

SC Constitutional Bench urged to send civilians' cases to ATCs

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court, hearing petitions against the military trial of civilians, has been urged to transfer the cases of civilians to the Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATCs.) Faisal Siddiqi, who was representing civil society, proposed that the transfer of cases would be a "via media" — the middle way. He added that if the trials conducted by military courts were invalidated, the cases of civilians handed maximum sentences by military courts should be sent to the ATCs, while the cases

where convicts have completed their punishments should be considered "past and closed transactions". "If the court accepts my argument, the trial of civilians by military courts should be declared null and void," Mr Siddiqi argued. Faisal Siddiqi says power of officers to transfer custody of accused to army shouldn't be unlimited. Headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, the seven-judge CB resumed the hearing on a set of intra-court appeals filed against the court's Oct 2023 order of nullifying the military trial of civil-

ians involved in the May 9 violence. The core issue in this case was the appropriate forum to try civilians, the lawyer argued, adding that civilians should be tried in civilian courts to ensure adherence to fundamental rights. On Mr Siddiqi's suggestion, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar remarked if he was seeking fresh trials of those already convicted for their involvement in the May 9 violence. "If these cases are transferred from military to civilian courts, then from where would the trials should commence?" asked the judge. He also

questioned whether ATCs should treat evidence recorded during military trials as admissible. The counsel contended that he was asking for a limited fresh trial by ATC of those who were awarded maximum punishments like six to ten years imprisonment. Justice Khan, who was heading the bench, asked the counsel that if the concept of past and closed transactions was accepted, would it not mean endorsing military trials of civilians? Unlimited authority the court also questioned how it was decided which case would be prosecuted by military courts.



Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz is briefed on the balloting for free solar panels, on Monday.

Protests in Baltistan over arrest of three religious scholars

GILGIT: (News Desk) Demonstrations were held in various areas of Baltistan division on Monday against the arrest of three religious scholars at the Pakistan-Iran border in Balochistan after they returned from Iran. Leader of the Opposition in the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly Kazim Mesum, along with religious scholars, demanded the immediate release of the three detained scholars.

A sit-in blocking Kargil Road in GB's Kharmang district continued for the third consecutive day, while another demonstration was staged on K2 Road in Shigar district.

Protesters said Syed Aga Ali Abbas from Kharmang, Sheikh Ghulam Abbas from Skardu and Sheikh Akhtar Hussain from Shigar were students at a religious institution in Iran. Holding pictures of the detained scholars, the protesters chanted slogans demanding their release. Since then, there has been no contact, raising serious concerns among their families and the community.

No event held in GB to mark wildlife day



GILGIT / ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The World Wildlife Day on March 3 passed without any major event to mark the occasion in Gilgit-Baltistan, a region famed for its picturesque landscapes and biodiversity. Unlike in the past, no ceremonies or events were organised by the government or non-government organisations in Gilgit-Baltistan this year. GB is rich in flora and fauna because of its varied climatic conditions and ecosystem. The region is home to several rare species, such as marco polo sheep, ibex, markhor, urial, blue sheep, lynx, snow leopard, leopard cat, brown and black bears, wolf, fox, marmot, chakor and ram chakor and golden eagle. Some of these species were on the brink of extinction due to illegal and unchecked hunting, negligence of the wildlife department and climate change-related issues. According to a statement by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), World Wildlife Day served as a reminder of the deep connection between wildlife and people. "As we face environmental challenges, it's crucial to remember how our future is intertwined with the health of the planet." In a statement, UNDP Pakistan said that World Wildlife Day was a celebration of "Pakistan's rich biodiversity," from snow leopards in the northern mountains to the endangered Indus River dolphins.

