Coordinator and Director-General of ISI, shedding light on pertinent issues and ongoing initiatives.

Former Prime Minister and cabinet members provided invaluable updates on the progress of existing projects, underscoring the commitment to driving sustainable economic growth through strategic investments. Notably, discussions centered on projects pivotal to the nation's economic advancement, reflecting a shared vision for prosperity and development.

Prior to the meeting, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif held discussions with Army Chief General Asim Munir to assess the prevailing national and internal security landscape, highlighting the interconnected nature of economic prosperity and security.

In his address, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif underscored the pivotal role of the committee in fostering economic development and attracting foreign investment. He reiterated the imperative for unified action in addressing prevailing economic challenges, emphasizing the need for comprehensive reforms to be implemented over a sustained period. While acknowledging the imminent installment from the IMF, he emphasized the necessity of prudent decision-making and equitable burden-sharing across society.

Echoing the sentiment of collective responsibility, Ali Amin Gandapur expressed willingness to collaborate, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity in investment allocations. Assurances were provided to Chief Ministers regarding equitable distribution of investments, reaffirming the commitment to fostering regional development and prosperity.

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz emphasized the readiness of provincial authorities to extend full cooperation, proposing the appointment of focal persons to ensure seamless communication and coordination. Similarly, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah advocated for measures to enhance provincial capacity, signaling a proactive stance in advancing collaborative initiatives.

Sarfraz Bugti echoed sentiments of alignment and cooperation, highlighting a shared commitment to driving progress through collective action. As the nation stands at the precipice of transformative change, the collaborative spirit exhibited at the Apex Committee meeting embodies the resilience and determination essential for navigating economic challenges and realizing a prosperous future for all.

By Hussain H Zaidi

Is populist leader Imran Khan's recent letter to the IMF a malicious ploy to push a cash-starved Pakistan on the brink of default? Or is it an earnest attempt to safeguard genuine democracy in Pakistan? Khan's detractors and supporters will answer the questions in their own fashion.

Likewise, the question of whether the correspondence on hand will serve any, and what, purpose is susceptible to varying answers. Be that as it may, the PTI supremo is not the first political leader in Pakistan who has invited international intervention in the country's domestic affairs.

Written in the backdrop of the recent national elections, which the PTI alleges were rigged – though the party ended up winning more seats than most forecasts had given it – the letter is addressed to the IMF managing director 'under the instructions and on behalf of' the jailed leader. The letter is carefully worded to avoid the impression that the PTI is out to scuttle the multilateral donor's lending to Pakistan, which it desperately needs to avoid a complete economic meltdown, leading possibly to it having to default on its external debt obligations.

All the same, the letter adds that the lending facility may only be negotiated by a 'duly elected government', which, in the party's eye, the new coalition doesn't represent. Therefore, the Fund has been requested to make the capital inflows to Pakistan subject to audit of at least 30 per cent of the total number of seats of the national and provincial assemblies.

In Pakistan, almost every electoral exercise has remained shrouded in controversies, with the losing party (or parties) crying foul. In 2018 when the PTI was elected to power, the PML-N and other parties had cast similar doubts on the fairness of the elections.

It may be strange, but by no means unprecedented, that the party winning the highest number of seats is putting the cred-

ibility of the polls under question. In 1988, the PPP, which emerged as the single largest party and eventually formed the government, declared the elections rigged. In 2024, however, the PTI has to sit in the opposition because of its failure or unwillingness to negotiate a coalition with another major party.

In recent years, the political and economic cycles have converged, as the induction of a new government coincides with the start of a fresh IMF programme. In 2008, the PPP government signed a credit agreement with the Fund a few months after its inauguration. The PML-N government did the same in 2013. In 2018, the PTI government flip-flopped for several months on the question of going to the multilateral donor, believing that they would be able to recover the mythical \$200 billion stashed by 'corrupt' Pakistanis in foreign banks. Once the dichotomy of myth and reality dawned upon it, the ruling party wasted little time in approaching the Fund.

