



Hosted an Iftar Dinner for Pakistan Cricket Team at Army House. Wished them all the best in their future endeavours

Chief of Army Staff
Gen Syed Asim Munir

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President Zardari to address parliament's joint session on Apr 16

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari is scheduled to address the joint session of the parliament on April 16, to mark the beginning of the parliamentary year, following the general elections. The joint session of the parliament will be held on Tuesday (April 16) at 1600 hours, according to a President House press release. He would address the joint session in pursuance of Article 56 (3) of the Constitution which says, "At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the National Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year the President shall address both Houses assembled together and inform the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) of the causes of its summons." President Zardari summoned the joint parliamentary session in exercise of the power conferred under Articles 54 (1) and 56(3) of the Constitution.

Awais sets April 23 deadline to power curb pilferage



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari has given April 23 as deadline to all Chairmen, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Power Distribution Companies (DISCOs) to curb power pilferage completely. Terming the current efforts to curb menace of power pilferage insufficient, the minister directed strict action against power thieves, said a statement issued by the Power Division here Monday. The data did not match to the actual damages of power theft, he said. He said the incumbent government has zero tolerance about power pilferage and committed to rooting out the power theft menace. He said all the concerned officers should trace all the sources of electricity pilferage and addressed them. SEs, XENS SDOs and concerned field staff have to give certificate of no theft in their respective areas, the minister said. He said all CEOs would verify these certificates and submit them to the ministry. These performance would be reviewed on weekly basis and no leniency would not be tolerated, he said. Awais said legal, disciplinary action would also be taken against the officials for inconsistency or conflicting evidence. Amendments would also be brought in the laws severely punish the officials involved in electricity theft, he said. He said there would be amendments to the laws preventing dismissal of the officials found involved in such crimes. APP

Ashrafi commends PM's Saudi visit for strengthening economic ties

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Monday lauded Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to Saudi Arabia, highlighting its potential to foster economic cooperation and fortify bilateral relations between the two nations. In a media talk, he said both the countries are keen in expanding their partnership in various sectors. Ashrafi emphasized the significance of prime minister's diplomatic outreach, particularly in the realm of economic cooperation adding that the visit holds the promise of unlocking new avenues of economic opportunities for both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Highlighting historical, cultural, and religious bonds, he expressed optimism that the discussions held during the visit would yield tangible results leading to enhance collaboration in diverse fields, including trade, investment, and infrastructure development. He commended

the prime minister's proactive approach in exploring avenues for cooperation and advancing bilateral ties to new heights. He said in the meeting between prime minister and crown prince, a comprehensive discussion was also held regarding the escalating situation in Gaza and the ongoing crisis in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The meeting, aimed at addressing regional instability and promoting peace, emphasized the importance of international intervention to halt Israeli aggression and ensure compliance with international law. Ashrafi said both leaders expressed grave concerns over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and stressed the need for the international community's involvement. They called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, access to humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza, and adherence to international legal frameworks, he added. APP



MAKKAH MUKARRAMAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif performs Umrah.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia affirm commitment to expedite first wave of \$5b investment package

VOM Report

MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif met with Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud here wherein the two countries affirmed their commitment to expediting the first wave of the previously discussed investment package worth \$5 billion. The bilateral ties and regional as well as global developments of mutual interest, including the worrying situation in Gaza were discussed in the meeting that took place at Al-Safa Palace here on Sunday during Prime Minister Shehbaz's three-day visit to the Kingdom, according to a joint statement issued on Monday. The discussions centered on fortifying the fraternal relations between the two brotherly nations and exploring avenues for enhanced collaboration across various sectors. Emphasis was laid on the Kingdom's supportive role in Pakistan's economy and the mutual desire to strengthen trade and investment ties, the statement added. The two countries called for efforts by the international community to halt Israeli military operations in Gaza and mitigate humanitarian impact besides emphasising the need to advance the peace process. Both sides underscored the imperative for



the international community to pressure Israel to cease hostilities, adhere to international law, and facilitate unhindered humanitarian aid access to Gaza. Two sides discussed the need for advancing the peace process in accordance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly as well as the Arab Peace Initiative aimed at finding a just and comprehensive solution, to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The two sides stressed the importance of dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve the outstanding issues between the

two countries, especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute to ensure peace and stability in the region. The Crown Prince congratulated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on assuming the office and expressed warm wishes for his tenure. Prime Minister Shehbaz also conveyed gratitude for the Kingdom's steadfast support and hospitality and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to bolstering bilateral ties and economic cooperation. PM Shehbaz invited the Crown Prince to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at the earliest convenience which he accepted.

