

President vows strong retaliation against terrorists

Asif Ali Zardari affirms nation’s unity in face of terrorism and intruders will be reciprocated

By Adam Khan Wazir/ISPR

RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari said the people of Pakistan and its armed forces were united and would face terrorism in unison and expressed the resolve to make the terrorists accountable for the blood of each martyred Jawan, the President Secretariat Press Wing said in a statement on Sunday.

Late on Saturday, the president attended the funeral prayers of Shaheed Lt-Col Syed Kashif Ali and Capt. Muhammad Ahmed Bader, who were martyred in Mir Ali in North Waziristan district in a terrorist attack earlier in the day. The president paid tributes to the martyrs and reiterated the resolve to respond to terrorist activities with full force.

The nation’s brave brothers, sons and friends had been protecting the borders, Zardari said. He promised that the blood of the sons of the soil would not go in vain,” the statement added. The

two brave officers were among the seven martyred in a terrorist attack in North Waziristan’s Mir Ali area. The funeral prayers were offered at the Chaklala Garrison in Rawalpindi, according to the military’s media wing.

The funeral was also attended by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chief of Army the Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar as well as Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, senior serving military and civil officers, relatives of the Shuhada and locals of the area. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the troops foiled an initial attempt of intrusion into an army installation in the wee hours of the day.

However, a group of six terrorists rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into it. The six terrorists were also killed in the subsequent clearance operation. According to the ISPR, the media wing of the military, President Zardari said: “Pakistan

has decided that whoever will enter our borders, homes or country and commit terror, we will respond to them strongly, regardless of who it is or from which country.”

“This noble sacrifice stands as another glorious testament to the unflinching resolve of our gallant sons, who have never hesitated to offer the ultimate sacrifice for the defense of our Motherland. The whole nation stands in solidarity with our armed forces,” he added. Zardari praised the Pakistan Army, saying that it had “consistently upheld the ideals of Faith, Unity, and Discipline and always endeavored to set higher benchmarks of professionalism and loyalty in its unrelenting fight against terrorism”.

The bodies of the martyrs were later taken to their respective hometowns, where they will be laid to rest with full military honors, the ISPR stated. The five other martyred soldiers were Havildar Sabir, resident of district

Khyber; Naik Khurshid, resident of district Lakki Marwat; Sepoy Nasir, resident of Peshawar; Sepoy Raja, resident of Kohat; and Sepoy Sajjad, resident of Abbottabad.

A group affiliated with Pakistani Taliban leader Hafiz Gul Bahadur claimed responsibility for the attack. Bahadur’s outfit is the strongest militant group in North Waziristan.

He fled to Afghanistan following Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014.

Meanwhile, the local tribes of Waziristan Lower and Upper have not only expressed deep sorrow over this heartbreaking incident but have termed it as a very painful incident. They further said that the terrorist attack in the holy month of Ramazan is highly condemnable, adding further that they would stand with their security forces till the end of the last terrorists and were ready to make any kind of sacrifice for the country.



WANA: President Asif Ali Zardari honored the martyrs and reaffirmed the commitment to combat terrorist activities with unwavering determination.—MM photo/screengrab

Tarar blames PTI for campaign against army

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaulah Tarar said on Wednesday the PTI was behind the propaganda against the armed forces and warned the former ruling party of action.

Addressing the media in Lahore, Tarar said the Pakistan Army is the “guarantee of our survival” and that the humiliation of martyrs will not be tolerated. “I condemn the insulting social media campaign launched by a political party against the martyrs and their sacrifices,” said the information minister. “Those who are responsible and campaigning for their own political interests will be held accountable. The humiliation of the country’s interest and martyrs will not be allowed.”

Tarar maintained that social media should be used responsibly and warned the accounts involved in the malicious campaign of action following an investigation. “Many social media accounts are being operated from abroad, but some are also present in Pakistan and the list of these account holders is being prepared,” said Tarar.

“Those who humiliate our martyrs are enemies of the country. Where does the courage to insult these martyrs come from? Pakistan comes first, and only if the country exists, do politics and politicians exist,” the minister added. The information maintained that the PTI has a ‘history’ of running derogatory campaigns on social media.

The minister further said the PTI backed the May 9 riots and the controversial letter to the IMF, adding that if PTI deemed the protest outside the IMF wrong, the party should condemn it. “The reconciliation should be open for those who were not involved in the May 9 incident, but action should be taken against those seen in the CCTV footage of incidents that day.

Pakistan, IMF set to ink for \$1.1bn tranche

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund are on the brink of the final tranche in April.

Coinciding with the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank in Washington, scheduled to commence on April 15th, Finance Minister Mohammad Aurangzeb is poised to lead a delegation to the U.S. capital, signaling Pakistan’s intent to pursue a new and larger loan program to bolster its financial stability. The ongoing talks between Pakistan and the IMF have seen significant strides, with the Pakistani government committing to crucial economic reforms, including

last day of discussions, paving the way for the IMF’s Executive Board’s approval of the final tranche in April.

timely increases in electricity and gas tariffs, as well as the abolition of tax exemptions.

The Finance Ministry has disclosed plans for further increases in electricity tariffs effective from July 1, alongside the implementation of measures for regular adjustments to facilitate cost recovery. Moreover, Pakistan has pledged to digitize its tax system, a move aimed at enhancing efficiency and revenue collection. This decision underscores the country’s commitment to modernizing its tax infrastructure and fostering economic development.

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PM extends tenure of air chief

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has extended the tenure of Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu by a year, a day before the air chief was due to retire. The tenure of Sidhu was due to end on Saturday and he was set to retire on March 18. The four-star Pakistan Air Force (PAF) officer and 16th chief of air staff took over command of the air force on March 19, 2021,



from his predecessor ACM Mujahid Anwar Khan.

Babar joined GD (Pilot) branch of the PAF in 1986 as a fighter pilot. He has also served in fighter squadrons, operational airbases, and regional commands. He attended Combat Commanders School, Air War College, and Royal College of Defense Studies in the United Kingdom for higher studies.

The Air Chief Marshal has also served as Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Operations Research and Development), Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Training Officers) and Director General of Projects at Air Headquarters Islamabad. Babar also served as additional secretary in the ministry of defence. He was awarded Sitara-e-Imtiaz (military) and Tamgha-e-Imtiaz (military) in recognition of his services.

“We should stop politicizing martyrs’ sacrifice”, says PTI

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Responding to Information Minister Attaulah Tarar’s statement, a spokesperson for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Wednesday stated that the martyrs are the collective assets of the nation, transcending any political or group divisions.

In a statement, the spokesperson asserted that those martyred while fulfilling their duty of defending the homeland are true heroes and disrespecting them by exploiting their sacrifice for petty political gains constitutes a grave crime. The PTI spokesperson remarked that the “attacks” on the armed forces and its martyrs have been a tradition of PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, and his cohorts.

Gas becomes rare in Ramazan

Residents in major cities are forced to depend on expensive LPG cylinders due to gas load shedding

By Saima Baloch

KARACHI/ LAHORE/ PESHAWAR: Despite provincial governments making promises of uninterrupted gas supply to household users during the month of Ramadan, gas has become a rarity in the holy month, leading residents to rely on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders. Consequently, prices for LPG cylinders have increased.



Tired of the government’s false promises, the populace of the country has started relying on LPG gas cylinders to cook meals for sehri and iftar. This increase in demand has led LPG cylinder dealers to exploit the situation and overcharge for the cylinders, which has irked the populace.

One such individual is Shaan, who drives a motorcycle for a ride-hailing company in Karachi. “A few days ago, the price of a cylinder was Rs. 200, but ever since Ramadan started, the prices have increased to Rs. 500,” bemoaned Shaan, who further complained that the price hike had ruined his monthly budgeting.

Concurring with Shaan, Asif Abbasi, another local, expressed his anger at the fact that the government had

increased the price of gas manifold and was a silent spectator as the LPG cylinder mafia was busy profiteering. Just like Karachiites, the residents of Lahore are similarly perturbed. Muhammad Ejaz, a resident of the city, asserted that the government’s assurances of uninterrupted supply of gas during Ramadan were false.

