



**CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif pledges support for honest officers and public service**

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**PM AJK declares victory day for Pakistan after soft retort' against India**

Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq, while terming February 27 as a Victory Day for Pakistan, has said that the Pakistan Air Force amply demonstrated its conventional and technological supremacy through its successful counterattack against IAF. The AJK premier said that on this day in 2019 Pakistan Air Force exhibited its professional capabilities and fighting prowess by responding to Indian aggression. (Details on Page 2)

Sha'aban 17, Wednesday, February 28, 2024

www.dailyspokesman.net

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Daily Spokesman Vol: 17, Issue: 319 Price Rs. 25.00 Pages 8

**Called on**

ISLAMABAD: H.E General Fayyadh bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff, Saudi Armed Forces awarding King Abdul Aziz Badge of Honour of the Excellent Class of Saudi Arabia to Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force on Tuesday.



**Air Chief visits Saudi Arabia to promote Pak-Saudi defence ties**

ISLAMABAD: Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force called on General Fayyadh bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff, Saudi Armed Forces and His Royal Highness Lieutenant General Turki Bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Forces, during his visit to Saudi Arabia. Meetings were focused upon further promoting Pak-Saudi defence ties, particularly between the two Air Forces through joint military exercises and technological collaboration. During the visit, the Air Chief was awarded King Abdul Aziz Badge of Honor of the Excellent Class by Chief of the General Staff, Saudi Armed Forces.

**NA session: Caretaker govt responds to President Alvi's objections**

**Spokesman Report**

ISLAMABAD: The caretaker federal government has responded to President Dr. Arif Alvi's objections on the returned summary for summoning the National Assembly's (NA) inaugural session. According to details, the federal government in response told Dr. Arif Alvi that the president does not have the 'discretion or power' to halt the National Assembly session under Article 91 of the Constitution 1973. "Nowhere in Article 91 is it written that if the House is incomplete, the National Assembly session cannot be convened," the sources added while quoting the federal government. It added that the president could only adjourn the 'ordinary' session of the National Assembly under Article 54 of the constitution. In the summary, the president was asked to summon an extraordinary meeting of the National Assembly for oath-taking of the newly elected members. The caretaker federal government

requested Dr. Arif Alvi to review his decision and summon the National Assembly session by February 29. "It is not written anywhere in the constitution that if specific seats are not allotted,



the session cannot be called," the sources said while quoting the federal government. It added that under Clause 2 of Article 91 the constitution, it is obligatory to summon the National Assembly within 21 days of the election. "Even if the President does not call the National Assembly session by February 29, it would still be held on the same day," the caretaker government maintained in the response.

**Pakistan resolved to safeguard its sovereignty, regional security: PM**

**Spokesman Report**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Tuesday said that being a peace-loving country, Pakistan was resolved to safeguard its sovereignty and regional security. The prime minister, in a message on the fifth anniversary of the Operation Swift Retort, paid

tributes to the professional capability and resolve of the Pakistan's armed forces. On February 27, 2019, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) had shot down two Indian planes that had violated Pakistani airspace. One of the Indian pilots was captured by Pakistan, but was later handed over as a gesture of peace. The prime minister said that the Pakistani



armed forces had proved their operational superiority falsifying the Indian claims. "No one should have doubt that Pakistan is a peace-loving country that was determined to protect its sovereignty as well as the regional security," he remarked. The prime minister reiterated the resolve that Pakistan would forcefully respond to any aggression against it.

**President Arif Alvi to face dual constitution violation charges, says Bilawal**

**City Desk**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Tuesday asserted President Arif Alvi will face dual constitution violation charges after his retirement. Talking to media men outside the Supreme Court after hearing of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's presidential reference, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said President Arif Alvi is 'violating' the constitution of Pakistan by denying summoning the NA session for the swearing-in of the new lawmakers. It's a constitutional requirement to summon NA session by February 29, Bilawal said and added the president is denying discharging his duties. The PPP leader said they will replace Arif Alvi as president after the swearing-in of the new house and he will face



dual constitution violation cases including one of dissolving the assembly despite VONC motion and another of denying calling the session of the lower house of the parliament. Criticising the PTI founder, Bilawal Bhutto said the man who is incarcerated in Adiala Jail is not ready to learn from his mistakes. "PPP too made mistakes but one has to learn from it." He urged everyone to exercise their power in their respective constitutional domain and underlined the need for respecting each other despite political differences, as this is the only way forward to steer the country out of crises.

**PTI founder supports President Alvi's decision of not summoning NA session**

**City Desk**

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder on Tuesday said that President Arif Alvi did the right thing by not summoning the National Assembly (NA) session. The former premier said this during an informal interaction with journalists at Adiala Jail on Tuesday. He claimed PTI won the election, but 'rigging' was done to 'snatch' PTI's seats. Founder PTI said there could be no greater theft than the public mandate, the whole nation is saying that a 'rigged' 20-seater is being made prime minister. He reiterated his demand for the resignation of the CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja. Former prime minister Imran Khan alleged the caretaker governments were also against PTI, alleging that the Election Commission is still engaged in rigging after the election. He announced a protest on Saturday against the alleged theft of PTI's mandate in the February 8 elections.

**ECP allows voter lists' modification till bye-election schedule announcement**

**City Desk**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declared on Tuesday that electoral rolls would remain open for modifications until the announcement of the bye-election schedule. An ECP spokesperson, in a statement, urged the individuals seeking to transfer their votes or desire correction in the voter list, to submit forms 21, 22, or 23 to the district election commissioner or registration officer in their particular area. "Once the bye-election schedule is announced, the electoral rolls in the specific constituencies will be frozen," he added. It may be mentioned that the word "freeze", in electoral terms, signifies that no alterations can be made to the voter lists after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decides to freeze them. Unfreezing the voter lists allows for pertinent changes to be made to the voters' data.

**FEB&GIF clears educational-stipend claims within 45 days: Solangi**

**City Desk**

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi informed the Senate on Tuesday that the claims related to the educational stipends were cleared by the Federal Employees Benevolent and Group Insurance Funds (FEB&GIF) within 45 days. Responding to a question during the question hour in the Senate, he said that on average, 35,000 to 40,000 claims per annum were being received by the FEB&GIF for educational stipends from federal government employees. He said that as of December 2023 and January 2024, around 4,997 claims were pending for the processing. The main reasons for this delay were twofold, he said adding first, the seasonal nature of claims, as the period from August to March was the peak time for receiving educational stipend claims due to examination results being declared from SSC to Masters during this period.

