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IHC seeks 'proof' ex-PM retained cipher



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday observed that the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) had no proof that cipher was retained by the former prime minister and it went missing from his possession.
The observation was made by a division bench comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb while hearing appeals filed by the ex-PM, who is the founder of the PTI, and his foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi against their conviction in the cipher case.
Earlier, defence counsel Barrister Salman Safdar had submitted a report of the foreign ministry regarding distribution of copies of the secret document. The report revealed that almost every recipient, including the former army chief and the chief justice, returned the copy "after a case was registered against the former prime minister."
Special prosecutor Hamid Ali Shah briefed the court on how the cipher was sent to the PM Office from the foreign ministry. Chief Justice Farooq asked him if the FIA had any record that prove the ex-PM retained the cipher.

Punjab police need reforms, donning uniforms doesn't solve problems: Gandapur



Soon Times Correspondent PESHAWAR
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said on Wednesday the Punjab police needed reforms, and the problems could not be solved just by donning police uniforms.
Ali Amin Gandapur, while speaking to Dunya News, said, "If I pinpoint something, everyone starts criticising me. Everyone knows what's economic and employment situation when the PTI government was in power and how the PDM performed in its previous and present regime?"
The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister said mere lip service would not work. Similarly, making TikTok videos could not help resolve the masses' issues.
The Punjab police remained instrumental in the worst poll rigging during the general election, he said while reiterating the need to reform them.

PM forms committee to probe wheat import during caretaker govt



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
With the farming community raising a great hue and cry over the government's failure to commence its wheat procurement drive, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday formed a committee to probe the circumstances under which wheat was imported during the caretaker government.
According to a Dunya News report, the prime minister has put retired Justice Mian Mushtaq in charge of the committee which will probe the unnecessary grain import that caused losses of billions of rupees to the state kitty. The committee will submit its findings to the prime minister after two weeks.
Scores of farmers took to the street on Monday against what they call the government's indifference to their plight. Police used force to disperse the protests of farmers particularly in Lahore and south Punjab. Arrests were also made.

PM Shahbaz urges businessmen to prioritise improving working conditions of labour class

PM says govt striving to bring substantial changes in economy



Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif greets a labourer at a luncheon he hosted in their honour on the occasion of Labour Day in Lahore on 1st May 2024.

Soon Times Correspondent LAHORE:
Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that they were fully cognisant of the importance of the labourers and workers in the national economy, urging the wealthy, businessmen, investors and industrialists to prioritise improving the working conditions of their employees.
Addressing a gathering of labourers and workers from different sectors at his residence in connection with the observance of International Labour Day, the prime minister said that the country's economic situation was challenging but they were striving to turn it around with collective efforts and sincerity.
He said that Pakistan would soon become a powerful country through a functioning of a fair system and the hard work of the workers.
The prime minister said that the government was striving to bring about substantial changes in the national economy and to recover billion of rupees being wasted due to corruption.
Referring to his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, PM Shehbaz said that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other leadership desired to see Pakistan moving on the path of progress.
The Saudi business and investors' delegation would soon visit Pakistan which would increase businesses and job opportunities in the country, he added.
The prime minister said that in the upcoming fiscal budget, they would try to provide further relief to the labour class.
Calling upon the entrepreneurs and well-to-do class, the prime minister said that they should also think beyond their families and businesses and invest in certain education and health projects for the deprived classes like those established in the developed countries.

Deputy PM Ishaq Dar arrives in Gambia to represent Pakistan at OIC Summit



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Wednesday arrived in Gambia to represent Pakistan at the 15th Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit being held in Banjul on May 4-5.
Dar announced his arrival in Gambia in a post on social media platform X, erstwhile Twitter.

Dar received by the Gambian Minister of Petroleum and Energy Nani Juwara, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Ambassador Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi and Ambassador of Pakistan to Senegal accredited to Gambia Satima Maymuna Said.
The Foreign Office announced in a press release on Wednesday that Dar would also attend the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers' Meeting preceding the summit on May 2-3. During this meeting, ministers will discuss and finalise the agenda and outcome documents for the summit.
The summit is being convened at a critical juncture for the Muslim Ummah, particularly as the conflict affecting the people of Gaza persists without resolution. It presents an important opportunity for OIC leaders to address the dire situation in Gaza and present a unified stance on the Palestinian question.