FC soldier martyred in Kalat suicide bombing

QUETTA: (News Desk) A Frontier Corps man was martyred and four others were injured in a suicide attack carried out by a woman on a convoy near Kalat on Monday, officials said. The attack came a day after Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti expressed alarm over the security situation prevailing in the province. Officials said the suicide blast took place when the FC convoy was passing through the Mughalzai area. "An FC soldier was martyred and four others were wounded in the attack carried out by a female suicide bomber," Kalat Dep-

uty Commissioner Bilal Shabbir confirmed, adding that soon after the attack security forces and police cordoned off the area and shifted the body and the injured to hospital. The banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA-Azad) claimed responsibility for the assault. Reports said the targeted FC vehicle was badly damaged in the attack, but other vehicles in the convoy remained safe. "An FC commandant travelling in the convoy also escaped unhurt in the suicide attack," a senior security official said. Sources said the FC convoy was on its way to a

mess from the FC fort in Kalat area. Police and CTD officials started investigation into the incident while security forces launched a search operation to trace out the elements involved in the attack. The martyred FC soldier was identified as Lance Naik Attaullah while the injured were sepoys Wakeel, Zahid, Abbas and Mushtaq. The condition of one of the injured is stated to be serious. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid homage to the martyr and extended condolences to the bereaved family. CM Bugti said terrorism and cowardly acts could not affect the prov-

ince's peace and stability. Earlier on Sunday, CM Bugti while talking to the media in Quetta expressed alarm over the security situation in Balochistan. He said the rise in acts of terrorism is the result of the previous government's policy of appeasement of militant groups like the banned TTP, noting that several Taliban 'commanders' released during Imran Khan's tenure had re-established their camps. Admitting that the security situation in Balochistan is alarming, the chief minister pledged that terrorists will not be allowed to control even an inch of land of the province.

Pims doctors examine Imran in jail

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) A team from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) visited the Adiala Jail on Monday to conduct a medical check-up of former prime minister Imran Khan.

The four-member team was headed by Dr Altaf Husain, an ENT specialist. Other members of the team included Dr Umar Farooq from the hospital's Dental Department, Dr Muhammad Ali Arif from General Medicine and Dr Tashfeen Intiaz from General Surgery. The checkup lasted 30 minutes.

The examination follows a spate of allegations recently levelled by the PTI, most notably its information secretary Sheikh Waqqas Akram, claiming that the government had placed Imran Khan in solitary confinement.

56 PTI workers get bail as arrest warrants out for Omar Ayub, others

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) While an anti-terrorism court approved the post-arrest bail applications of 56 PTI workers in cases related to the Nov 26 protest at D-Chowk, on Monday, a court of judicial magistrate issued arrest warrants for PTI leaders Omar Ayub and others in a separate case.

ATC Judge Abul Hasnat Mohammad Zulqarnain granted the bail after hearing arguments from both sides.

The cases against the PTI activists had been registered at Tarnol and Kohsar police stations. Arrest warrants issued by a court of judicial magistrate issued arrest warrants for PTI leaders Omar Ayub, Amir Dogar, and Aamir Mughal over their continuous non-appearance in a case related to the violation of Section 144. During the hearing, the court accepted the applications for exemption from personal appearance submitted by PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Shoaib Shaheen. Barrister Gohar had formally filed a request for exemption, which the court approved. However, arguments on the acquittal applications of the accused could not be presented, leading the court to adjourn the proceedings until April 23.

Existing railway pension policy unsustainable, Senate body told

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The existing Pakistan Railways pension policy, which was formulated a decade back, is financially unsustainable, the Senate Standing Committee on Railways was informed on Monday.

During the review of budgetary allocations by the parliamentary committee, the Inspector General of Railway Police proposed the introduction of a contributory pension system to alleviate financial pressure on the government.

The committee expressed concern over contractual recruitments, emphasising the need for transparency and merit-based appointments.

When a senator highlighted the importance of converting contractual positions to regular employment, the railway secretary informed the parliamentary committee that the department had 58,000 positions against the required workforce of 95,000.

