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Sindh govt announces public holiday on April 4

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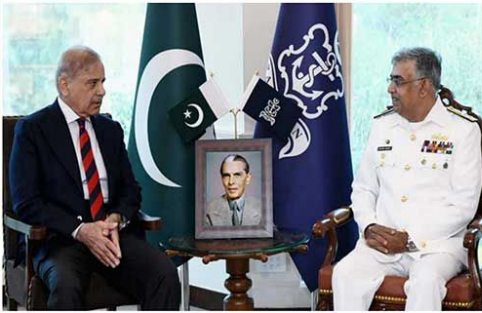
Pakistan to provide all possible security to Chinese citizens: Foreign Office



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
The Foreign Office said on Thursday that the government will ensure all possible security of Chinese citizens residents in Pakistan.
Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said during the weekly briefing that Pakistan condemns all types of terrorism.
The Pakistan government was in touch with Chinese counterpart, she said and added that Pakistan and China are neighbours and have strong brotherly relations. She assured Beijing that a thorough investigation of Bisham incident was being conducted and the perpetrators would not go unpunished.
Regarding Kashmir and Palestine situation, she said that the ongoing Indian atrocities in its occupied valley should end. Pakistan would continue to support Kashmiris until they get right to self-determination, Ms Baloch added.

PM Shahbaz Sharif lauds Pakistan Navy for safeguarding country's maritime interests

The naval chief benefited the prime minister for his visit and reposing his confidence in the Navy



ISLAMABAD: After a high-level meeting with Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday decided to constitute a commission to probe into allegations levelled by the Islamabad High Court's (IHC) judges against the country's spy agencies of interfering in judicial matters.
The premier-CJP huddle comes after six judges of the IHC — Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kiyani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz — wrote to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to convene a judicial convention over the matter of the alleged interference of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, in judicial affairs.
"PM Shehbaz assured CJP Isa that no compromise will be made on the

judiciary's independence." Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said in a press conference after the key meeting today.
Tarar added that the federal government has responsibility to investigate the matter under supervision of an impartial judicial personality, which may be a retired judge with good reputation, under the Commission of Inquiry Act.
At the same time he also announced that a decision in principle has been made to constitute a commission, and the 'premier will take up the matter during the federal cabinet meeting tomorrow (Friday).'
"The federal government considered the content of the judges' letter an extremely serious matter as no one should be allowed to meddle in any institutions' affairs, and it should be probed."
To a question, Tarar categorically rejected speculations of concealing facts or slowing down probe process.

Punjab Assembly approves budget for financial year 2023-24



Soon Times Correspondent LAHORE
The Punjab Assembly approved the budget for the financial year 2023-24 on Thursday.
Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan presided over the budget session.
The proceedings started with voting and discussions on the annual budget and fiscal demands. A total of 42 such demands were presented in the House, along with seven cut motions.
Opposition members initiated the debate by voicing their objections to certain budgetary allocations.
Sumni Iftikhar Council leader Imtiaz Sheikh, attacked the treasury saying charity seats for women which sparked a contentious exchange of views.

President for further boosting bilateral cooperation with UK



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK) enjoy cordial relations, rooted in history and shared legacy, which have been reinforced by high-level interactions and people-to-people contacts over the years.
He stressed the need to further strengthen trade and economic ties for the mutual benefit of the two friendly countries.
The president expressed these views while talking to the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Both sides exchanged views on

matters of bilateral importance.
During the meeting, the president expressed his warm sentiments for His Majesty King Charles III and the Princess of Wales, Catherine Middleton, and wished them good health. He also mentioned that the people of Pakistan held His Majesty the King in high esteem.
Talking about the economic situation of the country, the president stated that the stabilization of the economy was the priority with a key focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation.
The president highlighted that climate change posed a serious challenge to Pakistan as it was among the most vulnerable countries to climate change. He informed the high commissioner that Sindh had mangrove forests, covering an area of 600,000 hectares, which supported the coastal ecosystem, besides contributing to environmental sustainability. He said that Pakistan had huge potential for solar and wind energy, and their proper utilization could help the country meet its energy requirements.
Jane Marriott felicitated President Asif Ali Zardari on assuming the office of the President of Pakistan.