**Final IMF installment likely to be negotiated by new govt**

**Commerce Desk**

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is preparing to host a team of the International Monetary Fund for its second review to unlock another installment of the Stand-by Agreement from the money lender. The government has completed 25 out of the 26 requirements laid out by the Fund. However, the last remaining item concerning legislation related to National Highway Authority, Pakistan Post and Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation cannot be completed as the National Assembly has just been elected. Finance Ministry officials expect the IMF team's talks to continue with the new elected government instead of the caretaker government. The visit's schedule is likely to be decided after the new government takes office. Successful talks would release the third installment of the SBA worth \$1.1 billion. The SBA was agreed in last July and has helped Pakistan successfully avoid default.

**SC adjourns Bhutto reference till March 5**

**City Desk**

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Tuesday adjourned hearing of presidential reference pertaining to the 'judicial murder' of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto till March 5. A nine-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Tariq Masood, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Musarrat Hilali heard the reference. PPP's Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari attended the hearing. At the outset of hearing, Amicus Curiae Justice (Retd) Manzoor Ahmed Malik informed the court that he had prepared a summary of the case.

He said the murder incident took place between the night of November 11 and 12, 1974 at Shadman Chowk in Lahore. The investigation into the murder case registered at the Achhra Police Station, Lahore was closed by saying that the accused could not be traced. He said that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not named as an accused in the case. He said the record of the case was obtained by the police for re-investigation on August 8, 1977 without any written permission from the magistrate. He said that the magistrate had issued a formal order to close the case which was not challenged anywhere. "This order remains in field till date. The Federally Investigation Agency, however, conducted a separate investigation despite there

was no provision in the law to transfer the investigation from the police to the former," he added. Justice (Retd) Manzoor said that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had accused the then chief justice of being biased. He referred to the statement Ahmed Raza Kasuri in the Shafiqur Rehman case that the purpose of naming Bhutto in the case was not that he had murdered his father himself. The amicus curiae said that it was claimed that a conspiracy was hatched to kill Ahmed Raza Kasuri but he was still alive. Sessions Judge Ijaz Nisar had sought a report from the public prosecutor on the matter but the very next day, the case was transferred to the high court. He argued that Bhutto's lawyer could not appear in the first hearing and the court sought evidence on next

date which was a clear violation of the legal process. The accused were also charged separately while ignoring the rules, he said, adding that if there were more than one accused, the charge would be one. The chief justice remarked that he was looking at the order sheet and it seemed that it was a civil case. As per the charge sheet, the elements of conspiracy to murder were added to the charge. Surprisingly, it was not clarified that where that conspiracy had taken place. "In this case, the basis of murder is said to be a conspiracy," he said. Later, the court adjourned the reference till March 5. It may be mentioned here that former president Asif Ali Zardari had referred the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto murder reference in 2011 to the apex court.

**Murad Ali Shah takes oath as Sindh chief minister**

**Bureau Report**

KARACHI: Syed Murad Ali Shah has received a third consecutive term as Sindh Chief Minister (CM) as he took an oath of his office on Tuesday at Governor House. Governor Kamran Tessori administered him oath in a ceremony attended by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, PPP MNAs and MPAs, representatives of business community and others. During chief minister's election, presided over by Sindh



Assembly Speaker Owais Qadir Shah, a total of 148 votes were cast, with Murad Ali Shah obtaining 112. His opponent, MQM-P candidate Ali Khurshidi, garnered 36 votes. Lawmakers from the Jamat-i-Islami (JI) and the Sunni Ittehad Council, which was joined by PTI-backed independents who won seats in the Feb 8 polls, abstained from participating in the voting process. The politico has served twice as Sindh's chief minister from 2016 to 2018 and then from 2018 to 2023, and this will be his third consecutive term.

# CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif pledges support for honest officers and public service

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has expressed her admiration for honest officers, emphasizing the importance of integrity in public service. She vowed to uphold meritocracy and prevent any form of nepotism, stating that political appointments would not be tolerated under her administration. Furthermore, she underscored the government's commitment to transparency in financial matters.

Addressing officials at the Darbar Hall Civil Secretariat, Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif emphasized the importance of providing quality health care services to the public. She directed officials to prioritize the prevention of diseases like dengue and polio, and to ensure the continuation of public utility projects in the health sector.



Maryam Nawaz Sharif also highlighted her support for officers and employees who demonstrate dedication, stating that innovative ideas for public service improvement would be welcomed. She praised civil servants for their patriotism and commitment to public service, stating that accountability, transparency, and efficiency were non-negotiable principles.

The Chief Minister also stressed the importance of promptly addressing

public grievances, stating that immediate action should be taken to resolve issues. She emphasized the need for institutional and organizational reforms to address problems at their root.

During her visit to the Punjab Civil Secretariat, Maryam Nawaz Sharif commended the restoration project of the Civil Secretariat for preserving its historical significance. She inaugurated a museum within the Secretariat and reviewed ongoing projects. Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman provided a detailed briefing on the functions of various departments.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, Chairman Planning and Development, Secretary Health, Secretary Finance, Members of the Punjab Assembly including Maryam Aurangzeb, Azmi Bukhari, and Sania Ashiq, as well as the IG Punjab and other secretaries.

## PM AJK declares victory day for Pakistan after soft retort against India

Abdul Mjeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq, while terming February 27 as a Victory Day for Pakistan, has said that the Pakistan Air Force amply demonstrated its conventional and technological supremacy through its successful counterattack against IAF.

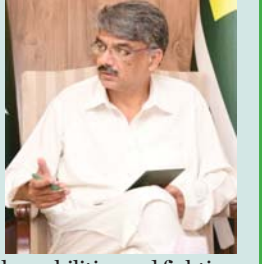
In his special message issued on the fifth anniversary of Operation Soft Retort, the AJK premier said that on this day in 2019 Pakistan Air Force exhibited its professional capabilities and fighting prowess by responding to Indian aggression.

Referring to Pakistan army's excellent track record and ability to defend the geographical frontiers of the country, Prime Minister Haq said that Pakistan Army has always proved its metal.

The PM said that downing of the Indian war plane and arrest of its pilot was not only a big surprise for India but the befitting response by the Pakistani Shaheens had completely destroyed the myth of India's military power.

The operation swift retort, he said, dashed to the ground the India's ambitions and false proud. "Now India cannot even dare to cast an evil eye on Pakistan".

"We are proud of Pakistan Army, which has always fulfilled the nation's expectations", he said, adding that Pakistan Army was the guarantor of peace in the region.



