

Lt col, capt among seven army men martyred in North Waziristan attack

Six terrorists ram car bomb into post, follow up with multiple suicide bombings before being neutralized, says ISPR

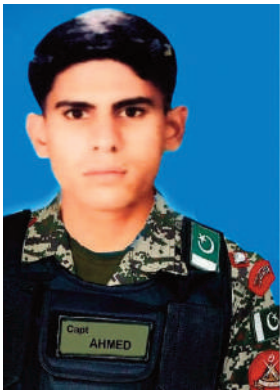
News Desk/ By Adam Khan Wazir

RAWALPINDI: A lieutenant colonel and captain were among seven soldiers martyred in a terrorist attack in North Waziristan's Mir Ali, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated on Saturday. At least six terrorists were also killed in the attack.

As per the ISPR, troops foiled the initial attempt of intrusion into the army installation in the wee hours of the day however, a group of six terrorists rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into it, later carrying out multiple suicide bombings. The attacks led to the collapse of a portion of a building, resulting in the martyrdom of five brave soldiers.

The martyred soldiers included Havildar Sabir, a resident of district Khyber; Naik Khurshid, a resident of district Lakki Marwat; Sepoy Nasir, a resident of Peshawar; Sepoy Raja, a resident of Kohat; and Sepoy Sajjad, a resident of Abbottabad.

During the ensuing clearance operation, the Pak



RAWALPINDI: Martyred officers Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar (L) and Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali (R).—MM photo: ISPR

army troops led by Lieutenant Colonel Syed Kashif Ali, engaged and gunned down all the six terrorists. However, 39-year-old Lt. Col Ali, a resident of Karachi, and 23-year-old Captain Muhammad Ahmed Badar, a resident of Talagang, embraced martyrdom.

The ISPR reported that the troops were engaged in a "sanitization operation" to eliminate any other terrorists present in the area. The "security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the



menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the authority noted in its statement.

The funeral prayers for the martyrs took place in Bannu Cantt later in the evening. According to the ISPR, the martyrs will receive full military honours during their burial in their respective native towns. A significant presence of military and civil officials, including Major General Anjum Riaz, the

General Officer Commanding, attended the funeral.

"The Pakistan Army remains committed to sacrificing its lives until the last drop of blood in defence of our beloved motherland," stated the military's media wing. In an attack in early February, at least 10 policemen including members of an elite force were martyred in a brazen attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) restive Dera Ismail Khan district.

It was important to highlight that the new base was established merely months after Pakistan allowed hundreds of TTP terrorists to return as part of the confidence-building measure. It was evident that the returning TTP terrorists instead of laying down arms regrouped and posed a greater threat to Pakistan's security. The increased TTP attacks prompted authorities to withdraw from the peace efforts brokered by the Afghan Taliban. "[The] TTP was further strengthened and emboldened, increasing attacks with a broader degree of autonomy to manoeuvre," the UN report said.

IMF asks to increase power, gas tariffs

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The talks between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to secure the final tranche of \$1.1 billion under a standby arrangement have reported some significant progress.

The two sides are expected to reach a staff-level agreement early next week. Sources from the Finance Ministry have revealed that Pakistan has also committed to timely increases in electricity and gas tariffs, as well as the abolishment of tax exemptions. The sources said that the electricity tariff is expected to be further increased from July 1. Additionally, measures will be put in place for monthly, quarterly, and annual adjustments to facilitate cost recovery.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the abolition of tax exemptions, including those pertaining to income tax, sales tax, and duties. Plans are underway to phase out the current annual tax exemption amounting to Rs2.239 trillion, with a further commitment to gradually document the economy to bolster tax revenue. The government has also pledged not to issue any new tax exemptions or amnesty schemes in the upcoming budget. However, exemptions for foreign diplomatic missions and non-profit charitable organizations will be retained.

PPP objects to IMF's NFC demand

Govt informs Fund revisiting award requires constitutional amendment

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) objected to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demand that Pakistan should revisit the National Finance Commission (NFC) formula, wondering why the global lender would push the Center to encroach on the provincial share.

The PPP has raised concerns just a day after the IMF called upon Pakistan to reopen discussions on the NFC award to address the ongoing imbalance in the distribution of fiscal resources between federal and provincial governments. IMF Mission Chief to Pakistan, Nathan Porter, raised concerns over the distribution of resources and responsibilities and underscored the

need for a more equitable arrangement with newly-appointed Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb during Pak-IMF talks for a \$1.1 billion loan tranche.

PPP Vice President Senator Sherry Rehman, while reacting to the IMF's demand has raised question regarding IMF's involvement in Pakistan's resource allocation formula. Senator Rehman while questioning the IMF's alleged role in Pakistan's resource allocation stressed that there is no indication of the global money lender seeking to interfere in Pakistan's constitutionally agreed frame of resource allocation.

"There is no indication that the IMF is proactively seeking to meddle in Pakistan's constitutionally agreed resource allocation frame,"

Senator Rehman said, adding "Why would the IMF want to put itself in the middle of changing the NFC formula of Pakistan?"

Instead of eying at provincial share, Senator Rehman reminded that it seems it is the federal structure that cannot collect taxes, which incidentally the provinces are doing far better than the center. Rather than further encroaching on provincial shares, she said, the federal government should worry about improving tax collection through the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

"Since the 7th NFC Award, FBR taxes have remained stagnant in the range of 9% of the GDP, whereas provincial taxes have increased from 0.3% to over 1% of the GDP," Rehman pointed out.

SBP denies reports of issuing polymer currency notes

Central bank calls reports 'baseless', asserts 'no such plan underway'

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) denied reports, circulating on social media and news channels, that it was issuing a new series of polymer currency notes. In a statement on Saturday, the central bank refuted the reports as 'unfounded and lacking merit'. According to the SBP, there are currently no plans or proposals to transition from paper to plastic (polymer) currency notes.

The statement emphasised that the utilization of cotton-based paper for currency production remains the standard, with materials primarily sourced locally from Security Papers Limited – which uses mainly local raw materials. The reports regarding the issuance of polymer currency notes come days after the recent

controversy about the misprinting of Rs1,000 notes in circulation.

A one-minute video went viral earlier this week, showing a few printing on the backside of a new Rs1,000 notes. The video maker, who did not appear on camera but identified himself with his voice in the background as a National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) branch manager in Model Colony, Karachi, displayed the misprinted notes in his hand.

A spokesperson for SBP – later on Wednesday – said that commercial banks and individuals who have received the one-sided printed notes can exchange them at the bank branches where they received the faulty notes.

They can also exchange the notes at the designated 16 offices of the central bank nationwide.

Court set to hear Nawaz sons' plea on 19th

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad has given the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) until March 19 to prepare arguments and submit records of the references in which former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's sons, Hassan and Hussain, were co-accused.

Islamabad Accountability Court-I Judge Nasir Javed Rana resumed hearing Hassan and Hussain's plea for their acquittal in the Flagship, Al-Azizia, and Avenfield references on Friday. Advocate Qazi Misbah appeared on behalf of Hassan and Hussain along with the pleader of the accused,



Rana Irfan. Hassan and Hussain had requested exemption from attending Friday's hearing, a request which the court accepted.

Prosecutors Afzal Qureshi, Sohail Arif, and Mirza Usman appeared in court on behalf of NAB. They requested the court to grant them time to prepare arguments as well as present the relevant record. The court granted NAB time until March 19. A day earlier, on Thursday, Hassan and Hussain received significant relief as the accountability court revoked its earlier order declaring them proclaimed offenders and canceled their permanent arrest warrants.

FIA enforces ban on 87 employees over misconduct

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has taken major action against several of its employees following numerous complaints. An official notification issued by the Deputy Director of Human Resource Management revealed a ban on the deployment of 87 employees across airports and anti-human trafficking circles.

The list includes a wide range of staff, from Assistant Directors and Office Superintendents to Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, Head Constables, and Constables. Notably, the bans extend across various FIA zones, indicating the widespread nature of the disciplinary actions.