Pakistan Agrees to Launch PM Abiy's Green Legacy Initiative in Major Cities



VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have agreed to launch the Green Legacy Initiative of H.E. PM Dr. Abiy Ahmed in the major cities including Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, Sialkot and others. This was agreed upon in a meeting between H.E. Jemal Bekir Abdula, Ambassador of Ethiopia to Pakistan, and Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination H.E. Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam. The Ambassador lauded the role played by H.E. Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam in initiating a joint collaboration between Ethiopia and Pakistan last year for addressing climate related issues. He recalled the launch of Green Legacy Initiative in Islamabad last year in the presence of senior ministers, government officials, diplomatic corps, business community, media and civil society. The Ambassador stressed the need for enhanced collaboration between the two countries to address climate issues through skills, technology, information and knowledge sharing. He said the government of Ethiopia stood ready to work together with the Pakistani government in addressing climate-related issues such as floods, food insecurity and others. Ethiopia would extend all-out support to Pakistan on climate mitigation through technological transfer and experience sharing, the ambassador remarked. He also congratulated H.E. Romina Khurshid Alam on assuming the charge of the Coordinator to the PM on Climate Change. H.E. Romina Khurshid Alam expressed keen interest in the launch of the Green Legacy initiative in different cities of her country. She said the climate change was a global phenomenon and joint efforts against climate changes were the need of hour. The government of Pakistan is looking forward to working with Ethiopia to deal with climate change, she added.

Interior Minister Naqvi strongly condemns explosion in Khuzdar



ISLAMABAD: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the explosion in Khuzdar, Balochistan and has expressed deep sorrow and regret over the loss of precious lives in the blast. In his message, the Federal Interior Minister has expressed his heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of the martyrs and prayed for patience. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured in the blast. He said that the government, security forces and the people are determined in the war against terrorism and this scourge will be eradicated from the land of Pakistan.

Army Chief hosts iftar dinner for Pakistan Cricket Team

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir on Monday hosted an Iftar Dinner for Pakistan Cricket Team at Army House Rawalpindi.



According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release, the Pakistan Cricket Team underwent and concluded physical training at Army School of Physical Training (ASPT) camp in Kakul, Abbottabad. Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Mohsin Naqvi along with PCB officials also attended the Iftar. The COAS while talking with the players

wished them all the best in their future endeavours. The cricketers thanked COAS for the excellent training provided to them at Kakul and the role Army plays in supporting the games in Pakistan. PR

Govt determined to boost economy to give confidence to business community: Commerce Minister

KARACHI, Apr 08 (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Monday said that the government was confident and focused to further improve all the factors linked with the economy, so as to boost confidence of the business community. He said this while talking to media after a meeting at the Pakistan Business Council (PBC) here on Monday. He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also held several meetings regarding economy of the country and business, exports, trade and energy sectors are among our top priorities. Jam Kamal Khan said that the Commerce Ministry is well aware of its responsibility to reach out business community to take the input from them and



we are determined to give our utmost to resolve the challenges being confronted by this community. Referring to a recently held pre-budget

seminar at Islamabad, the Federal Commerce Minister said that representatives of the business community from all over the country were invited to take their

valuable suggestions to incorporate in the policy and decision-making process so as to further improve the situation. The commerce minister told that trade diplomacy has been a very vital factor throughout the globe which helps the countries to improve their diplomatic ties. He said that the government as well as the business community are considering the available options to move the things in the positive direction. Jam Kamal Khan said that the government is very hopeful and taking things forward in a progressive way and in near future we will share with the media and the masses the opportunities we need to ponder over for our progress and prosperity.

He told another questioner that the road map of exports is not like pushing a button to improve the exports immediately rather it is a gradual and continuous process and therefore we will have to take appropriate steps accordingly. He lauded the performance of the previous caretaker government, and said that many things were streamlined by the caretaker setup in the past six months as smuggling was also controlled to a greater extent and some of the initiatives needed to be taken ahead. To a question, he said that the ban on Onion export was imposed till April 15 only for Ramazan-ul-mubarak and further extension in it is not under consideration. He said that steps were taken during last

five months to improve border control mechanism and now the present government has taken a decision to establish a dedicated authority to enable all the concerned departments operate under one umbrella. To a question about the auto industry, he said that like other industries the suggestions are also received pertaining to cars manufacturing and we will take an amicable decision on it ahead of the next budget. Speaking about the law and order situation in Karachi, he said that the law and order is a provincial subject while the Center government facilitates the provincial governments and we will continue our cooperation and further improve collaborations in this regard. APP

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How to fix education

HAFIZ ABDUL MAJID

There is a protest going on outside the University of Balochistan (UoB). Since there is a ban on protests inside the university campus, the protesters, including teachers and other staff members, are holding the protest outside the campus on Sariab Road. Such protests are now becoming a routine activity for public-sector employees. This time, the university's employees are out on the streets, demanding the timely payment of their salaries, which the university administration is unable to pay. Last year, the UoB remained closed for months owing to the non-payment of salaries.