“The gas schedule given by the Sui Northern Gas Company is not being followed, as a result gas is non-existent.

Moreover, people have installed illegal gas generators at their homes, which has exacerbated our plight,” regretted Ejaz. Muhammad Umair, while agreeing with Ejaz, opined that the government had left the populace to

fend for themselves. “Since there is no gas, if we resort to using electricity, the bills are sky-high.”

Zahra, another resident of the city, shares her plight. “Gas is sometimes available from 4 in the evening to 7 in the morning, and if we are lucky, it is also available from 4 in the morning to 7 in the evening.

However, with such a limited time slot, neither can we cook properly, nor can we make breakfast for the children, who are not fasting,” she explained.

“What has made matters worse are the high prices of LPG cylinders. One kilogram of LPG is retailing for Rs. 350, which is out of reach for middle-class families,” she added.

India’s ‘Lottery King’ emerges as top political donor

News Desk

NEW DELHI: India’s “lottery king”, accused by the authorities of fraud and money laundering, has emerged with his company as the nation’s top political donor under an opaque funding system that has just been partially opened to scrutiny.

Santiago Martin’s Future Gaming and Hotel Services spent 13.68 billion Indian rupees (\$165 million) between 2019 and 2024 - 40 percent more than the next-highest donor - under the now-scrapped funding system, which allowed anonymous and unlimited donations to political parties, data showed on Thursday.

The information, published by the election commission on the orders of India’s Supreme Court, shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party was the biggest overall recipient but does not detail which party any donor gave to. Although the court found

the “electoral bonds” system unconstitutional, there was no suggestion that donations were improper. A flashy, smooth-talking figure who has made friends across the political spectrum, Martin, 59, has splurged on politicians, handing out expensive gifts as his business empire grew, according to local press accounts.

Over the years, tax authorities, police and investigative agencies have searched his business premises and seized properties in connection with cases against him. His appeals against property seizures by the Enforcement Directorate, India’s financial crime agency, were dismissed last year.

“They have allegedly cheated the lottery issuing state governments by not depositing the entire sale proceeds generated from the sale of lotteries,” and violated the lottery law by illegally retaining and claiming prizes on unsold tickets, and manipulating data, the agency said.

Punjab CM breaks fast with inmates

News Desk

LAHORE: In a compassionate gesture aimed at improving prison conditions and fostering familial bonds, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz undertook a visit to Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore on Sunday. During her visit, she engaged in various activities aimed at enhancing the well-being of the inmates and inaugurated significant facilities within the premises.

Responding to her directives, a diverse iftar spread was meticulously prepared, featuring traditional delicacies like biryani, samosas, and pakoras, alongside nutritious fruits and yogurt, fostering a sense of community among the incarcerated population. In a heartfelt gesture, Maryam Nawaz personally served the prisoners and conducted a thorough inspection of the prison’s kitchen to ensure the quality of meals served.

The Chief Minister also took a moment to reflect as she visited the cell where her father, Nawaz Sharif, had been confined previously, acknowledging the challenges faced during that period.

Fastening students attacked in India’s Gujarat

News Desk

AHEMDABAD: A group of foreign students in India’s western Gujarat state faced a harrowing ordeal as they were brutally attacked by a far-right Hindu mob while offering prayers during the holy month of Ramazan. The incident, which occurred at the Gujarat University premises in Ahmedabad, left at least four students injured and caused significant damage to property.

According to reports, the students had gathered for the Ramazan Tarawih prayers inside the boys’ hostel as there was no mosque available on the university campus.

However, their peaceful worship was disrupted when a mob armed with sticks and knives stormed the hostel premises, unleashing violence, and vandalism upon them.

The eyewitnesses recounted the terrifying ordeal, describing how the assailants shouted slogans and hurled stones while vandalizing hostel properties.

Shocking videos shared on social media depicted ransacked dormitories and the destruction of students’ belongings, including motorbikes and electronic devices.

Country’s future links with educated youth: PM

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that the country’s future hinged upon the well-educated and skilled youth and for the provision of quality education, the federal government would facilitate high achievers with a scholarship scheme to study in well-reputed global educational institutes.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Ikramullah, a student from Balochistan province, who is currently studying in the 9th class at Lawrence College Murree. Under the prime minister’s direction, the student from the 2022 flood-affected area of Qila Saifullah was provided

with the facility to receive education at the country’s prominent educational institute.

The prime minister recalled that he had met the desperate student in the Khasnook camp in Qila Saifullah when floods had caused destruction in Balochistan province in 2022. Shehbaz said that he had assured the student of the provision of quality education, adding that it pleased him greatly that the student was now studying at Lawrence College.

The student thanked the prime minister for giving him the opportunity to meet him. Congratulating the prime minister, he said that he prayed for Shehbaz Sharif for his kind gesture.

WHO urges Israel to halt planned assault on Rafah

News Desk

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) has appealed to Israel to refrain from launching an assault on Gaza, where a significant portion of Gaza’s population is taking shelter.

In a statement issued on Saturday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed grave concern over reports of Israel’s planned ground assault on Rafah. He emphasized that further escalation of violence in this densely populated area would result in

more deaths and increased suffering.

Ghebreyesus called upon Israel “in the name of humanity” not to proceed with the assault and instead work towards peace. He highlighted the dire humanitarian situation in Rafah, stating that the 1.2 million people there have nowhere safe to move and lack access to fully functional, safe health facilities.

The WHO chief underscored that many residents of Rafah are too fragile, hungry, and sick to be relocated. He emphasized that allowing the humanitarian catastrophe in Rafah to worsen

must be prevented at all costs.

The appeal from WHO comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the military’s plans for action in Rafah. However, details regarding the operation’s timeline were not provided in the statement issued on Friday.

Both the United Nations and the United States have repeatedly cautioned against such a military operation. Netanyahu has pledged to continue the conflict, aiming to dismantle Hamas following an attack by Islamist militants.

Iran to provide 40bcm gas to Pakistan

Iran offers to provide technical support for Pak-Iran gas pipeline as well as modernization of Pakistan Steel Mills

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a move to defying US sanctions on Iran, Pakistan has secured a significant energy deal with its neighbor. Iran has pledged to supply Pakistan with 40 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas annually, a substantial boost to the nation's energy security. This agreement coincided with the Pakistani government's long-awaited decision to begin construction of its 80-kilometer section of the much-delayed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. The proj-

ect, envisioned for decades, has faced numerous obstacles, primarily due to US sanctions on Iran. Pakistan previously suspended participation in the project in 2013 citing "force majeure" due to these sanctions. However, chronic energy shortages within Pakistan have spurred the government to prioritize the pipeline's completion. The agreement signified a critical step towards addressing Pakistan's growing energy needs as well as this project would not only enhance energy security but also foster closer economic

ties with Iran. Meanwhile, the Iranian government has further bolstered the project by offering technical assistance for pipeline construction and potentially aiding in the modernization of Pakistan Steel Mills, a key domestic steel producer. This collaboration could provide significant benefits for both nations' infrastructure development. However, the project's success remains contingent on navigating the complexities of US sanctions. Pakistan may seek a waiver or pursue alternative financing mecha-

nisms to avoid potential sanctions violations. Continued diplomatic efforts between Pakistan, Iran, and the US will be crucial in bringing this vital energy source online. Earlier, the Ministry of Energy has announced the approval of the first phase of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline by the caretaking Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE). The decision, which comes after approximately ten years of postponement, is set to enhance the nation's energy security. During that session, the

CCoE considered a summary from the Petroleum Division regarding the IP Gas Pipeline. The committee endorsed the recommendations of the Ministerial Oversight Committee for the project, which was established by the then caretaker prime minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in September 2023. The approved work included the construction of an 80km section of the pipeline within Pakistan, extending from the border to Gwadar. The pipeline would bring natural gas from Iran's South Paras Gas field.

