

PM Shehbaz commends team, nation for unlocking IMF deal, new \$1.3bn climate fund

Islamabad(News Desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday commended his team for unlocking the new \$1.3 billion arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), along with a successful first review of the ongoing 37-month bailout programme. The announcement from the global money lender came early Wednesday morning, saying that it had reached a staff-level agreement (SLA) with the Pakistani authorities. Speaking at a federal cabinet meeting today, the premier thanked the members

of his team, saying it was through "day and night" efforts that led to the achievement of this milestone. "This was through teamwork, no doubt," he said, adding that some had questioned whether the government would be able to achieve the feat without the mini-budget. "With God's grace, the mini-budget did not come," he said, adding that despite challenging circumstances, with terrorism prevalent in two provinces and inflation reaching historic highs amid other problems, the government as well as the nation persevered.

"Particularly, the common people who faced difficulties, if their sacrifices weren't there, the staff-level [agreement] would not have been possible as they face the burden of inflation," he stressed and said that the salaried class and the provinces contributed to the milestone. He went on to commend the provinces for passing the tax laws to meet the requirements of the Fund amid reluctance and concerns. In February, in a rare show of unity, the Sindh provincial assembly had unanimously passed the Sindh

Agricultural Income Tax Bill. Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had already passed the amended agricultural income tax law that was a part of the federal government's commitments under the IMF's \$7bn agreement spanning 37 months. IMF deal brings total disbursements to about \$2bn Earlier today, the federal government reached a deal with the IMF for a new \$1.3bn arrangement and also agreed on the first review of the ongoing 37-month bailout programme, the Fund had confirmed on Tuesday.



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif speaking at a federal cabinet meeting on Wednesday

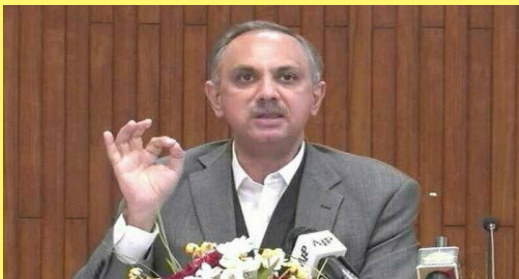
PTI to hold protest at Adiala jail over Eid

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) After failing to get any concession for the party's founding chairman, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) will hold protests outside the Adiala Jail on three days of Eidul Fitr.

The Chairman of Public Accounts Committee and head of the PTI Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chapter, Junaid Akbar, in a televised interview, said that the party workers will hold protest on all three days of Eidul Fitr outside the Adiala jail where the former prime minister, Imran Khan, is imprisoned.

He also said if the government wanted to hold talks with the main opposition party, it (government) has to take the first step and show its seriousness in the talks. He said that everything is not ideal in the opposition alliance, but said that efforts are being made to strengthen the alliance. "The parties in Tehreek-i- Tahaffuz-i-Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP) are supporting us. Now we have been trying to get the support of the political forces which are not part of the parliament.

Opposition leaders challenge delay in picking new chief election commissioner



ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Opposition leaders in the National Assembly and Senate have filed a petition before the Islamabad High Court (IHC), challenging the delay in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The petition, submitted by Omar Ayub and Shibli Faraz, calls for urgent action to fill the vacant positions in compliance with constitutional provisions.

The petitioners argued that the CEC and ECP members from Sindh and Balochistan completed their tenure, and the delay in appointing their successors was a violation of the Constitution. They urged the court to declare illegal their continued stay beyond their constitutional tenure. The opposition leaders contended that government inaction, particularly by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, and Senate Chairman Yousaf Raza Gilani, created an "administrative void" in the ECP. They asked the court to declare that the government failed to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities. They further requested the court to issue a directive to the NA speaker to form a parliamentary committee and nominate MNAs for the selection process. Similarly, they demanded, Mr Gilani submit the names of Senate representatives to expedite the appointments. If a consensus is reached, the proposed names are sent to the parliamentary committee for approval.

Centre 'accepts' Bilawal's offer for security talks with PTI

LAHORE: (News Desk) The federal government has accepted PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's offer to initiate a dialogue with Imran Khan's PTI to evolve consensus to fight terrorism.

"The government has no objections if Bilawal Bhutto engages in dialogue with the PTI," Adviser to Prime Minister Rana Sanaullah told Geo News on Tuesday. He said if the PPP chairman managed to secure PTI's commitment to participate in the talks, the government would have no issue to recon-

vene the Parliamentary Committee on National Security Committee meeting.

"Bilawal Bhutto is already part of the government, and if talks between PTI and the ruling coalition succeed, it will eventually be a success for the government itself" he clarified, also confirming reports that the PML-N had demanded a share in power in Sindh from the PPP.

A day earlier Mr Bhutto-Zardari had urged PM Shehbaz Sharif to convene another meeting of the Parliamentary

Committee on National Security, even after a month, to build national consensus for combating terrorism. He highlighted the need for national unity to counter the rising tide of terrorism and called upon the prime minister to take on board all political parties, including those who skipped the earlier sitting of the committee. He said the building consensus on national issues had become difficult but "we must unite to fight terrorists. All political stakeholders must come together for the country and nation

instead of preferring personal interests".

The PTI-led major opposition alliance, Tehreek Tahaffuz-i-Ayeen Pakistan, had chosen not to attend the recent security huddle, citing the absence of incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan. The parliamentary committee's meeting, also attended by Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir and DG ISI Lt Gen Asim Malik, was held against the backdrop of rising terrorism, including the hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Bolan district of Balochistan

PPP stages Sindh-wide protests against canals project

KARACHI / HYDERABAD: (News Desk) The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on Tuesday staged demonstrations and rallies across Sindh against new canals planned to be extracted from Indus under a federal plan.