The Balochistan government allocates a yearly grant-in-aid as financial assistance for public-sector universities. This amount is distributed as per an agreed formula among the 11 public-sector universities in the country. The budget for this year is Rs2.5 billion. One may wonder how Balochistan's oldest university has become so financially fragile that it does not have funds to pay the salaries and pensions of its employees on time. Multiple reasons have brought things to this point. The university administration blames it on the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which has slashed its budget share per the 18th Amendment. It also complains about receiving meagre funding from the provincial government. This is one side of the story, which, however true to some extent, does not depict the whole picture. The provincial government last year constituted a high-level reform committee to dig out the reasons for the financial ills of public-sector universities in the province and submitted recommendations for improving the financial sustainability of these higher education institutions (HEIs). The chancellor – ie the governor of Balochistan – also chaired a three-day conference to mull over the financial malaise of the universities and recommend remedies. All the vice-chancellors of the universities gathered in Quetta for three days. The universities' reform committee and the vice chancellors' conference came up with a host of suggestions to overcome the administrative and financial weaknesses plaguing the finances of the universities. They also flagged some issues in their reports. One such issue is the flagrant violation of the HEC's guidelines observed in appointments and promotions by the universities. According to the HEC's Institute Performance Evaluation Report (2021), in certain appointments and promotions, the University of Balochistan relaxed both the criteria of experience and the number of publications required for the promotions. This is not only a violation of the HEC's guidelines but also a major reason for the plummeting of quality education in universities. Such out-of-turn promotions, indeed, prove to be a drag on the finances of the university to boot.

Similarly, another form of mismanagement is observed in the misuse of scholarship facilities. Back in the Musharraf era, the HEC, in a bid to promote quality education in the higher education sector, introduced a scholarship programme. From 2008 to 2019, around 68 faculty members of the University of Balochistan availed themselves of these scholarships and proceeded abroad for higher education. However, 12 of these faculty members never returned. The university administration has apparently done nothing to bring them back or at least recover the salary amount or scholarship money spent on their studies. Like any other public-sector entity in Pakistan, public-sector universities in Balochistan face the issue of overstaffing. According to the report by the reform committee, the sole women-only university in the province, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, had hired 290 employees on contract, while the UoB had hired more than 85 contractual employees. These are in addition to the employees who have been rehired after their retirement, who not only enjoy monthly salaries but claim pensions as well. It was also recorded with great concern by the committee that some of the statutory positions – which, under the Balochistan Universities Act 2022, are to be filled through a competitive process – are given to the faculty members of the universities. The positions of pro-vice chancellor, registrar and treasurer in many universities, including UoB, are filled on either an additional charge or an ad-hoc basis. And that too mostly by the faculty members who are professionally academics and not suited for such administrative positions. The pension allowance also claims a major chunk of the budget of older universities. The UoB administration has mismanaged it big time. The audit of public universities for FY2022-2023 reveals that the UoB has no separate pension fund, due to which commutation and monthly pensions are paid from the recurring grants received from the government. Furthermore, on July 14, 2021, the university management, without approval from the Senate/syndicate, increased the pension contribution from 45 per cent to 65 per cent, which caused an impact of Rs50 million per month. For financial sustainability, the annual budget of universities must be properly prepared and discussed at the relevant forums. In the case of public-sector universities, these forums include the finance and planning committees, the syndicate and the Senate. The draft budget prepared by the treasurer's office is placed before these forums, and detailed discussion is carried out. All budgetary demands, including the creation of new positions, development initiatives, and non-development budget, are discussed, deliberated upon and approved. Unfortunately, many public-sector universities in the province do not place their annual budgets before the syndicate and the Senate for approval. Besides pointing out the mismanagement and weaknesses in the administrative and financial systems of public-sector universities, the reform committee and the VC conference also recommended some useful solutions to address these problems and put the universities on the path of financial stability and growth. One such recommendation was for universities to explore new streams of revenue generation and enhance their revenues at least by 50 per cent from the current levels. Some of these recommendations are briefly mentioned here: First, universities should explore alternative avenues of income generation to increase sustainable operations. They may undertake research commercialization and establish university-industry links.

The writer is a former secretary of the colleges and higher education department, Balochistan.



Dr Ayesha Razzaque

The pursuit of uniformity

research but could not afford to retain the talent it needed. The bureaucracy of education refused to acknowledge that all institutions of higher education were not alike, could not have the same mission, and that not all of them were equipped to conduct valid, let alone world-class, research. Albeit for different reasons, the pursuit of uniformity was strangling both NUT and RUT.

There once was a national university, let's call it the National University of Technology (NUT) located in Metropabad, a major city of a developing nation.

Metropabad was a sought-after place to live, which is why NUT – a public university – was fortunate to attract some of the most qualified faculty available in the country. However, Metropabad was one of only a few well-developed cities in the country which meant that the cost of living there was high relative to most of the country. Faculty members happily joined NUT but soon discovered that they could not make ends meet on their salaries, which were affixed centrally, and country wide.

Kot Sadu, a small town in a rural area of that same country was home to another university, let's call it the Rustic University of Technology (RUT). RUT was located in an underdeveloped part of the country with no industry in its vicinity, Internet connectivity that was spotty, slow, and unreliable, and traveling on roads after sunset could be unsafe. Students attending RUT were often from nearby districts that were similarly underdeveloped and were, for the most part, underprepared for university studies.

