

HAAL AHWAL

Monthly News Reviews on Food and Agriculture

March, 2023

Roots for Equity

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Roots for Equity

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Preface:

The *Haal Ahwal* was initiated in 2013 as an Urdu quarterly publication and came out with more than 20 journals till 2019. From 2020 onwards, due to Covid19's lockdown, and other resource gaps the publication was discontinued. The Urdu version of *Haal Ahwal's* was compiled as a fairly comprehensive resource bringing together current news and developments in the agriculture sector. Its aim was to provide readers with a chronological order of developments in various sub-sectors of agriculture and its interconnected domains to develop their understanding on the political economy of agriculture.

With the publication in hand, it's obvious that *Haal Ahwal* is being launched once again. However, after a gap of three years, it comes with some changes. The first most apparent is that, this time it's being published in English. The range of topics remain much the same, following the previous pattern of more coverage of Pakistan's domestic scene and sparingly international coverage. *Haal Ahwal* will now be on a monthly basis and not quarterly.

The publication covers a wide range of subjects, encompassing various aspects of agriculture and related fields. It delves into topics such as farmers, laborer, agricultural resources (including land, water, and inputs), seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural loans, agricultural machinery, and industrial production. News items on food and cash crops, fruits and vegetables, livestock, fisheries, and poultry are added. And then on more macro issues of neoliberal policies, trade, exports, imports, the corporate sector including agrochemical companies, food and fertilizer companies, corporate lobbies and foreign aid are also covered. Related issues such as environment, pollution, health and safety, climate change, and natural disasters, poverty, inflation, food security and people's and farmers resistance also have particular emphasis. All these topics will be covered more fully in the national context and where relevant to Pakistan, as part of international policies and politics. In addition, there is coverage of news on international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank,

Asian Development Bank; aid agencies such as the USAID and others as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Though the layout of the news items has been changed quite a bit, we are retaining our take on the news items covered under Points to Ponder, which is given in the very beginning of the publication. The next section is based on excerpts of what the editorial team considers the most important news items in this period. This is followed by table of contents making it easier for readers to look for their topics of interest. And then we have the meat of the publication based on abbreviated news items included in each sub-section. As was the case for the Urdu *Haal Ahwal*, two major newspapers have been used for the news items included, namely the “Daily Dawn” and the “Business Recorder.” Please note, only the Sunday newspaper is used for news coverage from “The Daily News.”

At the end, we would like to add that comments and critique for making the resource more useful to our readers is very welcome.

1,000	1 Thousand	1 Thousand	ایک ہزار
10,000	10 Thousand	10 Thousand	دس ہزار
100,000	100 Thousand	1 Lac	ایک لاکھ
1,000,000	1 Million	10 Lac	دس لاکھ
10,000,000	10 Million	1 Crore	ایک کروڑ
100,000,000	100 Million	10 Crore	دس کروڑ
1,000,000,000	1 Billion	1 Arab	ایک ارب
10,000,000,000	10 Billion	10 Arab	دس ارب
100,000,000,000	100 Billion	1 Kharab	ایک کھرب

Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	French Development Agency
AFT	Akhtar Fuiou Technologies
SFERP	Sindh Flood Emergency Rehabilitation Project
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
SIFC	Special Investment Facilitation Council
AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
BHC	Balochistan High Court
PCRWR	Pakistan Council for Research in Water Resource
WRAP	Water Resource Accountability in Pakistan
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
BOI	Boards of Investment
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
FCA	Federal Committee on Agriculture
PCGA	Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association
APTAP	All Pakistan Textile Mills Association
REAP	Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan
CCC	City Climate Committee
CCD	City Climate Dashboard
PAJCCI	Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CCS	carbon capture and storage
CDWP	Central Development Working Party
PPQC	Plant Protection Quarantine Certificate
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
KPEC	Khyber Pass Economic Corridor
PPPA	Public Private Partnership Authority
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CIP	cotton intervention price
COSOP	Country Strategic Opportunities Programme
CPAC	China-Pakistan Agricultural Corridor
CPI	Consumer Price Index
NIH	National Institute of Health
HSD	High-Speed Diesel
SPI	Sensitive Price Index
FDE	Federal Directorate of Education