On none of the occasions in the past did a political party send a formal request to the lender of last resort to make its assistance contingent upon an election audit. This makes the PTI's letter at issue an unprecedented move. If nothing else, it brings out the PTI's unique style of doing politics. In 2014, it may be recalled, the party while protesting the 'rigged' elections had urged the people to stop paying taxes and utility bills and overseas Pakistanis not to send remittances.

The number of resident or expatriate Pakistanis who heeded the exhortation is beside the point. What's unfortunate is that a political entity came up with such an unlawful demand and, what's even more unfortunate, that it got away with that. In any other democracy, such advice to the people would have sounded the death knell of a leader's career. But in our case, it shored up his stature for being brave enough to mince no words in calling a spade a spade. At any rate, if people do not pay taxes or utility

charges, it's they who will suffer the most. Anyone who advises a parent to throw the baby out with the bathwater is not very sincere with the family.

At the same time, other political parties and leaders – both past and present – have also looked to friendly and influential countries to meddle on their behalf on the strength of strong personal relations or their common stakes in democracy. As a rule, such interventions are sought behind the scenes or in a subtle manner. Therefore, it may not be in order to name the beneficiaries or the countries concerned.

Whether those interventions served the cause of democracy or otherwise benefited the nation is anybody's guess. But each intervention has lent credence to the impression that by withholding or unleashing economic benefits – or even giving signals to that effect – the state of Pakistan can be made to be more receptive to foreign demands.

It seems the PTI had that impression in mind when it decided to approach the IMF for an election audit. Aside from responding to the requests for intervention on a case-to-case basis, most developed countries have put in place an institutional mechanism to meddle in the internal affairs of developing countries. An example is the Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance, commonly known as GSP Plus, of the European Union (EU), which gives duty-free access to developing countries like Pakistan to all EU member states.

To become a recipient of GSP Plus, a country must ratify and 'effectively' implement several multilateral conventions relating to human rights and good governance, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The EU is entitled to monitor the implementation of these conventions and take up with the recipient the deficiencies, if any. A country may be removed from GSP Plus if it fails to measure up to the stipulated stan-

dards.

At any rate, the scope of these conventions is broad enough to give EU members a wide window into the political affairs of countries like Pakistan. Whether the EU or any of its constituents has engaged with Islamabad on recent political developments using GSP Plus as a bargaining chip is a different question.

Coming back to the IMF, its credit remains subject to a set of rather stringent conditions, which in principle are essentially economic. That said, the line between economics and politics is only fine, as political policies and developments bear significantly on the economy.

In a narrow sense, it is the Fund's business to make sure that the government concerned is capable of meeting the performance requirements that the capital assistance entails. It is from this business that the IMF's interest – the wherewithal it possesses – in a recipient country's politics stems. This especially holds in the case of countries like present-day Pakistan, beset with intense political polarization.

We may also be mindful that though a global institution, the Fund's architecture rests on the West's economic values, which are rooted in certain political norms – both summarized in the term 'liberalism', at the heart of which lies democracy. Besides, the US, the paterfamilias of liberalism, accounts for 16.5 per cent of the total votes in the IMF Executive Board, much higher than any other country, which in the end decides which member will get the Fund's capital and on which conditions.

What importance the IMF attaches to the PTI's letter in drawing up its credit programme with Pakistan is a question that cannot be answered here. However, the party's election audit demand may further downgrade Islamabad's negotiating power viz-a-viz the Fund and make for more stringent – and manifestly unpopular – conditions. Maybe the letter was undergirded by such a perception.

By Raoof Hasan

The induction of a new government that is not equipped with the legitimacy to come up with any medium- or long-term strategy to rid the country of its nagging problems is likely to add to the challenges that Pakistan is faced with at this critical juncture. The recent proclamations of the new incumbents in power reflect an utterly jaundiced understanding to go about attaining the purported objectives.