NUT and RUT were two very different institutions with different resources, different caliber faculty, and students of different levels of preparation. Nevertheless, they were judged by the same yardstick – the number of papers published irrespective of whether they contained anything worthwhile or not.

Universities like NUT were unable to pay their faculty a competitive wage because they were constrained by nationally set remuneration scales that were blind to the needs and context of universities like NUT which was located in a major metropolitan area and had a higher cost of living. It was equipped to do good, valid

Just like Metropabad's NUT and Kot Sadu's RUT, Pakistan's public universities are either like one or the other or fall somewhere in between. An entry-level faculty position usually goes to someone in their late 20s or early 30s, an age bracket in which many in our society have a young family. At many public universities, the starting salary for an entry-level faculty position, as decreed by the HEC's Tenure Track System (TTS) contracts, even one from one of the world's top universities, is around Rs200,000 (less than \$720 by today's exchange rate).

However, unlike public sector employees all through the government, they are not offered any pension, medical coverage, or other benefits. To add insult to injury, they are working alongside colleagues on legacy BPS contracts that do provide those benefits. Predictably, the result has been acrimony and dissatisfaction because appointees under both service structures want what the other one has but they do not. This has been a standing problem for over a decade that I have written about on multiple occasions (most recently, 'The fierce politics of Pakistan's academia', The News Intl., December 23, 2023).

In a recent meeting of university leaders and senior members of the education bureaucracy in Islamabad, some of the recommendations on some issues made sense but others were rather lackluster and predictable.

On the issue of multiple service tracks for faculty, the recommendation was to create a "standardized performance-based faculty appointment service structure in the HEIs" and a "unified pay scale(s) ... in consultation with the Government of Pakistan." Similarly, recommenda-

tions included "uniform criteria and pay packages ... for positions like Registrar and Treasurer." The assembly also made recommendations about the procedure for PhD students to change their supervisors, which amounts to external micromanagement of universities and is something the learned leaders of universities should be able to figure out for themselves.

I found it noteworthy that most recommendations amounted to demands from everyone working below the rank of VC (academics, finance departments, curbs on admin promotions, austerity) and many demands from various departments and agencies of the government (demand for guidelines/dictation, more funds for salaries of Pro-VCs, seed funding for endowments, etc). It seems like the only group of whom very little is demanded are VCs themselves – no expectation to fundraise, no expectation to lobby for legal reforms on behalf of their institutions, no expectation to innovate.

On almost every challenge, the default response seems to be to seek assistance, resources, and guidance from outside instead of leveraging the lack of decrees issued from the top as policy space in which to innovate. This is not a suggestion without precedent: Over the years, at least a few public universities have established and grown their endowments and can now afford to pay what they need to retain the right academic talent. They are not beholden to every minor diktat from the education bureaucracy and can exercise their autonomy like most other universities only dream of. Globally, in many countries this is not an exception – it is the norm.

As a nation, we are obsessed with uniformity, even where it does not make sense. We are cursed with a smooth-talking ruling elite that is, some more than others, quick on cunning slogans but dim-witted on policy. We ought to strive for equal opportunity but that is not the same and should not be confused with enforced uniformity. Nevertheless, campaign promises of uniformity, singleness, and the elimination of choice (for others) draw cheers from

voters.

I would like to make a special mention here of Germany (population 84 million all speaking one language). Post-WW2, Germany has trodden carefully to avoid any kind of hierarchy or class/caste system in its population for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, its secondary school system (grade 5 and onwards) comprises at least four different types of schools geared to prepare students for different futures (vocational or academic). Providing students equal opportunities does not imply that all schools and curricula must be cast from the same mould.

Uniformity (of some kind) may be an option in city-states and small countries like Monaco / Liechtenstein / Iceland / Maldives / Luxembourg (populations of less than ~1 million), Ireland / New Zealand / Norway / Finland / Denmark / Singapore (populations of less than six million). It is not an option for a country with the fifth-largest population of 245 million and that speaks more than 70 languages, especially with next to no additional resources to deploy.

The only place in our country that could qualify is the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) with a population of 1.2 million and less than 450 public schools. At the current pace of spending on ICT schools and if the population stands constant, it will be more than a decade until all schools can be provided with basic infrastructure that many are missing and achieve a basic level of uniformity of infrastructure – boundary walls, toilets, running water, electricity, classroom furniture, Internet access, computers labs, and libraries.

We should certainly strive for equal opportunity for school and university students although, in a country as large and diverse as ours, we are still decades away from achieving it. And as misguided as it is, there is no possibility of the kind of perfect uniformity that political messiahs keep promising voters. Anyone who tells you otherwise either does not know what they are talking about or is being dishonest.

The writer (she/her) has a PhD in Education.

Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect The Asian Telegraph's point-of-view

Today in History

History of Pakistan



Under pressure from the PPP, public resentment, and anger against his administration, Khan resigned from the presidency in poor health and handed over his authority to the army commander, a little known personality and heavy alcoholic, General Yahya Khan, who imposed martial law.
1969-1971: martial law
Main articles: Bangladesh Liberation War; Indo-Pakistani War of 1971; National Security Council

of Pakistan; and Legal Framework Order, 1970
 President General Yahya Khan was aware of the explosive political situation in the country.[104] Support for progressive and socialist groups was rising, and calls for a change of regime were gaining momentum.[104] In a television address to the nation, President Khan announced his intention to hold nationwide elections the following year and to transfer power to the elected representatives.[104]

Virtually suspending the 1962 Constitution, President Khan instead issued the Legal Framework Order No. 1970 (LFO No. 1970) which caused radical changes in West Pakistan. Tightening the grip of martial law, the One Unit program was dissolved in West Pakistan, removing the "West" prefix from Pakistan, and a direct ballot replaced the principle of parity.[110] Territorial changes were carried out in four of the country's provinces, allowing them to retain their geo-

graphical structures as they were in 1947.[110] The state parliament, supreme court and major government and authoritarian institutions also regained their statuses.[110] This decree was limited to West Pakistan, it had no effect on East Pakistan.[110] Civilians in Ayub Khan's administration were dismissed by the military government which replaced them with military officers.

To be continued....

Showbiz

Taylor Swift is praised by Drew Barrymore for her powerful writing and kindness

Joey King reveals how she became friends with Taylor Swift on Drew Barrymore Show



Taylor Swift has recently been appreciated by Drew Barrymore for her powerful writing on her talk show. "One of my favourite things is Taylor's writing," said the Never Been Kissed actress. Drew continued, "I mean what an incredible poet she is and her lyrics as well as the music," while raising two girls. "This is the hero we need," she remarked. Drew started praising Taylor after her celebrity guest Joey King shared how she became Taylor's friend at the age of 10 during latest appearance on The Drew Barrymore Show. Drew asked Joey, "I am watching, refreshing myself with the music videos you did with Taylor Swift. So,

how old were you at that time when you did the first music video." To this, the Kissing Booth actress replied, "I was 10 when we shot the first video." The co-host wanted to know if she and Taylor had been friends since then? Joey responded, "Yes, I was friends with Taylor from that time. I mean I was 10 so she was supportive and sweet but then we became more friendly as I got older." The actress told Drew, "When Taylor asked me to be a part of I Can See You video, it's a full circle of Taylor version of Speak Now. It was so special." During the show, Drew questioned, So, what was Taylor like?

Tech

Total solar eclipse 2024: Strangest eclipse-related queries and their answers

The total solar eclipse will take the spotlight Monday, April 8, 2024. The rarity and mystique surrounding this event has led to a plethora of questions and speculations. As eclipse anticipation builds, individuals are really wracking their brains to contemplate the significance and possible effects of this celestial phenomenon. Can we use a toilet during a solar eclipse? Oh, absolutely! It's not like the sun and moon will suddenly vanish from the solar system if you step away for a moment. So yes, feel free to relieve yourself without fear of astronomical consequences. Should you shower after eclipse? There's no need for a special post-eclipse shower. Just stick to your regular hygiene routine and you'll be fine. Eclipses aren't known for shedding solar particles or moon dust that drifts down to coat us. Why can't I sleep after eclipse? There's no scientific reason why you can't sleep after an eclipse. It's likely just a combination of heightened emotions and



adrenaline, according to eightsleep.com. What does it mean if a baby is born during the eclipse? If a baby is born during an eclipse, it holds no special significance or meaning in terms of the baby's characteristics, personality or destiny. Does a solar eclipse affect pregnancy? No, solar eclipses do not affect pregnancy. Despite various cultural beliefs and myths surrounding solar eclipses and their supposed effects on human health and behavior, there is no scientific evidence to support any connection between solar eclipses and pregnancy outcomes.

Health

Prostate cancer cases predicted to double by 2040

A new study warns that prostate cancer cases will increase substantially worldwide over the next two decades. This rise is linked to a growing population of elderly people. The study warns that the number of cases could double by 2040. The number could reach nearly 3 million annually by 2040, compared to 1.4 million in 2020. Deaths caused by prostate cancer will also rise by 85%, reaching nearly 700,000 annually. The increase is expected among men living in low- and middle-income countries. The main risk factors for prostate cancer, such as age over 50 and family history, are beyond lifestyle modifications or public health interventions. The Lancet Commission on Prostate Cancer advises early-detection programmes targeting high-risk individuals. It also emphasises the importance of awareness campaigns and improv-

ing diagnosis and treatment, particularly in low- and middle-income nations. The commission highlights the necessity for inclusive research involving diverse ethnicities, especially individuals of West African descent, to address the disparities in prostate cancer outcomes. Prostate cancer constitutes 15% of all male cancers. This cancer is a significant contributor to mortality and disability. In the UK, it is ranked as the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in men and is the most prevalent male cancer in over half of the world's nations. Nick James, lead author of the commission, stresses the urgency of proactive measures, stating, "As more men globally reach middle and old age, we must prepare for this impending surge in prostate cancer cases." "We know this surge in cases is coming, so we

need to start planning and take action now. "Evidence-based interventions, such as improved early detection and education programmes, will help to save lives and prevent ill health from prostate cancer in the years to come. "This is especially true for low- and middle-income countries which will bear the overwhelming brunt of future cases." In high-income countries, current screening methods often involve the PSA test. However, the commission suggests a more targeted approach, combining PSA testing with MRI scans for high-risk groups, including those with a family history of the disease or of African descent. The commission also calls for significant improvements in prostate cancer care in low- and middle-income countries, emphasising the need for enhanced medical infrastructure and trained personnel.