Dispute resolved between N Waziristan, Orakzai tribes

By Adam Khan Wazir

WANA: A successful Jirga was held between Assistant Commissioner Mir Ali Subdivision and Upper Orakzai tribes, including Misri Khel (North Waziristan) and Biland Khel (Orakzai), in the presence of neutral mediators at Tauda China CP. Two days before, a conflict between the two tribes resulted in injuries to six individuals in a disputed area near Tauda China CP Shewa. Acting on the directives of the District Administration North Waziristan and Upper Orakzai, AC Mir Ali Subdivision Dr. Sadiq Ali and AC Upper Orakzai Imtiaz Ali Shah, along with Tehsildar Shewa Kashif and concerned district officials, convened a Jirga with the elders of Misri Khel and Biland Khel at Tauda China to discuss maintaining peace, implementing a ceasefire for three months, and halting construction at the disputed area. The written agreement signed by elders of both tribes and countersigns by AC Mir Ali Subdivision and Upper Orakzai are attached for reference.

Inundated streets pose risks of pandemic outbreaks

By Ismail Baloch

GWADAR: Member of Provincial Assembly Moulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and municipal authorities should immediately take action to prevent stagnant and contamination of water issues, as well as the potential outbreak of epidemics. Expressing these concerns, Hamid Manna said the recent torrential rains have caused havoc in Gwadar, praising the efforts of MPA Moulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and others during relief and rescue operations. He said despite the hard work and vigilance for the past 20 days, the effects of destruction could not be eradicated.



PAK-IRAN BORDER: Construction workers busy in the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project.—MM photo

Thai CG highlights Islamic values at Iftar dinner

By Zahid Karani

KARACHI: Consul General of the Royal Thailand Narut Soontarodon lauded the rich Islamic values of the Pakistani nation during an Iftar dinner hosted by Thai Airways in honor to top travel agents at a local hotel. The event was attended by guests from aviation industry, featured discussions on bilateral relations and cultural exchange. Expressing warm wishes for Ramadan, Soontarodon expressed his delight at experiencing Ramadan in Pakistan for the first time, highlighting the significance of sharing Iftar with Pakistani friends. He commended the local cuisine and emphasized Thailand's respect for the religious rights of its Muslim population, constituting 5 percent of the total population.

Marketing Manager Thai



KARACHI: Thai Airways hosted Iftar dinner in honor to top travel agents at a local hotel. Photo shows Narut Soontarodon, Consul General of Thailand Panutat Yodkhaew, Visa Consular Rashid Siddiqui, Thai Airways Marketing Manager for Pakistan Arif Suleman, Mobin Ansari, Asim Arif Suleman, and others.—MM photo

Health risks in Gwadar needed prompt action

By Anwar Nawab

GWADAR: In the aftermath of torrential rains, Gwadar faced mounting health risks as stagnant water and debris posed threats of multiple disease outbreaks. Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, a Member of the Provincial Assembly, and local authorities have been urged to take immediate action to mitigate the situation. Hamid Mana, Secretary of the Comedy Ward in Gwadar, emphasized the urgent need for intervention, stating that the recent torrential rains have caused extensive damage in the area, and despite commendable efforts by MPA Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and others, the aftermath of the devastation still persisting. Underground water accumulation resulted in collapsing walls of numerous homes, exacerbating the already dire situation. Instead of prioritizing the relief efforts, Gwadar Municipality's Vice-Chairman has been criticized for focusing on future planning rather addressing the immediate health crisis. With thousands of residents at risk, there is an urgent call for comprehensive action to prevent the spread of waterborne viral diseases and ensure the complete rehabilitation of affected individuals and communities.

Maleeka's name removed from ECL

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's intervention facilitated the removal of PTI leader Maleeka Bokhari's name from the exit control list (ECL). Bokhari, facing difficulty in travelling abroad due to being on the no-fly list for a year, appealed on social media handle for help regarding a visit to Australia due to her sister's deteriorating health. Maleeka wrote about her sister's dire condition on Saturday, stating that she was put on a ventilator and doctors had given her only 24 hours to live. CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz responded to her post and assured her of assistance, pledging to intervene with authorities "I hope you have filed a request in writing officially," she wrote in her post on X. Following the CM's involvement, Bokhari thanked her for swift action and announced that her name had been removed from the no-fly list, allowing her to travel to Australia to be with her ailing sister. It is pertinent to highlight that Bokhari, along with numerous PTI lawmakers were detained amidst the government's crackdown following the May 9 incident. The former national assembly member announced her resignation from party roles on May 25, during a press conference convened at the Islamabad Press Club.

VC IBA showcases milestones

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Asif Ahmed Shaikh, in a press briefing at IBA Sukkur, highlighted significant accomplishments during his first year in office. The university has achieved noteworthy milestones across various domains, signaling a commitment to excellence and progress. The recent attainment of AACSB Accreditation, making IBA Sukkur, the only public university to earn this prestigious recognition.

METRO MATTERS

Citizen shoots robber dead in Orangi Town

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A suspected robber, who allegedly attempted robbery at a gas filling station near Al Fateh Ground in Orangi Town, was shot dead by the shopkeeper, while another robber managed to escape from the scene. The locals hailed the shopkeeper for taking down the robber and expressed their support. According to the police, within the jurisdiction of Mominabad Police Station near number 10 in Orangi Town, two robbers were fleeing after looting the owner of an LP gas filling station. During the incident, the shopkeeper used his licensed pistol to fire at the fleeing robbers from behind, resulting in the death of one suspected robber, while his accomplice abandoned the motorcycle and successfully fled the scene. The body of the deceased robber was concealed and transferred to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital via ambulance. Police stated that no identifying documents were found on the deceased 30-year-old robber. After necessary legal procedures, the body was transferred to the morgue for identification through DNA testing.

Millions of rupees collected in alleged traffic fines

By our correspondent

KARACHI: With daily traffic fines crossing the mark as the city is witnessing a staggering daily collection of approximately one hundred million rupees from the citizens in alleged violation charges by the traffic police. On Karachi's roads and intersections, 8 to 10 traffic police officers and officials are visible, stopping vehicles, especially motorcyclists, issuing fines by citing various alleged violations of the law. The imposition of fines worth thousands of rupees is adding to the woes of already distressed citizens due to inflation, with Karachi boasting of 90 traffic sections. Traffic police officials claimed that each section officer has been given a daily target of issuing fines to more than 25 violators. Citizens complained that some officers intimidated them with hefty fines, and then solicited bribes of a few hundred rupees, threatening to issue official tickets if questioned or stopped further. The DIG Traffic stated that the increase in fines is due to violations of traffic laws, while prior to the Ramadan, there must be obedience of traffic rules when people were not being challaned.

Gangster arrested by LEAs in crackdown

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The law enforcement agencies, based on intelligence, jointly conducted an operation and arrested a ringleader of the extortion gang, Arif Ali, from the Defense area. During the initial interrogation, the suspect revealed his affiliation with the extortion gang and admitted to being the ringleader of the said gang. The suspect confessed to being involved in several extortion cases in various areas of Karachi. He allegedly demanded 20 lakh rupees from a trader in Clifton and issued serious threats in case of non-payment of extortion money. The suspect used stolen SIM cards and mobile phones for extortion calls and would switch off his phone after making the extortion call. He has previously extorted 10 lakh rupees each from two other individuals as well. Raids are being conducted to arrest other accomplices of the suspect. The arrested suspect has been handed over to the police for further legal action.

Karachi faces losses in millions due to fire eruption

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A devastating fire broke out in a battery factory, resulting in goods worth millions being reduced to ashes. According to officials from the Fire Brigade, they received information about the fire in a battery factory near SITE area. Immediately, three fire tenders and one bowser rushed to the scene to participate in the rescue operation. The fire originated in the factory's storeroom. Three fire brigade vehicles were deployed to extinguish the flames. The exact cause of the fire could not be determined immediately. Valuable goods were burnt to ashes due to the blaze. Fortunately, there were no reported casualties. The fire at the battery factory has been brought under control, with cooling operations underway. No significant loss of life or property has been reported in the incident. In another incident, a fire broke out in the parking lot in Gulshan-e-Iqbal. According to Fire Brigade officials, the fire engulfed the bushes in the parking lot. A team from Rescue 1122 initiated firefighting operations. Several motorcycles were burnt to ashes due to the fire. Two fire brigade vehicles managed to control the blaze. The situation is now under control, and cooling operations are ongoing.