## All Parties Hurriyat in Kashmir write to OIC to protest treatment of Kashmiris in Indian jails

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD MUZAFFARABAD: The All Parties Hurriyat Conference-AJK chapter has issued an urgent appeal to Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hisein Ibrahim Taha, inviting his attention towards the unjust treatment faced by Kashmiri detainees in Indian jails.

Mehmood Ahmed Saghar, Convener of the APHC-AJK chapter, penned a letter to the OIC headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, expressing grave concerns over the deteriorating conditions endured by Kashmiri detainees. The letter emphasized the wrongful imprisonment of individuals who have been implicated in politically motivated cases, suffering under India's oppressive regime.

Saghar highlighted the challenges faced by Kashmiri prisoners, including political activists, journalists, and civil society members, who have been arrested and detained under draconian laws such as the Public Safety Act (PSA) and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

The appeal underscored the misuse of so-called anti-terrorism laws and the manipulation of the judiciary to suppress Kashmiri voices advocating for a peaceful resolution to the Kashmir dispute. The APHC stressed the urgent need for international intervention to address what it termed as "judicial terrorism" against Kashmiri detainees.



## Solar Pakistan is great events: Rana Kashif

PPA

ISLAMABAD: The Futech Energy Managing Director Rana Kashif said that Solar Pakistan is great events and this exhibition this year holding 1 in 3 halls and in first day there is huge response receive from the public in this exhibition. He further said that Solar and Energy exhibition create awareness among the people and I think that in year 4 exhibition should be held not in big city in also others small city of Pakistan. He said that due to these kind of exhibition playing a vital role to high light the products of Solar. At last he said that my message to the people to visit in Expo Center, Lahore and watch this huge solar exhibition.



## Gwadar facing possible flooding after torrential rains

PNP

GWADAR: Multiple parts of Balochistan received torrential rain on Tuesday causing alarm about flooding, particularly in Gwadar.

Visuals showed swathes of land inundated by water as residents tried to save their belongings and shift to safety.

At least seven houses have been destroyed by the rains and many major highways have been rendered unusable for traffic. Balochistan's Senator Kauda Bakhsh has called for Gwadar to be declared a calamity-hit region. He also said that the entire city of Gwadar has been overrun by water.

However, Gwadar's DC said that the rain has temporarily stopped in the city and it has not lost road connections via road to Karachi and Turbat.

The DC acknowledged that Gwadar's internal roads have been affected. He also said that numerous houses have been partially damaged by the rains. Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has also expressed concern over the post-rain situation in Gwadar.

Bilawal also called on both the city's administration as well as PPP workers in the area to make all possible efforts for the city's relief.

## Women University of Multan signs MoU with Australia on women's empowerment

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: By cherishing the principle of building bridges between Australia and Pakistan through academic collaboration and nourishing the Academia-Industry Linkages, The Women University Multan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Australia-based non-profit organization Celebrating and Conserving Cultures (CCC), and a management consultancy Indus-Yarra Linkages (IYL). Prof. Dr. Kalsoom Pracha, the Vice-chancellor, Prof. Dr. Mamoon Khan, The Registrar, Dr. Kanwal Rehman, Director of ORIC, and Dr. Asma Akbar, Assistant Director of ORIC, Trainings, and Startup Links from the Women University Multan and Mr. Saqib Awan, Director of IYL, and Ms. Uzma Rubab, Director of CCC have attended this prestigious event and signed this Memorandum of Understanding.



## Protest

KARACHI: Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami hold a banner during protest against Israel attack on Ghaza outside a mosque, in the Provincial Capital.



Photo: Online

## Pakistan Zindabad marks 5th anniversary with jubilant ceremony in Muzaffarabad

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: The fifth anniversary of Pakistan Zindabad under the title of "Pakistan Zindabad" on the timely response and professionalism of the brave forces of Pakistan in the air violation committed by India and the capture of the downed plane and its pilot Abi Nindan.

A grand ceremony was held in the Central Press Club here under the auspices of the Young Journalist Forum, in which the chief guest was the Central Deputy Secretary Information of Pakistan People's Party Azad Kashmir, nominated candidate for Assembly Constituency Lipa Valley, Shaukat Javed Mir, Member of the



District Council Syed. Ali Raza Sabzwari Advocate, Chairman Union Council Muzaffarabad Iqbal Yasin, renowned businessman Abdul Razzaq Mughal, Private School Association leader Nishad Butt, Ashiq Butt, Muqds Prince, Bilawal Munir, leaders from all schools of thought, including from the electronic print media. Speaking at the participation ceremony,

Pakistan People's Party Azad Kashmir Shaukat Javed Mir said that the breakfast of the Indian forces in the Lahore Gymkhana and the Indian pilot's desire for tea and the legendary hospitality of the Pakistani Kashmiri people will go down in history.

Shaukat Javed Mir has become the cause of shame and retreat. The forces of Pakistan sacrificed their lives for the defense of the home-

land and national identity and proved that they will continue the ongoing war against the anti-national forces and terrorists together with their defeat. He said, Operation Rah Najat, Operation Zarb-e-Azb, Operation Radal al-Fasaad, besides the Indian aggression on the Line of Control and Working Boundary, the nation fought alongside its elite forces.

Pakistan has fought three wars for the freedom of Occupied Kashmir, Syed Ali Raza, Iqbal Hasin, Abdul Zaq Khan, the Holy Khwaja Bilawal Munir Nishad Butt said that the people of Kashmir will continue to sacrifice for the defense of Pakistan until the last breath of the people of Kashmir.

## Outgoing caretakers take important decision about gas, electricity prices

PPA

ISLAMABAD: The Caretaker federal government has decided to empower the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) and Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) to fix electricity and gas tariffs respectively without the government's approval.

According to details, the caretaker government has decided to end the government's role in the regulation of gas, electricity, and petroleum products prices.

The sources privy to the development said that the federal cabinet through circulation approved amendments in separate rules of the OGRA, NEPRA, and Petroleum Division.

The sources said that after the amendments, OGRA, NEPRA, and Petroleum Division would be empowered to regulate the prices without government interference.

Besides, appellate tribunals would also be set up for public grievances under the amendments.

Earlier in the day, in another shock to the already overburdened power consumers, the NEPRA has notified a hike of Rs7.5 per unit in the price of electricity as part of the fuel price adjustment (FCA).

The power sector's regulatory authority approved increase in the electricity tariff by Rs7.5 per kilowatt hour (kWh) under the head FCA of January 2024 and this hike in power tariff will be charged to power consumers during the month of March 2024. The increase will be applicable to all the consumer categories except lifeline consumers and the power consumers of K-Electric (KE). The hike in the power tariff will cause Rs66 billion worth additional burden on the already burdened power consumers.