In Gujranwala Zone alone, 12 employees faced bans, while 7 were implicated from the KPK Kohat Zone, and 9 from Multan Zone.

Curiously, the names of 16 employees from the Islamabad Zone did not appear on the list, suggesting exoneration or ongoing investigations.

Adoption of UNGA resolution on 'Islamophobia' hailed

The General Assembly has also called upon the member states to take legislative and policy measures

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Saturday welcomed the adoption of the resolution titled "Measures to Combat Islamophobia," by the UN General Assembly with an overwhelming majority.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the resolution was presented by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as a follow-up of the General Assembly Resolution 76/254, which designated March 15 as the International Day to

combat Islamophobia.

The General Assembly has condemned the incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence against Muslims, as manifested in the increasing number of incidents of desecration of the Holy Quran, attacks on mosques, sites, and shrines, and other acts of religious intolerance, negative stereotyping, hatred, and violence against Muslims.

The General Assembly has also called upon the Member States to take legislative and policy measures to combat religious intolerance, negative stereotyping,

hatred, incitement to violence and violence against Muslims. Pakistan welcomed the General Assembly's call for the appointment of a "United Nations Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia". This historic appointment will be the first of its kind, exclusively dedicated to combating the scourge of Islamophobia.

The adoption of the resolution comes at a critical time, amidst rising Islamophobia, as manifested by an increasing number of incidents of discrimination, violence, and incitement against Muslims around the world.

Asad Toor granted bail in anti-judiciary campaign case

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Special judge central Humayun Dilawar granted bail on Saturday to vlogger Asad Toor in a case related to running a malicious campaign against the judiciary. Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) special prosecutor Ishfaq Hussain Shah appeared before the court and informed that the agency had no objection to the vlogger being granted bail.

The bail was granted against surety bonds worth Rs5,000. Separately, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) also declared the call-up notices issued to Toor by the FIA against the law. Issuing a seven-page written order on the vlogger's plea against the FIA notices, IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq maintained that the FIR was lodged after the wrongful issuing of notices.

The judge maintained that the relevant forum can be approached once the FIR is registered, adding that the court cannot order Toor's release due to the bar on taking suo motu action. Toor had challenged the notices dated February 23 and 26 before his arrest. The IHC had reserved its decision on the case on March 7.

In January, the caretaker government had constituted a six-member high-powered joint investigation team (JIT) to inquire into the malicious campaign launched against judges of the top court after the CJP Isa-led bench announced the verdict on the PTI intra-party polls. On February 24, Toor and anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan were summoned by the FIA's cyber crime wing.

FIA summons PTI's Marwat over tweet

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Cybercrime Wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has issued a notice summoning Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Sher Afzal Marwat on March 18 for levelling serious allegations on social media platforms.

The summons follows a complaint filed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MNA Barrister Aqeel Malik regarding a tweet made by Marwat. Marwat, residing at G9/1 in Islamabad, was served a summons notice under Section 160 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The notice stated that an inquiry would commence based on the request of Barrister Aqeel Malik.

The notice stated that the newly elected MNA tweeted on March 9 using his Twitter handle, summoning him to participate in the inquiry and provide relevant evidence. It further mentioned that failure to appear for the inquiry will be interpreted as having nothing to contribute to the matter.

The notice advised Marwat to bring his mobile phone and electronic devices along with him. It also warned that failure to comply is subject to punishment under Section 174 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). However, it remains unclear which specific tweet prompted the complaint.

SC issues notice in May 9 bail case

Justice Hilali remarked that the incident occurred on May 9, but the FIR was lodged on May 10

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court issued notices to the Punjab government on Friday while hearing bail applications from individuals accused of vandalizing state and army properties following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan on May 9, 2023.

A three-member bench, led by Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and comprising Justice Mussarat Hilali and Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, also summoned records of the case. During the proceedings, Justice Mandokhail inquired about the extent of damage caused to properties by the accused, whether weapons were re-

covered from them, and how many charges were pressed against them.

The lawyer for the accused responded that they were charged under almost all sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). When Justice Mandokhail asked if they were also charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, the lawyer affirmed. Justice Hilali remarked that the incident occurred on May 9, but the FIR was lodged on May 10.

The lawyer for the accused claimed that the alleged rioters were not affiliated with any political party but were shopkeepers. Justice Rizvi observed that the accused were identified through CCTV footage.

World alarms over Modi's controversial citizenship law

News Desk

NEW DESHLI: The controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) implemented in India by the Modi government has stirred both national and international concern over its potential impact on human rights and democratic principles.

Following protests within India, the international community, including the United Nations, the United States, and Amnesty International, has raised serious reservations regarding the CAA. The United Nations Human Rights Commission labeled the Act as a violation of India's human rights laws.

Expressing concerns, the spokesperson of the US State Department emphasized the importance of religious freedom and equal treatment for all minorities under the law. They stated that the US is closely monitoring the implementation of the law by the Indian government.



RAWALPINDI: General Shaikh Mohamed bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain called on General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) at GHQ.—MM photo: ISPR

Land allotment investigation exposes hidden quandaries

Investigations stopped; land worth trillions of rupees doled out to influential people, builders by revenue officers

News Desk

KARACHI: Shocking revelations have emerged regarding the fraudulent allocation of government land worth trillions of rupees to influential figures, land mafia, and builders through forgery and tampering of official records.

Sources indicate that the probe initiated by the Chief Minister's Inspection Team (CMIT) into these illegal allotments has been abruptly halted, allegedly due to pressure exerted by influential mafia elements. However, CMIT Chairman Rafiq Ahmed Burri denies any external pressure, attributing the stall in investigations to staffing shortages and the

non-cooperation of revenue officers. Despite writing several letters, the Board of Revenue officials are not providing the required records, the investigation will be resumed soon, he said.

As per records, in the ongoing investigation conducted by the investigative team, Assistant Commissioner Abdulfatah Panhwar, Nazeer Abro, Mushtaq Jatol, Asad Abbasi, Javed Ladhk, Mukhtiar Kar Abbasi, Asif Somro, Parvez Malik, Shamsad Ali, Tapidar Salim Raza, Khan Muhammad Imrani, Haq Nawaz Aijan, Mumtaz Kallu, Amanullah Nandwani, and others have been held responsible for embezzlement, causing trillions of rupees in losses to govern-

ment properties. These officers doled out government land even to Afghan nationals on forged documents, the report said.

Sources said that the investigation team formed on the instructions of the former caretaker chief minister was given the task of investigating the illegal allotment of thousands of acres of government land, alteration of official records and large-scale forgery in the four districts of Karachi, West, East, Malir and Keamari. While the investigation team has only been able to determine the forgery done on 5,500 acres of land in the Manghopir tehsil of West district, it was stopped from working with the return of the system,

sources claimed.

The investigation report of Manghopir tehsil, has not been sent to the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary for further legal action despite the passage of a month. The investigation was initiated following public complaints of illegal allotment of thousands of acres of government land, alteration of government records and large-scale forgery.

According to the report, revenue officers have colluded with the Board of Revenue members and made allotments despite being prohibited by the Supreme Court. Sources say that despite the existence of outstanding records in the CMIT, the investigation of

more districts has been stopped due to the pressure of the influential land mafia. According to the report, investigations so far have identified government officials, private individuals, and beneficiaries of the massive fraud.

The committee included CMIT member Agha Ijaz Pathan, Section Officer Syed Amjad, Mukhtiar Kar Abbasi, Bhangwar and Supervising Tapidar Mir Barkat Talpar. The committee was tasked to investigate cases of illegal allotment, fraudulent entries in records of rights to benefit private individuals, builders and land mafia and falsification of revenue records and deliberate destruction of records.

METRO MATTERS

FIA arrests builder on allegations of corporate tax evasion

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration team at Jinnah International Airport has detained the well-known builder, Asif Razaq Dinar, on suspicions of causing billions of rupees worth of losses to the national treasury. Dinar has been handed over to the Federal Board of Revenue's Corporate Tax Office (CTO).