Incidents claim lives of several individuals in Karachi

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a heart-wrenching incident near Ayesha Colony, DHA Mor, three sisters, who were on their way for shopping, were struck by a speeding vehicle, resulting in the tragic death of one woman and injuries to two others. Additionally, on Superhighway near Navy Town's powerhouse, four individuals, including a woman, lost their lives in traffic accidents. In Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Shanti Nagar, a 6-year-old girl lost her life after falling into a water tank. A body was recovered from the gutter near Site Area, Ghani Colony. The deceased woman in the fatal accident near Ayesha Colony was identified as 27-year-old Aqra. The injured sisters were identified as Noreen and Amber. The deceased woman was a mother and a resident of Korangi. All three sisters had gone to purchase items from the Gold Mark Shopping Center when the accident occurred. The search for the vehicle involved in the hit-and-run incident is underway. According to rescue authorities, a motorcyclist lost his life after falling into a drain near the Navy Town's powerhouse on Superhighway. The deceased was identified as Rashid. Furthermore, a young man named Aamir lost his life in a traffic accident near Taj Hotel on Superhighway. In another tragic incident near the Lucky Cement Factory on Superhighway, a 52-year-old woman, identified as Nasiba, lost her life. She was transferred to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. Additionally, a 25-year-old motorcyclist lost his life after falling into a drain near the Navy Town's powerhouse. He was transferred to a nearby police station via ambulance, where he was identified as Rashid, son of Muhammad. In another unfortunate incident near Kimari, near the Ziauddin Hospital Colony, a 19-year-old youth lost his life in a traffic accident. The body was transferred to the Jinnah Hospital, where the deceased was identified as Hamza, son of Tayyab. Moreover, in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, near the Shanti Nagar Sindh Hotel, a 6-year-old girl lost her life after falling into a water tank at her residence. The body was transferred to Jinnah Hospital, where the deceased was identified as Ghulam Fatima, daughter of Akhtar. Near Site Area, Ghani Colony, a 48-year-old man's body was found in a drain. It was transferred to the Civil Hospital.

Bus attacked, two injured in resistance

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a distressing turn of events near Manghopir on Sunday, a group of pilgrims traveling to the Noorani Shrine in Balochistan came under attack by the dacoits. During the robbery attempt, the dacoits resorted firing upon facing resistance. As a result, a mother and her daughter sustained injuries. The injured victims, identified as Razia and Sabiha, were promptly shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for medical treatment. Additionally, on the Superhighway near Pakola Company, a civilian named Allah Dad was wounded in firing incidents. According to the police, in the Liyari Umar Lane area, a group of unidentified motorcyclists opened fire, injuring a man and his nephew. The wounded individuals were identified as Babar, aged 45, and Abdul Rahman, aged 16. The police suspect personal enmity as the initial motive behind the incident, and investigations are ongoing. Moreover, near Sher Shah, close to the Paracha Bridge, a 40-year-old man named Dilawar, son of Abdul Ghani, sustained injuries in a firing incident. He was promptly transferred to the nearby Civil Hospital for immediate medical attention.

House ransacked, trader killed, friend injured

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In an incident of robbery, the dacoits raided a house near Bakra Piri of Esa Nagri area. During the confrontation, the dacoits shot and killed a dairy trader and injured his friend. The number of fatalities due to robbery-related resistance and shootings, while toll of the current year has now reached 44. According to the SHO Pak Colony Police Station Faissal Gul, the incident of firing occurred around 4:30am on Sunday. Two individuals were injured in the incident. He mentioned that the injured were immediately shifted to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital for medical treatment. However, 32-year-old Farhan succumbed to his injuries, as he had suffered a fatal gunshot wound to the back. On the other hand, the other victim, 36-year-old Shoaib Husain, is currently under treatment. The deceased, Farhan, was a resident of Liaqatabad No. 10. Both friends, Farhan and Shoaib, were injured during the incident.

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Clash erupts in Larkana over teacher's killing

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: The riots erupted in Larkana as scuffle broke out between protesters and police during a demonstration against the killing of Hidayatullah Lohar. Organized by civil society, activists, and workers of political parties, the protest turned violent near Jinnah Chowk as the demonstrators demanded an FIR for Lohar's targeted murder, which occurred 25 days ago in Nasirabad. The victim's daughters, Sassui and Sorath Lohar, along with others, expressed frustration over the police's reluctance to file

an FIR despite repeated pleas. As tensions rose, the police charged baton and used tear gas to disperse the defiant protesters, resulting in injuries, including to women like Sassui and Sorath Lohar. Several protesters, including Fozia Senghar, were detained, with no reports of their release as of now. The protesters vowed to continue their sit-in until an FIR is registered and the suspects in Lohar's murder are apprehended. The incident has sparked outrage in the local community, emphasizing the urgent need for swift justice in cases of targeted killings.

Earthquake hits parts of KP

By our correspondent

SWAT: A moderate earthquake measuring 4.6 on the Richter scale struck parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with tremors felt in and around Swat. The quake's epicenter was situated at a depth of 188 kilometers, near the Pak-Afghan-Tajikistan border region.

As of now, there have been no immediate reports of damage or casualties resulting from the earthquake. However, the seismic event serves as a reminder of the region's susceptibility to such natural phenomena. Authorities are closely monitoring the situation and urging residents to remain vigilant.

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Ramazan with inflation

The surge in prices of essential food items during the holy month of Ramadan has sparked widespread concern among citizens across the country, leaving many grappling with the dilemma of what to purchase amidst rising costs. In the initial week of Ramadan, a significant uptick in prices was reported, amplifying worries among the populace. According to recent data from the statistics department, essential items witnessed a staggering 35 percent surge in prices during the first week of Ramadan alone. Bananas and tomatoes saw a notable spike of 22 percent, while eggs experienced an increase of over 7 percent. Additionally, onions witnessed a 6 percent rise in prices, with garlic, mutton, beef, and chicken also witnessing considerable hikes. The annual inflation rate has soared to 32.89 percent as a result of these price escalations, exacerbating the financial strain on households.

Over the past year, garlic prices have soared by 60 percent, tomatoes by an alarming 185 percent, and onions by a staggering 90 percent. Moreover, sugar has surged by 41 percent, with sugar prices witnessing a 37 percent increase. The relentless inflationary trend has rendered essential commodities such as vegetables, pulses, meat, and fruits unaffordable for many low-income families, further exacerbating the challenges posed by economic hardship. In major cities like Lahore and Karachi, the exorbitant prices paint a grim picture for consumers, with onions fetching as high as Rs. 280 per kilogram and tomatoes priced between Rs. 180 to Rs. 200 per kilogram. Similarly, the prices of ginger and garlic have skyrocketed to Rs. 700 to Rs. 800 per kilogram, further straining household budgets.

The recent survey, which identified inflation and unemployment as the primary concerns among Pakistanis, sheds light on the severe repercussions of soaring prices on daily life. In cities like Multan and Islamabad, the scarcity of essential commodities such as flour, sugar, and ghee has become glaringly evident, raising doubts about the efficacy of government subsidies in reaching the most vulnerable segments of society. Meanwhile, in Karachi, citizens are grappling with the glaring disparity between advertised prices and the actual rates prevailing in the market.

Additionally, apprehensions about the affordability of new clothes for Eid festivities further exacerbate the anxieties surrounding the economic hardships faced by households. As the holy month of Ramadan progresses, the burden of inflated prices continues to bear down heavily on families across the country. This underscores the pressing need for prompt and effective measures to alleviate the economic strain on the populace and ensure that basic necessities remain accessible to all, especially during this sacred time of reflection and charity.

‘World Sparrow Day’

As World Sparrow Day approaches, Karachi's residents are encouraged to reconnect with nature by participating in bird-watching activities aimed at spotting the beloved sparrows that once graced the city's skies. These small yet cherished birds, once a common sight in the windows and surroundings of childhood homes, have become increasingly rare amid the urban sprawl and environmental challenges facing Karachi. Observed annually on March 20th, 'World Sparrow Day' serves as a global reminder of the need to protect and preserve these iconic avian species. This year, under the theme "Give Sparrows a Chance to Chirp, We Love Sparrows," nations worldwide are organizing various events and initiatives to raise awareness about sparrow conservation and environmental stewardship.

