

# Cipher fame Lu vows to address Pakistan’s election irregularities

US Assistant Secretary assures insight of Pakistan’s politics just before Congressional Committee gears up for his testimony

News Desk

WASHINGTON: US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu is set to testify before a congressional committee today (Wednesday), where he plans to address various aspects of Pakistan’s political landscape.

Donald Lu, who boasts an intimate understanding of Pakistan’s political situation, intends to shed light on the country’s recent elections. Expressing familiarity with Pakistan’s political dynamics, he emphasized the resilience of its citizens who have historically participated in elections despite facing challenges such as violence and intimidation. He expressed his commitment to addressing any irregularities that may have occurred during the electoral process and American policy.

Highlighting the significance of federalism, Lu underscored the need for national unity achieved through



stability and mutual respect among all stakeholders. He reiterated America’s commitment to upholding democratic principles and ensuring that the voice of every citizen is heard. Moreover, the US Deputy Secretary of State hinted at forthcoming remarks regarding US policy on the irregularities observed in the Pakistan elections. He also raised concerns about unnecessary restrictions on freedom of expression, signaling America’s stance on safeguarding fundamental rights.

On the other hand, in a recent meeting between US Ambassador Vedant Patel and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, bilateral issues took center stage, according to statements from both sides. The Deputy Spokesperson of the US State Department affirmed that the discussions between the American ambassador and the Prime Minister covered various important matters.

Additionally, Patel held meetings with the Pakistani finance minister and other members of the financial

team to delve into critical economic issues.

Expressing a mutual commitment to counter-terrorism efforts, Patel emphasized the importance of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists. He reiterated the United States’ strong cooperation with Pakistani authorities in combating terrorism. The US State Department’s deputy spokesperson highlighted the significance of open communication channels between the two countries, stating, "Whatever is an important issue, we discuss it with the Pakistani authorities."

Acknowledging Pakistan’s robust media landscape, the spokesperson emphasized the importance of transparent communication channels between the two nations. This meeting underscores ongoing efforts to address bilateral issues and strengthen diplomatic ties between the United States and Pakistan.

## Nawaz concerned over IMF's electric shock

By our correspondent

LAHORE: PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif on Monday raised concerns over the impending surge in electricity and gas prices under the directives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), questioning the extent to which the people could bear such burdens.

Addressing a special meeting of the Punjab government alongside Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Nawaz Sharif stressed the pressing need to address the potential hike in utility prices imposed by the global lender. Senior provincial ministers and officials were in attendance, including Marriyum Aurangzeb, Azma Bukhari, Bilal Yasin, Syed Ashiq, and Sania Ashiq, along with chief secretaries and other concerned authorities.

During the briefing, it was revealed that previous procurement methods subsidized wheat prices uniformly, benefiting both the impoverished and the rich alike. However, mounting circular debts, now totaling Rs630 billion, posed a grave challenge to the government. If left unaddressed, experts warned the debt could soar to a staggering Rs1.1 trillion. Nawaz Sharif reiterated the need to prioritize farmers’ concerns, stressing that government funds should be dedicated to supporting agricultural initiatives.

# Gaza facing imminent famine: Secretary Blinken

Ironically America pleading Israel to prioritize provision of aids to those in dire need

News Desk

WASHINGTON: In a dire warning, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has declared that the entire population of Gaza, comprising two million people, is currently grappling with severe levels of acute food insecurity.

With UN agencies sounding the alarm that north Gaza could plunge into famine by May unless decisive measures are taken, the situation demands immediate attention and intervention.

Blinken’s sobering remarks come amidst his ongoing trip to the Philippines, during which US officials have announced his forthcoming travel to the Middle East.

This will mark his sixth visit to the region since October, underscoring the re-

lentless efforts to broker a ceasefire and alleviate the suffering of civilians caught in the crossfire. As negotiations between Israeli representatives and Hamas are set to resume in Qatar, Blinken’s call for a halt to hostilities and the facilitation of humanitarian aid gains added significance. The talks aim to secure a deal to end the violence, ensure the delivery of essential aid, and address the issue of Israeli hostages.

The gravity of the situation in Gaza cannot be overstated, with Blinken asserting that the entirety of the population is in dire need of humanitarian assistance, according to United Nations assessments.

This alarming situation underscores the imperative for immediate action and solidarity from the international

community. Addressing concerns about the lack of access for journalists and the rising casualties among media personnel in Gaza, Blinken reaffirmed the principle of ensuring media presence in conflict zones.

In response, Israel’s diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva refuted the accusations, asserting its efforts to provide aid to Gaza.

However, aid workers on the ground contend that security challenges, exacerbated by Israeli actions, have hampered relief efforts, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. As Blinken prepares for his upcoming diplomatic engagements in the region, including meetings with Saudi and Egyptian leaders, the focus remains on garnering support for a post-war plan to stabilize and govern Gaza.

# Lawyers invoke presidential immunity for Zardari

NAB prosecutor contends essential to first determine whether this court can hear the Park Lane case as per existing laws

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari’s lawyers invoked presidential immunity on Tuesday as an accountability court heard the Park Lane reference. Zardari’s counsels, Farooq H Naek and Arshad Tabraiz contended that Zardari, having been elected the president now, has presidential immunity.

The Accountability Court then asked whether the case could progress against the co-accused. Zardari’s legal representatives responded affirmatively that legal action could proceed against the

remaining defendants. The NAB prosecutor contended that this case pertains to a private bank. It would first need to be determined whether this court could even hear it, as per the existing laws.

He further said deputy prosecutor Azhar Maqbool Shah has presented arguments concerning other references, adding that he would also argue this reference at the next hearing. The court adjourned the hearing till April 17.

The Park Lane reference alleges Zardari of influencing relevant authorities during his previous term as the

president – from 2008 to 2013 – to obtain loans for his ‘front companies’. NAB claimed that Harish and Company was the frontline firm of Zardari’s Park Lane Estate which caused a loss of Rs60 million to the national exchequer.

The former president allegedly received a loan of Rs1.5 billion released for Parthenon Private Limited “with ill intention”, and the money was later transferred for his personal use through fake bank accounts. NAB accused the former president of causing the national exchequer a loss of Rs3.77 billion.

## Senate polls’ 2nd second phase kicks off

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The second phase of the Senate elections has kicked off nationwide, with returning officers initiating the process of scrutinizing the candidates’ credentials. Commencing today, the scrutiny of nomination papers will span across today and tomorrow (Wednesday), ensuring a thorough assessment of candidates vying for Senate seats. Four candidates are contending for two seats in the federal capital, Islamabad.

Polling for the Senate elections is set for April 2, preceded by the issuance of a revised candidate list on March 26 and a window for withdrawal of nomination papers until March 27. In the federal capital, members of the National Assembly will cast their votes to elect senators for one general seat and one seat for technocrats, including Ulema.

Similarly, members of the four provincial assemblies will participate in the selection process, electing senators for various seats, including general, women, and technocrats, in accordance with provincial quotas. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 42 candidates have submitted their nomination papers, with 25 vying for general seats, 10 for technocrats and Ulema seats, and seven women candidates for reserved seats.

## Bilawal extends heartfelt Nowruz greetings

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: Chairman of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, extends warm greetings and heartfelt congratulations to all communities celebrating the joyous occasion of Nowruz.

Nowruz, the harbinger of the Persian New Year, is embraced by diverse cultures and communities worldwide, including a significant populace in Pakistan.

In a press release from the Media Cell at Bilawal House, the PPP chairman expressed that Nowruz embodies themes of renewal, hope, and unity. "On this auspicious day, I extend heartfelt congratulations to all Pakistanis, including the esteemed Parsi community, who celebrate Nowruz with traditional fervor and joy," he added.

Recognizing the Parsi community’s integral role in Pakistan’s diverse cultural landscape, he acknowledged their significant contributions to the nation’s social, economic, and cultural tapestry.

# US envoy pledges to bolster economic cooperation

Talks centered on enhancing the nation's tax administration and support for IMF plan

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador Donald Blome met on Tuesday with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb to discuss further US cooperation and support for Pakistan’s efforts to meet its reform targets.