FIA's Land Revenue and CTO have collectively registered five cases against the accused. In four cases, Dinar had obtained bail while he was wanted in the CTO case and was included in the stop-list. On Friday, Asif Razaq Dinar arrived in Karachi from Dubai, and immigration authorities halted him due to his inclusion in the stop-list. Subsequently, the CTO authorities were informed, and a team from CTO escorted the accused to the customs special court where his remand has been obtained.

It's notable that Asif Razaq Dinar holds significant political influence in Karachi and is one of the prominent builders in the city. Additionally, he owns a steel scrap company in Hub, Balochistan. The accused is also a central figure in cases pertaining to fake companies defrauding the national exchequer of billions of rupees. It's worth mentioning that the accused had left the country last year; his return is speculated to be the result of a deal or the authorities' effort to recover the embezzled amount. The upcoming days will unveil the truth.

Speeding car overturns, kills five

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A tragic accident occurred on Kareemabad Bridge, resulting in the loss of five lives. According to reports, a speeding car overturned, leading to the demise of one person, while four others lost their lives in separate incidents during the traffic chaos. The incident took place near Landhi Shafi Mor, close to the Douglas Company, where a 43-year-old individual lost his life. The body was transferred to Jinnah Hospital via Edhi Ambulance. The deceased was identified as Muhammad, son of Wali Khan, from Block 02, Saima Royal Residency, Gulshan-e-Iqbal.

Additionally, a 65-year-old individual lost his life after falling from the roof of his residence at Gulshan-e-Iqbal. The body was shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital via Chhipa Ambulance. The deceased was identified as Syed Asghar Ali Shah, son of Syed Ghulam Shah Bukhari. The fatal accident occurred when a speeding car lost control, veered off, and collided head-on with another vehicle. The deceased bike rider (during treatment) succumbed to his injuries at the Civil Hospital. The identity of the deceased motorcycle rider is Amir, son of Wali Khan, aged 32. The tragic incident has left the community in mourning, highlighting the importance of road safety measures and responsible driving practices.

ANF arrests six suspects on drug smuggling

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has initiated a series of crackdowns against drug smuggling activities, leading to the apprehension of six suspects. In a total of 11 operations, more than 150 kilograms of narcotics were seized.

At Lahore Airport, a parcel destined for Australia was intercepted, containing 1.9 kilograms of ice. At Islamabad Airport, a traveler intending to depart for Jeddah was found in possession of 31,700 heroin-filled capsules. In another operation at Islamabad Airport, a passenger bound for Dubai was caught with 84 heroin-filled capsules. Similarly, at Multan Airport, a traveler bound for Qatar was found carrying 93 ice-filled capsules.

In Lahore, a consignment of grease sent to the GP Office was discovered to contain 950 grams of ice. At Karachi Airport, a parcel sent to Sharjah was intercepted, containing 70 grams of heroin. From Quetta, 75 kilograms of heroin were seized. Near Coastal Highway Passni, 55 kilograms of charas were confiscated. Additionally, 2 kilograms of heroin were recovered from a suspect near Data Darbar in Lahore, and 1.5 kilograms of ice were seized from a suspect near Tariq Road in Karachi. Moreover, 690 grams of heroin were recovered from a suspect in Bahria Town, Rawalpindi.

Legal proceedings have been initiated against the apprehended individuals under the Anti-Narcotics Act, and investigations are underway.

Robberies, gunfire grip Karachi

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The city is witnessing a surge in daylight robberies and incidents of shootings targeting civilians. In recent events, robbers shot and injured six individuals while attempting to resist the robberies.

According to the police, in Essa Nagri and near a water pump, four civilians sustained injuries during a dacoity attempt. In another incident near Essa Nagri Bakra Peeri, two armed assailants attempted to rob citizens, firing upon resistance and injuring two individuals identified as Farhan and Shoaib. Both assailants fled the scene after snatching cash and mobile phones, leaving the wounded victims in critical condition.

Near a water pump, armed assailants tried to loot young motorcyclists and injured both during the resistance. In Azizam Amila, a civilian named Azeem, who resisted the armed assailants, was also injured. The assailants managed to flee the scene after the robbery.

In Orangi Town near Daryn Asnana, during a robbery attempt, armed robbers opened fire and injured a 35-year-old man named Rahman. Similarly, in Soudabad's area of Miliyar Kala Board Block B, a 43-year-old man named Muhammad Naseer was injured in a shooting incident. Rescue authorities have reported that incidents occurred during attempted robberies. In the Milir Bridge area near Anwar Baloch Hotel, a 41-year-old man, Mazamil, was injured in a shooting incident and transferred to the hospital for treatment via Edhi Ambulance.

Afghan dacoit gang's leader arrested

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Clifton Police have apprehended the alleged mastermind of an Afghan dacoit gang involved in bloodshed and looting across Karachi. Details reveal that the gang leader, identified as Abidullah alias Kharzi, has been arrested, as disclosed by SSP Majid Hayat.

According to investigations, the Afghan dacoit gang is implicated in various incidents of bloodshed and looting in Karachi. The apprehended suspect, Abidullah alias Kharzi, provided crucial revelations during interrogation. It has been revealed that Constable Waheed Parvez is also involved with the apprehended suspect. On February 13th, in North Karachi, the officer was martyred near his residence. Constable Waheed Parvez was posted as a gunner with a judge's security van when the suspect and his accomplices ambushed and martyred him during a dacoity.

The gang member, Bilal, specializes in making petrol bombs, while Ahmedullah Afghan and Khan are involved in multiple cases of murder and causing injuries to civilians.

After carrying out their criminal activities, the suspect Abidullah alias Kharzi would flee to Afghanistan and operate the group from there. The gang's video of dacoities went viral last month. One of the suspect's accomplices was apprehended by the public and handed over to the authorities.

SSP City stated that the suspect's accomplices forcibly separated from the public using weapons during the apprehension. Some members of the suspect's gang were killed, while others were arrested in injured condition.

Three arrested on fake passports

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration has apprehended three passengers at Karachi Airport who were attempting to fly to Saudi Arabia using counterfeit passports. According to details, the FIA Immigration transferred the suspects to the Anti-Human Trafficking Circle.

As per the FIA, the suspects identified as Ali Raza, Muhammad Salim, and Mohsin Bashir were traveling to Saudi Arabia on visit visas through Flight No. FZ334. It has been revealed that the suspects had fake visas of Thailand stamped on their passports. Subsequently, the suspects were shifted to the Anti-Human Trafficking Circle in Karachi for further legal proceedings.

Warrants issued for KMC officers on billboard accident

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Last year, arrest warrants were issued for KMC officers in the case of a civilian death due to a signboard collapse in Karachi. Former Municipal Commissioner Akhtar Ali Shaikh and two KMC directors, Azhar Ali and Tasleem Ali, have been issued arrest warrants.

The court has ordered the SHO Nazimabad to arrest the accused persons and present them in court on Monday, March 18. The court stated that it was the responsibility of the accused to ensure the proper maintenance of the signboards in their respective areas.

These officers failed miserably in the performance of their duties and also attempted to conceal evidence of the incident. In August 2023, one person was killed and two others were injured in the signboard collapse in Nazimabad Underpass.

Judge rebukes ex-CJ for shunning accountability

Justice Mandokhail says Saqib Nisar failed to fulfil obligation by not referring complaints to SJC

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In his additional note to a recent judgement, a Supreme Court judge, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, has severely criticized a former chief justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar. Justice Mandokhail has noted that CJ Nisar failed to fulfil his constitution, moral and ethical obligation as the country's top judge as he did not refer the misconduct complaints filed against him to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) during his term as the chief justice.