## Bishop Yousuf Sohan visited Hazrat Shah Rukn Alam Darbar

Asim Tanveer

MULTAN: Chairman of the Catholic Commission for Interfaith and Inter-Church Dialogue, Bishop Yousuf Sohan, along with a delegation, visited the shrine of the great spiritual leader of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, Hazrat Shah Ruknuddin Alam, and met with the scholars. Karia Tas Pakistan Samuel Clement, Allama Dr Muhammad Arshad Ali Baloch, Qari Ramzan Chishti, Father Daniel Taj,



Father Azam Siddique, Father Shahzad Khokhar, Amroz Gul and other young women from different cities of Pakistan were present on

this occasion. Yusuf Sohan has said that interfaith and interfaith harmony in the Church is the need of the hour. The sanctuaries of the

saints are the havens of peace and order. From these sanctuaries, all people without discrimination always get blessings. The sanctuaries of the saints have played an important role in inter-religious and inter-religious harmony. We, along with our fathers and the church, visited the Hazrat Shah Ruknuddin Alam Darbar and coming here gave us peace of mind because Multan is the center of Saints and Dargahs of Saints are centers of spirituality.



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# Magical Bonding - A Tale of Love towards Pakistan and Pak Army - III

In the annals of Pakistan's history, few institutions command the respect, admiration, and gratitude of its citizens as profoundly as the Pakistan Army. Since the inception of the nation, the men and women of the Pakistan Army have exemplified unparalleled courage, selfless sacrifice, and unwavering dedication in safeguarding the sovereignty, security, and prosperity of the nation. From repelling external threats to providing vital assistance in times of crisis, the Pakistan Army's remarkable service to the nation underscores its commitment to duty, honor, and national pride.

stan's soldiers have distinguished themselves in conflict zones across the globe, working tirelessly to restore tranquility, protect civilians, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. From Sierra Leone to Bosnia-Herzegovina and beyond, the Pakistan Army's peacekeepers have garnered international acclaim for their professionalism, integrity, and commitment to upholding the principles of peace and security.

During times of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies, the Pakistan Army has consistently demonstrated its readiness to provide vital assistance and support to affected communities nationwide. Whether responding to floods, earthquakes, or other crises, the swift and coordinated efforts of the Pakistan Army have saved numerous lives, alleviated suffering, and instilled hope in those facing adversity. From conducting search and rescue operations to distributing relief supplies and offering medical aid, the humanitarian endeavors of the Pakistan Army exemplify the ethos of compassion, solidarity, and service.

Beyond its conventional roles in defense and security, the Pakistan Army has also played a pivotal role in spearheading nation-building and development initiatives aimed at improving the lives of ordinary Pakistanis. Through various endeavors such as infrastructure projects, educational programs, and healthcare services, the engineers, doctors, and educators of the Pakistan Army have worked tirelessly to uplift marginalized communities and empower them to forge brighter futures for themselves and their loved ones. Initiatives like the Pakistan Army Welfare Trust and the Fauji Foundation have made substantial contributions to social welfare, poverty alleviation, and economic development, significantly enhancing the quality of life for millions of Pakistanis.

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, few bonds are as profound and enduring as the connection between the people, their country, and its armed forces. It is a bond forged through the crucible of history, shaped by shared trials, sacrifices, and dreams for a better tomorrow. Whether defending sovereignty, promoting peace and prosperity, or extending a helping hand in times of need, the indelible bond between citizens, their nation, and its armed forces encapsulates the essence of unity, pride, and sacrifice.

At the core of the profound connection among citizens, their country, and their armed forces lies a spirit of unity amidst diversity. Despite variances in race, religion, or ethnicity, individuals unite under the banner of their nation, bound by a shared identity, heritage, and destiny. Serving as the safeguard of the nation's sovereignty and security, the army embodies this unity, acting as a unifying force that transcends societal divisions and cultivates a sense of solidarity and belonging among the populace. This special bond among people, their country, and their army is also marked by a profound sense of pride and patriotism. Citizens take pride in their country's accomplishments, heritage, and values, celebrating its cultural diversity and resilience in the face of challenges. While the army evokes feelings of reverence and admiration, with soldiers epitomizing the highest virtues of courage, honor, and sacrifice in their dedication to national service. This mutual pride and patriotism reinforce the connection between citizens and their armed forces, fostering a shared sense of duty and responsibility towards safeguarding and upholding the nation's interests and ideals.

*To be continued*

## CPEC new phase focuses on industrial cooperation, agriculture

Pakistan and China have decided to start a new phase of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with a lot of focus on industrial cooperation, agriculture, mining and energy.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"Having drawn from the excellent progress that was made during the first 10 years of this corridor, both China and Pakistan have decided to start the new phase with a lot of focus on industrial cooperation and agriculture, as well as mining and energy, (with) a renewed focus on renewable energy," he told China Daily.

Beyond that, in the second phase of CPEC, the two elements of high-quality development and the sustainable nature of the projects will get sharper focus, he said.

"Going forward, we are very excited to start the next phase, building on the very good progress that has been made," Hashmi said. "We have all the ingredients in place", including good-quality infrastructure, he said.

"These are areas which we also find alignment with, so both Pakistan and China agreed to pursue the next phase along these lines," Hashmi said.

Hailing China's global vision, he said the global visions proposed by China, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, underscore Beijing's goal of universal prosperity and sharing high-quality development with the rest of the world.

They "demonstrate the notion of win-win that President Xi Jinping has emphasized for a long time", he added.

Hashmi noted that at the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October, Xi announced an eight-point agenda in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative and that the global community lauds the program as it advances "innovation in development, livelihoods, open economy, (and) compliance with internationally accepted standards when building new projects".

Xi, in his keynote speech, listed eight major steps that China will take to support the joint pursuit of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, which include building a multidimensional Belt and Road connectivity network and supporting an open world economy.

Hashmi believes the larger spirit in the concept of a community of shared future, especially in the new era, is highly significant. "As far as I can see, I think this is where China has done an excellent job in bringing forth to the developing world, its own experiences, and its own good practices," he said.