Committee seeks report on budget utilisation, progress on railway projects. The committee sought explanations regarding incomplete railway projects and questioned the repeated revision of PC-1 for ML-1, which resulted in a significant cost escalation. Concerns were also raised over non-utilisation of funds, particularly in the Thar coal project. The railway secretary assured the senators that all ongoing projects would be completed by the end of fiscal year 2024-25. The committee directed the ministry to provide a comprehensive report on budget utilisation and the progress of railway projects in the next meeting.



Goods trucks are parked on a road leading to the Torkham border crossing, on Monday.—

Torkham tensions mount as forces trade fire

KHYBER: (News Desk) At least eight people, including six troops, sustained minor injuries on Sunday night after Pakistan and Afghan Taliban forces traded fire at the Torkham border, forcing civilians to flee for their lives besides causing one death due to 'cardiac arrest'. Sources said the firing started around

midnight, with both sides initially using light weapons and later resorting to heavy weaponry, which damaged several buildings in the area. A number of official and private buildings were hit by bullets and mortar shells overnight. While the guns fell silent around 11am, the situation remained tense

on the border and troops on both sides remained entrenched. Reuters quoted the Afghan interior ministry as saying that one Taliban fighter had been killed and two injured in the firing. Panic in area. The intense firing coupled with artillery fire caused panic among residents in the Bacha Maina residential

compound (a community of about 100 houses) who had to flee their homes in the middle of the night. Sabir Khan, a resident, told Dawn that they had to take shelter in the British-era railway tunnels to escape the bullets and rain. They moved to safer localities in Landi Kotal early in the morning.

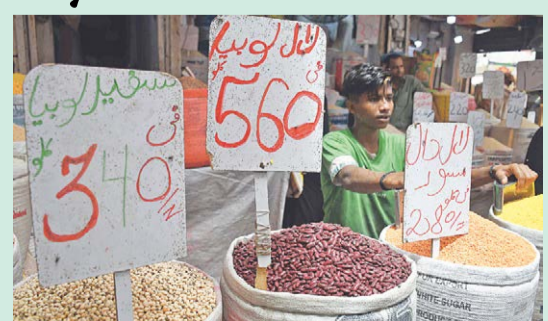
Inflation drops to lowest in nearly a decade

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Annual inflation continued its downward trend, falling to a nearly decade-low of 1.5 per cent year-on-year in February, primarily driven by a decline in perishable food prices, especially wheat flour. The decline even exceeded the Ministry of Finance's expectations, which had projected inflation to remain between 2pc and 3pc. In its February report, the ministry also predicted that the figure would rise to between 3pc and 4pc by March.

The slowdown in inflation is primarily driven by lower prices of wheat and its by-products, perishable items like onions, certain pulses, and a slight reduction in electricity charges. These products hold significant weight in inflation calculations, making even minor price changes impactful in reducing the overall inflation rate. In contrast, sugar and edible oil prices are rising in the domestic market despite their declining rates globally. The government has permitted sugar exports, particularly to

Afghanistan, citing surplus stock as the reason. The headline inflation, measured by Consumer Price Index (CPI), eased by 0.8pc in February on a month-on-month basis, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics on Monday. The inflation rate in February 2025 was the lowest since November 2015, mainly due to the high base effect from the previous year (February 2024 — 23.1pc). The CPI inflation dropped to 9.6pc in August 2024, marking the first single-digit figure

in over three years, and the downward trend continued in the following months. The CPI inflation surged above 10pc in November 2021 and remained in double digits for 33 consecutive months until July 2024. In between, it peaked at 38pc in May 2023, driven by unprecedented food and energy prices. Pakistan is currently experiencing disinflation, indicating a slowdown in inflation. In contrast, deflation refers to a decline in overall price levels. According to the Paki-



stan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), average cumulative inflation over the past 49 months increased by 83pc, impacting the retail prices of all consumer items. This decline in inflation does not indicate

a reduction in the cost of living. Economic team's efforts. In a statement, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction over the continuous decline in the CPI inflation.