PPP leaders described the plan as a threat to the province's water resources, provincial rights and agricultural survival. They demanded immediate shelving of the plan.

Thousands of people from all walks of life took part in widespread rallies held in all major and smaller towns of Sindh, right from Larkana to Thatta.

They flooded streets of their respective areas, waving banners and raising slogans against the 'anti-Sindh' project.

PPP leaders, allies of the federal government, also accused Islamabad of attempting to turn Sindh barren by diverting its water resources to other regions. Demands immediate shelving of controversial scheme In Karachi, a huge rally was organised outside the Karachi Press Club where senior party leaders, including Mian Raza Rabbani, Waqar Mehdi and Sadia Javed, addressed the participants.

Reporters Without Borders demands release of journalist Ahmad Noorani's brothers

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has demanded the immediate release of journalist Ahmad Noorani's brothers, who were allegedly forcibly disappeared in retaliation for his reporting.

Mr Noorani, currently based in the United States and working for the news outlet FactFocus, recently published an investigative report on a serving high-ranking military official and his relatives.

According to an RSF statement, around 20 armed men abducted the two brothers of Mr Noorani in Islamabad on March 19, shortly after the publication of his investigative report. It quoted the journalist as saying that "they confiscated all the phones and deleted videos taken by the family, then forcibly took the two brothers, both engineers, to an unknown location. Their relatives have had no news of them since". According to RSF, the local police have denied being behind the abduction.

Public Accounts Committee summons top bureaucrats on sugar crisis

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Tuesday voiced displeasure over the non-submission of a report on sugar crisis and called the secretaries of industries, commerce and food security ministries for a briefing on it. PAC Chairman Junaid Akbar Khan reminded officials that a report had been requested but was yet to be presented.

Consequently, the committee summoned the secretaries of three ministries to provide details about sugar prices, imports and exports.

The committee also scrutinised funds allocated to the ministry of housing and works that lapsed at the end of the fiscal year due to delays in their release. The secretary of housing and works attributed delays to the late release of final grants. Committee miffed at irregularities in PWD, delays in release of funds to housing ministry Expressing frustration over delayed disbursement of funds by the finance ministry, PAC member Naveed Qamar said this was a "mockery" that funds were released on June 26, four days before the end of the fiscal year. The committee questioned finance ministry officials on whether the lapse was anticipated and summoned the secretaries of finance and planning ministries to address procedural flaws. The meeting also reviewed audit objections related to the ministry of housing and works. The auditor general's report highlighted financial mismanagement exceeding Rs33.65 billion in the ministry and its subordinate bodies.



PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari addresses party workers and activists in Lahore

Journalist Waheed Murad 'forcibly disappeared' in Islamabad: family

Islamabad(News Desk) Journalist Waheed Murad was "forcibly disappeared by unknown" individuals from his house in Islamabad's G-8 sector, his family alleged on Wednesday in a petition filed before the Islamabad High Court (IHC) for his recovery. The petition, a copy of which is available with

Dawn.com, was filed by Murad's mother-in-law Abida Nawaz through lawyers Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and Hadi Ali Chattha. Abida claimed the journalist was "forcibly disappeared from his home in Sector G-8, Islamabad at around 2:05am by unknown officials presumably belonging to in-

telligence agencies, and accompanied by persons in black uniforms and two police double cabin vehicles". She described herself as an "eyewitness to the enforced disappearance [of Murad], and was also herself manhandled by the abductors who also took away her phone". The petition highlighted that Mu-

rad had raised his voice about the recent alleged enforced disappearance of US-based journalist Ahmad Noorani's two brothers. The state, the defence ministry, the Islamabad police chief and the Karachi Company police's station house officer were listed as respondents in the case.

Punjab has no claim on Sindh's water, says Azma Bokhari

LAHORE: (News Desk) The Punjab government says it has no claim on Sindh's water, but it will not allow any interference in its (Punjab) water management. "Let me tell you... Punjab has no claim over Sindh's water. However, no one is allowed to interfere in Punjab's water management," Punjab's Information Minister Azma Bokhari told journalists here on Tuesday. She was replying to a question over the ongoing water row between Punjab and Sindh.

Earlier, expressing profound concern over the severe water shortage in the province, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah asked the federal government to ensure a fair distribution of water so that every province receives its rightful share. The Sindh Assembly also recently unanimously passed a resolution against the construction of six new canals on the Indus River. The resolution, tabled by the Sindh CM, also demanded an immediate halt to any plans, activi-

ties or work related to the controversial project until an agreement with all provincial governments, particularly Sindh, is reached to ensure the rights of the province have been fully protected and respected. Ms Bokhari further pointed out that the country is facing a severe water shortage, with Punjab's water reserves decreasing by 41 per cent. "Sindh and other provinces should focus on better water management," she said. Minister says Punjab won't allow 'interference' in its water management

In reply to a question about sacking of different hospitals' heads and officials by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for non-availability of medicines, Ms Bokhari claimed: "The health sector is under the influence of the mafia, but no one will be allowed to deprive patients of medicines." Warning the Punjab government employees, she said those who did not align with Maryam Nawaz's vision would have no place in the department. She stressed the need for a biometric



system in hospitals saying the public hospital doctors must fulfill their responsibilities. "Maryam Nawaz's hospital visits are part of this initiative, making it clear that any officer failing to perform

will be removed," she said. Maryam Nawaz on Monday had sacked the principal and the medical superintendent of the Jinnah Hospital, Lahore, mainly over non-availability of medicines.