Workers' remittances record \$3 bn inflow in March 24

ISLAMABAD: The overseas workers' remittances recorded an inflow of US\$3 billion during March 2024, the State Bank of Pakistan on Monday said. In terms of growth, during the month under review, remittances increased by 31.3 percent on month on month basis and 16.4 percent on year on year basis, said a news release here.

Workers' remittances inflow of US\$ 21.0 billion has been recorded during the first nine months of the fiscal year 2023-24 as compared to US\$ 20.8 same period of last year.

Workers' Remittances inflows during March 24 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia (US\$703.1 million), United Arab Emirates (US\$548.5 million), United Kingdom (US\$461.5 million) and United States of America (US\$372.5 million).

BISP beneficiaries to receive financial assistance directly into bank accounts: SBP

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan, Monday, rolled out a facilitation framework to enable Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) beneficiaries receive financial assistance directly into their bank accounts.

The central bank, in a statement issued here, said that the facilitation framework has been developed in consultation with the BISP and banks and under the framework banks accounts of BISP beneficiaries will be opened in all banks and Micro Finance Banks across the country.

The decision has been taken to onboard BISP beneficiaries for receiving the social welfare payment into their accounts and under the framework, about 9.3 million BISP beneficiaries will be able to open a "BISP Sahulat Account" in a single visit to the designated bank branch within their vicinity.

The BISP has mapped its beneficiaries with a bank branch in the vicinity of the beneficiaries. However, given the large number of beneficiaries, the framework will be implemented in phases.

Initially, a pilot phase will be run in Karachi and Lahore for onboarding about 300,000 BISP beneficiaries and after successful implementation of the pilot phase, the framework coverage will be extended to other cities in consultation with BISP.

The framework is expected to facilitate disbursement of social welfare payments to BISP beneficiaries in an efficient and transparent manner, enhance women financial inclusion, and promote digitization of financial services. INP



RAWALPINDI: People board a train at Pindi Railway station to celebrate the joyous occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr with their loved ones. ONLINE

CTD makes 'progress' in probe of threat letter to judges

ISLAMABAD: The mystery behind the threatening letters sent to judges of the Supreme Court and various high courts is close to being unravelled as the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) is closing in on clues to the letter's scribe, sources told media on Monday.

According to the sources, CTD has noted key developments in the investigation of the matter after the forensic report of the handwriting in the letters was received by them. The sources added that the investigation department has matched the letters written to Supreme Court, Islamabad and Lahore High Courts judges.

As per the forensic reports, the letters to the judges of all three courts were written by the same person, the sources revealed.

Letters to all three courts, the sources added, sent by the name of Resham, Reshaman and Gulshad Khatun were written by the same person and were also sent through the same post office, according to the forensic report.

"There is a single mastermind behind sending threatening letters to judges," the sources within CTD told media, adding that arsenic found in the letters to the judges was also bought by the same person.

The CTD sources revealed that the department is also very close to finding out where the arsenic was purchased from.

Letters to all three courts, the sources added, sent by the name of Resham, Reshaman and Gulshad Khatun were written by the same person and were also sent through the same post office

"Nadra identification process of CCTV videos obtained near post boxes continues," the sources added.

Several judges of the SC and high courts, including Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, have continued to receive suspicious anthrax-laced letters since April 2, a day after the SC took suo motu notice over allegations of the Islamabad High Court's chief justice and other judges against spy agencies.

The first set of letters was sent to the IHC, the recipients of which included the chief justice of the high court among eight judges of the court.

A police team comprising experts launched a thorough probe to collect facts and ascertain powdery substance after the eight IHC judges received "suspicious letters containing suspected anthrax powder along with a threatening message".

The trend then continued with judges of the Lahore High Court and apex court, including CJP Isa, also receiving the threatening letters.

Following the episode, the government designated CTD to conduct an inquiry into the matter and find the culprit behind the threats being sent to judges.

In the wake of the threatening developments, the LHC administration devised new SOPs regarding letters being received in the name of jurists with all courier companies and postmen directed to get mandatory clearance of all genres of letters and posts from the security room.

A deputy superintendent police (DSP) ranked officer would then carry out a security checkup of the letters before being handed over to the relevant judges' staff officer.