"[A] complaint was filed by private appellants against the former HCJ (Saqib Nisar), but he sat upon the same and did not refer the matter to the council [SJC] by recusing himself, rather held the Council hostage by not convening a meeting," Justice Mandokhail stated in his 17-page additional note.

The additional note is part of the detailed judgement issued by a five-member bench



that on February 21 ruled that the SCJ proceedings once initiated against a judge did not stop upon the retirement or resignation of the judge. The five-member bench—including Justice Mandokhail—had issued this order while hearing an intra-court appeal filed by the government against a June 27, 2023 verdict of an SC division bench which had ruled that misconduct proceedings could not be initiated against judges who have retired or resigned.

In his additional note which

was unveiled along with the detailed verdict on Friday, Justice Mandokhail noted that it was not only the former CJ's constitutional obligation, but was also his moral and ethical responsibility to refer the matter to the council. "[CJ Nisar should have] asked a judge of the Supreme Court who was next in seniority [to] him to become a member [of the council], with further request to the council to proceed against him accordingly."

According to Justice Mandokhail, Justice Nisar as the

CJ was burdened with more responsibility to maintain a high moral and ethical standard by placing himself before the council for his accountability. "But he failed to do what was expected from him," he added. He noted that failure on part of Justice Nisar to refer his matter to the council not only resulted in undermining the constitutional provisions, but also amounted to preventing the SJC from performing its constitutional function.

"It is a fact that during his tenure, under his chairmanship, the council conducted proceedings against some other judges, but withholding the complaint filed against him, is a violation of the principle of equality regarding accountability amongst the judges." He said it was equally the responsibility of other SJC members to have had inquired about pendency of references or complaints against judges of the Supreme Court or high courts.

MQM-P MPA discuss gas issue with SSGC's MD

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Mohammad Aamir Siddiqui, the nominated candidate for the Provincial Assembly seat PS-102 from the Tehreek-e-Insaf party, held a meeting with the Managing Director of Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), Imran Maniyal, along with a delegation. During the meeting, Mr. Siddiqui briefed Mr. Maniyal and others from SSGC about the various issues faced by the public regarding gas supply disruptions and low pressure.

In response, MD Imran Maniyal assured immediate action on resolving minor issues, starting with the areas of Nafeesa Abad and Garden West.

Fake bank representatives arrested

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Unit has arrested a group of three individuals from the Gulshan-e-Iqbal area of Karachi who were involved in withdrawing large sums of money from accounts by posing as bank representatives.

According to the FIA spokesperson, after raiding the Generation 96 call center involved in illegal activities, the arrested individuals, Abdul Hamid, Shahzaib Afzal, and Nauman Ali, were apprehended. Authorities stated that the suspects would impersonate bank representatives by using the latest technology for making fraudulent calls. They would obtain details of debit cards from consumers through deception.

Departmental inquiry finds SHO guilty of crime patronage

SHO Baldia Faisal Rafiq allegedly involved in illicit trade of gutka and drugs

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The recent exposure of police officers' implication in crimes and their alleged support of criminal activities has prompted an internal investigation within the Sindh police force. Following the apprehension of Rao Rafiq, the Station House Officer (SHO) of Zaman Town police station, in connection with a robbery case, inquiries have been initiated against Faisal Rafiq, the SHO of Baldia Town police station, for his purported involvement in the illicit trade of gutka

and drugs.

Police sources have verified the conclusion of an investigation into SHO Faisal's alleged collusion with drug dealers and gutka vendors in the Keamari district. A substantial quantity of gutka was reportedly seized among the confiscated assets.

There have been accusations that SHO Faisal conducted a raid on a gutka factory, seized a large quantity of the product, and subsequently sold over 50 sacks to a gutka trader in exchange for a bribe.

In light of the allegations, DIG

South Zone Asad Raza ordered an inquiry into SHO Faisal's conduct, with SP SITE Atif Amir overseeing the investigation.

According to police sources, SP Atif has finalized the investigation, holding SHO Faisal responsible for the illegal gutka trade.

Furthermore, evidence has surfaced suggesting the operation of a clandestine group, comprised of individuals within the jurisdiction of the Baldia police station, allegedly engaged in criminal activities under SHO Faisal's patronage.

Arrest warrants for ex-KMC directors issued

Magistrate orders police to produce ex municipal commissioner and KMC directors by March 18

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The judicial magistrate for the Central district has issued non-bailable arrest warrants for a former municipal commissioner and directors of the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) in connection with the death of a citizen caused by a fallen signboard. The magistrate ordered the SHO of Nazimabad police station to arrest the accused and present them before his court.

During the proceedings on Saturday, the investigating officer submitted the case challan before the magistrate, in which the accused were found culpable. The magistrate approved the final challan and ordered the arrest of the absconding accused, ordering police to bring them into court by March 18.

The court remarked that it was the accused's responsi-

bility to maintain the signboards in their respective areas, highlighting their failure in this regard. Concerns were raised regarding potential tampering with evidence related to the incident. The court issued the arrest warrants for former municipal commissioner Akhtar and KMC directors Azhar and Taslim Ali. According to police reports, the incident occurred in August 2023, resulting in the death of a citizen and injuries to two others.

In a related development, a senior civil judge issued notices to the KMC on a petition filed by the widow of Syed Fakhre Alam, a citizen who died after falling into a drain. The petitioner's lawyer, Usman Farooq Advocate, argued that Fakhre Alam, a father of five and a worker at a dyeing factory had left for work on Sunday February 3, but never returned home.

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Vol. No. 92
Issue. No. 1
Email: news@metro-morning.com
Ramazan 6, 1445 A.H.

Politics of political arena?

The question of whether the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is truly steering the ship of state or whether internal turbulence threatens to destabilize the party's foundations looms large in the collective consciousness of Pakistanis. Yet, amidst the clamor for answers, a definitive resolution to this quandary remains elusive, obscured by a veil of uncertainty. Throughout Pakistan's tumultuous political history, there have been instances where political entities or leaders have faced accusations of treachery or criminality, leading to their marginalization from the political arena. However, in a curious twist of fate, many of these figures have later resurfaced, seeking redemption and claiming to have undergone profound transformations or embraced nationalist ideals.

What adds to the intrigue of these scenarios is the opacity surrounding the reasons behind such damning labels. Often, the public is left in the dark regarding the precise motives or evidence underpinning allegations of treachery or criminality, leading to speculation and conjecture. In navigating this murky terrain, Pakistanis are left to grapple with a fundamental question: Who wields the true power within the PTI, and to what extent do internal rifts undermine the party's cohesion and effectiveness? Until concrete answers emerge from the shadows of ambiguity, the debate surrounding the PTI's internal dynamics will continue to simmer, underscoring the complexities of Pakistan's political landscape.

The recurring pattern of political dominance followed by upheaval, from Fatima Jinnah to Bacha Khan and now seemingly reaching its zenith with Imran Khan, underscores a sobering reality in Pakistan's political landscape. These individuals, once comrades in governance, eventually find themselves embroiled in turmoil, prompting a critical question: how long will this cyclical saga persist, and can the nation withstand the toll of perpetual upheaval? The relentless cycle of political experimentation has left the country teetering on the brink, eroding public trust in the political establishment and fostering a disillusioned belief that politics is merely a game of power, with the true arbiters lurking behind the scenes.

While this narrative may offer solace to the ruling elite, the stark truth remains: governing a nation through such a lens is akin to building castles on shifting sands—ultimately destined to crumble under the weight of reality. As Pakistan grapples with the ramifications of this tumultuous trajectory, there arises a pressing need for introspection and reform. The nation stands at a crossroads where the trajectory of its political future hangs in the balance. Will it continue down the path of perpetual upheaval, or will it summon the collective will to forge a new narrative—one rooted in stability, accountability, and genuine progress? Only time will tell, but one thing remains certain: the status quo is untenable, and change, however daunting, is inevitable.