Atta Tarar's victory from NA-127 challenged in LHC



Soon Times Correspondent LAHORE
Victory of Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) leader and Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar from Lahore's constituency NA-127 in Feb 8 general elections has been challenged in the Lahore High Court (LHC).
Victory of Samiullah Khan from PP-145 has also been challenged. Justice Sultan Tanveer of Election Tribunal will conduct hearing on the petitions. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and others have been made party in the petitions.
Meanwhile during a meeting with the Political Counselor of the British High Commission Miss Zoe Ware, Attaullah Tarar said misinformation, disinformation, and fake news were problems of the entire world which had to be controlled.
The minister said the biggest

challenge on social media was fake news and the government was dealing with this problem.
In the meeting, relations between the two countries, and the promotion of cooperation in the fields of media were discussed in detail. Cooperation in the fields of film and drama was also discussed.
Attaullah Tarar said that journalists should adopt the process of verification on social media and the whole world should develop a code of conduct related to social media.
Miss Zoe Ware congratulated the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) on forming the government and Attaullah Tarar on assuming charge as Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

Commission to probe IHC judges' allegations, says law minister



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar announced on Thursday that the government would establish an inquiry commission to investigate allegations made by judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), accusing the country's intelligence agencies of interfering in judicial matters.
The law minister's announcement regarding the commission followed a meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa at the Supreme Court concerning the letter from IHC judges sent to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC).
While addressing a press conference alongside Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor

Usman Awan, the law minister stated that the commission would be formed in accordance with the Commission of Inquiry Act and would be chaired by an impartial retired judge who would compile a report on the commission's findings.
He mentioned that the name of the individual appointed to lead the commission would be announced within two to four days.
Tarar explained that PM Shehbaz Sharif would present the matter to the cabinet on Friday (tomorrow), which would then establish the commission to investigate the allegations made by six IHC judges.
Earlier, PM Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with CJP Isa regarding the matter. Law Minister Tarar and AGP Awan accompanied

the premier.
The premier remained with the CJP for around one and a half hours to discuss the letter written by six judges of the IHC.
No statement was issued after the meeting. However, the CJP convened full court again at 4:00 pm.
On Tuesday, six IHC judges penned a letter to the SJC, alleging interference in judicial matters by the country's intelligence agencies.
The SJC comprises CJP Isa, apex court judges Mansoor Ali Shah and Mumtaz Akhtar, IHC CJ Aamer Farooq and Peshawar High Court CJ Mohammad Ibrahim Khan.
The IHC judges, in their letter to the SJC, asserted that there were efforts to coerce judges by targeting their relatives through

Hadiqa Bashir - first Pakistani to acclaim Global Citizen Youth Leader Award



Soon Times Correspondent (Web Desk) - Hadiqa Bashir, a 22-year-old girl from Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is the first Pakistani to claim the prestigious Global Citizen Youth Leader Award.
Hadiqa, a dedicated activist and founder of Girls United for Human Rights, is at the forefront of promoting women's rights and gender equality in her community.
Through a range of initiatives addressing issues like early marriage, sexual

health, education, poverty alleviation, and climate change, she showcases a strong dedication to sustainable development and underscores the transformative potential of education, particularly in tribal Pakistani communities.
Hadiqa Bashir has been recognised as a young leader for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and a Global Fellow for gender equality.
She has been honoured with numerous awards, including the Asian Girls Ambassador Award, the Acumen Fellow

Award, and the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award, all acknowledging her unwavering commitment to gender equality.
Continuously contributing to social justice and sustainable development in Pakistan, Hadiqa exemplifies the essence of positive change through her leadership and advocacy efforts.
Hadiqa is among the 32 newly selected 2024 Global Citizen Youth Leaders Award recipients from Australia and the broader Asia-Pacific area making an impact to address global challenges including climate change, rising hunger and poverty, and conflict.

Naqvi meets CM Gandapaur to discuss security situation



Soon Times Correspondent PESHAWAR
Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi Thursday met Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Amin Gandapaur to discuss the security situation of the province.
It was decided to beef up intelligence-based activities to end terrorism in the province.
Both the leaders expressed regret over the deaths of the Chinese citizens in the suicide attack in Shangla. The federal

interior minister directed effective measures to combat terrorism.
He said Pakistani nations' resolve cannot be defeated by the cowardly actions of the miscreants and the enemies.
Gandapaur said the provincial government was determined to take all possible steps to control terrorism, ensuring protection and safety of lives and properties of people of the province.