Analysis

Abdul Basit Alvi



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Ashfaq Al-Awsat)

## "Why the increase in medicine prices?"

In today's times, there is no one who is not worried about rising inflation. By the way, inflation is an international problem. In all the countries of the world, the necessities of life are increasing day by day. To a large extent, this is a natural process, because the population of the world and especially Pakistan is increasing with the speed with which the goods are increasing. The production of food and other necessities of life is not increasing accordingly. If the resources are not available, the country cannot be managed in an orderly manner. This is also the case. By the way, there is already a storm of inflation in the country which is not stopping in any way, which has seriously affected the poor class and has also raised the cries of the white-clad middle class. While the supervisory governments seem to be spending time on ding-tapao policies showing indifference to the ground situation, they are not interested in this smart inflation, nor are they concerned with the problems faced by the citizens, while the administrative parts control inflation at the level of the markets. Instead of controlling, it is determined to take action against the retailers, but the caretaker government did not get any relief before and will not get any relief now.

If we consider and look at the performance of the caretaker government, we will know that the caretaker government, as soon as it was established, had made lofty claims that it would take practical measures to make the economy more prosperous, economic stability and control of demand. They will give relief to the people. But the caretaker government has done it as soon as it goes and has given the people the inflationary shocks that the people

could have expected. If the rest of the inflation is left in its place and only the recent increase in the prices of medicines is discussed, this move of the caretaker government is cruel to the people and especially the poor people. By increasing the prices of drugs, it was impossible for the people to live and now they gave a new opportunity to the people to increase the prices of medicines. You can do it yourself. DRAP had sent a summary of price hikes to the government for 262 drugs and the government has approved the hike in the prices of 146 life-saving drugs. Includes vaccines and antibiotics. After this decision of the federal cabinet, the prices of medicines in the market are likely to increase every week after ten days.

After the approval of the cabinet, the Ministry of Health has issued a notification for the deregulation of medicines. The cabinet has given the power to fix the prices of drugs to the pharmaceutical companies from Drape, the caretaker cabinet does not have this power. They took the position that the pharmaceutical companies will burden the public by selling drugs at arbitrary rates. According to a government notification, the Drape Act, 1976 has been amended to remove the role of Drug Regulatory Authority Pakistan Drape and empower pharmaceutical companies to fix drug prices. This decision of the government will be applied to non-essential medicines i.e. daily medicines. Medicines in Pakistan are divided into essential and daily medicines. Now controlling the prices of daily use medicines i.e. fever, headache, blood pressure, antibiotics, anti-allergy and multivitamins will not be under the jurisdiction of the government, while the authority to increase the prices of life-killing medicines will be given to the cabinet.

It will be possible only with approval. The public is expressing regret over the government's decision as the daily increase in the prices of medicines has already troubled them, the latest move will increase the hardships of the patients.

There are only 464 drugs in Drape's list of essential drugs while there are more than 1300 drugs in the market. Thus, the power to increase their prices will go to the pharmaceutical companies. The government has already experimented with anti-nutrition drugs, whereby medicines that used to cost Rs 15 are now being sold at Rs 2,500 or more after deregulation. Pharmaceutical companies in Pakistan have been demanding for a long time to fix prices based on market demand, now they have been given an opportunity to play openly. Although they have taken notice, pharmaceutical companies are so strong. That they may cause more problems by creating a medicine crisis. This has happened on many occasions in the country, Peristamol, which used to cost 10 rupees, is now being sold for 35 rupees.

The common man has already become a victim. In a recent survey, 44 percent of the Pakistani people have expressed concern about their financial situation, saying that they are financially weaker than ten years ago. Gone, drug price hikes will fuel the fire. The government has increased the prices of 146 life-saving medicines. According to the notification, the prices of the drugs that have been increased include cancer, vaccines and antibiotic drugs. The Drug Regulatory Authority had sent a summary of the price hike of 262 drugs to the government. The government has listed 146 life-saving drugs. Increased prices of medicines. According to the authorities, the prices of 116 drugs included in the list will be increased by the pharmaceutical companies themselves. Officials further said that the government will now control the prices of only 464 medicines included in the National Essential Medicines List.



Analysis

Tariq Khan Yousafzai

## Education standards in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Asmat Shah Garwaki

Education standards in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have suffered due to unnecessary experiments and dwindling socio-economic conditions during the last two decades or so resultant into increase dropout ratio of students from educational institutions.

The political and economic instability besides socio-economic imbalances and unnecessary experiments of the past governments have adversely affected education standards in the province where currently over 4.7 million children are out-of-schools. Bringing them under the education net would be challenge number one for the new elected government.

Detrimental to democratic and economic growth, the high rate of illiteracy in the province especially in merged tribal districts has not only risked the very existence of the education system but it also deprives the poor strata from quality education despite tall promises made by the democratic dispensation, resulting an increase in poverty, unemployment and illiteracy in the country.

"I left my education at primary school after the death of my father and started labour work to support my eight-member family and never look behind," said Kamal Khan, a resident of Pabli tehsil. "To pay heavy loans obtained for the treatment of my father Hamayun Khan died due to pancreas cancer, I abandoned education and started job in construction industry to clear the loans and run house expenses due to poverty," he added.

"Education standards in KP has suffered as it was passed through different unnecessary experiments during the last two decades in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, resulting an increase in dropout ratio of students from schools and unemployment," said Professor Dr AH Hilali, former Chairman Political Science Department, University of Peshawar while talking to the news agency.

Shahab Khan, senior planning officer KP Educa-

tion Department said that about 15,667 new schools were required to enroll 300 such children (aged 5-9 years) per school for upcoming academic year, adding ALP (alternate learning pathways) were initiated for OSC. He said that 300,000 OSC would be enrolled in schools in KP in the next three years besides construction of 10,000 new schools and 1,000 ALP.

Early Child Education (ECE) policy is ready while teaching materials including teachers' guidebook and handbook for such mode of learning prepared; adding transformation of Katchi into ECE was in progress besides completion of training of 790 master trainers and 425 teachers on ECE.

More than 4000 teachers in primary, secondary and middle schools recruited and about Rs30 million invested to support 489 literacy centers besides disbursement of Rs three billion in scholarships among students of the hitherto neglected tribal districts.

Similarly, more than Rs20 million have been spent on students in madrasas in four years, while free textbooks and bags provided to more than 600,000 students in tribal districts besides over Rs20 million for digital skills of students in 2018-22. Besides shifting over 1100 schools to solar energy in the tribal districts, more than three billion rupees were allocated for solarizing of schools.

Former Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education Department Mohtasim Billah Shah said the department has notified provision of free textbooks from class nursery to 12 for the academic year 2024-25. He said 100 free textbooks would be published from class nursery to class 03, 80 percent from class 04 to 05 while the remaining 20 percent to be managed from old textbooks. Similarly, 50 percent of textbooks would be published for class 06 to 12 and remaining 50 percent to be managed from old textbook.