A positive disagreement

A significant disagreement has emerged between Pakistani negotiators and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding financial figures. However, the government has not shown any inclination towards imposing additional taxes through an interim budget during the remaining period of the current fiscal year. While revising budget deficits is possible, the IMF is urging Pakistani authorities to ensure the certainty of achieving a primary surplus. Criticizing Punjab's financial situation, the IMF has stated that the province has failed to generate the desired revenue and curb its unchecked expenditures. Discussions have revealed that the IMF wishes to empower the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to collect taxes in Punjab, and once collected, distribute these revenues by deducting collection fees, with a particular focus on the province with the highest population.

The IMF aims to improve fiscal federalism and has recommended consensus be reached on an interim basis for consultation on cross-cutting fiscal matters for the implementation of NFC Awards. Currently, the IMF seeks better coordination with provincial governments, including improved communication to ensure the achievement and full implementation of budgetary goals for fiscal year 2024 through enhanced dialogue, including better fiscal arrangements. The Punjab government has pledged to cut Rs. 115 billion in its expenses through a memorandum of understanding on this matter. This measure is intended to achieve a surplus for the remaining period of fiscal year 2024.

Provincial governments have expressed readiness to secure loans for items accumulated over an extended period and have demonstrated preparedness for the implementation and payment of these loans through a system of staggered disbursements and payments. This loan has been generated by the Provincial Food Departments working outside the government's fiscal boundaries. However, the IMF's demand to introduce a simple tax scheme for retailers has led Finance Minister Shaukat Tareen to participate in another meeting at the last minute. He could not attend the IMF meeting on Friday regarding financial matters.

Therefore, the government will need to inform the IMF about its intentions regarding the scheme to tax retailers. The government has already obtained the authority to impose taxes on retailers during the previous budget session. This scheme does not require any legislative approval from parliament, but the government led by the PML-N appears to be hesitant to grant approval to tax shopkeepers to protect its political base. The IMF has provided estimates ranging from March to June, which it claims the Ministry of Finance has shared. However, the FBR has clarified that it aims to achieve an annual tax collection target of Rs. 9.415 trillion, and there is no need for any interim budget regarding this matter.

After extensive discussions, the IMF has instructed the FBR to share its monthly targets in a timely manner, and if necessary, take additional tax measures. The IMF has made it mandatory for the FBR to share its monthly collections by May 3, 2024. The IMF has also announced its intention to provide monthly data to the IMF based on indicators of agreed performance.

There is a significant difference between the estimates of the IMF and the Ministry of Finance regarding non-tax revenues. The IMF has provided references to increasing expenditures, including loan repayments and other expenses, which may lead to revisiting the decided budget deficit, which could reach 7.9 percent of GDP.

Ramadan and gastrointestinal health

By Uzma Ehtasham



Ramadan, the holy month of fasting observed by Muslims worldwide, holds significant spiritual and cultural importance. In Pakistan, where Islam is the dominant religion, Ramadan is observed fervently, bringing families and communities together in acts of worship, reflection, and charity. However, alongside the spiritual rewards of fasting, there are health considerations, particularly concerning gastrointestinal issues, which often arise due to changes in dietary habits and eating patterns during this month.

Ramadan is more than just a month of abstaining from food and drink during daylight hours for Muslims in Pakistan. It is a time of increased devotion, reflection, and community engagement. The pre-dawn meal, known as "Sehri," marks the beginning of the fast, followed by the evening meal, or "Iftar," which breaks the fast after sunset. These meals often hold cultural significance, with families coming together to share traditional dishes and specialties.

During Ramadan, dietary patterns undergo significant shifts across Pakistan. According to a recent study conducted by the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad, nearly 80% of Pakistani Muslims experience changes in their eating habits during Ramadan. These changes often involve consuming heavier meals at Sehri and indulging in rich, calorie-dense foods at Iftar. Unfortunately, these dietary adjustments can lead to various gastrointestinal issues. The consumption of spicy, oily, and heavy foods during Sehri and Iftar can trigger indigestion and heartburn in many individuals. A study published in the Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases found that 45% of participants reported experiencing symptoms of indigestion and heartburn during Ramadan.

Insufficient fiber intake, coupled with reduced water consumption during fasting hours, often results in constipation and dehydration. Research conducted by the Aga Khan University, Karachi, revealed that cases of dehydration and constipation increase by 35% during Ramadan compared to other months. Conversely, overeating, particularly of fried and spicy foods, can lead to diarrhea and exacerbate nutritional deficiencies. A recent survey conducted by the Pakistan Medical Research Council found that 30% of individuals experienced diarrhea during Ramadan, highlighting the importance of dietary balance and moderation.

To mitigate gastrointestinal issues during Ramadan, adopting preventive measures is essential:

Balanced Diet: Prioritize a balanced diet during Sehri and Iftar, incorporating a variety of foods from all food groups to ensure adequate nutrient intake.

Hydration: Maintain hydration by drinking plenty of water between Iftar and Sehri, and limit caffeinated and sugary beverages.

Moderation: Practice moderation in portion sizes and avoid overeating, focusing on mindful eating to prevent indigestion.

Fiber Intake: Include fiber-rich foods such as whole grains, legumes, fruits, and

vegetables in Sehri and Iftar meals to promote digestive health and prevent constipation.

Physical Activity: Engage in light physical activity during non-fasting hours to aid digestion and maintain overall well-being.

Medical Consultation: Individuals with pre-existing gastrointestinal conditions or persistent symptoms should seek medical advice for appropriate management and dietary recommendations tailored to their needs.

Ramadan in Pakistan is a time of spiritual renewal, communal bonding, and self-reflection. However, the dietary changes associated with fasting can pose challenges to gastrointestinal health.

By adopting a balanced diet, staying hydrated, practicing moderation, and seeking medical advice when necessary, individuals can navigate Ramadan while minimizing the risk of gastrointestinal issues.

With mindful eating habits and proactive self-care, Ramadan can be a fulfilling and spiritually enriching experience for all in Pakistan.

Who should be the finance minister?

By Mosharraf Zaidi

Asking the wrong question is one of the most prominent qualities of the Pakistani public discourse. 'Who should be the finance minister?' is the wrong question. Whoever is made finance minister matters marginally. Whoever eventually gets made the finance minister is almost always the wrong answer. This isn't because Pakistan is special or unique. It is because we are asking the wrong question.

The right questions are: 'What is the finance minister's job?' and 'What is required for the finance minister to be successful?'

In today's column, I will try to present answers to these two questions.

Broadly, the finance minister's job is to manage and steer the economy. This seems simple when framed this way. In fact, it is one of the most complex jobs on the planet. The finance minister must steer on the internal and the external fronts – and must do so whilst also ensuring that public policy as it relates to the economy (which relates to almost every aspect of governance) is broadly coherent. Let's take each of these three aspects of the job separately: internal economic functions, external economic functions and policy coherence.

The internal part of the finance minister's job first. The finance minister is responsible for the budget (which itself includes how to spend money as in expenditure, and more importantly how to earn money as in revenue). The finance minister is also responsible for managing the fiscal relationships with the provinces; this mostly involves trying to squeeze the provinces into spending less and less money.

Crucially, the finance minister is – whether State Bank autonomy champions like it or not – also responsible for domestic borrowing and repayment of money. From a policy perspective, this means that internally alone, the finance minister is responsible for all fiscal policy and most monetary policy. The array of organizations and government functions that this brings either directly under, or indirectly under the influence of the finance minister is staggering, from the SBP to the SECP to the auditor general and Competition Commission of Pakistan, and from the Energy Division to the Inter-Provincial Coordination Division and the Privatization Commission.

Traditionally, because the finance ministry is such a difficult assignment, it became a superministry. This superministry used to have five 'divisions' under it, each with its own secretary. Now, the five traditional functions or divisions at the finance ministry were finance itself, revenue, economic affairs, statistics and planning. Over the years, this shrunk to two. Planning became a separate ministry early during the 2013-2018 parliamentary tenure when the PML-N ruled the country.