Gen Asim addresses conference on Pakistan-UK regional stability



Soon Times Correspondent RAWALPINDI
Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir delivered a keynote speech at the conference on Pakistan-UK regional stability at the National Defence University on Tuesday.
According to the Public Relations Department of the Pakistan Army (ISPR), British Chief of General Staff Sir Patrick Sanders also attended the conference while the nominated British Chief of General Staff, Roland Walker, was among the speakers.
Experts in various fields, defence officials, intellectuals and civil society representatives participated in the conference, added ISPR.
The conference is an important defence dialogue between the two countries. A 30-member British delegation is visiting Pakistan from April 29 to May 3 for the conference.
Earlier, Gen Asim met the British generals and discussed matters of professional interest and development of bilateral defence relations, said ISPR.

Maryam Nawaz field hospitals project to bring healthcare to people's doorsteps

Punjab CM says dream she shared with ex-PM Nawaz Sharif has been realised today



Maryam Nawaz at a podium during the inauguration ceremony.

Soon Times Correspondent LAHORE
Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has launched the field hospitals project with the aim of delivering healthcare facilities directly to the doorsteps of the people.
Speaking at the inauguration ceremony in Lahore on Wednesday, the chief minister expressed satisfaction that the dream she shared with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif of bringing healthcare to people's doorsteps had been realised.
Maryam announced the establishment of 32 field hospitals across the province, with the first one being established in Bahawalpur.
She said these hospitals would particularly serve villages and remote areas lacking access to healthcare facilities.
Regarding the facilities offered at the field hospitals, Maryam highlighted that they would include outpatient departments (OPDs), immunisation services for newborns, maternity services, surgical facilities and the availability of lady healthworkers.
The CM affirmed her government's commitment to ensuring the provision and availability of health-related services throughout the province, stating that numerous field hospitals had been established within six months since she assumed office in Punjab.
In an indirect reference to the use of containers by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Maryam remarked that previously, containers were solely employed for inciting violence, arson and tearing up utility bills. However, she added, from now on, containers would be repurposed as platforms for delivering medical aid to the people.
CM Maryam urged critics of her initiatives, particularly those scrutinising her videos,

US supports Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism: State Dept



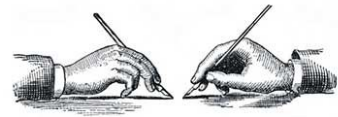
Soon Times Correspondent WASHINGTON
US State Department principal deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel on Tuesday said the United States supports Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism.
Briefing the newsmen in Washington, Vedant Patel said the United States and Pakistan have a shared interest in

combating threats to regional security.
Vedant Patel said that we support Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety and security of its citizens in a manner that promotes the rule of law and protection of human rights.
He said that our partnership with Pakistan on security issues includes a high-level counterterrorism dialogue, funding robust counterterrorism capacity, and building programmes and supporting a series of US and Pakistan military-to-military engagements.
Replying to a question, Patel said that acting Under Secretary for Political Affairs John Bass is on visit to Doha and Islamabad.

Opposition alliance demands full court for judges' letter



Soon Times Correspondent PESHAWAR
The leaders of the Tehreek-e-Tahafuz-e-Ay-een-e-Pakistan (TTAP), a grand alliance of six opposition parties, convened here on Tuesday, with Mahmood Khan Achakzai presiding over the meeting.
The meeting, attended by former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser, Balochistan National Party (BNP) Chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal and others, conducted a comprehensive review of the country's political landscape and engaged in in-depth discussions regarding the complaints raised by six judges of the Islamabad High Court about alleged intervention of intelligence agencies in judicial matters.
Following the meeting, a communique was issued, wherein the opposition leaders highlighted the significant pressure exerted on judges.
The alliance decided to reach out to bar councils and lawyers across the country, observing that safeguarding the constitution was the fundamental pillar of Tehreek-e-Tahafuz-e-Ay-een-e-Pakistan's mission.
The alliance demanded that the matter pertaining to the judges' letter should be heard by a full court bench of the Supreme Court and those responsible for meddling in judicial affairs be taken to task. During the meeting, the TTAP vehemently condemned Israeli aggression in Gaza and the genocide of Palestinians.



SALUTE TO LABOR COMMUNITY

Federal Minister for Privatization, Board of Investment & Communications Abdul Aleem Khan has said on Labor Day that he salutes the high morale of every hard worker, laborer and skilled

person who is serving this beloved country. He added that one who is performing his duties even in the most difficult situations is praiseworthy and we must acknowledge such services not only on 1st May but every

day. Abdul Aleem Khan said that there is no doubt our labor community has great share in the country's economic system and keeps its alive and active. Federal Minister stressed that we must adopt such ways to

provide maximum facilities to the labor class and to include them in the national stream. Abdul Aleem Khan expressed his good wishes for every laborer living in this country and prayed for their success.