Destitute of the people's mandate, they refuse to understand that they don't carry their trust to take steps that impact their destiny. The crude and naked manner the midnight assault was conducted to steal people's mandate and anoint a criminal gang as the new rulers of the country has left behind an unpalatable taste. Furthermore, no one is willing to accept the outcome as people have seen with their own eyes how the results were tampered with which was amply evidenced when the ECP uploaded the relevant forms on the website but were forced to remove them within a couple of hours.

It is not just that people are unwilling to accept the results. They are also angry and determined to carry forth their struggle to win their mandate back and put in power those they had voted for in the first place. This carries portents of violence which can be averted at this stage but, with the passage of time and further hardening of stances, may become impossible to deal with. On the face of it, parties that are partners in fabricating an unconstitutional and illegal government, as also their mentors, ap-

pear unwilling to concede that the elections were stolen; this needs to be remedied before proceeding further.

Simultaneously, not only the presence of Imran Khan but also his inherent ability to lead every narrative even from his prison cell is growing extremely disconcerting for the power-wielders. Having long banned the appearance of his photograph and spoken word in the media, they have now resorted to imposing a blanket two-week ban on his meetings with everyone including his lawyers. This is virtually pushing him into solitary confinement which speaks of an inordinate fear that afflicts them by the person of Khan even as he remains illegally incarcerated.

This is not taking the country towards a possible resolution of the conflicts that it is riddled with. It is pushing it in the opposite direction which is only going to aggravate the crisis and put it beyond the realm of any possibility of repair. Once it has crossed the red line and entered the land of violence, there will be no possibility of initiating remedial measures to find a solution to the brewing crisis. So, the time, if any, is here and now. False egos need to be buried and sanity summoned to guide the errant individuals towards understanding the grave situation the country currently faces.

Foremost is the crisis of legitimacy of the new government. Those who have been hoisted in seats of power are those who lost the election, encompassing the entire PML-N leadership clan including Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Hamza Shahbaz. They did not win even a

single seat, yet they have been handed over the reins of power to the bewilderment of not only the people of Pakistan but the entire world. Understandably, the Commonwealth and the EU teams that visited Pakistan to ascertain the conditions before the elections have scripted extremely critical reports citing examples of gross irregularities. These reports, if and when made public, will open a can of worms.

What were the compulsions that propelled the power-wielders to install certified corrupt people to rule the country? This is a puzzle that rankles me often as I am unable to find a clue to such thinking which is bent upon accepting corruption as a means of advancing in life for power and profit. But it must not be forgotten that an edifice raised on pillars made of piles of pelf is likely to crumble even before it rises to full height.

Whatever may have been the reasons, the leading problem is that a grave mistake has been committed and is being forced upon people who are not only unwilling to accept any such fait accompli; they are also resisting it with their full passion and might. The entire social media speaks of the powerful drift the country is caught up in with no avenue for escape. There is a deafening clamour that elections have been stolen as the demand grows for this to be reversed and power passed to those who had won at the hustings.

But there appears to be no apparent chance of reversal of results as the perpetrators of this heinous crime remain adamant in implementing their intentions. Will the election results be written off and a

fresh referral made to the people? This is even less likely to happen as those who scripted the horrid show believe that they can still make it work. So where do we go from here onward?

Let me be candid. This fabrication has not worked so far and is not going to work in the future either. With time, this weight is going to become heavier, and the perpetrators will not be able to carry it. It is going to be an albatross around their necks which they will neither be able to cast off, nor bear along. It is going to transform into a situation laced with portents of severe unrest, even violence. The situation is grave. The people's mood is turning ugly. Their restraining ability is stretched. They are readying themselves for the plunge which will land us with grave challenges. This must be averted.

What is the way to go about doing that? First and foremost is the need to come down from the artificially elevated platforms the perpetrators have placed themselves on in the hope that they will remain safe. They need to face reality as it exists on the ground. This reality is ugly. This reality reflects the resurrection of the combined will of the people who have suffered through generations.

It is time to look at reality through the lens of people who have been wronged by looters and dacoits. They deserve their day. And that day will be when they are rid of them, not suffer them any further. The only option the power-wielders have is to bury their egos and join the people in securing their future as they proclaimed through the power of their vote. Nothing less will do.