According to the statement released by the Embassy of the United States of America, the talks centered on enhancing the nation’s tax administration and investment climate—a key priority for Pakistan. Ambassador Blome emphasized the United States’

steadfast support for Pakistan’s collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to conclude its current Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) successfully.

Blome also emphasized his dedication to broadening US-Pakistan economic collaboration in areas of common interest.

A day earlier, President Asif Ali Zardari and Ambassador Blome met to discuss a broad range of issues important to their bilateral relationship, including US support for continued economic reforms, human rights and regional security.

## PM resolves to foster ties with Kuwait

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif resolved on Tuesday to foster bilateral ties with Kuwait. Kuwait Ambassador to Pakistan Nassar Abdulrahman Jasser Almutairi called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to bolster bilateral relations. PM Shehbaz underscored Pakistan’s deep-rooted bond with Kuwait and expressed gratitude for Kuwait’s support, extending an invitation to the Amir of Kuwait for a visit.

Highlighting recent agreements worth US\$10 billion, PM Shehbaz emphasized the importance of swift implementation. The ambassador commended Pakistan’s support during difficult times and expressed Kuwait’s commitment to strengthening ties. PM Shehbaz lauded Ambassador Almutairi’s efforts in enhancing Pakistan-Kuwait relations.



ISLAMABAD: Kuwait Ambassador to Pakistan Nassar Abdulrahman Jasser Almutairi called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to bolster bilateral relations, here on Tuesday.—MM photo

## President, PM are Nab graduates: Ex PM

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said the President and Prime Minister are graduates of the NAB, having spent a long time in NAB’s jails.

Speaking to the media outside the Islamabad Accountability Court, he says that my fifth year in NAB



courts has begun, the first nine years were spent, and now it has been five years. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi says that although all the top officials did not go to jail, they were included in NAB investigations, and it is the responsibility of the government to repeal NAB laws. He said that the spectacle of NAB should end, no officer in the country is ready to work, they fear NAB, it was heard that the PML-N said that they would abolish NAB.

The former Prime Minister said that as NAB cases are made, they can also end, the NAB institution has been created but the people have not benefited from it, unfortunately, the government does not tell the people why inflation happens. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi also said that he does not want to say anything about Maryam Nawaz’s tenure as Punjab’s Chief Minister. On the other hand, the Islamabad Accountability Court has adjourned the hearing on the LNG reference against former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

# Naqvi urges new laws for online speech

Interior minister stresses that misuse of social media 'needs to be kept in check'

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said Tuesday the country needed better laws to regulate internet free speech, as disruption of social media platform X stretched into its fifth week. Islamabad has declined to clearly say whether it is behind nationwide restrictions to the platform, formerly known as Twitter, which left it rarely accessible since February 17.

"In a country like the US where such things (ban) are taking place, we will also need to review our law and make sure that there is 'no ban' on the freedom of expression," Naqvi added. The interior minister emphasized that the misuse of social media which results in levelling unfounded allegations "needs to be kept in check." "We need to make better laws," the minister said when asked whether his min-

istry was responsible for the X shutdown.

"Expression is fine, but making false allegations against people is wrong – it’s happening and needs to be fixed." "We must reassess our own laws and look into what is being misused," he told the media. X, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok were key planks in the election campaigning of jailed ex-prime minister and popular opposition leader Imran Khan.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Major General (ret’d) Hafeezur Rehman said that the authority had not received any written order from the interior ministry regarding the closure of X. While answering a question regarding Information Minister Attaullah Tarar’s acknowledgement of the closure, Rehman stated that Tarar should be questioned for any information on X.

## Court acquits Hassan, Hussain Nawaz in three NAB cases

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad acquitted on Tuesday former premier Nawaz Sharif’s sons, Hassan and Hussain Nawaz, in the Avenfield, Flagship, and Al-Azizia cases. The court, presided by Judge Nasir Javed Rana, had reserved its verdict.

During the hearing earlier today, NAB prosecutor Afzal Qureshi informed the court

that no appeal was filed against the acquittal of Nawaz’s sons or incumbent Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. He added that the main accused in the case had been acquitted earlier.

The petitioner’s counsel, Advocate Qazi Misbah, stated that the Islamabad High Court (IHC) acquitted Nawaz after relying on the same documents that supported Maryam’s acquittal.

News Desk

OTTAWA: A resolution from the federal New Democrats initially calling on Canada to recognize the "State of Palestine" passed amid widespread acrimony on Monday, after the Liberals drastically altered its wording to see the government simply work towards that aim as part of a two-state solution.

As per the Canadian media, after appearing destined to fail when the governing Liberals vowed Monday to not let the opposition sway its foreign policy, Government House Leader Steven Mackinnon shocked MPs on both sides of the aisle when he rose in the final minutes of debate to advance a nearly 500-word motion that rephrased considerable portions of the NDP motion.

The federal New Democ-



rats proposed a resolution in Canada to recognize the "State of Palestine," but the Liberals modified it to focus on pursuing peace in the Middle East through a two-state solution. Despite last-minute changes, the motion passed amidst controversy, with NDP

claiming a victory. The altered motion received support from Liberal, NDP, Bloc Quebecois, and Green MPs, while Conservatives opposed it.

The debate highlighted tensions, with concerns raised about the process and implications of the resolution.

Despite differing views, the focus remains on achieving peace and stability in the region amidst ongoing conflict. After generating considerable international attention and division among MPs during a nearly day-long debate, the non-binding but symbolic

NDP motion ultimately passed 204 to 117.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and almost all Liberal MPs voted in favour, alongside NDP, Bloc Quebecois and Green MPs. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his party voted against the proposal.

While nearly every element of the motion was altered (opens in a new tab), arguably the biggest change came in the final line.

That line originally asked the House to call on the government to "officially recognize the State of Palestine," but was rewritten to say: "work with international partners to actively pursue the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including towards the establishment of the State of Palestine as part of a negotiated two-state solution."



# Pakistan nears agreement with IMF

Regular talks with IMF on a new loan program will be held in Washington next month

By Zaheer Sheikh

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's ongoing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding an economic review entered their final round today, following a one-day extension granted yesterday.

Sources within the Finance Ministry disclosed that these discussions will chiefly concentrate on drafting a letter of intent and finalizing the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies. Statements from the Ministry of Finance indicate that the negotiations have proceeded smoothly, with no apparent deadlocks or impediments hindering progress. Originally slated



from March 14 to 18, the talks are advancing toward a fruitful resolution in a constructive and positive manner, ministry sources revealed.

Officials emphasized Pakistan's timely and earnest efforts in meeting the IMF's prescribed objec-

tives, underscoring the commitment to sustained economic reforms. Upon the successful conclusion of negotiations, Pakistan and the IMF are poised to sign a staff-level agreement, affirming the country's dedication to continuing economic restructuring. This agree-

ment is anticipated to unlock the release of the final tranche totaling \$1.1 billion under the \$3 billion standby arrangement, of which Pakistan has already received \$1.9 billion.

The IMF Executive Board will be urged to greenlight the tranche for Pakistan's benefit. Despite failing to reach an agreement within the initial timeframe ending on March 18, Pakistani authorities maintain that all IMF conditions have been met. They noted compliance with the requirement for a stringent monetary policy, with the policy rate holding steady at 22%. Pakistan has provided assurances to the IMF regarding substantial reforms

in the energy and taxation sectors, while the IMF seeks further elucidation on external financing arrangements.

Talks slated for today may lead to the signing of a staff-level agreement and potentially pave the way for a new loan program negotiation with the IMF. Finalization of the letter of intent is expected to occur following additional discussions, with the IMF Executive Board formalizing approval of the prospective agreement in April. Moreover, regular negotiations on the new loan program are scheduled to take place in Washington next month, reinforcing Pakistan's commitment to fiscal stability and growth.

## PPP issues Senate tickets to Balochistan's candidates

By Ismail Baloch

GWADAR: The Pakistan People's Party on Tuesday issued party tickets to candidates from Balochistan for the forthcoming Senate elections. Sardar Umar Khan Gorgage, Mir Changez Khan Jamali, Mir Tariq Masoori, Ijaz Baloch, and Kiran Baloch had been issued party tickets. Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, among others, distributed the party tickets to the candidates.