The department has planned to explore the possibilities of soft copies of textbooks to be used through personal, registered cell phones or on tablets, laptops of the students for academic year 2025-26.

# Pakistani students to visit Japan under the JENESYS Program

PPA

ISLAMABAD: On the invitation by the Government of Japan, a group of eight Pakistani undergraduate students (four from Islamabad and three from Karachi) will be visiting Japan from March 5 to 12, 2024 under the JENESYS (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths) program. A total of 49 youths have been invited from the SAARC countries to participate in this program which is being held under the theme of Environment.



JENESYS is a youth exchange program between Japan and the Asia Pacific region launched by the Japanese Government which aims at promoting mutual trust and understanding among the peoples of Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. With focus on the theme of environment, the invitees from the SAARC countries during their stay in Japan will be

provided opportunities to learn and deepen further their understanding of Japan's economy, society, history, politics, and diplomatic relations, and also experience Japan's diverse culture through lectures and visits. The Embassy of Japan held today a

pre-departure orientation session for the visiting youth to give them useful information before their departure for Japan.

While interacting with the students on the occasion, Mr. Kazumasa Takane, Counsellor / Head of Public

Affairs, advised them to make optimum use of this opportunity and learn as much possible about Japan during this short period as this may become a life changing experience for them. "Since my arrival in Pakistan last year, I have had the opportunity to meet many young people in Pakistan and have found them very energetic, talented and keen to learn about Japan and its culture. He hoped that youth from Pakistan and Japan can play the role of a bridge for further promoting mutual understanding and friendly relations between the two countries.

The Government of Japan invites every year several groups of undergraduate/graduate students from SAARC countries to participate in this short term invitation. The program is expected not only to promote capacity building but also to develop mutual understanding among youths of Japan and that of SAARC countries.

# Pakistan and UAE sign MoU for promotion of date palm cultivation

Spokesman Report

ABU DHABI: Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a Memorandum of Understanding today in Abu Dhabi aimed at boosting agricultural innovation and research related to development and promotion of various aspects of the Date Palm cultivation and related industry.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by H. E. Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence of the UAE. Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi and Dr. Abdelouahhab Zaid Prof., General Secretary, Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, signed the MOU.

The MOU will help in promoting joint cooperation and sharing of expertise between the two sides. It



will also provide an opportunity to Pakistani farmers to increase cultivation of date palm including through innovative ideas.

Being one of the pioneers, UAE will provide technological support to Pakistan to

increase date palm cultivation as Pakistan's rich topography presents immense potential in this sector. Pursuant to this MOU, First Pakistan International Date Palm Festival 2024 will also be organized. Pakistan and the UAE

enjoy fraternal relationship and are engaged on a range mutually beneficial collaborative projects including in the realm of political, economic, agricultural, cultural, energy and defence cooperation.

# China's top legislature concludes standing committee session

Spokesman Report

BEIJING: The Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) concluded its eighth session on Tuesday in Beijing. At the closing meeting, lawmakers voted to adopt a revised Law on Guarding State Secrets. President Xi Jinping signed a presidential order to promulgate the law. The law will take effect on May 1, 2024.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, presided over the closing meeting. Lawmakers approved in principle the work report of the NPC Standing Committee. The Council of Chairpersons of the NPC Standing Committee suggested entrusting Zhao Leji to deliver the report to the upcoming second session of the 14th NPC. Lawmakers passed a deputy qualification report and other personnel-related bills. They adopted the draft agenda of the NPC session and the draft name list of the session's presidium and secretary-general, and decided to submit the drafts to the preparatory meeting of the NPC session for deliberation. They also adopted the name list of the members invited to sit in on the session as non-voting participants, CGTN reported. Highlighting the significance of the NPC session in his address at the closing meeting, Zhao called for meticulous preparations to ensure a democratic, united, practical, and progressive session. Zhao also called for more support and encouragement for NPC deputies to speak the truth and propose practical solutions, thereby truly reflecting the voices and wishes of the people. He also urged good news publicity and stressed thriftiness in convening the session. Zhao chaired a meeting of the Council of Chairpersons before the closing meeting and presided over a lecture for lawmakers after the closing meeting. Revised Law on Guarding State Secrets The revised Law on Guarding State Secrets has codified effective measures and practical experience gained in work to guard state secrets since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), according to an official of the Legislative Affairs Commis-

# Affordable calls to China & Afghanistan with Zong

PPA

ISLAMABAD: 1 direct dialing bundle for China & Afghanistan at the most affordable price ever so that you can stay connected with your loved ones despite the distance!

Embracing multitude, Zong 4G understands the struggles of international calling from Pakistan and the inaccessibility tied to the expensive rates which is why IDD Bundles were introduced for more than 10 countries as a way to ease the process of international calling and make it accessible and affordable. Zong 4G's IDD bundles focuses on the theme of 'Kam Paisay Ziada Baat', offering prices as low as 15 Paisas per second for international calling to China & Afghanistan.

In order to make international calling to China & Afghanistan as accessible as possible and to facilitate its users, Zong 4G's International Direct Dialing bundle for China & Afghanistan has been tailored specifically for you to remain connected with your loved ones at all times. The bundle can easily be subscribed through My Zong App or by simply dialing \*3966# with the lowest ever subscription charges priced at Rs.2/daily.

IDD Kam Paisay Ziyada Baat – Prepaid Offer Sharing his insight on this, the official spokesperson for Zong 4G stated, 'International calling in Pakistan is an expensive facility, which is why Zong 4G deemed it important to contribute and formulate bundles that would be easily accessible to users nationwide while offering top-notch connectivity and affordability.'

# Tech-based vision a must to transform Gwadar into energy hub: experts



PPA

ISLAMABAD: Experts at a policy dialogue have said that Gwadar may be made an energy hub, but it is only possible through a technology-based development vision and a community-centric social development approach.

The policy dialogue titled: 'Gwadar as an Energy Hub of Pakistan: Pathways for Sustainable Development', was organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) under its Network for Clean Energy Transition (NCET) here.

In his opening remarks, Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri, SDPI Executive Director, said the discourse on a unique subject like Gwadar as an energy hub was pertinent and crucial at a time when the new government is about to take office. He further said the development of Gwadar as a port and a modern city has co-benefits that need to be identified.

Naghman Chaudhry, the former advisor and Strategic Analyst, said that keeping in view the recent developments in the Indian Ocean Region and global geopolitical landscape, it is important for the country to embrace a change of mindset. He underlined that Gwadar is an alternate port that could be used to degravitate Central Asian Republics (CARs) from Russian influence as the Gulf oil reserves were to last not beyond 40 years.