Pakistan faces average cost of Rs136bln per annum due to natural disasters: Speakers

ISLAMABAD: The Speakers at a validation session on financial flow and gap analysis of public finance for disaster preparedness and response said Pakistan faced an annual average cost of Rs136 billion due to natural disasters, necessitating a strategic shift towards anticipating their impacts rather than merely responding. This imperative emerged from a participatory workshop organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Islamabad. The workshop aimed to disseminate the Initial Findings of the Financial Flow and Gap Analysis of Public Finance for Disaster Preparedness and Response conducted by FAO Pakistan, a news release said.

The analysis seeks to facilitate specific advocacy and capacity-building steps essential for enabling national, provincial, and district-level systems to finance and support Anticipatory Actions (AA). With a focus on both national and sub-national levels, particularly in Sindh province, the study looked into government climate and disaster risk financing mechanisms, tools, and flows. Janek Toepper, Climate Change and DRF Specialist, FAORAP, along with Syed Aftab Raza, Public Finance Management Consultant, presented key findings from the research analysis, shedding light on the Disaster Risk Finance for anticipatory action. Following this, Mubushar Hussain, Manager of Disaster Risk Reduction at NDRMF, discussed the National Disaster Risk Financing Strategy and NatCat Model. Emphasizing the necessity for collaborative efforts among public, private, and international stakeholders, speakers highlighted a growing financing gap in global humanitarian assistance, adversely impacting critical services like health, education, and social protection. With only 71% of the required funding received for humanitarian needs during the 2022 floods in Pakistan, they recommended urgent reforms in finance systems to address climate change risks effectively through anticipatory actions.

Experts presented examples from various countries, including Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Mongolia, showcasing how Pakistan can leverage available public funds for anticipatory actions. These funds encompass district contingency funds, provincial disaster management funds, budgetary reallocations, NDMF, Ministry of Finance contingency fund, and contingent credit or risk transfer mechanisms.

Earlier, Florence Rolle, FAO Representative, welcomed participants, highlighting the transformative potential of anticipatory action in humanitarian and development endeavors. Naeem Iqbal, ECHO-PPP Project Coordinator at FAOPK, introduced the ECHO - Pilot Programmatic Partnership project and Anticipatory Action approach, while Ms. Ana Dizon, Early Warning and AA Specialist at FAOPK, moderated the session. Representatives from several government agencies, international organizations, and relevant stakeholders participated in the workshop including: the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Economic Affairs Division (EAD), Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), Ministry of Planning and Development, National Disaster Response Management Fund (NDRMF), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), World Food Program (WFP). APP

Estranged PML-N leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi approaches ECP to launch new political party

ISLAMABAD: Disgruntled Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Monday approached the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for the registration of a new political party.

The seasoned politician, who parted ways with the Nawaz-led party after having differences over the last year, submitted relevant documents to the poll organising authority's office for the registration of a new political party.

Abbasi, the former prime minister, served the top office from August 2017 to May 2018.

Speaking to reporters, Abbasi said he provided relevant documents to the election commission for his new political party which would be registered under the Election Act 2017. He announced that he would take part in next elections under the banner of his new party.

Prior to Abbasi's big move, two bigwigs from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) — Jahangir Tareen and Pervez Khattak — formed their own political parties along with a large number of politicians who had been part of the Imran Khan-founded party.

Tareen had officially launched his party, Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), in June last year. Just a month after Tareen, Khattak also launched his party by the name of PTI Parliamentarians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) which was joined by a large number of defectors from the former ruling party.

Abbasi had hinted at forming a new party on several occasions since he had differences with the PML-N's top leadership and also signalled that there would be a new party forming after the February 8 nationwide polls.

Mujtaba chairs meeting of Cabinet Standing Committee on Legislation, Privatization

LAHORE: Finance Minister Mujtaba Shuja-ur-Rehman chaired the maiden meeting of the Cabinet Standing Committee on Legislation and Privatization here at the Chief Minister's Office on Monday.

Provincial Ministers Sohaib Ahmad, Zeeshan Rafique and Azma Bokhari also attended the meeting.

The meeting discussed a five-point agenda including approval of land auction by the Senior Member Board of Revenue, review of the Punjab Assembly's annual calendar from February 2024 to February 2025 and approvals for amendments in Punjab Sales Tax on Services Act, 2012 (Section 39-1) and Infrastructure Development Cess Act, 2015. The minister directed the law and parliamentary affairs department's secretary to prepare the Punjab Assembly's calendar for the next hundred days and keep the MPs informed about its proceedings. A sub-committee should be formed for the review of approved amendments in the Punjab Sales Tax on Services Act, 2012 and Infrastructure Development Cess Act, 2015, he added. Mujtaba said that transparency should be maintained in the legislative process and the inclusion of all members in legislation should be ensured. APP

All time high': PSX hits new milestone as KSE-100 crosses 69,000 mark

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) hit a new milestone on Monday as it crossed the 69,000 mark due to several factors including stability on the economic front.

The benchmark KSE-100 index gained 1,203.20 points or 1.76% to close at 69,619.98 points, up from the previous close of 68,416.78 points.

According to Arif Habib Limited on X, formerly Twitter, the KSE-100 index crossed 69,000 and is trading at an all-time high.