SC conditionally allows military courts to announce reserved verdicts on civilians' trials



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday conditionally allowed the military courts to announce their reserved judgements on civilians' trials.
A six-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, heard the intra-court appeals against trials of civilians in military courts.
Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Shahid Waheed, Justice Mansoor Hilali and Justice Irfan Sattar Khan were part of the larger bench.
TODAY'S HEARING
At the beginning of the hearing, the attorney general said there was a possibility that 15-20

accused could be released by the special courts.
The attorney general told the court that acquitted and those with lesser sentences would be released with concessions. He said 105 accused were in custody of the army.
PEOPLE WITH LESSER PUNISHMENT WILL HAVE TO BE GIVEN CONCESSION BY THE ARMY CHIEF
He said for release of the accused, three steps will have to be followed. The first step will be the announcement of reserved verdict.



Pak-UK BILATERAL COOPERATION

President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom (UK) enjoy cordial relations, rooted in history and shared legacy, which have been reinforced by high-level interactions and people-to-people contacts over the years. He stressed the need to further strengthen trade and economic ties for the mutual benefit of the two friendly countries. These President expressed these views while talking to the British High

Commissioner to Pakistan, Ms Jane Marriott, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Both sides exchanged views on matters of bilateral importance. During the meeting, the President expressed his warm sentiments for His Majesty King Charles III and the Princess of Wales, Catherine Middleton, and wished them good health. He also mentioned that the people of Pakistan held His Majesty the King in high esteem.

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of 600,000 hectares, which supported the coastal ecosystem, besides contributing to environmental sustainability. He said that Pakistan had huge potential for solar and wind energy, and their proper utilization could help the country meet its energy requirements. Ms Jane Marriott felicitated President Asif Ali Zardari on assuming the office of the President of Pakistan.

The Strategic Significance of Pakistan-US Relations: A Comparative Analysis with Russia and China



Dr. Noaman Saeed Khattak

The relationship between Pakistan and the United States has been marked by a complex interplay of strategic cooperation, geopolitical challenges, and occasional tensions. While Pakistan maintains relations with various global powers, including Russia and China, the United States holds a unique position as the most important ally for Pakistan. This essay explores the multifaceted nature of Pakistan-US relations and examines why the United States remains paramount to Pakistan's strategic interests, especially in comparison to Russia and China. Historical Context: The historical roots of Pakistan-US relations can be traced back to the early years of Pakistan's independence in 1947. The United States viewed Pakistan as a strategic ally in its efforts to contain Soviet influence during the Cold War. Military assistance and economic aid flowed from Washington to Islamabad, solidifying the foundation of a strategic partnership. However, the relationship faced challenges due to Pakistan's nuclear program and its close ties with China. Strategic Imperatives: Several factors contribute to the significance of

the United States for Pakistan's strategic interests. Firstly, the United States provides substantial military and economic assistance to Pakistan, bolstering its defense capabilities and supporting its counterterrorism efforts. This assistance is crucial for Pakistan's security and stability, particularly in the face of regional challenges, including terrorism and instability in Afghanistan. Secondly, the United States serves as a key diplomatic ally for Pakistan on the global stage. Through its diplomatic influence and international partnerships, the United States can advocate for Pakistan's interests and provide diplomatic support during times of crisis. This diplomatic backing enhances Pakistan's standing in the international community and helps protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, the United States plays a vital role in facilitating Pakistan's economic development and integration into the global economy. Trade relations between the two countries contribute to Pakistan's economic growth, while American investment stimulates job creation and infrastructure development. Additionally, access to the US market provides opportunities for Pakistani exports, further enhancing its economic prosperity. Comparison with Russia and China: While Pakistan maintains relations with Russia and China, the United States remains the most important ally for several reasons. Firstly,

unlike Russia and China, the United States provides substantial military and economic assistance to Pakistan, addressing its immediate security and development needs. Secondly, the United States offers unparalleled diplomatic support to Pakistan on various international platforms, amplifying its voice and influence on global issues. Furthermore, the United States maintains a robust presence in the Indo-Pacific region, which aligns with Pakistan's strategic interests in maintaining stability and security in South Asia. In contrast, Russia's focus is primarily on its immediate neighborhood, while China's expanding influence in the region raises concerns for Pakistan regarding its sovereignty and regional dynamics. Conclusion: In conclusion, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States is characterized by strategic cooperation, diplomatic alignment, and economic partnership. While Pakistan engages with various global powers, including Russia and China, the United States remains the most important ally due to its substantial military and economic assistance, diplomatic support, and alignment with Pakistan's strategic interests in South Asia. As both countries navigate evolving regional challenges and global uncertainties, the strength of their partnership remains crucial for promoting stability and prosperity in the region.