IPPs	Independent Power Producers
CRS	Crop Reporting Services
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
FEA	Foreign Economic Assistance
CWDP	Central Development Working Party
DVCs	district vigilance committees
EAD	Economic Affairs Division
ECC	Economic Coordination Committee
EFFIS	European Forest Fire Information System
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
EVs	electric vehicles
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FBR	Federal Board of Revenue
FRC	Fertiliser Review Committee
GB	Gilgit-Baltistan
GHPL	Government Holdings Private Ltd
HDT	Haq Do Tehreek
ICBC	Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd
ICCI	Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ICU	Islamia College University
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JPMC	Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre
KCT	Khor Fakkan Container Terminal
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KPRM	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Mobilization
KSWB	Karachi Water & Sewerage Board
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LUMHS	Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MPCL	Mari Petroleum Company Ltd
MRP	Maximum Retail Price
MUET	Mehran University of Engineering and Technology

NARC	National Agricultural Research Centre
NCAP	National Clean Air Policy
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NHS	National Health Services
NUST	National University of Sciences and Technology
OGDCL	Oil & Gas Development Company Ltd
OSR	own source revenue
PAC	Pakistan Agriculture Council
PAC	Pakistan Agricultural Coalition
Parco	Pak-Arab Refinery Ltd
Passco	Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation
PBC	Pakistan Bar Council
PBC	Pakistan Business Council
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
PDMA	Provincial Disaster Management Authority
PDP	Pasban Democratic Party
PHCIP	Punjab Human Capital Investment Project
PIBs	Pakistan Investment Bonds
PIUs	Produce Index Units
PKI	Pakistan Kissan Ittehad
PoPA	Prevention of Persons in Trafficking Act
PPL	Pakistan Petroleum Ltd
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party
PRIDE	Punjab Resource Improvement and Digital Effectiveness
PV	photovoltaic
R&C	Regulations and Coordination
RMT	Rail, Maritime and Transport
SAI	Sindh Abadgar Ittehad
SAM	severe acute malnutrition
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SCA	Sindh Chamber of Agriculture
SDGs	sustainable development goals
Sepa	Sindh Environmental Protection Agency
SLA	staff-level agreement
SNGPL	Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd
SOPs	standard operating procedures
T5HP	Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project

TDPERP	Temporarily Displaced Persons Emergency Recovery Project
TDS	
THQs	Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNAMA	United Nations Mission in Afghanistan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
UoP	University of Peshawar
Wapda	Water and Power Development Authority
Wasa	Water and Sanitation Agency
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation
APTMA	All Pakistan Textile Mills Association
EFFIS	European Forest Fire Information System