Ticket to a better future

By Dr Junaid Ahmed

Pakistan has a long history of exporting its semi or low-skilled workers, particularly to the Persian Gulf nations. This trend persists even today.

The number of Pakistani workers seeking employment abroad has surged over time. Between 1971 and 2023, as per recent data from the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE), over 13.3 million workers registered themselves for employment abroad.

In 2023 alone, approximately 862,625 workers were sent abroad, a 3.6 per cent increase from the previous year. Of these, 91 per cent found opportunities in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait – the countries which tend to be the prime destinations of the Pakistani diaspora.

What underlies this increasing trend of migration? A combination of push and pull factors motivates the decision to migrate. Push factors include economic challenges, labour market difficulties, trust, and weaknesses in Pakistan's governance structure, while pull factors involve increasing labour demand in destination countries, income disparities, the prospects of better pay, and familial ties abroad.

Despite being employed across 40 different job categories, about 52 per cent of Pakistani workers abroad are engaged in low-skill or semi-skilled roles. Most labour migrants have chosen Saudi Arabia, the UAE, or other Gulf countries, where 44.7 per cent work as labourers and 22.8 per cent as drivers. Beyond these roles, various other professions contribute to the labour export, such as managers (4.5 per cent), salespersons (3.0 per cent), masons (2.7 per cent), technicians (2.5 per cent), foremen/supervisors (2.2 per cent), elec-

tricians (2.1 per cent), carpenters (1.5 per cent), mechanics and operators (1.2 per cent), clerks/typists and cooks (1.1 per cent), engineers and painters (1.0 per cent), among others.

Historically, the trends underlying the distribution of labour across different professions have remained consistent, notably highlighting a prevalence of semi or unskilled workers. The dominance of these roles, such as labourers and drivers, emphasizes the need for targeted policies to maximize Pakistan's human capital potential, especially in terms of capturing higher-paying jobs and adapting to changing labour market demands.

The dominance of these low-skilled roles poses significant challenges for the future. Structural changes in labour market demand, like those outlined in Saudi Vision 2030 and the prioritization of Saudization, aimed at increasing local labour participation, pose significant hurdles, especially for Pakistani workers in key destination markets.

Competition from other labour migration countries like Bangladesh and the Philippines also heightens pressure on Pakistani migrants, who often occupy jobs with lower skill requirements. Moreover, the predominance of skilled workers from India and the Philippines in certain professions further limits opportunities for Pakistani workers.

For instance, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority Survey on Overseas Filipinos in 2022, elementary occupations dominated among overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) at 44.4 per cent, followed by service and sales workers (15.5 per cent), and plant machine operators and assemblers (12.4 per cent).

Of the 1.13 million female OFWs, 69.8 per cent worked in elementary occupations, 14.4 per cent in service and sales, and 6.6 per cent in professional roles. Of the 828,000 male

OFWs, 28 per cent were plant and machine operators and assemblers; 17.1 per cent service and sales workers; 15.3 per cent craft and related trades workers; 15 per cent technicians and associate professionals; and 9.7 per cent elementary occupations.

Notably, the OFW's primary export of skilled/semi-skilled workers contrasts with Pakistan's export of predominantly low-skilled labourers to the Gulf. This distinction highlights Pakistan's need to diversify its labour exports and tap into new markets beyond traditional ones.

To address these challenges, Pakistan must prioritize skill development and market diversification.

Enhancing the skills of labourers to align with evolving job requirements is crucial. The National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), established in 2005, serves as Pakistan's apex body for technical education and vocational training.

Operating under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, its vision of 'Skills for Employability, Skills for All' and mission to provide direction and support for skill development aims to enhance Pakistan's social and economic profile. However, challenges persist in fully optimizing resources to meet international market standards, as highlighted by BEOE data on exported semi and unskilled workers.