Pakistan and the Tri-Border Market Proposal



Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer

In a bid to encourage economic collaboration and enhance regional connectivity, a groundbreaking proposal for a jointly administered market at the tri-borderland of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan has emerged during 2021, heralding a new era of cooperation among the neighboring nations.

Discussed by former governments of Imran Khan in Pakistan and Hassan Rouhani in Iran, interpreted by esteemed political economist Dr. Muhammad Asim, the proposal aims to capitalize on historical ties and geographical proximity to establish a platform for shared economic activities. Dr. Asim's careful research and advocacy have garnered attention, culminating in the presentation of his findings at prestigious academic forums and publications, including the International Studies & Research Institute in Tehran. The proposed market holds

immense promise for the socio-economic development of the region, offering opportunities for trade, investment and cultural exchange. By leveraging existing agreements such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Chabahar-Gwadar Memorandum of Understanding 2016, stakeholders envision a robust network that transcends borders and propels growth. However, amidst the optimism, challenges loom large. Tensions between major powers, security concerns of Iran and bureaucratic hurdles from Pakistan pose significant obstacles to the realization of this ambitious vision. Critics raise questions about the feasibility of implementation and the need for comprehensive strategies to address underlying issues. Nevertheless, proponents remain steadfast in their belief that the benefits of regional integration far outweigh the challenges. They emphasize the importance of pragmatic leadership in Pakistan similar to post-1979 Iran and post-US Afghanistan, must commitment to national interests and inclusive

dialogue in navigating the path forward.

As the proposal gains traction on both national and international platforms, Iran and Afghanistan as the two major stakeholders have been urged to seize the opportunity to chart a course towards peace, progress and prosperity. In fact, tri-border market initiative can stand as a testament to the potential of collective action in transforming the socio-economic landscape of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

In a world characterized by geopolitical complexities and economic interdependence, the tri-border market proposal offers a beacon of hope for a brighter future in the heart of South Asia. It is a testament to the power of cooperation and the resilience of nations determined to overcome barriers and forge a path towards shared prosperity. And, this has been realized by the Iran and post-US Afghanistan but the Pakistan, which was behind the proposal of this market, has been unfortunately turned its face from such mode of action since April 2022.

PSX hits all-time high, crosses 67,200 points

Soon Times Correspondent KARACHI:

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) hit an all-time high of 67,246 points before mid-day on Thursday after registering a 1% increase, maintaining its record-breaking spree on the second consecutive working day.

The market reached a new high after the UK-based global index provider (FTSE) announced its decision to retain Pakistan in the 'secondary emerging markets' category for the next six months against the expected decision to downgrade it.



FTSE is one of the two global indexes being tracked by foreign investors managing close to \$16 trillion in assets. The decision may help Pakistan attract extended foreign buying in local stocks. The intra-day high gains, however, clipped to 67,079 points, limiting the surge by 0.80% or 531 points at 1:10 pm, Thursday.

Missing Document

Original transcript of Sofia Majeed Daughter of Abdul Majeed, BS Hons Psychology academic year 2018 to 2022 Roll Number, 18311511-043 by University of Gujrat dated 20-01-2024 is lost somewhere in the area of Ganj Mandi. If any one finds it, please send it to this address: Sofia Majeed resident of New Shams colony, Rawalpindi. Phone number 03180106933



Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja in a meeting with delegation of Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) in Islamabad on March 28, 2024.



Politics in Pakistan is turning into personal rivalries: Cheema

Member of National Assembly Chaudhry Amir Sultan Cheema while talking to former candidate for National Assembly Pir Farooq Bahaul Haq at his residence who expressed his condolences to Amir Sultan Cheema on the death of his brother-in-law. On this occasion Pir Farooq Bahaul Haq said that I agree with your thinking. We should

keep political and personal relationships separate. The death of Amir Sultan Cheema's brother-in-law is a great tragedy. Chaudhry Shehzad Cheema was a subordinate officer who has always played a key role in the development of the country as well as peace and order in the region.