Navigating the Indus Water Treaty: India's Hyper-nationalism and Pakistan's Water Security Challenges



Soon Times Correspondent Lahore

The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a seminar titled 'Navigating the Indus Water Treaty: India's Hyper-nationalism and Pakistan's Water Security Challenges'. The event focused on the heart of Pakistan's socio-economic wellbeing—its water resources, and the challenges the Treaty faces due to the changing political dynamics in India. The seminar commenced with opening remarks by Dr Bilal Ghaznafar, Associate Senior Researcher at CASS, Lahore, who emphasised that cooperation, not conflict, is the key to securing a shared water future for the region. This was followed by a keynote address by Engineer Suleman Najib Khan, Convener, Water and Resource Development Council, who spoke about India's water aggression and termed it as an ecocide in nature. He added that there is no silver bullet and Pakistan must build the Indus Cascade for its water security. Mr Ahmed Rafay Alam, an environmental lawyer, discussed the legal perspective on the Indus Water Treaty and highlighted the need for Pakistan to take a robust stance in defending its water rights and seeking international support to resolve disputes and ensure the

implementation of the accord. The last speaker, Dr Hassan Abbas, a renowned hydrologist, framed the Indus Water Treaty as a catalyst for environmental peacebuilding. He promoted a holistic approach to water management, emphasising cooperation, sustainability, and regional stability in the face of climate change and geopolitical challenges. In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS Lahore, reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast dedication to upholding the fundamental principles enshrined within the Indus Water Treaty. He emphasised that as Pakistan's eastern neighbour, India shares the responsibility for maintaining peace in the region. Therefore, he urged India to reaffirm its solemn commitment to international agreements and cautioned against any unilateral measures that could potentially jeopardise the Treaty's integrity. Furthermore, he said that international institutions that played a pivotal role in formulating the Treaty must step forward to safeguard its sanctity and ensure its continued efficacy. The speakers pointed out that India's hyper-nationalism and unilateral measures on the Indus Water Treaty threaten Pakistan's water security and peace, endangering the lives and livelihoods of millions in the region. They also noted that Pakistan faces significant security challenges, including water scarcity, climate change, and India's assertive actions as an upper riparian state. Therefore, the seminar concluded with a resolute commitment to uphold the Treaty and a fervent call to action for the international community.

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Putin's Message to the United States



Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer

Russian President Vladimir Putin undertook an unprecedented action last week when a two-hour press conference intended for the American public. It didn't quite fit the conventional definition of a press conference, as Tucker Carlson, a talk show host perceived as sympathetic to Russia, was the sole reporter present. Nor was it strictly an interview, as Putin predominantly spoke without the benefit of questions. In a way, this format enhanced its value, allowing Putin to articulate his views in a manner that might not have been possible with questions framed from an American perspective. What emerged was a distinctly Russian perspective on the war in Ukraine, presenting Putin as a seemingly reasonable and thoughtful individual. While he made some dubious claims, it's acknowledged that leaders often make such assertions, even those who project statesmanship. Putin's conduct conveyed to the American public that his position is not entirely baseless. He emphasized his role as a Russian patriot working in the interest of his country, discouraging any comparison to figures like Stalin. Furthermore, he demonstrated extensive knowledge, surpassing that of most politicians. Though aided by pre-prepared questions, Putin gave the impression of a sophisticated thinker, showcasing Russia as governed by an adept leader.

Russian attack. Putin accused the United States and NATO of dishonesty and duplicity in dealing with Russia, which he argued was simply pursuing its historical imperative. This wasn't an ordinary program, nor was it a self-indulgent rambling: Putin's emphasis on the failure of negotiations in Turkey at the war's outset makes this clear.

Putin's main presentation delved into Russian history, explaining its formation centuries ago and drawing comparisons with the formation of Eastern Europe. He argued that Ukraine had always been a part of Russia, both physically and linguistically. Though unstated, implicit in his argument was the notion that Ukraine is an integral part of Russia and the invasion represents a return to an older reality. Consequently, according to Putin, Russian actions in Ukraine constitute a special military operation rather than an act of war. He also touched on Poland, suggesting that Poland and Lithuania are renegades inseparable from Russia. The discussion on Russian history was lengthy but not merely academic. Putin's argument was that history connects a place to its environment and inhabitants, giving Russia the right, in this case, to make claims on foreign territory. He subtly slipped in claims to the region that could be dismissed or overlooked, laying the foundation for Russian claims in Poland. Some of Putin's statements were confusing. For instance, he claimed that the current Ukrainian government and its predecessors were Nazis and therefore enemies of Russia. He cited collaborators before concluding that Ukraine is a remnant of Nazi Germany and therefore hostile to Russia and other countries that fought against Hitler. This left me puzzled, as every German-occupied country had collaborators, from France to the Netherlands, etc. Some may have been ideologically aligned with Nazis, but all sought to survive or prosper. Putin has proven to be sophisticated, so he must understand what he says and likely depends on the world not taking his claims seriously.

world not taking his claims seriously.