In Karachi, the Sindh Wildlife Department and the Wildlife Section have collaborated to orchestrate a special program for sparrow observation and counting. Scheduled for March 17th, citizen groups across different areas of Karachi will embark on sparrow-counting missions, documenting their findings through photographs and videos. Passionate wildlife photographers, university students, social workers, and enthusiastic individuals have formed dedicated groups in various locales, including Malir Town, Memon Goth, Gadap Town, Bahria Town, Steel Town, Hill Park, KDA Scheme, DHA, Clifton, Lyari, Korangi, Burns Road, Pakistan Chowk, NED University, and Karachi University.

Amidst the urban hustle and bustle of Karachi, the upcoming World Sparrow Day presents a unique opportunity for residents to reconnect with nature and contribute to conservation efforts. As the city grapples with the dual challenges of climate change and pollution, the plight of sparrows serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness between human activity and environmental degradation. Against the backdrop of rising temperatures, erratic weather patterns, and worsening air quality, the declining sparrow population underscores the urgent need for collective action to address environmental concerns. By participating in sparrow-watching activities, Karachi's residents can actively engage in citizen science initiatives aimed at monitoring and preserving local biodiversity.

The initiative, spearheaded by the Sindh Wildlife Department and the Wildlife Section, symbolizes a grassroots approach to environmental stewardship. Through the simple act of observing and documenting sparrows in their natural habitat, participants contribute valuable data that can inform conservation strategies and raise awareness about the importance of preserving avian biodiversity. Moreover, the invitation to register for sparrow-watching underscores the inclusive nature of environmental advocacy, welcoming individuals from all walks of life to join hands in protecting our natural heritage. By dedicating a few hours to sparrow observation, citizens not only forge a deeper connection with the natural world but also demonstrate their commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change and pollution on local ecosystems.

As participants immerse themselves in the serenity of bird-watching, they are reminded of the delicate balance between human activities and the environment.

By safeguarding the habitats of sparrows and other wildlife species, Karachi's residents contribute to the resilience of urban ecosystems and foster a sustainable future for generations to come. In essence, the act of sparrow-watching transcends mere observation; it represents a tangible expression of solidarity with nature and a commitment to protecting our planet amidst the challenges of climate change and pollution. As Karachi's citizens unite in this collective endeavor, they embody the spirit of environmental stewardship and pave the way for a greener, more sustainable future.

By Muhammad Waqar Rana

The Supreme Court and other superior courts have the power to interpret the constitution. But there is a need for caution. A US chief justice, John Marshall, in his famous McCulloch vs Maryland case remarked that it is impermissible to rewrite the constitution.

Rewriting the constitution means an interpretation of the constitution by the court which is neither based upon constitutional text nor is supported by any principle of constitutional law, convention or custom of the constitution.

It is, in fact, reading into the constitution and supplying a supposed omission on some high moral principles or an imagined, national or public good which, the court believes, its interpretation of the constitution would serve.

However, the power to amend the constitution is exclusively vested in parliament. And, second, it is against the foundational constitutional norm which ordains that 'authority' that includes both legislative and administrative, is exercisable by the chosen representatives and democracy is the grundnorm of the constitution of Pakistan. Some recent SC decisions amount to rewriting the constitution in the general public's perception.

A constitution unlike an ordinary statute or a by-law may not be interpreted literally. What is not in the text, at the most, can be interpreted in the light of the constitutional conventions or structure. The constitution of Pakistan contains different types of provisions which can be divided into four categories:

Ornamental provisions, which include the preamble and the principles of the policy. These are general provisions, and, on their own, do not create substantive rights or obligations; they can only be read along with some other substantive provisions of the constitution.

The second category is the charter of rights called fundamental rights and remedies for their enforcement. These rights,

being inherent, are a check on the state's power, and thus while interpreting these provisions and rights, a penumbra of rights come to life through a liberal judicial interpretation, and the power of the state to regulate or interfere in these rights is narrowly construed or interpreted in favour of the citizens (persons). It is this part where several principles and theories are put to use to expound the constitution.

The living constitution, organic law and the rule of purposive interpretation, and several other tools of interpretation are employed by the courts.

The third category of provisions relates to the creation and conferment of powers and jurisdiction of different institutions – more particularly parliament, executive and the judiciary. In the case of a federation, provisions of the constitution that deal with the distribution of legislative and administrative powers between the federation and states also come within this category.

These provisions of the constitution are to be interpreted firstly as per the letter of the constitution and then in the light of the underlying constitutional principles. Elections to the houses of parliament, voting rights, qualification of members of parliament, their powers and privileges, etc fall within this category.

In this category, courts, while interpreting those provisions, generally follow structuralism rather than positivism. In the US, where after the War Of Independence, the failure of the confederation, the importance of commerce in national life and then the civil war, were some dominating features that determined the judicial philosophy of the SC judges who set the nation on the right course of a union and made it a great nation.

In the UK, in the constitutional scheme as determined by the law and customs and the history of England – struggle between monarchy and parliament – ultimately the primacy was given to parliament, which became the ultimate protector of the liberties and rights of the people.

In India, the struggle has remained over

the custody of the constitution between the court and parliament. The famous Indian case – the 1973 Kesawananda Bharati case – finally tilted the balance in favour of the Supreme Court but the ultimate beneficiaries of this constitutional battle were the people of India whose rights were upheld by the SC.

The ultimate sword and shield for the protection of rights and citizens was the power of judicial review which became a salient feature of the basic structure as expounded in the Kesawananda Case. The Indian Supreme Court, while interpreting the constitutional text, went beyond the text and brought in a constitutional theory, not fully recognized in the constitutional jurisprudence of the common law countries to control the amending powers of the Indian parliament. The fourth category is transitory provisions.

In Pakistan, the history of the judiciary has been a history of capitulation of the judiciary before an unelected executive. The first constitutional crisis (1954) set forth the future course when the constituent assembly was dissolved.

The matter reached the federal court, chief justice Munir's court, which became part of the intrigue and capitulated. In the Moulvi Tameezuddin case (1955), a constitutional deviation adopted became a permanent norm of the political and legal culture of Pakistan. The sanctity of the constitution was sacrificed for an unending political and national expediency.

The Supreme Court's constitutional jurisprudence for the last 75 years is full of instances where the court, while interpreting the constitution, in fact, rewrote it. In the last two decades, dictated by political expediency created by real and imagined circumstances, the court has given several decisions that, when analyzed on constitutional principles and seen in the light of principles of interpretation, seem to weaken and erode political institutions and democracy.

Rule of law and supremacy of the constitution stand diluted. The ultimate conse-

quence is that the constitution has lost its supremacy in the affairs of the state. Its violations are increasing day by day. There is a strong perception among the polity that a divided court, despite several disclaimers, has eroded the constitutional command. Its ultimate victims are the people of Pakistan who are left remediless in the face of flagrant violations of the constitution. Judges have become powerful, but the judiciary as an institution stands weakened. The judiciary has been unable to identify its true role in the system.

Two instances from recent decisions of the Supreme Court are in point. The defection case regarding Article 63A of the constitution (though based on structuralism) and the most recent judgment on Article 209 (overruling an earlier judgment) are being seen as a rewriting of the constitution. The last judgment held that proceedings against a judge who resigns during the course proceedings against him continue before the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC).

The SJC is not a court but a domestic tribunal. There is no textual or structural basis for such an interpretation. The legislative history of Article 209 and practice in other jurisdictions – Canada, India and Australia – shows that proceedings end with the resignation of the judge. The matter of corruption of a judge is a separate issue for other courts. All judgments on political issues leave room for criticism.

Even George Orwell's 'hanging judge' will under no circumstances take a money bribe. But Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam was tried and convicted by the House of Lords for bribery and corruption on May 5, 1621. That was prior to the Act of Settlement of 1701.

Even the highest court of law has no power to legislate in the garb of interpretation. Being the ultimate guardian of the people's rights and rule of law, it guards against transgressions of their rights by the other branches of the government. It is empowered to say what the law is but cannot make law by itself.