Police organized awareness rally against Kite selling

Traffic Police Yusuf Cheema said that the purpose of organizing this rally is to stop the use of dangerous metal strings during Kite flying which causes loss of life. Kite flying has become more of a blood sport than a hobby. To prevent it, the Punjab government has imposed a ban. Incharge Traffic Police Sargodha Saeed Akhtar Dholka said that the risk of casualties

increases due to the chemicals used in the metal strings used during kite flying. Therefore, it is a right move by the government to ban it. Along with this, the traffic police is also providing awareness to motorcyclists about the use of safety wire. It will help in the elimination of road accidents due to kite flying strings.

Domestic Ombudsman visits Advisor to Ombudsman for continuing USC subsidy to deserving families after Ramazan

The Federal ombudsman to review the facilities being provided by the government for providing relief to low-income families. He expressed satisfaction with the stock position and availability and prices of essential items of daily use in the store as well as arrangements made to facilitate the consumers. Syed Zakir Hussain termed the facilitation to beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and persons with monthly income of less than Rs 60,000 (PMTI-60) as encouraging and said that Utility Stores Corporation (USC) was providing subsidies on 19 different essential commodities to the deserving families in the holy month of Ramazan. He said that every BISP registered beneficiary may purchase the subsidized essential items of daily use in a

specific quantity according to the monthly quota fixed by the USC while after the month of Ramazan the subsidy will be limited to only five items. The Advisor stressed that subsidy on 19 essential items for deserving families should continue even after Ramazan. They further informed that the rules of the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority were strictly followed by the USC while centralized software evaluated the sale and demand of every individual store and supplies were made to the store according to the requirements. On a query, they informed that as per the government policy, the BISP beneficiaries and PMTI-60 consumers were allowed to purchase 20-kilogram wheat flour, 5 kg sugar, and 5 kg ghee or 5-liter cooking oil on special subsidized rates in a month.



PM appoints Bharath Coordinator of National Health Services

Member National Assembly Dr. Malik Mukhtar Ahmed Bharath has been appointed as the Coordinator of National Health Services. His appointment has been approved by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif. Dr. Malik Mukhtar Ahmed Bharath has been elected Member of National Assembly from NA-82 Constituency. His brother Malik Sohaib Ahmed Bharath is currently the Minister of Communications and Construction of Punjab.



Atta Shaheed PS crackdown on kite sellers

111 South. Qasim Ali was arrested and a case was registered. District Police Officer Faisal Kamran said, the increasing number of accidents in the country during kite flying is condemnable. Kite sellers are not eligible for any discount. Citizens are requested to support the police to stop this bloody game. Give the information of kite sellers immediately to the concerned police station or 15 to ensure the safety of the citizens.

SE Highway submits recommendations to Govt for approval of construction & repair of roads

On the suggestion of Member of National Assembly Shaker Bashir Awan, SE Highway Circle Sargodha Mansoor Ahmed has submitted his recommendations to the Punjab Government for the approval of the construction and repair of thirteen roads of Khushab district at a total cost of Rs. 3 billion 92 crore 33 thousand. Among them, Nowshera to Sakesar Air Base Road at the cost of Rs 64 crore 52 lakh 80 thousand, Nowshera Road Patrol Chowki to Khatawai Road at the cost of Rs 25 crore 5 lakh 80 thousand, Nowshera to Jaba Road at the cost of Rs 35 crore 69 lakh 18 thousand, Khushab to Langarwala Bridge Road at the cost of Rs 58 crore 36 lakh 79 thousand, Khushab Pull Tala Gang Road will be constructed at a cost of 16 crore 55 lakh 97 thousand are included. White Road

Nourpur Thal Road at the cost of 10 crore 96 lakh 45 thousand rupees, Ganjwal Warchha Road at the cost of 20 crore 21 lakh 29 thousand rupees, Nurpur Thal to District Boundary Bhakkar via Jharkal at the cost of 27 crore 87 lakh 45 thousand rupees, Grote Adhikot Rangpur Road at the cost of 54 crore 32 rupees 11 lakh rupees, Ganjwal Adhikot road at the cost of 22 crore 38 thousand rupees, Matha Towana road at the cost of 25 crore 43 lakh 96 thousand rupees, Nurpur Thal Kaka Road via Jamali at the cost of 35 crore 24 lakh 69 thousand rupees and Rangpur Nurpur Thal road at the cost of 26 crore 82 lakh 16 thousand rupees are included.