To date, with 96 per cent of labour exports heading to Gulf countries, understanding their evolving trends is essential. Initiatives should focus on upskilling to meet changing market needs, aligning policies with Gulf countries' trends and laws to tap into their job markets effectively. Initiatives like Saudi Vision 2030 emphasize the preference for skilled, preferably local workers, reducing demand for unskilled labour.

By Miles Mogulescu

President Joe Biden's policy on the Israel-Gaza War is increasingly ineffective and incoherent. With one hand he calls on Prime Minister Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu to stop blocking humanitarian aid and refrain from a major ground attack on Rafah, which humanitarian experts warn would be catastrophic.

On the other hand he's sent over 100 shipments of arms to Israel since Hamas' horrendous attack on October 7 and Israel's wildly disproportionate attack on Gaza killing over 30,000 civilians. Israel is using this US military aid to starve and kill civilians.

Biden has stated that Israel's plans for a massive attack on Rafah – where over 1 million civilians are sheltered – is a "red line" which should not be crossed. Within 20 minutes Netanyahu spat in Biden's face, promising to defy Biden's red line and set up his own. Biden was caught on a 'hot' mic stating that it's time he has a "come-to-Jesus meeting" with Netanyahu over policy in Gaza. But Bibi is making Biden look like a weak chump.

It's clear that Biden's words will have no impact on Bibi who has devoted his political career to blocking Palestinian sovereignty and expanding Israeli settlements. But Biden has real political power over Bibi if he's willing to stand up for his stated principals. He can suspend offensive military aid to Israel until Bibi changes Israeli policy in Gaza.

As 'The Guardian' reminds

us that President Ronald Reagan stopped Israel's 1992 bombing of Arab civilians in Lebanon in its tracks. That summer Israel carried out an all-out assault on Beirut, cutting off food, water and power in an attempt to destroy the PLO, whose fighters were hiding in a tunnel network under the city. Then on August 12, dubbed 'Black Thursday,' Israel bombed Beirut for 11 straight hours, killing more than 100 people.

Reagan phoned right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to "express his outrage" and condemn the "needless destruction and bloodshed" calling the Israeli attacks a "holocaust". Asked whether Reagan had threatened Begin with a suspension of US arms aid to Israel, Reagan's deputy press secretary responded "I won't discuss that." In any case, twenty minutes after his first call with Reagan, Begin called Reagan back to say he was stopping the bombing. After putting down the phone, a surprised Reagan told an aide: "I didn't know I had that kind of power."

Well, President Reagan did have that kind of power and so does President Biden if he has the courage to use it.

As retired Israeli Maj General Yitzhak Brack stated in a recent interview, "All of our missiles, the ammunition, the precision-guided bombs, all the airplanes and bombs, it's all from the US. The minute they turn off the tap, you can't keep fighting. You have no capability. ... Everyone understands that we can't fight this war without the United States. Period."

Stop the war



Pakistan demands UNSC overhaul

Urges world body to be more inclusive to address conflicts

News Desk

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called on the UN Security Council to "seriously consider" ways to implement its resolutions, especially on long-standing disputes, while stressing that the 15-member body must become more transparent, accountable, inclusive and democratic to respond to the growing challenges.

"Nothing undermines the credibility of the Council more than the 'selective' implementation and non-implementation of its resolutions," Ambassador Munir Akram told delegates when the long-running negotiations aimed at restructuring the Security Council resumed Tuesday.

"Failure to enforce its resolutions undermines the credibility of the Security Council and erodes confidence in its ability to fulfil the responsibilities assigned by the UN Charter," the Pakistani envoy said at a session devoted to the five inter-linked 'clusters' of issues on reforming the Security Council, with a focused discussion on its working methods.

In his remarks, Ambassador Akram reiterated Pakistan's commitment to promoting enhanced



transparency, accountability, and inclusivity within the Security Council's working methods, and called for collective efforts to achieve meaningful reforms.

Full-scale negotiations to reform the Security Council began in the General Assembly in February 2009 on five key clusters — the categories of membership, the question of veto, regional representation, size of an enlarged Security Council, and working methods of the council and its relationship with the General Assembly.