The challenge of governance

By Raashid Wali Janjua

Governance and politics in Pakistan are bound in a dialectic of principal contradiction wherein the demands of politics and governance come into direct conflict due to the nature of politics.

Intent for governance is not enough as the capacity to govern and political will are needed to pull Pakistan's economy and politics out of the state of long-standing distrust.

The notion of 'principal contradiction', put forward by Chinese politician Mao Zedong, can well explain the dilemma of politics and governance in Pakistan. As per the concept of principal contradiction, the dialectical relationship between the two opposing aspects inherent in any concept leads to a meaningful change. There are interesting parallels between Mao's notion of contradiction and Pakistan's governance woes.

Some of these contradictions, according to Pakistan's eminent historian Ayesha Jalal, include theological-secular, unitary-federal, civil-military, and overdeveloped state-weak polity.

Unfortunately for Pakistan, these contradictions, instead of yielding the desired change, have always led to long periods of stasis. With governance challenges galore and a plethora of people's demands, it would be interesting to see if the new coalition government can resolve the principal contradictions inherent in the demands of politics and imperatives of governance.

One of the contradictions visible is the extractive nature of political demands by the

electorate and its damaging impact. In simple words, we have a Westminster polity, wherein prime ministers and chief ministers are routinely subjected to illegal and unreasonable demands that conflict with the requirements of good governance.

Take the example of Balochistan where in the past the practice has been to get into the legislature to extract rents for oneself and one's allies, leading to the bizarre sight of all members of the Balochistan Assembly joining the provincial cabinet. While politics in the province demands extraction and patronage, good governance demands merit and equity. The failure of the political leadership to resolve the contradiction between their selfish interests and the demands of the deserving segment of the population leads towards the misappropriation of funds through collusion with favourite contractors.

The resultant lack of development makes Balochistan the least developed province of the country. Anger arising out of public deprivation is cleverly deflected towards the state, exacerbating the narrative of federal apathy with hate.

At the federal level, the issue of dwindling federal share from the divisible pool as per the NFC may pose serious problems; federal liabilities include debt servicing, defence expenditure, and government administration including pays and pensions. How that contradiction is resolved in the face of increasing provincial demands, like the enhanced NFC share of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the national pie after the merger of the former Fata region, would be the test of the

government's political capability in managing these contradictions.

The biggest bulwark to good governance would be the failure to bring the loyal segment of the electorate for the PML-N like traders and big business owners into the tax net. The government would have to resolve the principal contradiction in the interests of traders and the state in favour of the state showing the desired resolve.

Similarly, the elusive services sector that has gotten used to tax evasion would have to be brought into the tax net. The much-needed FBR reforms and the inertia of tax bureaucracy create another contradiction worthy of the government's urgent attention.

The imperative of the right choice for the cabinet slots, especially in technical ministries, would definitely clash with the patronage-driven needs of political loyalists, especially among legislators. If this contradiction is not resolved in favour of the state through strict adherence to merit the mounting debt, export stagnation, energy price spike, and prevalent stagflation would run the country down the morass of insolvency.

The contradiction in digital connectivity and the need for content moderation and data localization would hamstring the IT revolution leaving the investors, especially international ISPs, in a quandary, whether to invest or not in such a risky business environment.

Then there is the nexus between crime and politics. This nexus thrives on weak governance leaving ungoverned spaces where terrorism and crime exist cheek by

jowl. The ecosystem of crime in the shape of smuggling, tax evasion, drug trafficking and gun running benefits multiple stakeholders who would leave no stone unturned while opposing all government initiatives to enforce rule of law. To resolve this conflict and to break the crime-politics nexus, there is a requirement for bipartisan political consensus that eludes the new government.

The governance needs of the restive erstwhile Fata come in conflict with the worldview of major political actors in KP – the JUI, PTI, and PTM. While the political reforms and merger of newly merged districts (NMDs) are anathema to the JUI, some parties vehemently oppose the strong players in the region.

These contradictions are being exploited by terrorist groups like the TTP. In the absence of political ownership to fight against terrorism and end the ecosystem of crime and illegal activities, the stabilization of the restive NMDs would remain a pipe dream.

The government also needs to resolve the contradiction inherent in anti-smuggling measures and the slowing down of the once-bustling trade market for the locals. Without an alternative livelihood model, the conflict between rule of law and livelihood provision would remain unresolved.

Civil-military relations also demand urgent treatment. The resolution of this conflict according to eminent US scholar Rebecca Schiff entails a concordance between the interests of people, the political elite and the military of a country.

While so far this concordance is elusive, economic development and human security appear to be the only leavens that bind all three stakeholders in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Road to SIFC

By Farhan Bokhari

As Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government takes charge amid the worst economic downturn in Pakistan's history, the future of an investment-starved country remains the biggest challenge for the foreseeable future.

For all practical purposes, Pakistan's economy remains at a standstill, driven by lacklustre growth and easily overwhelmed by a host of challenges. In brief, the economy remains simply flat.

In this lacklustre environment, Pakistanis have for months debated the utility or not of pursuing investments led by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). The council has been the proverbial talk of the town, formally bringing together Pakistan's top civil and military leaders on a common platform.

And its principal focus remains embedded in providing agricultural land in central and southern Pakistan to prospective investors from the oil-rich Middle East. For the moment across Pakistan, a host of players have questioned the SIFC as a game changer to lift future prospects.

But few have stepped ahead to welcome the SIFC as an alternative to steer the country out of its immediate economic crisis.

As this debate continues, Pakistan is urgently in need of a long-term plan to carry the country away from recurring economic crises.

Given Pakistan's history, meeting the challenge will come about not just through the creation of another platform as in the SIFC. On the contrary, the eventual outcome on this front must emerge from carving out a road map through a

series of reforms aimed at transforming Pakistan.

For Pakistan, there are indeed valuable lessons to be learnt from the country's prior experience with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC. For instance, raising expectations at the outset with an estimated inflow of more than \$60 billion in Chinese investments was indeed a blunder.

The Pakistani public's hopes of witnessing such a staggering investment figure quickly led to unbridled pessimism. The lesson, if one was to be learnt from that exercise, was vitally just one – that talking up an initiative through a vast dollar sum runs the risk of having to deliver it quickly. In Pakistan's case, seeking up to \$50 billion or more under the SIFC, as spelt out by the caretaker government was indeed a colossal blunder.

As for the future of projects under the SIFC, two interrelated initiatives will be vital for its success.

First, Pakistan must strive to open the doors for domestic investors in the agriculture sector as it lays the ground for the inclusion of foreign investors. This is an area that has remained neglected for long. Domestic investors armed with funds to bankroll investments in this area including the introduction of newer technologies will help finance a key gap surrounding Pakistan's farm sector.

Eventually, there is a chance for Pakistan to make investments more popular in agriculture, which remains central to the country's economic health. There is also a chance of the benefits including a rise in the production of food commodities domestically, helping to reduce dependence on food im-

ports.

On the other hand, opening up parts of the agriculture sector to landless peasants will inspire fresh popular confidence in the future of Pakistan. This too has been a much neglected area. The choice of arming landless peasants with land potentially could mark the first step towards battling afresh the largely neglected incidence of rural poverty.

Together, these two steps as a precursor to the SIFC could lift popular confidence in SIFC and strengthen the argument for foreign investors to take stakes in Pakistan.

Going forward, the new government needs to squarely reconsider its economic priorities. Amid the recent and much-heated election campaign, promises of large spending on future infrastructure projects, notably from leaders of the PML-N, seemed only hollow in the face of the prevailing challenges.

At a time when Pakistan faces an unprecedented crisis surrounding its food security, building expensive new train lines or highways or other elements of infrastructure would remain on hold.

In Punjab, newly appointed Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's promise of building five new IT cities or delivering an air ambulance service were examples that were devoid of deep thinking over Pakistan's prevailing economic challenges. Punjab remains Pakistan's bread basket, though its ability to deliver on the country's food needs remains behind its potential. Rather than new infrastructure projects, the province needs to focus on revitalizing its agricultural resources in support of Pakistan's overall well-being.