Few days back, the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians sought applications from candidates for the Senate elections. PPP leader Nayyar Bukhari said: "The applications can be submitted until March 14." Bukhari had asked the candidates willing to contest the elections to send their applications to Zardari House in Islamabad and Bilawal House in Karachi." Bukhari said: "The applications should be sent under the name of the PPPP." A bank draft of Rs 100,000 should be attached in the name of the PPPP with the application.

## Sindh to launch crackdown against drug lords

By Saima Baloch

KARACHI: Sindh Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon reiterated his commitment to curb the menace of drugs on Tuesday. Expressing his thoughts, Memon said: "The actions will be taken daily as we get to eliminate the scourge of drugs." He added: "The youth has to be taken out of the clutches of drug dealers."

Memon made it clear that teams consisting of competent officers will be formed to launch a crackdown against drug dealers.

"The officers who will deliver in this regard will be awarded with prizes and honors," he added.

## IHC seeks AG's response on cipher case appeals

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued on Tuesday a notice to the Advocate General, calling for a response to appeals lodged against the conviction of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in the cipher case.

IHC Chief Justice Aamir Farooq and Justice Mian Gul Aurangzeb heard the case in which notable figures including family members of Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi, elected representatives, senators, and legal experts also attended. Lawyers representing Imran Khan and Shah Mehmood Qureshi, namely Salman Safdar, Sikandar Zulqarnain, and others, presented arguments before the bench.

Salman Safdar, the legal representative of the accused, initiated the proceedings by scrutinizing the procedural aspects of the case. He highlighted alleged discrepancies in the filing process of the FIR, emphasizing irregularities in dates



and the absence of crucial documentation linking the defendants to the case.

Drawing attention to the role of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the initiation of the inquiry, Safdar underscored the necessity of adhering to legal protocols. He asserted that the inquiry allegedly commenced prior to the formal filing of the complaint, casting doubt on the integrity of the investigation process.

In response to queries from the bench regarding the conduct of the trial, the defense stressed the importance of upholding the principles of fair trial as enshrined in Article 10-A. They raised concerns over the timing and conduct of the trial, suggest-

ing potential infringements on the defendants' rights.

The court, while acknowledging the complexity of the case, underscored the need to ensure a transparent and equitable legal process. Chief Justice Amir Farooq emphasized the significance of cross-examination and expressed a commitment to upholding the defendants' rights throughout the proceedings.

Furthermore, the court deliberated on the status of the government-appointed lawyers and sought clarification on their standing in the case. The defense reiterated concerns over the timing of the trial and highlighted challenges faced during the proceedings.

## Army arranges learning tour for Bajaur's students

By Mehrab Shah Afridi

BAJAUR: The Pakistan Army organized a four-day educational event for 30 students from various schools and colleges in Bajaur district. This initiative, part of the "Education for All" campaign, aimed to broaden the students' horizons by engaging them in the rich history and educational fabric of prominent cities across Pakistan.

The journey commenced in Rawalpindi, where the students were invited to visit the Army Museum, Army Institute of Military History, NUST, and iconic landmarks like the Pakistan Monument and Faisal Mosque in Islamabad. Moving on to Lahore, the students explored the cultural heritage of the city, visiting renowned sites such as Minar-e-Pakistan, Badshahi Masjid, Mazar-e-Iqbal, Army Museum Lahore, Alama Iqbal Residency, and the vibrant spectacle of the Wagah Border.

The final part of their trip led them to Peshawar, where the students were captivated by the majestic beauty of the historic Bala Hisar Fort.

## VC SALU sent on forced leave again

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: Due to delays in the investigation of the video scandal by the FIA, Vice Chancellor of Shah Abdul Latif University, Dr. Khaili Abu Poto, has been sent on compulsory leave for the third time.

However, this time he has been sent on leave for 60 days. In his absence, Vice Chancellor of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University Nawabshah, Dr. Amanat Jalbani, will serve as the acting Vice Chancellor of Shah Abdul Latif University for an additional charge for 60 days.

## METRO MATTERS

### President's vision 'not aid but trade'

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Shazia Marri, the spokesperson for the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians, has stated that President Asif Ali Zardari's vision of 'Aid, Not Trade' needs to be effectively implemented.

In a statement, Shazia Marri remarked that Bilawal Bhutto wants the perks enjoyed by the rich to be converted into relief for the poor. She emphasized that the Pakistan People's Party aims for political and economic stability in the country. Shazia Marri also asserted that the NFC Award is the constitutional right of the provinces, and efforts should be made to boost the morale of farmers, as they are the ones who will ultimately ensure food security in the country.

### One assailant dead, six arrested in Korangi clash

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a dramatic turn of events in Korangi, citizens retaliated against dacoits, resulting in the death of one assailant in Zaman Town, Gulberg. The police, in a swift response, apprehended six dacoits, including three who were injured, in the municipal area. According to details, a notorious dacoit identified as Dhayy Number fell victim to the citizens' aggression while allegedly attempting to flee from the jurisdiction of Korangi police station. The public apprehended the dacoit and subjected him to violence, resulting in his demise. No valuables were recovered from the dacoit's possession, and his identity remains unknown as biometric verification is underway.

Investigations are ongoing regarding the incident. In Iltehad Town, the police attempted to intercept three suspicious individuals riding motorcycles, leading to an exchange of gunfire. In the ensuing operation, the police managed to apprehend Bilal and two others, Zeeshan and Muhammad Abbas, seizing two illegal pistols, a Honda 125 motorcycle, and four mobile phones from the suspects. The criminals had previously carried out a robbery two days ago on the Sher Shah Paracha Bridge, where they robbed Dilawar Ali of his mobile phone and cash after shooting him. One of the suspects, during the robbery, also inflicted injuries on Dilawar Ali.

The recovered mobile phone stolen during the incident has been retrieved. Additionally, in Gulberg, near Alahiya Masjid, a shootout occurred between the police and dacoits who had fled after committing a robbery. One dacoit, Muhammad Sunni, son of Muhammad Ramazan, was arrested in injured condition with a 9mm pistol recovered from his possession. Three stolen mobile phones and a motorcycle were also found. In Federal B Area, near Tariq Ground, during a confrontation with street criminals, two-way firing resulted in the arrest of one dacoit, Shahid, son of Zameer, in injured condition. Meanwhile, the second accomplice, Usman, son of Ghani, took advantage of the darkness and fled on a motorcycle. The police recovered a loaded 9mm pistol magazine from the scene.

### Fire breaks out at café Bogie in Cantt Station

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A sudden blaze erupted at Café Bogie restaurant in Cantonment Station, swiftly brought under control by two fire brigade vehicles. According to fire brigade officials, the blaze caused smoke to spread throughout the café bogie. Railway police and other rescue agencies also rushed to the scene. It took the fire brigade's two vehicles several hours to bring the situation under control. The Deputy Commissioner stated that the café bogie had been closed for some time when the incident occurred, and there were no occupants inside.

As all doors were closed when the fire broke out, it is possible that someone may have thrown something from outside. According to fire brigade authorities, the causes of the fire could not be ascertained, and no significant damage occurred, although the café bogie burned to ashes due to the fire.

### ANF seizes 52kg narcotics in crackdown

By our correspondent

KARACHI: ANF continues its crackdown against drug smuggling, with 52 kilograms of narcotics seized in 5 operations, leading to the arrest of 4 suspects. At Islamabad Airport, 440 grams of ice were confiscated from a passenger bound for Qatar.

In another operation at Islamabad Airport, 54 heroin-filled capsules and 4 suspicious substances were recovered from a passenger traveling to Karachi.

Similarly, at Lahore Airport, 70 heroin-filled capsules were seized from a passenger bound for Abu Dhabi. Near Tarnol on the Islamabad Expressway, 1 kilogram of charas was seized from a woman.

Legal proceedings under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been initiated against the arrested suspects, and investigations have been launched.

### Police bust city-wide robbery ring

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Police have arrested ten dacoits involved in city-wide robberies and the buying and selling of stolen motorcycle spare parts. According to details, SITE-B Police apprehended armed dacoit Muhammad Sabir along with a stolen Honda 125 motorcycle.