Despite a general agree-

ment on enlarging the Council, as part of the UN reform process, member states remain divided over the details. The so-called Group of Four — India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan — who seek for themselves permanent seats on the Council have shown no flexibility in their push for expanding the Council by 10 seats, with six additional permanent and four non-permanent members.

On the other hand, the Italy/Pakistan-led Uniting for Consensus (UfC) group, which firmly opposes addi-

tional permanent members, has proposed a new category of members — not permanent members — with longer duration in terms and a possibility to get re-elected.

Highlighting the integral role of working methods reform within the ongoing reform process, Ambassador Akram underscored the imperative for the Council to address its procedures to enhance functionality and inclusivity. He particularly emphasized the need for transparency, inclusivity, and democratic processes in decision-making.

MQM-P MPA intervenes, police return bribed money

By our correspondent

KARACHI: MQM Pakistan's Member of Provincial Assembly from constituency PS-98, Arsalan Parvez, intervened when he witnessed police harassment against a poor individual in his constituency, resulting in the suspension of two police officers.

It is remembered that last night, during a routine check, several police officers busy with checking stopped a laborer returning from the factory and, during the search, the police officers snatched the laborer's monthly wage from his pocket, threatening to frame him in a case if he didn't comply. The poor laborer protested vehemently against these officers, but instead of returning his money, they took away his month's wages.

The impoverished individual then lodged a complaint with the local MPA of MQM-P. The MQM MPA took immediate action, informing the higher authorities about the incident, which led to prompt action being taken. Following an investigation into the incident, the concerned police personnel were immediately suspended.

Police kills wanted criminal

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: Nawabshah Police have neutralized a notorious criminal wanted in 19 felony cases including murder, dacoity, robbery, highway robbery, and various other offenses.

SSP Nawabshah, Tanveer Hussain Tunio, addressing the media, revealed that the Police had engaged in a rigorous pursuit of a criminal gang along the National Highway in Skrand, Nawabshah, who were attempting to perpetrate a robbery. He stated that upon noticing the proactive movement of the Police, the criminals resorted to firing at them.

In response, the Police retaliated, resulting in the elimination of a criminal identified as Kamran s/o Ghulam Haider Hakro. Additionally, a Kalashnikov and bullets were recovered from the scene. However, the other accomplices of the deceased dacoits managed to flee and are currently being pursued. Upon scrutiny of the criminal history of the deceased, it was revealed that he was implicated in approximately 19 cases of dacoity, robbery, highway robbery, and murder.

Zardari seeks presidential 'immunity' in NAB reference

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari filed on Thursday an application in an accountability court seeking presidential immunity in the Thatta water supply reference.

During the hearing of the case, the president's counsel submitted the application and stated that the same has also been attained in other cases and the current case cannot proceed. The court issued notices to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in the case and adjourned the hearing till April 22.

The other accused in the case include former secretary Ejaz Ahmed Khan, Ali Akbar, Ejaz Memon, Ali Akbar Abro, Khawaja Abdul Ghani Majeed, Manahal Majeed, Abdul Nadeem Bhutto, and others. The water supply reference pertains to an alleged illegal award of a contract for the water supply scheme in Thatta to a private contractor.

In January 2023, an accountability court sent back a corruption reference against Zardari after amendments to the NAB law. Earlier, Zardari also secured presidential immunity in the Park Lane reference case. Accountability



court Judge Nasir Javed Rana presided over the proceedings and heard the Park Lane reference against the president and others.

Zardari's lawyer Farooq H. Naik emphasized that President Zardari's status as the country's elected head granted him immunity from legal action, thus rendering the continuation of the case against him untenable.

NAB prosecutor contended that this case pertains to a private bank. It will first need to be determined whether this court can even hear it, as per the existing laws. Subsequently, the court adjourned the hearing until April 17.

The main reference in the Park Lane case accused

Zardari of influencing relevant authorities during his tenure as the president — from 2008 to 2013 — to obtain loans for his front companies.