Funding UNRWA

By Binoy Kampmark

The steady and ruthless campaign by Israel to internationally defund the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), is unravelling. The lynchpin in the effort was a thin, poison pen dossier making claims that 12 individuals were Hamas operatives who had been involved in the October 7 attacks. Within a matter of days, two internal investigations were commenced, various individuals sacked, and US\$450 million worth of funding from donor states suspended.

As the head of the agency, Philippe Lazzarini, explained at a press conference on March 4, he has "never been informed" or received evidence of Israel's claims substantiating their assertions, though he did receive the prompt about the profane twelve directly from Israeli officials. Every year, both Israel and the Palestinian authorities were furnished with staff lists, "and I never received the slightest concern about the staff that we have been employing."

Had Israeli authorities signed off on these alleged participants in bungling or conspiratorial understanding? Certainly, there was more than a pony whiff of distraction about it all, given that Israel had come off poorly in The Hague proceedings launched by South Africa, during which the judges issued an interim order demanding an observance of the UN Genocide Convention, an increase of humanitarian aid, and the retention of evidence that might be used for future criminal prosecutions for genocide.

An abrupt wave of initial success in starving the agency followed, with a number of countries announcing plans to freeze funding. In the

United States, irate members of Congress accused the agency of having "longstanding connections to terrorism and promotion of anti-semitism". A hearing was duly held titled "UNRWA Exposed: Examining the Agency's Mission and Failures" with Richard Goldberg, a senior advisor of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies frothing at an agency that supposedly incited "violence against Israel, subsidizes US-designated terrorist organizations, denies Palestinians their basic human rights, and blocks the pathways to a sustainable peace between Israel and the Palestinians." The attempt to cast UNRWA into gleefully welcomed oblivion has not worked. Questions were asked about the initial figure of twelve alleged militants. News outlets began questioning the numbers.

The funding channels are resuming. Canada, for instance, approving "the robust investigative process underway", also acknowledged that "more can be done to respond to the urgent needs of Palestinian civilians". The initial cancellation of funding to the agency, charged Thomas Woodley, president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, had been "a reckless political decision that never should have been made."

The Swedish government was also encouraged by undertakings made by UNRWA "to allow independent auditing, strengthen internal supervision and enable additional staff controls", promising an initial outlay of 200 million kroner (US\$19 million).

The Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, Johan Forssell, promised that it would "monitor closely to ensure UNRWA follows through on what it has promised."

‘First Lady’ gears up for political role

Sets a new precedent that may ignite a constitutional debate on the President's impartiality toward the ‘First Lady’ as a ‘politician’

By Imtiaz Hussain

ISLAMABAD: In a momentous development heralding her foray into the realm of politics, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, the youngest scion of President Asif Ali Zardari, the ‘First Lady’, is set to vie for the upcoming by-election for the NA-207 Nawabshah constituency.

This announcement comes in the wake of the vacancy created by Zardari's ascendancy to the presidency, offering Aseefa a maiden opportunity to contest an electoral race. Concurrently, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's imminent assumption of the role of the ‘First Lady’ of Pakistan adds a new dimension to her burgeoning political career.

Meanwhile, a constitutional debate may also be sparked as how long the President, constitutionally a non-political entity, would remain unbiased or non-political as the ‘First Lady’ would become a politician or a member of the National Assembly. Following her father's inauguration as the 14th president of Pakistan, Aseefa stands poised to become only the second daughter or sister of a head of state in the nation's annals to hold this esteemed designation.

Scheduled for arrival in Nawabshah Sunday, Aseefa has formally lodged her nomination papers for the by-election, marking her inaugural venture into electoral politics and perpetuating her family's political legacy. Anticipation runs high among supporters and party stalwarts who are primed to extend a warm welcome to her at Nawabshah Airport, where she would launch her campaign with a rally towards Zardari House.

This unprecedented development diverges from convention, as traditionally, the position of the first lady has been reserved for the spouse of a head of government or state. Aseefa's journey to the forefront of politics has been marked by her unwavering support for her father and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Over the past decade, she has been an outspoken proponent of the party's political agenda, standing shoulder to shoulder with Zardari in various capacities.

Her presence at her father's presidential inauguration epitomized her steadfast allegiance to the party's cause.

As the by-election looms, all eyes are trained on Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's electoral campaign as she endeavors to garner the trust and backing of constituents in NA-207 Nawabshah. With her dual roles as a political aspirant and the prospective first lady, Aseefa is poised to make significant inroads in shaping Pakistan's political landscape and perpetuating her family's enduring legacy.

In an interview with BBC 5 Live Sport, Hartley, a former English cricketer, shared her decision to fast alongside the players, expressing her desire to understand their experience and emotions as they compete on the field after fasting throughout the day. “I really want to understand how they're feeling when they get to the game. I think it is only fair that the players are doing it, so I should join them [in fasting],” Hartley explained.

Acknowledging the challenges of fasting, especially within the context of her daily routine, Hartley admitted that it is indeed a demanding endeavor. “We have just broken our fast now after we fasted all day. I have had some dates and some salad. We can eat till 4am and then we don't eat again till 6:40pm the next day. It is hard, so hard,” she shared.

Given the late-night schedule of PSL matches, Hartley revealed that she adjusts her sleeping pattern accordingly, highlighting the dedication and commitment required to synchronize with the team's fasting regimen.

Multan Sultans' journey to the final has been remarkable, with the team securing its place after defeating Babar Azam's Peshawar Zalmi in the Qualifier match. With Mohammad Rizwan leading the charge, Multan Sultans' remarkable performance has positioned them as formidable contenders in the tournament.

As they gear up for the final showdown, Hartley's decision to fast alongside the players underscores the spirit of unity and camaraderie within the Multan Sultans' camp, further enhancing the team's sense of solidarity and cohesion as they strive for victory in PSL 9.

PSL PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE



Multan Sultan's coach Alex Hartley joins players in Fasting

By our correspondent

KARACHI: As the excitement builds for the Pakistan Super League season nine (PSL 9) final between Multan Sultans and Islamabad United, an unexpected revelation has emerged: Multan Sultans' spin bowling coach, Alex Hartley, is observing the fast during the holy month of Ramadan, just like the rest of the team.

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Babar Azam is the best leader: Darren Sammy

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Peshawar Zalmi's head coach Darren Sammy has expressed that he believes Babar Azam is the best leader. Speaking at a press conference in Karachi, Darren Sammy said that on this wicket, we reduced the runs by 15 to 20. We gave Islamabad a chance to bat after the initial 10 overs, and the target in our minds was 200.

He said that this wasn't the traditional cricket of Peshawar Zalmi; Imad Wasim and Haider Ali played very well. We made mistakes in bowling, and there was a lack of consistency. Darren Sammy stated



that it doesn't matter if you don't win the trophy, playing playoffs every year is not significant. Winning every trophy in 9 playoffs is not enough; we wanted to win more and reach the final.

Peshawar Zalmi's head coach

further said that he is very happy about the return of cricket to Pakistan, hoping for a big crowd in Karachi for the final. It is clear that in the eliminator 2 of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9, Islamabad United defeated Peshawar Zalmi by 5 wickets, qualifying for the final.

In the match played at the National Bank Cricket Arena in Karachi, Islamabad United won the toss and invited Peshawar Zalmi to bat, with Zalmi scoring 185 runs for the loss of 5 wickets in the allotted 20 overs. Islamabad United successfully chased the target in the 19th over. Islamabad United's team will face Multan Sultans in the final.



NAWABSHAH: Pakistan People's Party leader Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, along with her aunt Health Minister Sindh Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, is set to submit her nomination papers for the NA-207 Nawabshah by-elections.—MM file photo

Gwadar struggles with internet connectivity

By our correspondent

GWADAR: The residents and businesses in and around Gwadar city are grappling with severe internet connectivity issues as all mobile service providers completely failed to deliver fast and reliable internet services.

A number of individuals, including students, IT professionals, franchise holders, online gamers, YouTubers, and the general public are facing significant challenges due to slow and inconsistent internet services. This situation is directly impacting economic productivity at both the individual as well as national level. Despite the widespread dissatisfaction among consumers, reaching out to service representatives to address these concerns has proven to be a daunting task.