Dr Hassan Daud Butt, Associate Professor, Bahria University and former Director CPEC at the Ministry of Planning and Development, stressed the need to find a middle ground between opportunities and challenges to get an alternative plan for a speedy development of Gwadar under CPEC.

Shakeel Ahmed Ramay, Chief Executive Officer, Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development, said the total gross regional product of Shenzhen city alone is \$482 billion that started its journey from a few million dollars.

Dr Eram Ashraf, Research Scholar, said there is a scarcity of data on CPEC that needs to be resolved to ensure credible flow of information for better reporting on the gamechanger project. "Gwadar is not connected to the national grid, so how it can become energy hub whereas it is important that the policy initiatives should be inclusive that means not only power players, but also local communities should have their input and stakes in the decision-making process. The problems of protesting people, including women, needs to be addressed on priority bases," she added.

# Alif Holdings presents waterfall eastern tower, where luxury meets investment security

PPA

LAHORE: Alif Holdings Pvt. Ltd, a beacon of excellence and innovation in Pakistan's real estate development landscape, proudly announces the launch of their latest project, Waterfall Eastern Tower in Lahore. This new addition to Lahore's skyline promises to elevate the standards of luxury living while offering unparalleled investment opportunities in the region.

The project, which marks the 17th venture of Alif Holdings (Pvt.) Limited, comprises three distinct towers—Central Tower, Eastern Tower, and Western Tower—housing over 200 luxury apartments and presidential suites. Each unit is designed to offer residents the epitome of comfort and convenience, with features such as a Compatible RFID system for entry and exit, Full home automation, CCTV surveillance with armed guards, and High-speed elevators.

Alif Holdings Pvt. Ltd prioritizes the security of investments for its customers. With a track record of delivering successful projects and a commitment to transparency and integrity, investors can trust that their investments in Waterfall Eastern Tower are in safe hands.

# Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Turkmenistan Atadjan Movlomov called on Interim Federal Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali on Tuesday.



Photo: PID

# Jordan keen to expand trade relations with Pakistan

PPA

ISLAMABAD: H. E. Dr. Maen Khreasat, Ambassador of Jordan visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and during an interaction with the business community, said that his country is keen to expand trade relations with Pakistan so that both countries can achieve mutually profitable outcomes. He said that Jordan and Pakistan can cooperate in many areas including tourism, IT, sports, vocational training for youth, agriculture, and others. He said that there is a good potential for cooperation between the women entrepreneurs of both countries to achieve mutual profits. He said that the bilateral trade volume of around US\$ 50 million between Jordan and Pakistan is much less

than their actual potential and stressed that Jordan and Pakistan should establish direct air links to promote strong connectivity between their private sectors to explore all untapped areas of bilateral business and investment cooperation. He said that Pakistani investors can invest in the real estate sector of Jordan. He assured that he would cooperate in developing business linkages between the private sectors of both countries to increase bilateral trade and economic relations between Jordan and Pakistan.

Speaking on the occasion, Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan and Jordan enjoy cordial relations that should be transformed into growing trade and economic relations between the two countries to achieve mutu-

al benefits for their economies. He said that Pakistan produces many quality products including textiles, food products, pharmaceuticals, sports goods, surgical items, and leather goods. Jordan should enhance its imports from Pakistan to meet the needs of its consumers. He said that both countries should focus on the regular exchange of trade delegations and facilitate B2B meetings between their private sectors to strengthen bilateral business cooperation. He said that the Jordan Embassy should share the list of its major imports with ICCI so that the business community can increase its exports to Jordan.

Akhtar Hussain, Muhammad Ashfaq Chatha, Maqsood Tabish, Rizwan Chheena, and others were also present at the meeting.







## Called on

ISLAMABAD: Ethiopian Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf on Tuesday.



Photo: Online

## Ethiopia, Pakistan discuss maritime cooperation

## Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: H. E. Jemal Beker Abdula, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, called on Chief of the Naval Staff H. E. Admiral Naveed Ashraf on Tuesday here at the Naval Headquarters in Islamabad.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on the matters of mutual interests including bilateral cooperation in the area of maritime and regional security.

On the occasion, H. E. Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula briefed the Naval Chief on the major role being played by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in promoting pan-Africanism in the region to foster the spirit of brotherhood, fraternity and collaboration among the people of Africa.

The Ambassador also informed the Naval Chief about the successful conduct of the 37th African Union Summit by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa which witnessed

the presence of more than 49 heads of the states from African countries and senior officials of international organizations.

He highlighted the role of the FDR Ethiopia in ensuring regional security by immensely contributing to the fight against terrorism.

The regional integration initiatives of the FDR Ethiopia including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, port diversification and energy export to the neighbouring countries also came under discussion during the meeting. On the occasion, the

Ambassador said the FDR Ethiopia had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland that completely aligned with the international rules.

He said Ethiopia had been striving to connect the whole region by sharing its resources with brotherly countries in order to ensure just and equitable development across the region.

On the other hand, Chief of the Naval Staff H. E. Admiral Naveed Ashraf acknowledged the role played by Ethiopia in regional integration through multiple initiatives.

He congratulated the Government of the FDR Ethiopia on holding the AU summit successfully.

The Naval Chief, on the occasion, acknowledged the historical significance of Ethiopia as well as the great importance attached by the Government of Pakistan to its bilateral relations with an heir of the one of the oldest civilizations.

He said both the countries were heirs of the centuries' old civilizations and had huge potential for the bilateral cooperation including the area of maritime.

## President emphasizes early prevention of diseases to avoid expensive treatment



## City Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Tuesday said that adoption of preventive measures against various diseases was prerequisite to ward off treatment which was expensive in Pakistan and such habits would also help reduce burden on the health system. The president expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation of Pakistan National Heart Association (PANAHA) that called on him at that Aiwan-e-Sadr to present a report on the activities and accomplishments of the organization, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release.

The president stressed upon creating awareness among the masses

about the significance of preventive measures against non-communicable diseases and heart diseases. He also underscored the need about the role of media, local population, mosques and non government organizations to create such awareness, besides utilization of different latest platforms to spread awareness messages. PANAHA President Major General (ret) Masud Ur Rehman Kiani briefed the president about the role of the organization and public awareness campaigns including holding of walks, seminars, lectures and training sessions. He said that they were creating awareness among the people about healthy activities and lifestyle. President Alvi appreciated PANAHA for its contributions in the health sector.

## IHC withdraws show-cause notice to DC Islamabad

## City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday withdrew the show-cause notice issued to Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon for non-appearance in the contempt of court case. IHC's Justice Babar Sattar heard the miscellaneous application of DC Islamabad pertaining to the contempt of court case. Irfan Nawaz Memon appeared before the court along with his lawyer Raja Rizwan Abbasi.