However, the mastermind, Azhar, managed to escape during the operation. The illegal pistol seized from the suspect's possession and the stolen Honda 125 motorcycle were recovered from the SITE-B area. The suspect revealed details of street crimes during interrogation. Meanwhile, Malir Cantt Police arrested two suspects, Muzammil and Shoaib, involved in motorcycle lifting and street crimes. One 30-bore pistol and one stolen motorcycle were recovered.

Jackson Police arrested Akhtar Gul, involved in the buying and selling of stolen motorcycle spare parts, and recovered seven chassis, three engines, and a large number of motorcycle spare parts.

New Karachi Industrial Area Police arrested Ali Raza alias Mitha, who injured a laborer during a robbery attempt, along with his two accomplices, identified as Arshad and Babar.

One pistol with rounds and a mobile phone were recovered from the suspect's possession. Saudabad Police arrested Haseeb, involved in street crimes, and recovered weapons. The suspect confessed to multiple crimes during interrogation.

### Key suspects arrested with weapons in Old Golimar

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Three key suspects involved in operating a narcotics network in the old Golimar area have been apprehended along with weapons and drugs. The apprehended suspects include infamous drug dealers Riasat Jaddgal and Kashif Dada, who were operating the narcotics network in the vicinity of Golimar and its surrounding areas.

The arrested individuals, identified as Aje alias Ayan, Omar, and Lal Mohammad, were captured in a targeted operation in the old Golimar area. Among the arrested suspects, Omar and Aje are managers of the drug-selling operation managed by Riasat Jaddgal and Kashif Dada, who operate their narcotics network in the old Golimar and adjoining areas.

These suspects have also been involved in gang-related activities. During interrogation, Lal Mohammad disclosed hiding weapons at his residence and providing shelter to gang members. From the possession of the arrested suspects, three illegal pistols, ammunition, and 173 grams of ice were recovered.

### Police bust fake juice factory in Clifton

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Police raided a factory producing fake juices under the names of major companies in Clifton. Five suspects involved in producing fake juices were arrested. During the raid, 30 cartons of harmful counterfeit juice, 15 cartons of chemicals, packaging materials, and other items used in the production of juice were recovered. The suspects have been identified as Umair, Farhan, Jawed, Afnan, and Imran. They were selling fake juice across the city. Fake juice is extremely detrimental to health. Legal proceedings have been initiated against the suspects.

### Prisoner's tragic suicide in Malir jail after AIDS diagnosed

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A prisoner in Malir Jail committed suicide upon receiving a positive AIDS diagnosis. Jail Superintendent Khan Ali Hassan Zardari has been directed to investigate the incident. Prisoner Azir Khan Jadon jumped to his death.

Jail Superintendent Khan Ali Hassan Zardari has instructed the IG Sindh to conduct an investigation into the incident. The IG Jail has been directed to complete an immediate inquiry and submit a report. The prisoner tested positive for HIV, leading to mental distress. The Provincial Minister for Prisons expressed condolences to the family of the deceased.

## Pakistani wins Rs22m SUV in UAE raffle draw

News Desk

DUBAI: A Pakistani man, currently residing in Saudi Arabia with his wife and six children, experienced an unexpected stroke of luck as he emerged as the proud winner of a Maserati Grecale GT worth Dh300,000 (approximately PKR22 million) during the recent 'Dream Car' draw in the UAE, Khaleej Times reports.

Muhammad Umar Farooq, employed in the marketing department of his son's trading company, frequently shuttles between the UAE and Saudi Arabia for work. It was during his travels, while passing through various airports in the UAE,

that he became acquainted with the enticing advertisements promoting the Dream Car raffle.

Intrigued by the prospect of winning big, Umar decided to take a chance and participate. "I have been purchasing the ticket on my own for the past 2-3 years. My motivation to try out Big Ticket was simply to try my luck," he revealed. When questioned about his plans for the luxurious Maserati, Umar disclosed, "I will sell the car and continue participating in Big Ticket draws. My advice to everyone is to continue to try your luck with Big Ticket – you shouldn't give up without continuing to try."



DUBAI: Muhammad Umar Farooq walks away with a Maserati Grecale GT during 'Dream Car' draw—MM photo

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## President’s impartiality ‘?’

The recent flurry of statements on social media regarding the health of Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari underscores a significant confluence of concerns. Particularly noteworthy is the commentary by seasoned journalist Hameed Mir, who has offered insights into the president's mental well-being. However, verifying any news disseminated on social media platforms remains a daunting task, and it is essential to distinguish speculation from substantiated facts. Zardari, known for his political acumen, has long been a prominent figure in national politics. The notion that such a seasoned politician could make a misstep, especially concerning his own daughter, is unexpected. Recently, newspapers and television channels carried sensational headlines about Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, the youngest children of Benazir Bhutto and Asif Zardari, being bestowed with the title of Pakistan's First Lady. In the annals of political history, the appointment of the family members to positions of power has long been a contentious issue, often sparking debates surrounding 'nepotism' and 'ethical' governance. However, the recent nomination of Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, daughter of President Zardari, to contest elections from her father's vacated seat has ignited a fresh wave of scrutiny and deliberation. While such familial succession is not unprecedented, the intertwining of political ambition with the sanctity of the presidency raises complex legal and ethical questions that demand careful consideration.

At the heart of this debate lies the delicate balance between the apolitical nature of the presidency and the political aspirations of its occupants. As the First Lady, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari occupies a unique position, wielding both symbolic influence and practical privileges that accompany her role. However, the prospect of her engagement in active political endeavors while holding the prestigious title of 'First Lady' raises concerns about the potential blurring of lines between official duties and partisan interests. Central to this discourse is the legal framework governing the conduct of public officials and their family members. While our legal system is equipped to address such intricacies, the integrity of these laws is called into question when those entrusted with upholding them appear to flout their principles. Thus, it becomes imperative to ascertain whether Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's participation in electoral politics aligns with the legal boundaries delineated for individuals occupying her esteemed position.

Moreover, the specter of potential misuse of official privileges looms large, casting a shadow over the integrity of our democratic institutions. Should Aseefa Bhutto Zardari choose to pursue political ambitions, the concern arises as to whether she would adhere to official protocols or leverage her privileged status for personal gain. In such a scenario, the principles of justice and fairness must prevail, ensuring that no individual, regardless of their familial ties, is exempt from accountability and scrutiny. As Pakistan grapples with the implications of this unprecedented development, it is incumbent upon lawmakers, legal experts, and civil society to engage in robust dialogue and deliberation. The sanctity of the presidency and the integrity of our democratic processes hinge upon the prudent navigation of these complex legal and ethical waters, ensuring that the principles of transparency, accountability, and justice remain paramount in all facets of governance.

## Our approach towards Israel

As we vehemently decry the injustices inflicted upon Palestinians by the relentless Zionist regime, it's incumbent upon us to acknowledge our complicity in bolstering this oppressive state. Our vocal condemnations and social media posts resonate with the plight of the Palestinian people, yet we lament the inaction of Muslim governments and armies in curbing Israel's genocidal rampage against Palestinians. We express outrage at the unwavering support Israel receives from the governments of the United States, Britain, and many European and Western countries, disdaining their complicity. The helplessness of the United Nations further exacerbates our dismay. In contrast, we admire protests in Western countries advocating for Gaza and Palestinians' rights while vehemently opposing Israel's actions. We eagerly share videos of boycotts against Israeli products and brands, showcasing our efforts to economically damage Israel if we cannot halt its atrocities.

For some time now, there has been a campaign in our country to boycott Israeli beverages, products, and franchises, with significant public participation. However, many have now reverted to their old habits. Israeli drinks and products are once again in demand in various cities, consumed at weddings and used in households as before.

Advertisements in newspapers and on TV promote these products, encouraging increased consumption. Even amidst Israel's atrocities, Israeli and Jewish companies sponsor the Pakistani Super League (PSL). All of this amounts to strengthening the hands of Israel, which has claimed the lives of nearly thirty thousand Palestinians, including children and women, turning Gaza into ruins and depriving its population of basic necessities.