The Statistics Division, originally attached to the Planning, Reform and Special Initiatives Division, was thereafter dissolved during the 2018-2023 parliamentary tenure when the PTI (and later the PDM) ruled the country. Economic Affairs varies from being a separate ministry to being placed back with the finance minister. The logic for this variance has never actually been the argument for whether the external part of the traditional finance minister role requires a separate ministry or not; the logic has always been the need to carve out a new ministry to award to party stalwarts. It should be emphasized that this is a system-wide failure, not a function of any individual failing.

The two divisions still under the finance minister are finance and revenue. But here too there is complexity. The Federal Board of Revenue isn't exactly the Revenue Division – and over the years, bureaucrats have wavered between wanting a distinct secretary for revenue or wanting this role to be housed within the office of the chairman of the FBR. This variance leads to significant fragmentation and fracture of authority and policy clarity when it comes to the distinction between fiscal policy which is ostensibly the FBR's role, and fiscal policy execution – which is not just the FBR's job, but also the job of the various provincial boards of revenue, as well as the wider array of measures taken to secure debt (and pay for running the Islamic Republic of Pakistan).

There is the other matter of the logic of keeping the taxation function (internal revenue) connected to the customs function. All told, this headache ends up being the finance minister's to resolve – but lacking adequate bandwidth, the way it is resolved means that it never really is.

The finance division itself has almost a dozen separate units, or wings, including budget, the debt management office, devel-

opment, expenditure, inter-government finance (IGF), human resources, litigation and regulation, corporate finance and external finance. Each wing is led, for the most part, by deeply experienced and capable individuals – some with as many as two decades of progressively greater responsibility inside the ministry. But remember, these wings report to a single secretary, who then reports to the finance minister. If that sounds unwieldy, it's because it is. The last of the wings I have listed within the finance division – external finance – is an interesting one. It leads us to the wider issue of the external aspect of the finance minister's job.

On the external front, the finance minister has three key interfaces: bilateral partners and lenders (country to country), multilateral partners and lenders (the MDBs and the IFIs included), and the commercial players (banks and financial institutions as lenders, institutional investors in Pakistani bonds and paper, and other holders and managers of assets and wealth, globally).

To manage this, the finance minister has one additional secretary, but the government of Pakistan has a lot more ammunition. There is the Economic Affairs Division – whose job is to manage the relationship with bilateral and multilateral partners (think World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Islamic Development Bank, all the UN agencies and also think JICA, USAID, and FCDO). And of course, there is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – where the Foreign Affairs Division manages Pakistan's standing bilaterally and multilaterally. When it comes to external affairs, there is also the National Security Division and the array of military and intelligence organizations and bodies that influence policy.

This makes the job of the finance minister one that requires deep collaboration and trust across the cabinet and in Rawalpindi, but especially with whoever is running the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and whoever happens to be assigned the role of Economic Affairs minister. It gets worse.

Finally, the finance minister is responsible for at least minimally coherent and robust public policy when it comes to the economy. This has two key aspects. The first is policy coherence within government, and the second is policy coherence with respect to stakeholders outside of government.

Within government, the finance minister needs to have at least some degree of influence and standing in at least three functions that are outside his or her direct domain: the first is trade and commerce, the second is investments and the third is technology. These three pillars of economic policy sit completely outside the finance ministry, but they are not only in need of the finance ministry themselves, they are also crucial for the finance minister to do her or his job well. One easy example is the issue of customs, which is central to the way trade policy (and especially imports) is managed.

Traditionally, finance ministers have ruled the day, leading to commerce ministers who feel powerless and foreign ministers who have no real influence in informing how Pakistan's interests are affected by trade deficits or surpluses with various countries or regions.

Outside government, a finance minister needs to ensure coherence of economic policy by promoting and encouraging the private sector and growing the economy – and part of this requires that she or he protect government policy and decisions from the attrition and corrosion to the public interest caused by the meddling and influence of big money interest groups, such as APTMA, Pakistani banks, and real estate developers. It is the finance minister's job to make doing business and making money in the country easier, whilst also making sure that these groups do not enjoy subsidies and freebies that hamstring Pakistan for generations.

In summary, the three key roles of a finance minister – internal economic functions, external economic functions, and policy coherence – demand a minister that can cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. No individual finance minister can succeed without a prime minister who offers her or him their complete trust, and without cabinet colleagues who see their own success in the success of the finance minister.

What should also be plainly clear to anyone with a pulse is that Pakistani government structures are now outdated by roughly half a century. How is any government that already struggles under the burden of political instability and the dominance of the military supposed to enact any kind of structural change? Worse, how can any finance minister ever succeed under these constraints?

Work for a better world

By Evangelos Vallianatos

There's some truth in this ideal picture of America, and I liked it. I am grateful to America for my education, which opened my eyes to see the world, especially giving me an opportunity to know myself.

Biden is also right that the Republicans want to forget January 6, 2021. This was an unsuccessful coup inspired and guided by former President Trump. Yet the Republicans are so unpatriotic they are choosing Trump to represent them in the presidential election of 2024. I find this choice despicable, undemocratic, and illegal. No one has explained to me how a putschist can legally remain a free man and can even run for president.

Rich people like Trump have money and lawyers to trigger appeals from one court to another.

But such a practice is abusive of the rule of law and democratic norms. President Biden understands the shenanigans and hatred of Trump, but his Justice Department did very little to protect the country from the chance that Trump may be elected to return to the White House.

During the "energetic and impassioned speech" of Biden, I watched the cold indifference, nay contempt, of the Speaker of the House Mike Johnson and the Republicans for Biden. It's frightening to think how these politicians (Democrats and Republicans) are so bitterly divided over class, race, politics and a myriad other issues.

Biden said millionaires

and billionaires should pay a fair amount of taxes. They should, and much more. After all, the disparity of wealth in the United States is extremely acute. And yet Republican presidents (and their friends in Congress) always give trillions of dollars in tax-cuts to those super wealthy Americans we call billionaires. Why are Americans putting up with such medieval political and monarchical arrangement?

The very existence of billionaires denies democracy and, needless to say, fairness.

Biden should have been much more forthright about taxes and wealth. He should promise the American people to tax 99 percent of the wealth of billionaires. Take all those trillions and use them to build the infrastructure for a non-carbon energy and economy. Put electric trains, buses, and trams everywhere and free America from the car plague.

Those Americans who cannot part their car fine them hundreds of thousands of dollars. Do the same thing to the owners of yachts and private airplanes.

Put solar panels over every house and building roof, parking lot, and church – all over the country. Solar panels would also cover the buildings of all schools, colleges, and universities. After all, climate change is getting worse.

If Biden takes the dangers from climate chaos seriously, and admits the truth to Americans, and commits himself to fighting the climate enemy, he will be reelected.

However, Biden has work to do. He started his State of

the Union speech with a visceral attack against the President of Russia Putin. I was embarrassed listening to such warmongering falsehoods. That Putin (just like Hitler) was attacking much more than Ukraine. Watch out, Europe, Putin is coming after you.

This vitriolic nonsense got a huge applause, which tells you false patriotism sells. But this speech against Russia sounded to me obscene.

Why would the President of the United States attack publicly another country, Russia, as if the United States had declared war against Russia? Is the United States waging war against a nuclear-weapons superpower, Russia? If that is true, watch out.

You certainly don't want to start a nuclear war. No country, including the United States, can 'win' such a war. Only death, destruction, holocaust and darkness follows that war.

Biden's bravado might have been designed to please the merchants of munitions and the Military Industrial Complex. But stressing war and propaganda for war are not wise or enticing ideas in trying to convince Americans to reelect him. Besides, warmongering brings Biden down to the level of Republicans.

I recommend that Biden discards his madness for war.

Stop funding Ukraine and Israeli wars. Stop them. Rebuild good relations with Russia. Focus on the vast climate enemy. Tax the rich to pay for remaking America friendly to nature and climate.