Elsewhere, while expressing his willingness to negotiate, Putin mentioned that the United States was harming itself by using the dollar to force foreign powers to align with its worldview. He then made disconcerting comments, stating that China's economy dwarfs that of the United States and that its economic future is bright. It's as if the reality of China has been overlooked in the two years since Ukraine was attacked. He said this in the context of claiming that a new economic order is emerging and that for that to happen, China must lead it. It's interesting that Putin's deeply analytical remarks, even if some parts are debatable, concluded with obviously erroneous claims, likely due to fatigue. Another point that caught my attention was his comments about Russian intercontinental hypersonic missiles. The speed and maneuverability of hypersonics make defending against an attack very difficult. The United States has not yet deployed a hypersonic missile and there is no evidence that it is developing an intercontinental version. If Russian intercontinental hypersonic missile is as capable as Putin suggested, then that may have been the most significant aspect of his statement. The remainder of Putin's comments comprised complaints about NATO and the United States and his insistence that the uprising in Kyiv in 2014 was the real start of the war. He did not explain how Russia could have ignored such a significant threat for so long. As the president of a modern nation-state, Putin is obligated to elucidate his policies to his people and seek to influence foreign governments and public opinions. The objective is not solely truthfulness, but rather persuasiveness, strategically applying pressure on other governments. It can be observed that Russia has embraced modernity, adeptly balancing the presentation of truth and myths, even allowing Carlson some opportunities for refutation. Putin perceived him as a friendly yet unpredictable figure, leading to a cautious approach with limited engagement.

However, due to the interview's length and complexity, there's a possibility that some of the American public might have tuned out early, missing parts of the conversation. The historical context, the intended American audience and the remarkably detailed description of Russia and its history seem to be

setting the stage for negotiations. In defense of

On the occasion of International Workers' Day, the largest gathering of the federal capital was organized at National Press Club Islamabad under



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD

On the occasion of International Workers' Day, the largest gathering of the federal capital was organized at National Press Club Islamabad under the auspices of National Press Club, Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists and Pakistan Workers Federation. Implementation of the minimum wage law across the country, inclusion of representative labor organizations in the consultation process in the privatization of national enterprises, violation of workers' rights in the name of pension reforms, full implementation of labor laws in the public and private sector, Implementation of health insurance for journalists, timely payment of salaries, abolition of forced

dismissals, abolition of undue restrictions on freedom of expression, abolition of black law, implementation of PEMRA Amendment Act, establishment of Council of Complaints and media workers. Other demands of the workers, including the implementation of the minimum wage law, immediate government purchase of wheat from farmers and immediate approval of their demands and the release of arrested farmers, were unanimously presented to the government, according to details on International Workers' Day. On the occasion of the Federal Capital, the largest gathering of the Federal Capital was organized at National Press Club Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Islamabad Union of Journalists and National Press Club under the

auspices of Pakistan Workers Federation, in which the leaders and workers of important labor organizations across the country participated, attended Secretary RIJUI Asif Bashir Chaudhary was responsible for organizing the ceremony. Speaking at the ceremony, former Chairman Senate and Secretary General of the People's Party Parliamentary, Nair Hussain Bukhari said that when the People's Party came to power, the workers' rights of We faced trials and jails for giving jobs and ending forced dismissals. Nayyar Bukhari said that today a big issue is with our farmers. If farmers are not heard today, there may be famine in Pakistan in the coming years. It is ridiculous to use storage as an excuse for not buying wheat. Wheat harvest comes in April and wheat importers should be traced in March. Chairman NAB is sleeping??? NAB takes immediate action against the political people and also asked the caretaker rulers.



President Asif Ali Zardari being briefed about the overall security, law and order situation of the Sindh province, at the Chief Minister House, Karachi on May 1, 2024.