Samuallah Tariq, the head of research at Pak-Kuwait Investment Company, attributed the gain to the stability on the economic front, hopes of a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal, the privatisation of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

Khurram Schehzad, CEO of the Alpha Beta Core financial advisory firm, said that investors gained confidence due to "resuming the privatisation process with those making losses as a priority so the government fiscals can get better".

"[This is] followed by IMF's last tranche to be received in the coming week to support external."

Stocks concluded the outgoing week on a high note, with expectations set for a positive performance in the upcoming short trading week, which will span only two days before the extended Eid holidays, traders told media.

"In the upcoming week, we expect the market to remain positive," said brokerage Arif Habib Ltd. "Developments related to SOEs (state-owned enterprises) privatisation or EFF (Extended Fund Facility) program with IMF will further improve market sentiment."

The market closed at 68,417 points, increasing by 1,412 points or 2.11% week-on-week.

Punjab govt to roll out network of rehab centers to treat, cure ailing wildlife: Marriyum

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Senior Minister Punjab, Marriyum Aurangzeb on Monday said that government of the Punjab would roll out a province wide network of rehabilitation centers to treat and cure ailing wildlife being poached and mutilated for entertainment purposes and enhance public education and awareness on bio-diversity with the technical assistance of Four Paws.

The senior Punjab Minister visited the Margallah Wildlife Rescue Centre erstwhile Islamabad Marghazar Zoo to view the newly rehabilitated black bears being rescued by the Punjab Wildlife Department on the special directives of the Chief Minister Punjab and held a press talk, where she was flanked by Prime Minister's Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam, Chairperson Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB), Rina Saeed Khan and team of Four Paws' experts busy in treating the rescued bears.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister Punjab have initiated combing operations to know that there has been no poached wild animals, wildlife rescue center across Punjab



whereas the Punjab Wildlife Department rescued six dancing black bears who were in a pathetic condition. There were three raids conducted in a row which resulted into a series of actions being underway to curb the menace of illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching, she added.

The IWMB has been working on wildlife preservation, whereas the Four Paws team had reached on their own expenses from Bulgaria, Austria and Germany to treat the maltreated animals, she said.

"It is against CITES (international convention on illegal wildlife trade) and our wildlife laws. But it is unfortunate have initiated combing operations to know that there has been no poached wild animals, wildlife rescue center across Punjab

to rehabilitate the bears. The Bears have a natural habitat of their own that is unique," she said.

Marriyum Aurangzeb mentioned that the Punjab Wildlife Department revealed that the bears were made dancing on hot plates, whereas the nose pins drilled in their nostrils were pulled to hurt them that made the animal shake showing people like the bear was dancing. Senior Punjab Minister termed it an insensitive attitude and a punishable offence as per the law. She noted that Punjab wildlife rescue centers' establishment was underway, whereas the first has been started from Lahore Safari and the other at the Lahore Zoo area.

"A microchip has been installed for a

separate identity of each bear. However, a five-hour surgery by Dr Frank was done here with his mobile equipment of Four Paws to do a critical dental surgery of the bear. We will collaborate with them to establish a network of rehab centers and education of local masses for awareness across the province," she added. The Minister regretted that wildlife had never been at the political agenda whereas the current regime had endorsed special focus on the matter. "We have started GIS survey of wildlife population and a mobile app will be launched after eid to keep public aware of wild animals," she said.

Marriyum Aurangzeb said the federal capital showcased the country's wildlife and therefore a most modern wildlife education facility would be established here to apprise the masses on protection and benefits of wildlife. However, the citizens role would be critical in making it a success, she added. To a query, Marriyum said, "It's a holistic wildlife plan and we will introduce licensed trade of pet animals that will be electronically linked to EPA's dashboard to keep a digital track of the animals being domesticated at home. However, captivity of wildlife is illegal."

Balochistan CM chairs meeting of reforms committee for improvement of governance



QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti chaired the first meeting of the reform committee for formation of effective measures and time frame for improvement of governance.

The meeting decided to introduce artificial intelligence technology to account for ghost and absentee employees in the province.

Chief Minister directed the Information Technology (IT) department to prepare a pilot project, despite decision made to hire experts from private sector to enable CMDU.

He said that the experts included in the committee should make recommendations regarding the improvement of the relevant sectors,

for the improvement of governance, AI technology should be started from BMC, Civil Sandeman Hospital and University of Balochistan.

The AI system will be implemented in a phased manner across the province, he said adding that people were suffering due to the weaknesses of governance.

He said that there was a lack of trust between people and government departments, People's trust in the state has to be restored adding that the biggest obstacle in the way of good governance was corruption.

He said that 30,000 young people would give technical education with aim to make expert to get jobs every year abroad saying that clear direction form improving governance should be made.

The results of major decisions taken today will start coming in the next decade, he said adding that vision would be given to the reform committee, the committee should determine the right direction.

If the pension bill and unnecessary expenses are not controlled, after the next ten years we will not have the resources to maintain the basic facilities, the CM noted. APP