Despite these circumstances, Palestinians face severe difficulties in accessing food and medicine due to Israeli restrictions.

Many of us have only recently become aware that numerous items used in our homes are Israeli or products of Jewish companies that support Israel's aggression. We've realized that most soaps, laundry detergents, cooking oil, cosmetics, soft drinks, juices, makeup products, dairy products, chips, chocolates, biscuits, and more, originate from Israel.

Now, the onus is on us to decide whether to boycott products from Israeli and pro-Israeli Jewish companies or continue engaging in their purchase and sale.

By boycotting such products, we can, at least, take a stand against Israel's oppression. Conversely, by not boycotting, we financially aid Israel, contributing to the oppression faced by our Palestinian brethren. Let's refrain from becoming complicit in this injustice.

By Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Like many nations burdened by debt, Egypt once again found itself navigating a storm of economic challenges, a scenario all too familiar to Pakistan.

With an external debt-to-GDP ratio breaching the 42 per cent mark as of September 2023 and short-term liabilities teetering close to \$40 billion against a backdrop of dwindling foreign reserves pegged at \$35 billion, the macroeconomic quandary was palpable, and the inflation last August had crossed 40 per cent.

External shocks – notably, the unfortunate situation in the Middle East and the Red Sea's vicissitudes – further muddled the waters, jeopardizing critical foreign exchange lifelines such as tourism and Suez Canal revenues. In 2022-23, against the odds, the tourism sector did not do that badly, with earnings clocking in at a commendable \$13.6 billion. Nonetheless, the looming spectre of inflation was rekindled by the Red Sea tumult and a stark nosedive in Suez Canal receipts, which halved in January 2024 compared to the year prior, heralding potential trade disruptions and shortages.

In a bid to staunch the economic haemorrhage, Egypt, the second largest debtor of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after Argentina, once again courted the IMF for succour, culminating in a strategic entente last week. This pact, a lifeline intended to shore up Egypt's faltering economy, was predicated on ensuring debt sustainability, recalibrating price stability, and spurring private sector-led growth through a gamut of structural reforms.

The key terms and conditions agreed between the IMF and Egypt include shifting to a flexible exchange rate system; monetary and fiscal policy tightening, including containing off-budget capital expenditure and recalibration of infrastructure expenditures; targeted budget support for vulnerable households through an expansion in coverage of the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programmes; and balancing public and private sector roles through reducing the state

footprint and strengthening the ability of the private sector to better contribute to economic growth.

Building upon a previous \$3 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) from December 2022, this accord burgeoned into an \$8 billion lifeline, including a \$1.2 billion tranche earmarked for environmental sustainability endeavours. It's important to note that under the prior arrangement, Egypt struggled with implementing a market-based exchange rate, divesting state assets, and curtailing the military's economic footprint, leading to a delay in the first review of the 2022 EFF initially slated for March 2023.

Parallel to this IMF pact, Egypt clinched a land agreement with the UAE sovereign fund ADQ, a move criticized by the opposition, but it did channel critical liquidity into the domestic economy. The \$35 billion pact, inked on February 23 for the Ras al-Hikma coastal development, not only encompassed a \$24 billion land acquisition but also the strategic reallocation of \$11 billion from the UAE's pre-existing Central Bank deposits in Egypt. This monumental investment is poised to catalyze an additional \$150 billion in investments, envisaging Ras al-Hikma's metamorphosis into a vibrant economic nexus, thereby bolstering employment and propelling growth, with Egypt maintaining a 35 per cent stake in the venture.

The currency flotation that ensued saw the Egyptian pound depreciate to 50 per dollar from a previous rate of 30, marking the fifth devaluation since April 2022; the black-market rate ominously surged to 70. The Central Bank of Egypt also increased its overnight lending rate by 600 points to 28.25 per cent.

This financial recalibration and the UAE's capital injection have kindled a spectrum of reactions within Egypt. While the government heralds these developments as a panacea for the prevailing macroeconomic malaise, dissent brews among civil society, underscored by vociferous opposition from social movements, NGOs, and legal circles, criticizing President Sisi for selling off Egypt's pristine beaches and apprehensive

of the austerity's bite and its ramifications on the vulnerable.

Despite the criticism, the initial tranche of the Emirati investment pegged at \$10 billion and expected to be completed within the next two months, is anticipated to mitigate the adverse impacts of the devaluation, thereby alleviating banking constraints and easing the remittance flows.

The economic sagas of Egypt and Pakistan, particularly their frequent engagement with the IMF (Pakistan is the fourth largest borrower of the IMF), mirror each other's struggles with the cyclical nature of the crisis, intervention, and temporary reprieve. This pattern highlights a critical challenge: the difficulty of sustaining reform momentum post-IMF intervention, a challenge compounded by a lack of political ownership and a tendency to revert to short-term political expediences at the expense of long-term economic stability.

Both nations also grapple with the ramifications of external shocks, such as global commodity price fluctuations or geopolitical tensions, which can derail economic progress and magnify existing vulnerabilities. Both have also struggled with structural issues, including governance challenges and the need for deeper institutional reforms, which can impede the long-term success of IMF-supported programmes.

Egypt's case, particularly its recent IMF deal and the consequential sale of a significant stake in Ras al Hikma, exemplifies the high stakes and complex decisions countries face in the throes of economic distress. For Pakistan, Egypt's experience is not merely a distant tale but a mirror that reflects on its economic challenges and the potential strategies for recovery.

Two crucial lessons emerge from Egypt's experience. First, the international community's willingness to assist is often tinged with geopolitical considerations. The IMF, which had suspended its 2022 program with Egypt due to a lack of progress, willingly increased the loan amount by nearly three times in 2024, thanks to its strategic importance. It is obvious that Egypt's potential role as an interlocutor between Hamas and Is-

rael amidst the Gaza conflict catalysed a more favourable engagement from the IMF and international stakeholders.

This highlights the geopolitical dimension of economic bailouts, an aspect where Pakistan's situation diverges following the Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan, diminishing its leverage in international negotiations.

Second, the concept of economic sovereignty and the inherent costs of financial rescues become starkly apparent. Egypt's concession of Ras al Hikma underscores a stark reality: financial aid, especially from fraternal nations, often carries hidden costs, potentially demanding painful sacrifices of national assets. Pakistan's reliance on financial rollovers from allies like China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, while currently beneficial, might similarly necessitate unwelcome compromises in the future.

As Pakistan steers through these turbulent economic waters, the importance of comprehensive and sustainable reform becomes increasingly evident. The path forward entails a rigorous commitment to structural adjustments that transcend the immediacies of fiscal balancing acts. This encompasses a broad spectrum of reforms aimed at enlarging the tax base, enhancing revenue and improving its quality (more reliance on direct taxes), rationalizing public expenditures, and addressing the perennial challenges in the energy sector and state-owned enterprises.

The essence of this reformative journey lies in fortifying governance and institutional integrity, which are essential bedrock for fostering economic resilience and growth in the absence of geopolitical leverage.

With its blend of geopolitical manoeuvring and hard economic choices, Egypt's story offers Pakistan a valuable perspective on the complex interplay of international finance and national policymaking. As Pakistan forges its path toward economic recovery, the insights gleaned from Egypt's engagements with the IMF and its broader economic strategy highlight the critical need for a nuanced, multifaceted approach that balances immediate economic exigencies with long-term structural reforms.

## The price of extremism

By Husain Haqqani

After a flurry of praise for the police officer who saved her life, most Pakistanis seem to have forgotten the incident in Lahore involving the woman who was accused of blasphemy for wearing a dress with Arabic calligraphy. That a woman was almost lynched for wearing clothes that an illiterate crowd mistook for religious text highlights Pakistan's extremism problem.

Dismissing events like this incident as outliers or choosing to ignore them will not prevent them from occurring again. In December 2021, the Sri Lankan manager of a factory in Sialkot was beaten to death and set ablaze by a mob over allegations of blasphemy that turned out to be spurious. The woman in Lahore with the dress bearing Arabic language words was lucky that she escaped a similar fate.