Complaints were lodged regarding poor internet service often go unresolved, exacerbating frustration among consumers. The frustration has led to a decline in the purchase of internet packages, with many consumers opting to switch between mobile service providers in search of better connectivity. The dire state of internet connectivity in Gwadar city underscored the urgent need for mobile service companies to address infrastructure deficiencies and prioritize the delivery of fast and reliable internet services to meet the growing demands of residents and businesses alike.

Wildlife launches birds' count on 'World Sparrow Day'

Past three decades, Karachi saw up to 70pc decline in sparrow's population

By Nasir Ahmed

KARACHI: Wildlife authorities launched a campaign on Sunday to count the number of sparrows in the country's largest city of Karachi, where the human-friendly bird is fast disappearing from the skies.

The campaign will target specific urban and suburban hotspots of local sparrows in the metropolis, home to 20 million people. Joined by bird lovers, and divided into several groups, wildlife workers took positions at potential sparrow hotspots, taking pictures and filming the birds' movements.

The results of the bird count will be announced on March 20, Javed Mahar, a conservator at the wildlife department of Sindh, told the media.

Along with major South Asian cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka and Lahore, Karachi offers a mix of glossy skyscrapers, bustling shopping centers, shanty slums and massive traffic jams.

Once a natural habitat for birds, the metropolis has lost its precious wildlife not only through the ravages of time but also because of increasing human influence. According to Muhammad Moazzam Khan, technical adviser for the Worldwide Fund for Nature's (WWF) Pakistan chapter, the spar-



KARACHI: Sparrows also serve as indicators of air quality.—MM file photo

row population has dwindled by between 60 percent and 70 percent in Karachi over the past two decades.

Alteration of habitats, which is a direct result of unplanned urbanization and pollution, has badly affected the population of urban birds, mainly house sparrows, in major South Asian cities in the past two decades. Aside from Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad are among the most polluted cities in the region.

Lahore and Karachi, along with India's capital New Delhi, commercial capital Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, have topped the daily rankings of the world's most polluted cities this winter owing primarily to escalating industrialization and unplanned urbanization in recent decades. Instead of sparrows, human-friendly birds, who also serve as indicators of air quality; bird species such as kites, crows and mynas have occupied the skies of these cities.

Indian YouTuber arrested in venom party case

News Desk

NOIDA, India: Indian YouTuber Elvish Yadav has been apprehended by the Noida Police in connection with an alleged snake venom-laced rave party organized in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The 26-year-old content creator stood accused of providing snake venom during an event held at a banquet hall on November 3, 2023. Forensic analysis confirmed the presence of snake venom in samples collected from the party, leading to Yadav's arrest.

Charged under provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act and IPC Section 120A for criminal conspiracy, Elvish Yadav, along with six others, faces legal proceedings for their involvement in the incident. Despite prior questioning, authorities refrained from arresting Yadav, a former contestant on Bigg Boss. Police seized nine snakes, including five cobras, from the possession of the accused during the November event. Further investigations revealed that the venom glands were missing from all nine snakes, with authorities confiscating 20ml of snake venom.

Elvish Yadav has vehemently denied the allegations, dismissing them as “baseless, fake, and not even 1 percent true.” Reports indicate that snake venom is increasingly being utilized as a recreational drug, raising concerns about its potential dangers. Moreover, a People for Animals (PFA) official, who flagged the snake venom rave party, has filed another complaint against Yadav, alleging threats from the YouTuber.

Putin wins presidential election in Russia

News Desk

MOSCOW: Preliminary results indicate that Russian President Vladimir Putin has emerged victorious in the presidential election. The voting process, spanning from March 15th to 17th, has concluded, with all polling stations now closed.

Throughout the duration of the presidential election in Russia, approximately 74 percent of the 11.23 crore eligible voters exercised their voting rights, as reported by Russian media. Notably, Putin's adversaries staged a protest during the elections by discarding ballot papers. Moreover, this election witnessed the inclusion of remote regions such as Kherson and Donetsk, alongside other territories



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has emerged victorious in the presidential election on Sunday.—MM photo

across Russia. Of particular note, Chechnya recorded the highest voter turnout, reaching an impressive 96 percent.

Beyond the borders of Russia, voters from various corners of the globe participated in the electoral process at 230 polling sta-

tions. According to initial results, Putin clinched victory in the Russian presidential race, securing an overwhelming 87.97 percent of the votes, thereby securing his presidency for the next six years. Putin has held the reins of power in Russia since 1999.

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Roof collapse claims six, including three girls

By Adam Khan Wazir

SOUTH WAZIRISTAN: A devastating incident occurred in the Raghza area of Birmal Tehsil, District South Waziristan Lower, as a roof collapsed, resulting in the loss of six lives and leaving ten others injured.

The tragic incident unfolded as a family gathered in the living room after breaking their fast during Iftar. Eyewitnesses recounted how bystanders rushed to assist in pulling individuals from the rubble before rescue teams and police arrived at the scene. They said the roof of Afsar Khan's home, located 20 kilometers away from Wana, Lower Waziristan district, was collapsed, in which Afsar Khan, tragically lost his life along with five others, including Din Shifa, Ajwa Bibi, Sultan, Naseema Bibi, and Halima Bibi.

The injured, including Noor Ayaz, Ahmed Ali, Abdullah, Asma Bibi, Nakhmeena Bibi, Shana Bibi, Aqal Meena Bibi, Rehmat Bibi, Tariq Khan, and Amirullah, were swiftly transported to Sheikh Fatima Hospital Sholam and District Headquarter Hospital Wana for treatment. The family sources revealed that many of the injured are in critical condition, with some referring to Dera Ismail Khan for further treatment. The tragic incident has cast a pall of sorrow over the entire area, emphasizing the need for immediate support and assistance for the affected families.

PIA's crew reaches Canada without passport

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) air hostess Sumira managed to reach Canada without a passport. Sumira was assigned to duty on flight PK 781 from Islamabad to Toronto when the unprecedented incident unfolded.

According to sources within the airline, the air hostess traveled from Islamabad to Toronto relying solely on PIA General Declaration documents, circumventing the standard passport requirement. Upon discovery of the breach, PIA has been slapped with a hefty fine for allowing flight attendants to arrive in Canada without proper documentation.

Meanwhile, the national carrier's spokesperson confirmed that PIA has

been fined \$250 for the incident.

Contrary to speculations circulating in some quarters, PIA has vehemently denied reports suggesting that the air hostess intended to seek political asylum upon landing in Canada. The airline has emphasized that such claims are unfounded. It is pertinent more than 10 PIA air hostesses have gone missing in Canada over the past two years, raising concerns about the welfare and safety of airline staff operating on international routes.

Further details regarding the fine imposed on PIA and the circumstances surrounding Sumira's journey to Canada are expected to emerge, with senior reporter Javed Asghar poised to provide deeper insights into the matter.

Jemima defends Kate, condemns media discourse

News Desk

LONDON: Jemima Goldsmith - former spouse of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder chairman Imran Khan - has stepped forward to condemn the social media discourse surrounding the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Jemima's statement came in the wake of resurging rumors regarding an alleged affair between Prince William and Rose Hanbury.

Expressing solidarity with Kate Middleton and Prince William, Jemima Khan denounced the on-line content circulating on various platforms, branding them as “cruel jokes.” She underscored the detrimental impact such speculations can have on real individuals, emphasizing the need for empathy and respect in online discussions.

In a post on ‘X’ ex-Twitter, Jemima Khan lamented the transi-

tion of these purported jokes into something more insidious, warning against the dehumanization of public figures amidst the anonymity of social media platforms.

The controversy was further fueled by Stephen Colbert's recent remarks on The Late Show, where he hinted at distressing revelations concerning the British royal family. Colbert alluded to internet conjecture linking Kate Middleton's absence to potential marital strife

with Prince William, stirring fresh waves of speculation across online forums.

Jemima Khan's intervention serves as a timely reminder of the ethical considerations inherent in online discourse, urging netizens to exercise restraint and empathy when discussing the personal lives of public figures. As the rumor mill continues to churn, her advocacy for compassion amidst the digital cacophony resonates profoundly.