Crackdown is ongoing against the officers who harass the businessmen: Fayyaz Ahmad Ranjha

Soan Times Correspondent
Sargodha:
Member Advisory Committee Federal Tax Ombudsman Dr. Fayyaz Ahmad Ranjha while talking to the women of Women's Chamber Of Commerce and Industry at FTO office said, crackdown is ongoing against the officers who unnecessarily harass the businessmen. So far, 15 officers of various tax agencies have been sentenced on conviction. Traders should mark the officers of the tax authorities who are blackmailing. They can be punished up to six months under Section 2 of the FTO Act after a

transparent investigation. He expressed this while addressing an event for women of the Women Chamber of Commerce. President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Shanim Aflah, Sr. Vice President Sadia Khan, Vice President Tanzeela Fayyaz and Executive Member Dr. Humera were also present in the ceremony. Member Advisory Committee Federal Tax Ombudsman said, traders should also come into the tax system and pay their tax on time. The purpose of establishing the Federal Tax Ombudsman is to ensure prompt and affordable justice to the

people. The institution has been successfully solving the problems of the applicants and facilitating them. Applicants just submit their complaint on plain paper or our SMS service. We will protect the complainant in all possible ways. He added, the Federal Tax Ombudsman is playing an important role in promoting the private sector, protecting the industry and increasing the investment process in Pakistan. At the end, the shield was presented to the chief guest by the women of the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

7 injured in foiled overnight attack on police checkpoint in Taunsa



Soan Times Correspondent
Lahore:
Seven policemen were injured in an overnight attack by terrorists on the Jhangli checkpoint in Punjab's Taunsa district, police said on Wednesday. According to the Punjab Police spokesperson Syed Mubashir, it was the second attack on the checkpoint since January when a police official and a civilian had lost their lives while another police official was injured in a drive-by attack.

The "already alert policemen" stationed at the checkpoint engaged in a three-hour gun battle against the "15-20 terrorists who took advantage of the dark to launch a fierce attack from various directions", Mubashir said of the latest attack. "The terrorists wanted to take over the checkpoint and take the officers hostage," he stated, adding that the attackers used modern weapons, including rocket launchers, hand grenades, and guns with laser light.

The spokesperson added that the terrorists were "forced to flee after strong resistance" put up by the policemen as they ran out of ammunition. Elite Force constable Shahid Mansoor, who was seriously injured, was shifted to Nishtar Hospital in Multan for treatment, the spokesperson stated. Additional Sub-Inspector Imran, constables Muhammad Amir, Ashiq Zain, Rehmatullah and Sanullah, and Elite Force constable Tariq were among the injured, he added. Mubashir highlighted that the Dera Ghazi Khan regional police officer (RPO) and the district police officer (DPO) had visited the checkpoint two days ago to warn the personnel about the threat of an attack. The police officers had also carried out a defence rehearsal. Meanwhile, Punjab Inspector General (IG) Dr Usman Anwar said that the provincial police were "alert" and vowed to "never let the terrorists succeed in their nefarious aims". He said the DPO and the RPO reached the scene with reinforcements as soon as they received reports of the incident. Noting that seven personnel had sustained injuries while "fighting bravely", IG Anwar said that the district police and the elite forces responded with full force.



Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting Pakistan Coast Guards Headquarters in Karachi

Naqvi lauds coast guards' performance during Karachi visit

KARACHI:
Soan Times Correspondent
Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid a visit to the Pakistan Coast Guards (PCG) Headquarters in Karachi on Wednesday. Upon his arrival, he was warmly welcomed by the Director General of Pakistan Coast Guards, Brigadier Ghulam Abbas. During his visit, the interior minister paid tribute to the martyrs by laying a floral wreath at the martyrs' monument and offering a salute to honour their supreme sacrifice in defence of the motherland. Minister Naqvi received a comprehensive briefing on the professional operations of the Pakistan Coast Guards, highlighting their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities in preventing various forms of smuggling, with a particular emphasis on anti-narcotics activities. He was briefed on the professional training

programmes undertaken by the Pakistan Coast Guards and the proactive measures implemented to combat smuggling. Detailed accounts of seized contraband, including drugs, alcohol, and other illicit items, were provided, alongside insights into the disposal process, notably the destruction of seized drugs. Commending the institution's professional performance, Naqvi lauded the unwavering determination, courage, and efforts demonstrated by the officers and personnel of the Coast Guards. He emphasised the pivotal role played by the Pakistan Coast Guards, not only in times of peace but also in challenging situations, including times of conflict. Expressing his support, the interior minister extended his best wishes to the Pakistan Coast Guards and assured them of the government's commitment to providing all necessary support and resources to enhance their effectiveness and resilience.