The dress worn by the woman in question bore the word 'Halwa' in Arabic script. The word means beautiful in Arabic, and it is not uncommon in the Muslim world for Arabic calligraphy to be used to adorn dresses, buildings, and much more. But the irrational environment in Pakistan over religious matters, especially allegations of blasphemy, put the woman's life at risk. The international publicity over the incident ensured that everyone around the world who might be thinking of doing business with Pakistan had to think about facing similar risks.

Nations pay a hefty price when the rest

of the world sees them as irrational or extreme. Racist violence, for example, acts as a disincentive for business travelers belonging to different races from traveling to countries where race is an issue. In the case of Pakistan, religious extremism and vigilantism have become a factor in the decisions of potential investors and merchants.

Two days after the Lahore incident, an Arab businessman remarked to me that he immediately thought of his wife and daughters. "They wear Arabic calligraphy designs as part of their dress," he said, adding, "I was thinking of expanding my business to Pakistan, but do I want to walk through Lahore or Karachi with my wife or daughters, risking such attacks?"

Pakistan already has the world's toughest blasphemy laws and blasphemy is punishable by death after a trial. But some groups do not wait for the law to take its course and want to act as judge, jury, and executioner. Several people have been lynched before their cases go to trial and those acquitted due to lack of evidence are also attacked as if the allegation of blasphemy requires no proof other than the allegation itself.

Judges, too, have to fear the backlash of those who pretend to be all-knowing while hearing such cases. Instead of making Pakistani society more religious or pious, the practice of whipping up a crowd in a religious frenzy has created situations in which mobs lose all fear of God. Even in the recent case of the woman wearing the

Arabic calligraphy dress, the crowd had to be pacified with an apology from the woman though she had done nothing wrong. As Maulana Tahir Ashrafi pointed out, the men in the crowd, rather than the woman, should have been the ones to apologize.

Government after government in Pakistan has appeased groups that use religious slogans to divide and scare Pakistanis. Some have even seen the extremists as guarantors of Pakistan's security or as instruments of Pakistani influence across the border in Afghanistan or Kashmir. But the net impact of nurturing a religious outrage industry has only been to undermine Pakistan's external relations and weaken its economy. Official data suggests that between 2001 and 2018 "the direct and indirect cost incurred by Pakistan due to incidents of terrorism" amounted to \$123.13 billion.

Add to it the cost of fostering a society driven by anger and unable to figure out its real place in the modern world. Since falling under Western colonial rule, the Muslim world has developed a narrative of grievance and Pakistan is no exception. Like all national and community narratives, it has some true elements. But the current weakness of the Muslim world or of Pakistan is not entirely the fault of Western colonialism or postcolonial machinations.

Pakistanis must understand the consequences of low literacy rates, poor quality of higher education, and low female participation in the workforce. Instead, they are

fed narratives of conspiracy theories and hate against more powerful nations and a steady diet of religious-sounding rhetoric that is more political than religious.

On March 6, 1948, Pakistan's first opposition leader, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (who later became prime minister for a short time) warned the country's earliest leaders against building "a state which would be founded upon caucuses and coteries, a state which will be founded on sentiments, namely that of Islam in danger or of Pakistan in danger."

According to Suhrawardy, "a state which will be held together by raising the bogey of attacks and which you keep together by keeping up a constant friction between yourself and your sister Dominion [India], that state will be full of alarms and excursions. You think that you will get away with it but in that state there will be no commerce, no business and no trade."

Cautioning against attacks on non-Muslims in the immediate aftermath of partition, Suhrawardy said that such a course will only erode rule of law. "There will be lawlessness and those lawless elements that may be turned today against non-Muslims will be turned later on, once those fratricidal tendencies have been aroused, against the Muslim gentry and I want you to be warned in time," he observed.

Today, those words seem prescient. Even now, a comprehensive strategy of pushing back extremism is the only way forward for a country that faces a multitude of challenges.

## Second time's a charm

By Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

On March 10, I had the honour to attend the oath-taking ceremony of Asif Ali Zardari, the 14th president of Pakistan, at the President House.

On this occasion, newly elected Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif, outgoing President Dr Arif Alvi, family members of Mr Zardari, foreign diplomats, members of parliament, party leaders and dignitaries were also present.

When my article titled 'Election astrology' was published in these pages on December 22, 2023, a new debate started in journalistic circles. Later, in an interview with a private TV channel, I further elaborated on the predictions of Vedic Astrology that in the year 2024, every human being will be well rewarded for good deeds.

Time has proven my election prediction to be correct and true. As per Vedic astrology predictions, the PPP has succeeded in emerging as the kingmaker for government formation, and no one could stop the brave Asif Ali Zardari, with an impressive smile on his face, from sitting on the 'Raj Singhasan' (throne) of Islamabad.

When Mr Zardari was taking oath during the ceremony held in the President House, several prominent political events of the past began to revolve before my eyes.

In 1988, Ms Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of the first elected prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became the first female prime minister of the Muslim world by winning the national elections. Unfortunately, some undemocratic forces tried to topple the government in a short period of one year, and then the next year, a motion of no-confidence was submitted to the speaker of the National Assembly.

When journalists asked about the chances of the success of the opposition, I still remember that Zardari's statement became the headline of newspapers: "I can bet that the case will be the opposite." And then time proved his political vision to be true and accurate when the no-confidence motion, voted in the National Assembly on November 2, 1989, failed,

and Ms Benazir Bhutto was declared successful in saving the government.

However, due to his determination to serve under the banner of the PPP, a series of baseless accusations, political cases and untrue controversies began to malign his good image in the public eyes.

After her government was dissolved in 1990 under Article 58(2)(b), Zardari was arrested unjustifiably. After three years, he was released due to the termination of the next government. Once again, the PPP government was not allowed to complete its constitutional term and in 1996, Zardari was imprisoned for a long period of around eight years.

Zardari reappeared in the national arena at such a critical time when Ms Benazir Bhutto was martyred in a cowardly attack in Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi in December 2007. In such a tough situation, Zardari raised the slogan of 'Pakistan Khappay' bravely and once again played his leading role in strengthening democracy.

After being elected as president to end the dictator era, he willingly surrendered his special presidential powers to empower parliament, which I believe is one of his great achievements in safeguarding democracy in the country.

Undoubtedly, Asif Zardari has made history by being elected as a democratic president for the second time. In this regard, senior journalist Hamid Mir has made a correct analysis that time never stays the same, and it does not take long to change.

There are many ups and downs in the tireless struggle carried out by Zardari. Although he could not see his children grow up in front of him during his imprisonment, the time has come for him to enjoy the innocent antics of his grandchildren.

In my view, Mr Zardari's success with reconciliation policies is a lesson for us that we should make serving the people our priority during our good times and similarly, we should never despair of God's mercy in difficult times. Heartfelt congratulations to President Asif Ali Zardari for assuming the Raj Singhasan (throne) of Islamabad.

By Richard Heinberga

Early this month it was reported that members of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy (which is part of the International Union of Geological Sciences), who had been tasked with adopting or rejecting a proposal to declare that we are in a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene, declined the motion. This comes after years of lobbying by many Earth scientists to formally acknowledge that humanity is in the process of changing the planet in ways that any future geologist would find obvious and undeniable.

My first reaction to the news was disappointment. I've been using the term "Anthropocene" for years, and had the impression that the main opposition to its formal adoption came from those who believe that humanity is incapable of changing Earth systems in ways that will make a difference for thousands or millions of years to come. Assuming that humans are too puny to alter the planet significantly is a mental pathway habitually trodden by climate change deniers, and it's an excuse for doing nothing to avert a hellish future.

However, it turns out that the dispute among the roughly 20 scholars on the subcommission was mainly about whether humanity's impact on Earth should be viewed as an event – like a mass extinction or an asteroid impact – or as the start of a new epoch. The majority favored the former; and, even though the legitimacy of their decision is being questioned, I think they're right.

Ripples from human actions during the last few decades will spread far into the future. However, the consequences of the activities that are currently having profound impacts on the climate, oceans, and biota will limit those activities, so that human-

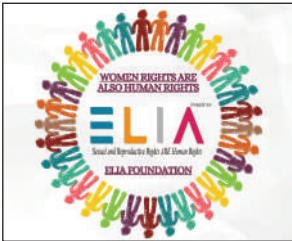
ity's industrial growth-based economy driven by fossil fuels will be mostly if not entirely gone by the end of this century.