At UN, Pakistan renews commitment to beat plastic pollution, bolster waste management

Pakistan has plans to fight plastic pollution and improve waste management system, Ambassador Munir Akram has said, amid global efforts to sustain a livable planet. "We plan to implement "Zero Plastic Waste Cities along the Indus" under the overall framework of the 'Living Indus Initiative' to tackle the challenge of plastic pollution," the Pakistan envoy told an event organized by the Mission of Turkey, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and UN-Habitat. The event was held at the UN headquarters in New York to mark the International Day of Zero Waste. The Day highlights both the importance of bolstering waste management globally and the need to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns. In his remarks, Ambassador Akram expressed appreciation for the initiatives of the President of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis and the message from Ms. Emine Erdogan, the First Lady of Turkey, for their commendable efforts in this regard.

In Pakistan, he said zero plastic waste cities will be established in the country's Indus Basin as part of this initiative, starting with the largest cities in the Basin such as Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Hyderabad, Multan, Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta. Highlighting the global challenge of waste generation, Ambassador Akram emphasized the significant amount of waste produced annually, including municipal, solid, and hazardous waste. Pakistan, with a population of 241 million people, generates 30 million tonnes of municipal solid waste each year, with 10 to 14 percent of it classified as hazardous waste, he told delegates. "Additionally, Pakistan receives an average annual tonnage of 80,000 hazardous waste from various parts of the world."





Japan leukaemia survivor Ikee to swim at Paris Olympics



Tokyo Leukaemia survivor Rikako Ikee will compete for Japan in the 100m butterfly at the Paris Olympics after missing out on an individual place at the Tokyo Games three years ago.

Three-time world champion Daiva Seto will swim the men's individual medley after Japan's 27-member team for the Paris Games was announced by the country's Swimming Federation. An 18-year-old Ikee was named MVP of the 2018 Asian Games after claiming six golds and two silvers, and was expected to be one of the stars of the Tokyo Olympics. In early 2019, a few months after those triumphs, she was diagnosed with leukaemia and spent around 10 months in hospital. She only returned to competition in August 2020 and completed an incredible comeback by winning the 100m freestyle and 100m butterfly at the 2021 Olympic trials. Her times were not fast enough to qualify for the individual events in Tokyo but the performances gained her selection for both freestyle and medley relay teams at her home Olympics.

Korda and Ko among most fancied at new LPGA Arizona event



Los Angeles Nelly Korda is off to her best start of any LPGA season and back atop the world rankings, but she wants to be boring at this week's LPGA Ford Championship. The 25-year-old American, the daughter of 1998 Australian Open tennis champion Peter Korda, will be among the favorites in the new tour event at Seville Golf and Country Club in Gilbert, Arizona.

Korda, the reigning Olympic champion, reclaimed the world number one spot by capturing her 10th career LPGA title last week at Los Angeles. "It felt really nice to get the W and get to double digits," Korda said. "My goal is to stay very present, take it -- as boring as it sounds -- one shot at a time and go from there. Korda's first victory of 2023 came in January's Drive On Championship in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, and both her triumphs this year have come in playoffs, the intensity fueling her for future success.

Former England women's football captain Houghton set to retire



London Former England women's captain Steph Houghton announced Wednesday she would be retiring from football at the end of the season. The 35-year-old Manchester City defender, who won 121 caps for the Lionesses, will end her playing career at the end of the current Women's Super League campaign. Houghton began her career with northeast club Sunderland in 2002 and also represented Leeds Carnegie and Arsenal before moving to City 10 years ago. "There is no easy way to say it, but I am retiring from football at the end of the current WSL season," Houghton said in a statement published on her own website. "Taking the decision to retire is such a difficult thing to do. Whilst age comes to every player, it makes it no easier having to say the words out loud. Football has been my life, my passion and I have loved the career I have had. "I am excited for whatever comes next but, in the meantime, I remain focused on giving everything I have left to Manchester City over the next two months."