ECP to unveil objections on PTI internal polls



Soan Times Correspondent
ISLAMABAD:
The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Tuesday issued directions to provide details of its objections to the PTI over its intra-party elections. A five-member body headed by the chief election commissioner heard the matter of the PTI's internal polls objections. PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Chief Election Commissioner Raouf Hasan appeared before the ECP. ECP Political Finance Director General

Masood Akhtar appeared before the commission and informed it that the Supreme Court had decided that PTI should conduct its internal polls on November 23 and December 22. However, he added that there were objections over the PTI's intra-party elections and it was necessary to clarify them. The PTI chairman told the commission that he would clarify all the objections. Gohar added that the PTI had submitted the details of its intra-party elections on March 9 this year but it was not yet provided with the ECP's objections over them. The PTI chairman further said if the objections over the party's internal elections were given to him, he would submit the answers. After hearing the arguments, the ECP issued instructions to provide the PTI

with the details of the objections and adjourned the hearing of the case. Speaking to the media outside the ECP office, the PTI chairman said they tried to suppress the party in every way but the people continued to support it. On the issue of an masses resignation from parliament, he said Sumi Ullah Council (SIC) chief Salabzda Hamid Raza had asked the PTI to consider the option. Gohar said as far as dialogue was concerned, it should be held with everyone. "We have not engaged in a dialogue process with anyone yet. We will inform you if it happens." The PTI chairman claimed that there were 175 political parties in the country but none of them had conducted their internal elections according to the Constitution. He added that the PTI had held its intra-party elections in line with the orders of the ECP and Supreme Court. Gohar stressed the need for lowering the political temperature.

Karachi gets more buses, routes to be announced soon

Soan Times Correspondent
Karachi:
The Sindh government on Wednesday announced that a new batch of buses had arrived in Karachi under the People's Bus Service initiative aimed at enhancing public transport services for the masses. The move comes as part of efforts to bolster the existing transportation network, particularly in Karachi city, the province's largest urban centre. Under the initiative, a new batch of buses sourced from China will be deployed to operate on additional routes within the city. The move is expected to alleviate the strain on existing transportation infrastructure and provide commuters with more efficient and reliable travel options. Talking to the media, Sindh Minister for Transport, Sharjeel Inam Memon, highlighted the government's commitment to improving public transport services. He emphasised that the introduction of new routes will be prioritised to ensure maximum benefit for the general populace. Memon indicated that the imported buses will be strategically allocated to serve areas where there is a high demand for public transportation. This targeted approach aims to address the longstanding



challenges faced by commuters, including overcrowding and insufficient coverage of certain areas. Last week, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had announced the inclusion of 150 buses into Karachi's transport network during his inaugural visit to the city. The premier commended the efforts of the provincial government in enhancing transportation services for the public. Earlier this month, Karachi introduced the Pink Bus service catering exclusively to women and girls, offering free rides for the first two months and subsequently at a nominal fare of RS50 per passenger. PPP Women's Wing Chairperson MPA Farah Talpur inaugurated the service, lauding its role in empowering women and fostering development and prosperity.



Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif interacting with families of labourers at a luncheon he hosted in their honour on the occasion of Labour Day in Lahore on 1st May 2024.

Govt tightens noose on non-filers

Soan Times Correspondent
ISLAMABAD:
In a major development, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) on Tuesday issued legally-binding instructions to the relevant departments to block mobile phone connections of over half-a-million non-filers, as its campaign to voluntarily register retailers also falls apart with only 75 retailers availing the scheme. The tax machinery also faced another setback on Tuesday when its 10-month tax collection fell short of the goal by around RS40 billion. Against the July-April target of RS7.414 trillion, the FBR provisionally collected over RS7.38 trillion. There was a 31% increase in the collection during the 10 months period. The developments came on the heels of growing resentment within the tax machinery over the government's decision to remove 25 allegedly corrupt and inefficient officers. The general body of the customs officers met on Tuesday and the 450 officers from grade 17 to 22 considered the options to either go on strike or file en masse applications to go on leave.

The FBR has issued the Income Tax General Order (ITGO) to disable the mobile phone SIMs of 506,671 persons who were not appearing on active taxpayer list but are liable to file the Income Tax Returns for Tax Year 2023 under the provisions of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, according to an announcement by the FBR. One person may have more than one SIM card and all of those connections will be cut off with immediate effect, said a senior FBR official. It is the first major, much-needed step that the FBR has taken after all its reminders and tax notices could not convince the people to fulfil their statutory obligation. Under the act of parliament, every person earning RS600,000 annual income or owning at least 1,000cc car or a house is liable to file the annual tax statement. The FBR had served tax notices on 2.4 million such non-filers and in the first phase it had blocked the SIM cards of over half a million who had taxable income and were earlier filing statements but did not file this time.