There will likely be fewer people on the planet then, and they will have far less power per capita. Earth simply doesn't have enough resources to enable a continuation of population growth and economic expansion for much longer before a decline commences. We will have the opportunity to shape that decline somewhat – to make it more beneficial by sharing the burden of contraction, or to make it more painful by fighting over what's left – but the techno-optimist vision of a future of ever-increasing human potency is a mere fantasy, and a dangerous one at that. So, it's probably better to think of the geological moment (a couple of centuries at most) of human techno-transformation and population explosion as an event – like a global conflagration – rather than a durable new regime (geological epochs tend to be several million years in duration).

The results of human overshoot will persist: If there are people around 10,000 or even a million years from now, they will be able to discern residue from the 20th and 21st centuries in the stratigraphy of lake beds around the world. That's when the Earth's climate changed; when toxic chemicals suddenly proliferated through atmosphere, soil, and waters; when glaciers melted; when radioactive particles were dispersed by atomic weapons tests; when untold numbers of animals and plants went extinct; and when ocean currents shifted.

The generations to come will inhabit a different world indeed. Earth's new regime, once it has stabilized, will surely be classifiable as a new geological epoch – but currently it's too soon to name it.





## Banditry in Katcha area sparks outrage

**400 abductions, 11 cops martyred, Katcha dacoits go beasts; notorious gangs such as Teeghani, Jagirani, Shir, Bheu, and Bhngwar are active**

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: In the Kacha area near Kandhkot and Kashmore in Sindh, a wave of banditry has gripped the region, with reports indicating the abduction of over 400 individuals and the brutal slaying of 10 laborers. Local authorities have confirmed these distressing figures, further revealing that in the past year alone, 11 policemen have fallen victim to these marauding bandits.

Recent incidents underscore the severity of the situation, with two civilians falling prey to the ruthless hands of Kacha bandits in recent days. Despite concerted efforts by the Sindh government and law enforcement agencies, various bandit factions continue to operate with impunity in Kacha, conducting raids and terrorizing local communities.

According to police sources, notorious gangs such as Teeghani, Jagirani, Shir, Bheu, and Bhngwar remain active in the Kandhkot and Kashmore regions. Confrontations between law enforcement and bandits have resulted in the martyrdom of 11 police officers, with an equal number sustaining injuries. Police operations, on the other hand, have led to



the demise of 23 bandits and the apprehension of 160 others.

Authorities have disclosed that between 35 to 40 individuals associated with banditry are currently under detention in the Upper Sindh districts of Larkana and Sukkur. Moreover, reliable sources suggest that over 200 suspects are held in custody in Sukkur and Larkana divisions, with 20 to 30 individuals granted bail each month in both regions.

In a tragic incident highlighting the perilous environment, a dedicated primary school teacher, Allah Rakhio Nidvani, was fatally shot by dacoits while commuting to his school in Kandhkot,

Sindh. Despite arming himself for protection amidst deteriorating law and order, Nidvani lost his life in a brazen attack.

Sindh's Interior Minister, Ziaul Hasan Lanjar, has demanded a report on the teacher's murder within 48 hours, acknowledging his unwavering commitment to educating children despite grave risks.

Amidst mounting concern, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) has decried the escalating violence perpetrated by Kacha bandits, questioning potential negligence or complicity on the part of government agencies.

The party's spokesperson, Islam Ghori, emphasized

the state's paramount duty to safeguard citizens' lives and property, urging decisive action against criminal elements.

In a separate incident underscoring the pervasive threat, dacoits shot and injured kidnap victim Manzoor Lashari after his relatives refused to pay a ransom of one million rupees. Further, the perpetrators have issued a chilling ultimatum, threatening to kill another abductee, Mashooq Lashari, unless a ransom of two million rupees is provided. Both victims had been abducted from Shikarpur 20 days earlier, highlighting the brazenness of criminal activities in the region.

## PM approves cycling track project

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has approved a plan to construct a network of cycling tracks in the federal capital for Rs2.4 billion. The 374-km-long cycling tracks are expected to be laid in 18 months according to the initial plan.

Termed as a transformative initiative by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), the project aims to promote a healthy lifestyle and address environmental pollution. Sources reveal that a comprehensive plan has been set in motion to construct cycling tracks across various sectors of the city. This ambitious project will be known as the Bicycle Lane Project (BLP).

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has emphasized the importance of creating a healthy environment for residents. To achieve this goal, bicycle lanes will be integrated into the city's infrastructure, particularly along highways and key areas like Khayaban Iqbal, Sector G-6, G-7, G-8, Green Double Lane, Jinnah Avenue, and Red Double Line. These cycling tracks will not only promote eco-friendly commuting but also facilitate metro bus passengers, offering them an alternative mode of travel.

Furthermore, the BLP includes plans for constructing 150 parking stands to accommodate e-bikes, allowing citizens to access affordable bike rental services. This initiative aligns with the phased elimination of petrol-powered bikes, contributing to a cleaner and healthier urban environment. The project encompasses essential features such as lighting and security arrangements to ensure a safe cycling experience for all users.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairperson Imran Khan surrounded by party leaders during the 'Haqeeqi Azadi' march.—MM file photo

## Court acquits Imran in two cases

**Judicial magistrate announces reserved verdict; rejects request to produce ex-premier in court**

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: A judicial magistrate of Islamabad acquitted former premier Imran Khan in two long march vandalism cases on Tuesday. Judicial magistrate Shaista Kundi announced the verdict reserved earlier in the day. The court, however, rejected the request to produce the PTI founder in court.

During the hearing, Imran's counsel Naeem Panjotra stated that all cases against the ex-premier were limited to the extent of intimidation. He was booked in multiple similar cases in one day. The complainant in the case is an SHO and he does not have the authority to lodge a case. The case also does not include the state-ments of witnesses, he added.

The judge inquired whether Imran had been acquitted in cases before, to which the counsel re-

sponded in the affirmative. The court then reserved the verdict to announce it later in the day.

The complaints against the former premier were registered at the Sahala and Lohi Bhair police stations. On May 27, 2022, the Islamabad police filed separate cases against 150 people including then PTI chairman Imran Khan, and other party leaders including Asad Umar, Asad Qaiser over allegations of arson and vandalism in the federal capital a day earlier.

The footage of the Safe City cameras as well as those from private TV news channels were included in the challans of the cases as evidence. At least 39 people were taken into custody after identification from the footage.

Two FIRs were registered at Kohsar police station over the complaint of sub-inspector Asif Raza and

sub-inspector Ghulam Sarwar under Sections 109 (abetment), 148 (rioting armed with deadly weapon), 149 (unlawful assembly), 186 (obstructing public service), 188 (disobedience), 353 (assault on public servant), 427 (causing damage) and 435 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to cause damage) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

In May 2022, Imran launched a march toward Islamabad to topple the coalition government that assumed power after he was ousted as the premier following a vote of no confidence. The rally was part of the PTI's struggle to achieve "real freedom" and deliver the nation from the "slavery" of the "US-backed" coalition government. Imran accused the coalition government of being an "imported government that came to power through a US-backed conspiracy".

## SBP governor reveals plans to manage external debt

By Zaheer Shiekh

ISLAMABAD: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jameel Ahmed has shed light on Pakistan's external debt situation and the government's plans to manage its financial obligations.

In a recent conversation with economic analysts, Governor Jameel Ahmed said discussions are underway to reschedule external debt amounting to \$2 billion within the next two weeks. Furthermore, he revealed that the government has devised a plan to roll over an additional \$4 billion of debt, indicating proactive measures to address financial challenges. This strategy aims to mitigate immediate payment pressures and provide breathing room for the government to manage its financial commitments efficiently.

The SBP governor also stated that the government needs to arrange payments worth \$4.8 billion in the remaining three months of the financial year. Governor Ahmed also provided insight into Pakistan's total external financial liabilities for the fiscal year 2024, amounting to \$24.3 billion. He further noted that \$13.5 billion of external debt has already been paid in the fiscal year, indicating ongoing efforts to honor financial commitments and reduce the overall debt burden.