Gilded age rerun

By Sam Pizzigati

Back in the middle of the 20th century, hardly anyone in America could have imagined that the future would bring this sort of over-the-top excess. By the end of the 1950s, the super rich appeared to be getting squeezed out of existence by a combination of top-bracket federal income tax rates as high as 91 percent and a vibrant labor movement that had significantly narrowed the pay gap between top corporate execs and their average workers.

Those taxes and that vibrant labor movement reflected, in turn, America's widespread disgust at the decades of swelling grand fortunes in the half-century after the Civil War, an era of excess that Mark Twain had early on tagged the "Gilded Age."

Back in that Gilded Age, just like today, grand private parties had come to symbolize the excessive wealth of an outrageously unequal era.

The hostess for the most famous of those Gilded Age soirées would be Caroline Astor, the spouse of the grandson of John Jacob Astor, pre-Civil War America's most famous awesomely affluent tycoon.

Every January, this famed "Mrs. Astor" – "Gilded Age Gotham's society doyenne" – would welcome into her mid-Manhattan mansion the 400 wealthiest of New York's rich. She typically hosted the evening wearing a huge necklace that had originally belonged to Marie Antoinette.

How big a deal did Mrs. Astor's annual ball become? The New York Times would eventually start publishing the annual list of her 400 guests. But why just 400? "There are only about four hundred people in the fashionable New York society," Astor's sidekick Ward McAllister noted in 1888. "If you go outside that number, you strike people who are either not at ease in a ballroom or make other people not at ease."

Five years earlier, those nouveau rich left off the Astor guest list had started putting on their own galas, with

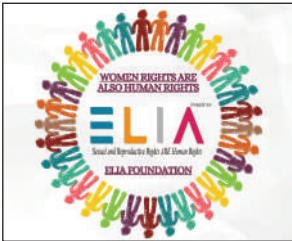
the Vanderbilts hosting a huge masquerade ball – for some 1,200 well-heeled guests – to celebrate the opening of their brand-new Fifth Avenue mansion.

Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt came into this spectacular affair "swathed" in satin and carrying "a battery-powered light that she could raise over her head like the Statue of Liberty." Dinner, catered by the renowned Delmonico's, would begin at 2 a.m.

Other Manhattan deep pockets would underwrite ever more imaginative affairs. The financier Henry Clews hosted a "servants ball" that had New York's wealthiest dressed up in rags and uniforms all made specially for the occasion from the "finest fabrics." A "circus ball" had the city's finest carrying peanuts "as a 12,000-pound elephant clomped about." In 1897, still another ball turned the Waldorf Hotel into a replica of the palace at Versailles.

In today's dollars, the hosts of that last affair shelled out nearly \$10 million to stage their festivities, a sum ample enough to outfit all the guests with party favors that included "jewelry for the ladies and cigars wrapped in \$100 bills for the men." The upper crust of this original Gilded Age, author Renée Rosen noted a few years ago, would eventually choke "on their own conspicuous consumption." By 1913, the ferocious inequality that this consumption so highlighted had helped bring into effect the first modern federal tax on high incomes.

By the mid-1940s, the federal tax rate on top-bracket income had jumped to over 90 percent, and that rate would hover around that level until lawmakers dropped it down to 77 percent in 1964 and 70 percent in 1965. Two decades later, the Reagan years would sink the nation's tax rate on top-bracket income all the way down to 28 percent, and the years since then have only inched that top rate – on paper – back to 37 percent. By the start of the 2020s, this light tax touch on America's most financially favored had left America's richest 0.01 percent with 10 percent of the nation's wealth.



BISP beneficiaries being exploited

Some franchise holders, weary of ongoing exploitation, admitted to providing devices to racketeers

By our correspondent

BADIN: Despite efforts to curb malpractices, illegal deductions ranging from Rs1,000 to Rs1,500 persist on the quarterly stipends provided to deserving women under the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) in rural Sindh.

The issue extends beyond Badin city, with illegal deductions reported during stipend disbursement in smaller towns such as Matti Talhar, Tandobago, Golarchi, Karyo Ghanoor, Pan-

grio, Nando, and Khoski. Many rural women, lacking literacy and familiarity with ATM operations, fall victim to exploitation by individuals lurking around banks during BISP payments. These agents charge exorbitant fees merely for operating the ATM machines on behalf of the beneficiaries.

Residents of Badin lamented that various parties, including police officers, bank guards stationed at ATMs, agents, purported journalists, camerapersons, social activists, and mem-

bers of political and social organizations, are complicit in these illicit activities. Furthermore, mobile phone franchise operators and holders of mobile wallet devices revealed facing coercion to facilitate illegal deductions, ultimately benefitting agents associated with law enforcement and extortionists posing as journalists or social workers.

Some franchise holders, weary of ongoing exploitation, admitted to providing devices to racketeers, in-

cluding policemen, journalists, and social activists, to evade further blackmail. Critics attribute the rampant embezzlement of funds allocated for impoverished women to governmental policy failures, as well as the apathy and incompetence of individuals entrusted with BISP disbursement. The systemic flaws exacerbate the plight of vulnerable beneficiaries, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reform and enhanced oversight within the program.



BADIN: A woman showing her Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) ID card. Government needs to take necessary action against the agents, exploiting innocent citizens.—MM photo

Bilawal forms bodies for talks in Punjab, KP

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE: Political parties have started reaching out to each other and submitting their nomination papers to the relevant returning officers (ROs) for the upcoming Senate elections slated for April 2.

For the 12 Senate seats from Punjab, around 120 nomination papers have been received so far. The PML-N has decided to give tickets to Ahad Cheema, Talal Chaudhry, Musadik Malik, Nasir Butt, and Perwaiz Rasheed for the Senate polls. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi will contest the Senate polls independently but he will be backed by the PML-N.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has approved the names for the Senate seats from Balochistan. The party has issued tickets to Mir Changez Jamali, Sardar Umar Gorgage, Ijaz Ahmad Baloch, and Haji Mir Lal Muhammad Jattak for the general seats. Bilal Ahmad Mandokhail and Tariq Masoori were issued tickets for technocrat seats. Ishrat Baloch was given the ticket for a women's seat in Senate.

The PPP chairman has also formed committees for negotiations with other political parties in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. PPP leaders Raja Pervez Ashraf, Syed Hassan Murtaza, Nadeem Afzal Chan, and Syed Ali Haider Gilani are part of the committee formed for Punjab. The K-P committee includes Syed Khurshed Shah, Faisal Karim Kundi, Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha and Shuja Khan.

Muttaqi, Dar agree to continue working together

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Afghan Interim Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi invited his Pakistani counterpart to visit Kabul in order to break the stalemate in the relations as he spoke to Ishaq Dar on telephone on Saturday.

This was the first high-level contact between the two countries in months and came on a day when another terrorist attack left seven Pakistani troops, including two officers, martyred in North Waziristan.

said. The spokesperson added that the freight train was propelled by a formidable GE U40 locomotive engine.

He said this train journey commenced from Karachi, carrying a staggering load of over 3,000 tons of cargo, destined for Kotri.

MQM-P strongly condemns terrorist attack in North Waziristan

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, the Convenor of Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan, expressed deep sorrow and condemnation in strong terms over the cowardly suicide attacks on a security check post by terrorists in North Waziristan. He mourned the loss of five young lives, including Lieutenant Colonel Kashif and Captain Ahmed Badr, who sacrificed their lives while fighting against terrorism.

Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui praised the courage and commitment of Pakistan's security forces, stating that the entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with them in defending the country. He emphasized that such cowardly acts cannot diminish our resolve and instead strengthen our determination to eradicate terrorism from our land.

Dr. Siddiqui also paid tribute to other martyrs, including Havaladar Sabir, Naik Khurshid, Sepoy Naseer, Sepoy Raja, and Sepoy Sajjad, offering heartfelt prayers for their forgiveness and calling for the complete eradication of the scourge of terrorism from the country. Amen.