On the court's directive, the DC submitted his response to the show cause, requesting for the withdrawal of the notice. The court accept-

ed this request. Irfan Memon then sought exemption from attendance on March 1, citing his scheduled tour to Saudi Arabia for Umrah. Justice Babar Sattar rejected the DC's request, observing that the court would pronounce the reserved verdict on March 1 and the accuser was expected to be present in the court on that day.

He ruled that the accuser could leave for abroad after the verdict's pronouncement. It may be mentioned that the decision of the contempt of court case is reserved for the issuance of a Maintenance of Public Order against Shehryar Afridi, which will be pronounced on March 1.

## Minister Gohar Ejaz returns from Saudi Arabia after 'fruitful' visit



## Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce, Industries & Production, Investment, Interior and Overseas Pakistanis, Dr. Gohar Ejaz returned to Islamabad after a successful visit to Saudi Arabia, where he engaged in high-level discussions to strengthen bilateral economic ties between the two nations.

During his visit, Minister Gohar Ejaz met with key Saudi officials including Minister of Investment Khaled Al-Falih and Commerce Minister Majid Bin

Abdullah Al-Qasabi in Riyadh. These meetings aimed to explore opportunities for collaboration and investment between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Accompanied by a delegation of 20 Pakistani industrialists, Minister Gohar Ejaz held productive discussions with Saudi ministers on various avenues for enhancing bilateral trade and investment. The discussions emphasized the importance of increasing cooperation in sectors such as oil and gas, construction, food, and agriculture.

Minister Gohar Ejaz highlighted the need to elevate trade and investment relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, underscoring the mutual benefits of closer economic cooperation. Saudi ministers expressed their commitment to strengthening trade relations with Pakistan, affirming their willingness to explore new avenues for collaboration.

## PTI decries 'theft' of people's mandate

## City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Tuesday continued its criticism of the recently-held general elections 2024, saying that it wants the "real mandate" of the public to be recognized.

Addressing a press conference, PTI leader Ali Muhammad Khan alleged that the people's mandate was stolen during the February 8 polls and added that the poor people decided on bringing "change" via elections.

He stressed that the public should be allowed to exercise its right to choose a government. "The results of the elections should reflect the actual votes cast by the people," he added.

Referring to Maryam Nawaz's election as the chief minister of Punjab, he said that he had nothing against her and would have congratulated the PML-N leader if she had won her seat through votes.

Ali Muhammad also urged the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to order probe into allegations of former Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chatha, who confesses to be involved in rigging the general polls in Rawalpindi division.

## Elections 2024

Political stakeholders were making efforts to forge alliances and secure 169 seats in the 336-member lower house of parliament.

PTI-backed Independent candidates consolidated their lead in the Pakistan general elections 2024 over mainstream political parties, especially in the National and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies, throughout the result announcement process.

According to the results announced so far, PTI-backed independent candidates have managed to win 92 seats. PML-N is in the second position with 79 seats, while the PPP has won 54 seats.

## Israeli forces stop Gaza aid convoy, detain and strip-search paramedics: United Nations

## News Desk

UNITED NATIONS: UN relief agencies operating in the war-torn Gaza voiced deep frustration on Tuesday over continuing aid access restrictions placed on them by the Israeli military, after ambulances carrying patients away from a stricken hospital at the weekend were stopped for several hours while health workers were searched and detained. "This is not an isolated incident. Aid convoys have come under fire and are systematically denied access to people in need," said the UN Humanitarian Country Team in Palestine, after the mission to evacuate 24 patients from Al Amal Hospital in Khan Younis.

The development came amid continued intense fighting across the enclave since October 7. Amid repeated international calls for a ceasefire, negotiations have continued for the release of the Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners

held in Israel. To date, nearly 30,000 Gazans have been killed, the majority women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Several patients "if not all of them" required some kind of surgical intervention "which of course could not happen at Al Amal Hospital", said Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN aid coordination office, OCHA. Thirty-one non-critical patients had to be left behind. Speaking in Geneva, Laerke confirmed that the evacuation mission had been flagged to the Israeli authorities who had acknowledged this notification as part of standard deconfliction protocols. But, the Israeli military had not given "any information or any communication" about why the ambulances were detained for at least seven hours nor why the paramedics "had been taken out, forced to undress", with two still not freed, Laerke said. The development involved a UN World Health Organization (WHO)-led convoy on Sunday

to Al Amal Hospital. Once there, UN-partner the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PCRS) evacuated 24 patients, including a pregnant woman, a mother and a newborn. The hospital - a PCRS-run facility - has been at the centre of military operations in the southern Gazan city for over a month, sustaining 40 attacks between January 22 and February 22 which left at least 25 dead and health workers too scared to leave the medical compound for weeks, the UN country team said in a statement. Today in Gaza, only 12 of its 36 hospitals were "partially functioning", WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told journalists in Geneva. "Six in the south and six in the north (but) 23 hospitals are not functioning at all." An additional 15 emergency medical teams had also been deployed in the south of Gaza with four field hospitals offering a combined capacity of 305 beds, Lindmeier continued. "These are important pockets of help,

but of course it would be more important to get the Gaza health system back up on its feet and get all those healthcare workers - which are there and trained and they are even, under these circumstances, ready to work - into a position and able to work." On Saturday, a UN relief mission to Al Amal successfully delivered desperately needed medical supplies, medication and antibiotics, along with some food, water and fuel for the generators. "The health workers confirmed that they were able to step outside the hospital buildings within the compound on Saturday after a month inside," WHO reported. "They were afraid for their lives, since there was fighting around the area and the hospital had been hit numerous times." Pre-war, the hospital had 100 beds and focused on maternal and child health with some capacity to address basic surgical and internal medicine needs, along with specialized rehabilitation services. But, destruction



caused by the bombing of the third floor decreased the capacity to an estimated 60 beds. Six UN entities participated in the operation which delivered enough supplies to treat 50 trauma patients: WHO, the UN aid coordination office (OCHA), the UN agency for Palestine refugees

(UNRWA), the UN population fund (UNFPA), the UN landmine relief agency (UNMAS) and the UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS). In a related development, UN peacekeepers expressed alarm on Tuesday at an escalation in hostilities on the border area

known as the Blue Line that separates Israel and Lebanon. The alert from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) follows what it calls "a concerning shift in the exchanges of fire" in recent days between Hezbollah militia in south Lebanon and the Israeli military.