Kylian Mbappe named 'greatest player in PSG history'



Julien Laurens, an expert for TNT Sports, has had high praise for Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) star Kylian Mbappe who is set to become a free agent this summer. Euro Sport reported. Speaking ahead of the Champions League semi-final against Borussia Dortmund, Laurens said that while he believed that Mbappe was "the greatest player" in PSG history, manager Luis Enrique will play a key role in the semi-final.

Laurens said: "There's definitely a different mentality this year to any I've seen before." He said that the 25-year-old PSG forward has often had his own ego issues despite being the best player. The expert said that he believes this season, which has been like the French footballer's 'Last Dance' type season, has been a big help to bring down his ego. He said that had it happened earlier, it could have even led to a change in heart.

Laurens said: "I think when he decided to stay two years ago, they told him they would do that [push for a more data-driven recruitment with fewer stars], but at the time, Luis Enrique was not the manager and everything like that."

"Now it's too late. Even if he thought this is really cool, I love this dressing room. Yes, Marquinhos is the captain, but really Kylian is the captain. I've got all my mates there."

Alicaraz Olympic for dream Olympics doubles match-up with Nadal



Madrid Spianard Carlos Alcaraz says he will form a dream team with his legendary compatriot Rafael Nadal in the men's doubles at the Paris Olympics later this year "if everything goes well."

The tennis tournament, which runs from July 27 to August 4, takes place at Roland Garros where Nadal, who will be 38 by then, has won a record 14 French Open singles titles. Speaking after reaching the Madrid Open quarter-finals -- extending his Madrid Open winning streak to a record-equalling 14 -- Alcaraz said he and Nadal had spoken "a little" about teaming up in Paris.

"If everything goes to plan, like I have already said, we will play the doubles together at the Olympics," said Alcaraz, who turns 21 on the day of the Madrid final on Sunday.

"But there is a long way to go till it gets underway," he said.

Sofia Vergara gets real about Joe Manganiello marriage: 'Wasn't fair'



Web Desk Sofia Vergara once again opened up about her split from Joe Manganiello and the reason behind it. Back in January, the Modern Family alum had confirmed that her marriage ended because Joe wanted to have children and she didn't.

"My marriage broke up because my husband was wanting to have kids and I didn't want to be an old mom. I feel it's not fair to the baby. I respect whoever does it, but that's not for me anymore," Sofia told the Spanish publication El Pais. Now, in a recent interview with PEOPLE, she once again weighed in on her marriage with the Magic Mike star and stated that the dynamics were simply "not fair" to her. When asked if she finds her decision to be "empowering," Sofia replied, "I was a mother already. I know what it means to be a good mother or to try to be the best mother that you can, and that takes a lot of sacrifices, takes a lot of energy." She added, "Nowadays, thanks to science, women can actually have babies older. Before, nature for some reason tells your body at 50 you are in menopause."



Pakistani players see improvement in latest ICC T20 rankings

Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman also improved 10 places to 62nd after his 104 runs during the series against New Zealand.

Sports Desk

Several Pakistani players have witnessed improvement in their positions in the latest T20 rankings released by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The recent ICC rankings have seen Pakistan's skipper Babar Azam, with a rating of 763, jumping one spot to secure the fourth spot on the list -- just one below his teammate and Green Shirts wicket-keeper batter Mohammad Rizwan who is ranked as the third-best T20 batsman in the world.

Babar's improvement in the rankings follows his impressive performance in the recently concluded home series against New Zealand where he finished as the highest run-scorer with 125 runs. The ICC's T20 batter's list, which is topped by India's Suryakumar Yadav followed by England's Phil Salt in first and second positions, respectively, doesn't include any Pakistani in the top 50.

Meanwhile, South Africa's Aiden Markram (5th), Rilee Rossouw (7th) along with England's Jos Buttler (8th) and David Malan (10th) are included in the top 10 T20 batters. Also, New Zealand's Tim Seifert improved seven places to equal seventh.

Russia ramps up arms production as US boosts support for Ukraine

MOSCOW

Russia's defence minister on Wednesday ordered a hike in weapons production and said deliveries needed to be faster for the war in Ukraine, a week after U.S. President Joe Biden signed off on tens of billions of dollars of new military aid for Kyiv.

President Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine touched off the worst breakdown in relations between Russia and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, according to Russian and U.S. diplomats.

Biden on April 24 signed a bill into law that provides \$61 billion in additional aid to Ukraine, including an array of artillery, rocket systems, anti-tank munitions and ammunition. Russia is gradually advancing at key points along the 1,000-km (620 mile) front line and



stated that U.S. arms will not prevent victory by Moscow, but some Russian officials are concerned that the U.S. support will escalate the conflict.