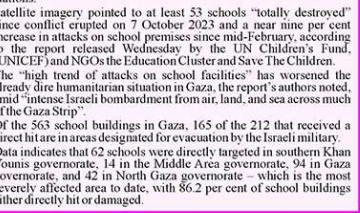
UN report reveals 212 Gaza schools 'directly hit' by Israel since Oct 7

That leaves hospitals such as Al-Aqsa Martyrs caring for an overwhelming number of patients with limited supplies and staff.

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza An international team of doctors visiting a hospital in central Gaza was prepared for the worst. But the gruesome impact Israel's war against Hamas is having on Palestinian children still left them stunned. One toddler died from a brain injury caused by an Israeli strike that fractured his skull. His cousin, an infant, is still fighting for her life with part of her face blown off by the same strike. An unrelated 10-year-old boy screamed out in pain for his parents, not knowing that they were killed in the strike. Beside him was his sister, but he didn't recognise her because burns covered almost her entire body. These gut-wrenching casualties were described to The Associated Press by Tanya Haj-Hassan, a pediatric intensive-care doctor from Jordan, following a 10-hour overnight shift at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the town of Deir al-Balah. Haj-Hassan, who has extensive experience in Gaza and regularly speaks out about the war's devastating effects, was part of a team that recently finished a two-week stint there. After nearly six months of war, Gaza's health sector has been decimated. Roughly a dozen of Gaza's 36 hospitals are only partially functioning. The rest have either shut down or are barely functioning after they ran out of fuel and medicine, were surrounded and raided by Israeli troops, or were damaged in fighting. That leaves hospitals such as Al-Aqsa Martyrs caring for an overwhelming number of patients with limited supplies and staff. The majority of its intensive care unit beds are occupied by children, including infants wrapped in bandages and wearing oxygen masks.

UN report reveals 212 Gaza schools 'directly hit' by Israel since Oct 7

UNITED NATIONS Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza has resulted in "direct hits" on 212 schools within the besieged enclave since Oct 7, according to an analysis partnered with the United Nations. Satellite imagery pointed to at least 53 schools "totally destroyed" since conflict erupted on 7 October 2023 and a near nine per cent increase in attacks on school premises since mid-February, according to the report released Wednesday by the UN Children's Fund, (UNICEF) and NGOs the Education Cluster and Save The Children. The "high trend of attacks on school facilities" has worsened the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, the report's authors noted, amid "intense Israeli bombardment from air, land, and sea across much of the Gaza Strip". Of the 563 school buildings in Gaza, 165 of the 212 that received a direct hit are in areas designated for evacuation by the Israeli military. Data indicates that 62 schools were directly targeted in southern Khan Younis governorate, 14 in the Middle Area governorate, 94 in Gaza governorate, and 42 in North Gaza governorate -- which is the most severely affected area to date, with 86.2 per cent of school buildings either directly hit or damaged.



Four people killed and seven wounded in stabbings in northern Illinois



ROCKFORD, Ill. Four people were killed and seven were hurt when a man went on a stabbing rampage Wednesday across multiple locations in a northern Illinois community, authorities said. A 22-year-old man is in police custody and was being questioned, according to Rockford Police Chief Carla Redd. She said one of the people who was wounded remained in critical condition. "My heart goes out to the families right now that are suffering a loss," Redd told reporters. She said the Rockford Police received a medical call at 1:14 pm followed by additional calls for police and paramedics. "We don't believe there's any other suspects that are on the run or at large at this particular time," Redd said. "Right now, we do want a clear motive as to what caused this individual to commit such a heinous crime."

Not all of the victims found at multiple addresses in the city had stab wounds and none were shot, according to Redd. Rockford Police initially said five people had been injured. Cori Hilliard, a public information officer with the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, told The Associated Press Wednesday evening that two more victims were among those hurt. Three people died at the scenes. The fourth died at a hospital. Police later identified those victims as a 15-year-old girl, a 63-year-old woman, a 40-year-old man and a 22-year-old man. Their names were not released. Redd said residents in the area were being asked to review their home surveillance camera footage for anything related to the attacks.