Zardari allegedly received a loan of Rs1.5 billion released for Parthenon Private Limited "with ill intention", and the money was later transferred for his personal use through fake bank accounts.

NAB accused him of causing the national exchequer a loss of Rs3.77 billion. The anti-graft body later filed a supplementary reference against Zardari in the Park Lane case, accusing him of using fake documents to acquire a bank loan for a dummy corporation.

WANA celebrates 'World Oral Health Day'

By our correspondent

WANA: In commemoration of World Oral Health Day, District Headquarters Hospital in Wana, South Waziristan, organized an awareness seminar and walk aimed at spreading knowledge about oral health care and addressing infection control during dental procedures.

Assistant Commissioner Wana, Faisal Ismail, graced the event as the chief guest, stressing the importance of World Oral Health Day in his keynote address. He emphasized the integral role of oral health in overall well-being and urged attendees to prioritize dental hygiene practices.

Dr. Asif Kamal, a dental surgeon, delivered an informative presentation on oral health care, focusing on preventive measures and proper dental hygiene techniques. Dr. Inayat Ullah, the Infection Control Officer, provided insights into the transmission of infections during dental procedures, highlighting the significance of stringent infection control measures.

Dr. Hammad Mahmood, the Medical Superintendent and Health Manager of DHQ Hospital Wana, presented the annual performance report for 2023, showcasing achievements and areas for improvement in healthcare services. Rahmat Ullah, President of Wana Welfare Association, also addressed the seminar, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in promoting oral health awareness and advocating for proactive healthcare practices.

The seminar and walk served as a pivotal platform for disseminating valuable information on oral health care and infection control practices.

Bulls extend rally, fueled by IMF deal

News Desk

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) extended its bull-run for the third successive day as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Islamabad reached a staff-level agreement following the final review under a \$3 billion standby arrangement.

Earlier, trading kicked off with optimism that the staff-level agreement would pave the way for the release of last loan tranche of \$1.1 billion in March or April. Pakistan's economic and financial positions have improved, said the IMF staff in a statement, which encouraged bulls to build their positions, taking the KSE-100 index to the intra-day high of 65,968.02.

Suicide bombing in Kandahar kills three

News Desk

KANDAHAR: A suicide bombing killed three people and wounded 12 others on Thursday in the Afghan city of Kandahar, a provincial official said, the heartland of the Taliban authorities that rule the country.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, and while multiple explosions have been reported around the country since the start of the holy month of Ramadan on March 11, few have been confirmed by Taliban officials. Afghanistan's capital is Kabul but Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada lives in Kandahar city, for decades the stronghold of the Taliban movement.

"A suicide attack occurred in which three combatants were killed and 12 others were wounded, ac-

cording to preliminary information," said Inamullah Samangani, director of information and culture of Kandahar province.

The explosion at around 8:00 am (0330 GMT) targeted a group of people waiting outside the New Kabul Bank branch in central Kandahar city. "Commonly our compatriots gather there to collect their salaries," Samangani told AFP, adding that the "victims were civilians".

Taliban authorities had surrounded the area outside the bank and did not let journalists close to the site. However, a journalist saw what appeared to be unconscious people or dead bodies being loaded into ambulances in the wake of the blast. Firefighters and security personnel were clearing the area, where blood, scraps of

clothes and shoes littered the ground. Hospitals did not respond to requests for information, saying they had been told not to speak to the media.

Samangani said "the situation is under control" at one of the city's hospitals where wounded were transported, denying that the need for blood donations was urgent as had circulated on social media.

"There is no such issue, and the wounded people are not in serious condition, they have superficial injuries," he said in a message to journalists.

The number of bomb blasts and suicide attacks in Afghanistan has markedly declined since the Taliban ended their insurgency after seizing power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government.

French watchdog fines Google €250m

News Desk

PARIS: France's competition watchdog on Wednesday said it fined Alphabet's Google 250 million euros (\$271.73 million) for breaches linked to EU intellectual property rules in its relationship with media publishers, citing concerns about the company's AI service.