At a meeting with the top military brass in charge of what Moscow calls the "special military operation" in Ukraine, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said the volume, quality and speed of arms production needed to be increased.

In Israel, Blinken set to push Netanyahu for sustained aid into Gaza



TEL AVIV

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday, pushing to get more aid into Gaza, while urging Hamas to accept a deal that would halt fighting in the enclave and bring Israeli hostages home.

Following visits to Rivadh and Amman earlier this week, the top US diplomat is now in Israel for a series of meetings on the final stop of his Middle East tour. It is Blinken's seventh visit to the region which was plunged into conflict on Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked Israel.

Illustrating the trip's humanitarian focus, Blinken is set to visit Ashdod port in southern Israel, which has recently started receiving aid for Gaza. He will ask Israel's government to take a set of specific steps to facilitate aid to Gaza, where nearly half the population is suffering catastrophic hunger. He met Netanyahu alone at his office ahead of a wider meeting that will include other senior Israeli officials and US diplomats.

"Even as we're working with relentless determination to get the ceasefire that brings the hostages home, we also have to be focused on people in Gaza for suffering in this crossfire of Hamas' making," Blinken said in remarks at the start of his meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Tel Aviv.



Georgian police crack down on 'foreign agent' bill protesters with water cannon, tear gas

TBILISI

Georgian security forces used water cannon, tear gas and stun grenades against protesters outside parliament late on Tuesday, sharply escalating a crackdown after lawmakers debated a "foreign agents" bill which is viewed by the opposition and Western nations as authoritarian and Russian-inspired. Reuters eyewitnesses saw some police officers physically attack protesters, who threw eggs and bottles of them, before using tear gas, water cannon and stun grenades to force demonstrators from the area outside the Soviet-built parliament building.

Levan Khabeishvili, the leader of Georgia's largest opposition party, the United National Movement, posted a picture on X with his face bloodied and sporting a black eye. A party official told Reuters Khabeishvili was beaten by police after disappearing from central Tbilisi. After being dispersed from parliament, around two thousand protesters continued to block Tbilisi's main Rustaveli Avenue, barricading it with cafe tables and rubbish bins. Some shouted "Slaves" and "Russians" at police. Earlier, riot police used pepper spray and batons to clear some protesters who were trying to prevent lawmakers from leaving the back entrance of parliament. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, an avowed foe of the

government whose powers are mostly ceremonial, said in a post on X the crackdown had been "totally unwarranted, unprovoked and out of proportion," and that the protests had been peaceful. The bill has heightened divisions in the deeply polarised southern Caucasus country, setting the ruling Georgian Dream party against a protest movement backed by opposition groups, civil society, celebrities and the figurehead president. Parliament, which is controlled by the Georgian Dream and its allies, is likely to approve the bill, which must pass two more readings before becoming law. Lawmakers ended Tuesday's session without a vote and the debate will resume on Wednesday. The bill would require organisations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents". Georgian critics have labelled the bill "Russian law", comparing it to Moscow's "foreign agent" legislation, which has been used to crack down on dissent there. Russia is disliked by many Georgians for its support of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia lost a brief war with Russia in 2008. The United States, Britain and the European Union, which granted Georgia candidate status in December, have criticised the bill.

Philippines says Chinese coast guard elevating tensions in South China Sea

MANILA

The Philippines on Wednesday accused China's coast guard of elevating tensions in the South China Sea after two vessels suffered damage from water cannon use by Beijing, an official said. Philippine officials have said a coast guard ship and a fisheries vessel were damaged when Chinese coast guard vessels fired water cannons at them while on their way to the disputed Scarborough shoal on Tuesday to help Filipino fishermen at sea. Commodore Jay Tarnella, Philippine coast guard spokesperson on South China Sea matters, said his Chinese counterparts have elevated tensions after it directly used water cannon against one of its vessels for the first time. "It just goes to show that Goliath is becoming more Goliath. They don't hesitate to use brute force to violate international law," Tarnella told a briefing. China has previously used water cannons against Philippine navy-crewed civilian supply vessels in the region. No country has sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal, a prime fishing patch close to major shipping lanes



that is used by several countries. The shoal falls inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and has been a constant source of flashpoint between it and China. Tarnella added China's actions do not count as an armed attack against a Philippine vessel, but he said China has been raising the pressure of its water cannons which have damaged their ships. Jacky Yu is closing his Japanese gift shop in Hong Kong after 12 years. He has made the difficult decision to move it online.