Housing project set up on police picket land

SHC summons compliance from IG on illegal building

News Desk

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) has sought an implementation report from the Sindh police chief on a petition filed against the construction of a multi-storey housing and commercial project on the land of police pickets in Sukkur division.

The IG's focal person and DSP HQ Kashmore-Kandhot appeared before the court on Saturday. The counsel for the petitioner highlighted that the Sukkur bench had previously ordered the demolition of the project constructed on the site of police pickets on February 21, 2019. Subsequently, residents of the building contested the decision of the SHC in the Supreme Court. After hearing all parties involved, the Supreme Court directed a reconsideration of the decision in 2023.

The IG's focal person requested a delay in submitting the implementation report, citing that it had already been presented to the Supreme Court. They requested additional time to

submit the same report to the SHC. The court instructed the IG to furnish the implementation report by March 21. Meanwhile, another SHC bench directed the deputy commissioner of Malir to conduct a thorough investigation into the issues surrounding an illegal cattle market and the contamination of water in Thado Dam and submit a detailed report within 15 days.

The SHC issued the orders while hearing a petition filed by a villager in Malir district, Muhammad Baksh Palari, on Saturday. The petitioner's counsel highlighted that an unauthorized cattle market has been established near Thado Dam, with sewage from this market being indiscriminately discharged into the dam's water.

As a result, the local population is being exposed to various diseases due to the consumption of contaminated water, the petitioner argued. Despite several appeals to relevant authorities, no action has been taken against the illegal cattle market.

PR runs world's longest freight train

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Railways has set a record by running the world's longest freight train that boasted an impressive length of over 2,500 feet and comprised a whopping 50 coaches, its spokesperson

Ukraine attacks Russian city on 2nd day of election

Missile strike kills two Russians; Putin says Ukraine trying to disrupt election, cyberattacks reported

News Desk

MOSCOW: A Ukrainian missile attack killed two people in western Russia and a separate drone strike set an oil refinery ablaze on Saturday, the second day of an election that President Vladimir Putin has accused Kyiv of trying to disrupt.

The Ukraine war has cast a shadow over voting in the three-day presidential election, which is all but certain to hand Putin six more years in the Kremlin. In the Belgorod region where cross-border attacks from Ukraine have become part of daily

life, the governor reported the deaths of a man and a woman.

Dmitry Azarov, governor of the Samara region 850 km (530 miles) southeast of Moscow, said the Syzran refinery was on fire but an attack on a second refinery had been thwarted.

Russia's Defence Ministry said it had repelled attempts by Ukrainian forces to cross the border into the Belgorod region. Governor Gladkov said that, given "the current situation", schools in much of the region would close on Monday and Tuesday, and that shopping cen-

tres in Belgorod city would be shut on Sunday and Monday.

Ukraine has staged repeated strikes this week on Russian soil, particularly against oil refineries. Russia mounted its deadliest attack in weeks on Friday when its missiles hit a residential area in Ukraine's Black Sea port city of Odesa, killing at least 20 people and wounding more than 70. Putin's hold on power is not under threat. Aged 71 and in office as president or prime minister since the last day of 1999, he dominates Russia's political landscape and none of

the other three candidates on the ballot paper presents any credible challenge.

His leading critics are in prison or have fled abroad, prompting the opposition to call the vote a sham. Russia's best known opposition politician, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic penal colony last month and his supporters have accused Putin of having him killed. The Kremlin denied that, and his death certificate said he died of natural causes. The Kremlin is hoping for a high turnout to demonstrate that the country is united behind Putin.

PSL PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE



Babar Azam blames bowlers over defeat against Islamabad

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Islamabad United qualified for the final of the PSL 9 on the back of a record seventh-wicket partnership between Imad Wasim and Haider Ali, as they beat Peshawar Zalmi by five wickets on Saturday at National Bank Stadium, Karachi in Eliminator Two.

Zalmi failed to defend their total of 185-5 as United batters overcame the early hiccup of being 50-4, and secured the berth in the HBL PSL 9 final, completing the target with an over to spare. Babar Azam, the captain of Peshawar Zalmi, expressed disappointment following his team's defeat and attributed their loss to a subpar bowling performance in the latter half of



United's innings.

"I think we were in a good position after 10 overs. But our bowling after that was very bad. We weren't up to the mark and we thought we had won the match," he said. "We were ahead but after that, we bowled ordinarily," he added.

Azam Khan and Imad Wasim got together to put up a 41-run fifth-wicket part-

nership injecting stability to United's innings. Luke Wood destroyed Azam's (22, 17b, 1x4, 1x6) stumps in the 11th over to leave United reeling with 95 required in nine overs. Haider Ali joined Imad in the middle and the duo took it upon themselves to stage the rescue act. Haider got going with two boundaries against Aamir in the 13th over, while he bludgeoned Arif Yaqoob

for a six in 15th over.

Aamir's 18th over, yielding 23, became the nail in the coffin for Zalmi as Imad hit a first-ball four followed by Haider hitting two towering sixes and a four. Haider smashed Wood for his fifth six in the 19th over while Imad hit the winning runs. Imad (59 not out, 40b, 9x4s) and Haider (52 not out, 29b, 2x4s, 5x6s) added an unbeaten 98 for the seventh wicket, the highest in HBL PSL history, to take their side to the final.

Babar credited Imad and Haider for their exceptional performance, acknowledging their partnership. He praised the impressive display by the opposing batsmen. "Credit to Imad and Haider for how they played," Babar added.

Two Gladiators players fined 5pc of match fees

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Two players of Quetta Gladiators, Abrar Ahmed and Saud Shakeel have been fined 5% of their match fees for breaching Pakistan Super League's (PSL) code of conduct in the match against Islamabad United on Friday.

As per the press release issued by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), spinner Abrar was fined for violating Article 2.4 of the PSL code of conduct which talks about consequences of not following an umpire's instruction.

In the 19th over against United, Abrar rolled the ball along the ground contrary to umpires' instructions in this regard. Whereas, opening batsman Saud violated Article 2.5 of the PSL rules which prevents from using provocative language or actions against a batter upon his dismissal.

Sindh ombudsman employees challenge hiring rules

Petitioners says no specific procedure or criteria available to fill the posts like advisors, consultants

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A group of employees of the provincial ombudsman has challenged the rules and precedents of making appointments on the vacancies of officers and lower staff in the department. The Sindh High Court Karachi will hear the petitioners as well as the respondents, including the provincial government, ombudsman, and his subordinate officers, on March 18.

Some 12 petitioners, who all work for the provincial ombudsman in BS-16 and BS-14, have contended in the petition that the ombudsman has been given 'unfettered' and 'unbridled' power to make direct appointments. According to them, there is no specific procedure or criteria avail-

able to fill the posts like advisors, consultants, fellows and associated ministerial staff. "Therefore, every Ombudsman takes advantage of such silence over the induction." The law governing the entire setup of the ombudsman is the Establishment of the Office of Ombudsman for the Province of Sindh Act, 1991.

They stated that most of the persons appointed under section 20 of the 1991 Act are retired civil servants who draw pensions from the government exchequer while also receiving huge benefits like official vehicles along with the driver and 150 to 250 litres of petrol besides pay from the Ombudsman. They claimed that contrarily Federal Ombudsman, Tax Ombudsman, Insurance Ombudsman and Ombuds-

man for Protection against harassment of women at the workplace hire employees through advertising the posts though the concerned laws are identical.

According to the petitioners, there are only three posts of advisors but the provincial ombudsman has appointed seven advisors. Likewise, they alleged, the ombudsman has also been filling the 21 posts of BPS-19 Director by hiring retired government servants on contract. "There is no criteria, qualification, eligibility, requirements, age limit, experience and term of contract."

The petitioners contended that such appointments violate articles 2-A, 9, 10-A, 18, 19, 19-A and 25, read with article 4, of the constitution.



MOSCOW: A woman casts her ballot at a polling station during the presidential election in Moscow, Russia.—MM photo