## Pakistan makes anti-rabies vaccine 'Dow Rab' launched

**Vaccine initially comprises 30,000 doses, swiftly made available through an efficient distribution network**

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a significant stride towards combating the scourge of rabies, Dow University of Health Sciences (DUHS) has launched an indigenous anti-rabies vaccine, "Dow Rab," offering a ray of hope to victims of dog bites across Sindh.

The unveiling ceremony, led by DUHS Vice-Chancellor Professor Muhammad Saeed Quraishi, marked a milestone in the medical landscape of Pakistan. Professor Quraishi expressed his commitment to ensuring the availability of the vaccine, emphasizing its pivotal role in saving lives. Developed by the Dow Institute of Life Sciences (DILS) at Ojha campus, the vaccine initially comprises 30,000 doses, swiftly made available through an efficient distribution network.

This breakthrough is poised to alleviate the suffering of countless individuals exposed to the threat of rabies. Speaking at the ceremony, Professor Quraishi underscored the university's dedication to self-reliance, aiming to transition from imported raw materials to locally sourced ingredients for



vaccine production. He announced plans to escalate production to an additional 170,000 doses, envisioning a future where Pakistan meets its own demand for anti-rabies vaccines.

DILS Chief Executive Officer, Syed Izhar Hussain, highlighted the culmination of extensive research and regulatory processes, culminating in the commercial production of Dow Rab. The vaccine, priced at a nominal Rs1,500 for the complete course, embodies DUHS's commitment to accessibility and affordability. In a bid to ensure nationwide accessibility, DUHS inked a memorandum of understanding with distribution giant Muller & Phipps.

This partnership signifies a strategic move towards

making Dow Rab readily available across Pakistan, addressing the dire need for rabies prevention measures. Rabies, a persistent threat in Pakistan, claims thousands of lives annually.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) Islamabad reports a staggering demand for over 2 million doses of anti-rabies vaccines each year, with a significant portion imported from India.

The introduction of Dow Rab comes at a critical juncture, amid a shortage of anti-rabies vaccines exacerbated by pricing conflicts.

Importers cite currency devaluation as a contributing factor, underscoring the importance of local manufacturing in stabilizing prices and ensuring a consistent supply chain.

## Film star Muhammad Ali's death anniversary

By Qaisar Masood Jafri

KARACHI: The film industry in Pakistan observed the 18th death anniversary of the legendary film star, Muhammad Ali on March 19 Tuesday.

Muhammad Ali was born on 19th April 1931 at Rampur in India. He joined Radio Pakistan Hyderabad station as a broadcaster in 1956. Later, he moved to Radio Pakistan Karachi where its then Director General Zulfikar Ali Bukhari became his mentor for his acting career. He started his film career in 1962. He was the lead actor and 'hero' in 94 films. He won the Nigar awards for record ten times during his career. The actor was known as 'Shahansha-e-Jazbat' among his fans. Ali remained the leading figure of Pakistani cinema for more than two decades. Today marks the anniversary of the legendary actor's demise. Professor Akash Mughal, a devoted fan of Muhammad Ali, paid tribute to the actor.

## Crackdown against profiteers in Gwadar

By Ismail Baloch

GWADAR: Chairman Municipal Committee Gwadar, Sharif Miandad, has taken robust action against shopkeepers involved in profiteering and selling expired goods, imposing heavy fines on multiple shopkeepers.

According to details, Chairman Municipal Committee Gwadar, Sharif Miandad, along with his team, visited various small and large shops, including fruit stalls, in different areas of Gwadar city. Shopkeepers were sternly warned against profiteering and the sale of expired goods, with heavy fines imposed on those found guilty. Watermelon sellers were instructed to ensure the regular checking of watermelons for customers, and emphasis was placed on implementing the price list.

Voice Chairman Municipal Committee Gwadar, Sharif Miandad, along with Councillor Nasir Naeem and Councillor Naveed Muhammad, were also present during the surprise market visit. On this occasion, Voice Chairman Municipal Committee Gwadar, Sharif Miandad, stated that no leniency would be shown in matters concerning the lives and property of the people.

## 'PTI founder bearing brunt of his incompetence'

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal said on Tuesday that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder was bearing the brunt of his "incompetence".

Iqbal said: "It is not fair to say that the PTI has the majority. We are having a two-thirds majority." He recalled the ouster of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif, saying, "Nawaz Sharif was never ousted in an engineered way." Iqbal said: "Hopefully, there will be no political confrontation." Talking about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Iqbal said: "It is a positive development that the KP chief minister came to meet the premier."

Ahsan Iqbal said, "what Ali Amin Gandapur had said was a ray of hope." He recalled the previous tenure of the PML-N, saying, "Between 2013 and 2018, the country had witnessed development." He emphasized the need to achieve political stability in the country.

"When we made Vision 2010, nobody had such a plan." "Today, Bangladesh and India have surpassed us," he lamented. He admitted that the country was facing severe economic hardships.

Speaking to media, Iqbal said: "The PTI is harming the country worldwide. The United States and International Monetary Fund (IMF) cannot provide the NRO to the PTI founder." He said: "We [PML-N] had never caused the uproar of bogus cases at the international forums. We faced bogus cases, and our leaders faced jail." Iqbal asked the PTI founder to prove his innocence in court. "The PTI is damaging the country's reputation."

"We had never penned a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or European Union (EU), despite the PML-N's reservations about the 2018 general elections," Iqbal said. Recalling the events that transpired on May 9, she lamented, "The military installations were attacked on May 9."

## Army completes relief operation in Gwadar

By Anwar Nawab

GWADAR: Pakistan Army's rescue teams have successfully completed dewatering operations at Gwadar Model School, Captain Murad Bakhsh Ward.

This effort has safeguarded the historic Model High School Gwadar, serving the community since 1956, where over 500 students pursue their education.

The joy of returning to school and immersing themselves in the learning process was palpable among the children, who expressed gratitude for the Army's timely assistance.

Principal Aziz ur Rehman, along with the dedicated teachers, commended the Army's efforts, recognizing their vital role in restoring normalcy to the school. In addition to their rescue operation, the Pakistan Army went a step further by distributing school bags and stationery to the students.

This gesture not only provides essential supplies but also symbolizes solidarity and support during challenging times.

## Imran challenges SC registrar's objections

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: PTI founder Imran Khan on Monday challenged the objections of the Supreme Court Registrar Office on his appeals against the rejection of his nomination papers from NA-89 and NA-122.

The petitioner stated that the registrar office has objected that the appeal was filed with a delay to the top court against the decision of election tribunal. It said that the registrar office could only view the petitions administratively and it couldn't raise objection regarding the maintainability of cases. It prayed the court to set aside the objections of SC's registrar office which was raised against the appeals on March 1. It may be mentioned here that the nomination papers of PTI's founder were terminated due to his conviction.

## China claims 'Arunachal Pradesh' to be a part of southern Tibet

News Desk

NEW DELHI: India's foreign ministry said on Tuesday that China was making "absurd claims" over Arunachal Pradesh, adding that the northeastern state which shares a border with China will always be an "integral and inalienable part of India".

China claims Arunachal Pradesh to be a part of southern Tibet. New Delhi rejects the claim, saying Arunachal Pradesh has always been a part of India. "Repeating baseless arguments in this regard does not lend such claims any validity," Randhir Jaiswal, India's foreign ministry spokesper-

son said on Tuesday. He was responding to last week's comments made by spokesman of China's Ministry of National Defense, days after Indian PM Narendra

Modi inaugurated a road tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh. Zhang said in a statement that India should "stop taking any moves that complicate the border issue and



An Indian army truck drives along Tezpur-Tawang highway in Arunachal Pradesh, India.—MM file photo

earnestly maintain peace and stability in the border areas", adding that the tunnel's inauguration "runs counter to the efforts made by both sides to ease the border situation". The nuclear-armed neighbors share a 3,000-km (1,860 mile) frontier, much of it poorly demarcated.

At least 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese troops were killed in 2020 in clashes along their border in the western Himalayas. The militaries of both countries have fortified positions and deployed extra troops and equipment along the border since those clashes. Both sides fought a border war in 1962.