The watchdog said Google's AI-powered chatbot Bard — since rebranded under the name Gemini — was trained on content from publishers and news agencies, without notifying them. Google has pledged not to contest the facts as part of settlement proceedings, the watchdog said, adding the company also proposed a series of remedy measures to certain shortcomings.

Google said it accepted the settlement "because it is time to move on", adding "we want to focus on the larger goal of sustainable approaches to connecting people with quality content and on working constructively with French publishers."

The company said the fine was disproportionate and said the watchdog had not sufficiently taken into account its efforts "in an environment where it's very hard to set a course because we can't predict which way the wind will blow next."

The fine is linked to a copyright dispute in France over online content in a case triggered by complaints from some of the country's biggest news organizations, including Agence France Presse.



MEULABOH, INDONESIA: Victims were found about 21 miles from the busy Ujung Karang Harbor, Meulaboh, Indonesia, here on Thursday.—MM photo

Indonesia rescues 69 Rohingya refugees after boat capsizes

Authorities say 42 men, 18 women, 9 children rescued in Meulaboh waters

News Desk

ANKARA: The Banda Aceh Search and Rescue (SAR) Office said a rescue team found 42 men, 18 women and nine children in the Meulaboh waters, according to the Antara News Agency.

"The victims were found floating in the waters of the sea about 21 miles (33 kilometers) from the Jetty Ujung Karang Harbor, Meulaboh, on Thursday morning," the agency quoted Al Hussain, who is the head of the rescue agency. The navy and Banda Aceh Air and Water Police (Polairud) assisted rescue teams in the evacuation process, it said.

"Currently, the team is still being deployed in the field. We will convey further information soon," Hussain said in responding to a question about casualties. Authorities said earlier that 100 Rohingya refugees

were onboard when the ship sank Wednesday in the waters of the Samatiga Sub-district, West Aceh Regency. Antara News said six refugees were also rescued by fishermen Wednesday.

The Rohingya mostly embark on dangerous journeys between November and April via boats to Thailand, Bangladesh or further to Indonesia and Malaysia when the seas are calmer. More than 1,500 Rohingya entered Aceh province between mid-November and mid-December 2023, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said in a report in December.

"Rohingya refugees have reported that despite the considerable risks associated with this sea route, they undertake these dangerous boat journeys due to the challenges of living in protracted displacement, the limited prospects for solutions, and the current situation in Myanmar," it said.



GWADAR: Funeral prayers being offered of the soldier martyred in Gwadar on Thursday.—MM screengrab

Funeral prayers offered of Gwadar attack martyrs

These sacrifices of our brave sons strengthen our resolve to fight against the scourge of terrorism, says ISPR

By Ismail Baloch/ISPR

GWADAR: Funeral prayers of two soldiers of Pakistan Army, who were martyred while foiling the terrorist attack in Gwadar Port Authority Colony on Wednesday, were offered in Gwadar on Thursday, the military's media wing said.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Sepoy Bahar Khan (35 years old, resident of district DG

Khan) and Sepoy Imran Ali (28 years old, resident of district Khairpur) will be laid to rest with full military honors in their respective areas. Representatives of Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy, Balochistan Police and civil society participated in the funeral prayer, the statement said.

"The Armed Forces of Pakistan stand by the nation and are committed to defeating terrorist attempts to sabotage the peace and stability

of Balochistan," the ISPR further added. "These sacrifices of our brave sons strengthen our resolve to fight against the scourge of terrorism," the military's media wing stated. Pakistan Army successfully eliminated eight terrorists during its swift response to an attempted attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Colony on Wednesday.

A band of eight terrorists made an attempt to infiltrate Port Authority Colony in

Gwadar. However, swift action by security forces thwarted their efforts. Armed with guns and bombs, the terrorists stormed the complex just outside the port that houses offices of government departments, intelligence agencies and paramilitary forces, said Saeed Ahmed Umrani, a government commissioner. The terrorists detonated a number of bombs before launching a shooting attack and trying to storm the complex, he said.