Polish prosecutors charge seven in financial probe



WARSAW Seven people were charged as a result of an investigation into alleged misuse of funds managed by the Polish justice ministry under the previous government, a prosecution spokesman said on Wednesday. The prosecution is now also analysing evidence to decide whether to request that some lawmakers be stripped of their parliamentary immunity about the investigation, the spokesman said. The probe focuses on the alleged misuse of money from Justice Fund, set up to help victims of crime when it was run by the government of the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party. PiS lost power in October 2023 to a coalition of pro-European parties and the new government headed by the coalition's leader Donald Tusk has vowed to hold to account those accused of breaking the law during PiS's eight-year rule. Earlier on Wednesday and Tuesday special services searched the residences of several former government officials, including the home of former justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro, and a parliamentary hotel room of his former deputy Michal Wos. Wos, who oversaw the Justice Fund, said his home outside Warsaw was also searched. "I have nothing to reproach myself for, everything was legal when I supervised the Justice Fund," Wos told reporters and said he would file a complaint against the prosecution. Ziobro, who has also denied any wrongdoing, said he had to interrupt chemotherapy he was undergoing because of Tuesday's search of his house, calling it a "spectacle of banditry and lawlessness". A Reuters analysis of company filings and statements showed firms have seen more than one, oh, \$7 billion in write-downs and lost revenue.

Obama, Bill Clinton to join Biden to raise \$25 million at event with Queen Latifah and Lizzo

WASHINGTON President Joe Biden will get a boost from Democratic predecessors Barack Obama and Bill Clinton on Thursday at a fundraiser in New York slated to raise more than \$25 million and add some oomph to Biden's 2024 re-election campaign. Biden and the two former commanders-in-chief will take part in a discussion moderated by "The Late Show" host Stephen Colbert at Radio City Music Hall in front of thousands of guests at what Biden's re-election campaign said would be the most successful political fundraiser in history. Musicians Queen Latifah, Lizzo, Ben Platt, Cynthia Erivo and Lea Michele are slated to perform, and some high-paying attendees will get their pictures with the three presidents taken by star photographer Annie Leibovitz. Biden, 81, has faced concerns about his age and fitness for a second four-year term. Recent Reuters polls show his approval rating at 40% and a tight race with Republican challenger Donald Trump, who is 77, ahead of the election on Nov. 5. Tickets for Thursday's event are between \$250 and \$500,000, according to a Democrat familiar with the event. More than 5,000 people were expected to attend. The event will not be televised, but the campaign plans to post content from it on social media. Small-dollar donors can pay \$25 to take part in a virtual event with the three men.



Talks resume on bringing Israeli officials to the US to discuss Gaza operation, the White House says



WASHINGTON Talks have restarted aimed at bringing top Israeli officials to Washington to discuss potential military operations in Gaza, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled a planned visit this week because he was angry about the U.S. vote on a U.N. cease-fire resolution, the White House said Wednesday. "So we're now working with them to find a convenient date that's obviously going to work for both sides," said press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. No date has been finalized yet. One U.S. official said strategic affairs minister Ron Dermer and national security adviser Zachi Hanegbi would be among the delegation to come to Washington. The official were not authorized to speak publicly about the sensitive discussions and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. An Israeli official said the White House had reached out with the goal of setting a new meeting. The official was not authorized to talk to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity. Netanyahu's office said the prime minister "did not authorize the departure of the delegation to Washington." The prime minister canceled the trip this week after the U.N. vote to demand a cease-fire in Hamas-run Gaza, the U.S. abstained from the

vote but did not veto it. Netanyahu accused the United States of "retreating" from a "principled position" by allowing the resolution to pass without conditioning the cease-fire on the release of hostages held by Hamas. The delegation to the U.S. was meant to discuss a promised ground invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which is over-flowing with displaced civilians. Israel has so far rejected American appeals to call off the Israeli operation. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant was already in Washington by the time Netanyahu canceled the trip by other officials. Gallant met with Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. The Gaza operation was one of many topics they discussed. Netanyahu on Wednesday said his decision to cancel was meant to deliver a message to Hamas that international pressure against Israel will not prompt it to end the war without concessions from the militant group, an apparent attempt to smooth over the clash between the allies. Speaking to visiting Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., Netanyahu said the canceled visit "was a message first and foremost to Hamas."