1 Hectare = 2.471 Acres

1 Acre = 4,840 Square Yards

1 Ton = 25 Mann = 1000 Kg

1 Mann = 40 Kg

News Excerpts

National News

Agricultural Production Resources

- The China-Pakistan Agricultural Corridor project would bring socio-economic development for farmers in the country and further pave the way for a new era of collaboration between the two all-weather strategic partners.
- Kazim Saeed, Strategy Advisor of PAC informed that Pakistan’s agriculture needs massive transformation based on research and development and the use of modern technology.
- The caretaker government of Punjab has signed an agreement to hand over at least 45,267 acres of land in three districts, Bhakkar, Khushab, and Sahiwal of the province to the Pakistan Army for ‘Corporate Agriculture Farming’.
- According to informed sources, the JV has been signed between the military, the Punjab government, and private firms dealing with corporate farming.
- Due to poor land reforms, ineffective agricultural policies, climate change and increasing population, the annual growth of the agriculture sector in Pakistan’s economy, which was 4 percent in 1960, has reduced to 2.5 percent in 2022
- The Pakistan Bar Council said that this illegal practice of donating out of public resources to the Army is neither justified nor acceptable to people of Pakistan.
- Sindh government’s failure to implement the Sindh Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 2015, in letter and spirit has led to an exponential increase in bonded labour in the wake of last year’s devastating floods making homeless and penniless peasants an easy prey for landlords and farm input dealers.
- Most government officials concerned were unaware of both the Prevention of Persons in Trafficking Act (PoPA), 2018, and law against bonded labour.
- Peasants constituted over 70per cent of labour force in agriculture farms and kilns but they were not given priority by the government.
- Sindh Industrial Relations Act, 2013, allowed peasants to join unions but the government was doing nothing to ensure their unionisation in agriculture sector and kilns.
- Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act, there were also other laws that could help protect women against abuse, exploitation, and marginalisation in feudal and tribal societies.
- The government should strengthen monitoring mechanisms by increasing number of labour
- Months after the floods, the district (Jacobabad) is still facing permanent water logging, which is damaging cultivable lands.

- The district administration claimed that permanent water logging has directly damaged around 70,000 acres of cultivable land and could affect over 100,000 acres of fertile land.
- Many districts in Sindh are facing water logging months after the floods. According to the latest situation report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) approximately 1.8m people are still living near contaminated and stagnant flood water pools six months after the government declared a national emergency.
- Pakistan has the twenty-fifth highest infant mortality rate globally, with almost half of all deaths in children under 5 being caused by undernutrition. More than 1.5 million children were lacking severe acute malnutrition (SAM) services, with 170,000 of them suffering from SAM with complications and lack of stabilisation treatment.
- A United Nations report said water scarcity is becoming endemic as a result of the local impact of physical water stress, coupled with the acceleration and spreading of freshwater pollution.
- On average, 10 per cent of the global population lives in countries with high or critical water stress.
- According to the UN climate study, “roughly half of the world’s population currently experience severe water scarcity for at least part of year.” “At least 2 billion people (globally) use a drinking water source contaminated with faeces, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio”.
- Pakistan and India are drawing water from the Indus aquifer faster than the rate of water recharges back into the aquifer, leading to a lowering of the water table back to or below pre-colonial times
- Pakistan is the world’s fourth largest user of groundwater and meets nearly half of the irrigation requirement with groundwater. “Nearly 90% of the tube wells are in Punjab due to lower salinity and relatively higher water quality.
- In the coming Kharif season, beginning on April 1, the country is heading towards a ‘massive water shortage’, somewhere between 27 per cent and 35 per cent, only months after unprecedented floods submerged large swathes of lands across Sindh and southern Punjab, Irsa sources told *Dawn*

Agricultural Inputs

- An Agriculture Investment Symposium provided a platform for matchmaking and exploring opportunities for private investors and financial institutions to invest in the agricultural sector.
- Two-thirds of the farmers borrow informally from family, friends, money lenders or loan sharks. Some 14pc of them borrow from Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd, 12pc from microfinance banks and only 4pc from commercial banks, which cater mainly to larger farmers.

- Estimated credit demand for farms of 12.50-50 acres was Rs843bn versus only Rs73bn that was actually disbursed. Credit demand for farms below 12.5 acres was Rs1.45tr, which was eight times the Rs181bn that banks actually disbursed to smallholder farmers.
- Digitt+, Pakistan's first regulated agri-fintech Company that's powered by AFT, intends to connect untapped agricultural markets with digital payment solutions and become the first entity to launch Mastercard in Pakistan.
- Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Syed Murtaza Mahmud has stressed the need for improving agricultural productivity through farm mechanisation and promote agricultural credit for the rural economy especially to enable growers to purchase modern agriculture technologies.
- The Income Tax department has been found imposing penalties and default surcharges for late payment of agriculture income tax which, according to the tax experts, is illegal because the taxation of agriculture income is not a subject of Income Tax Ordinance, 2001.
- Pakistan's dependence on imported potato seed is now set to substantially reduce with the application of aeroponics technology introduced in the country with the assistance of South Korea,
- Experts underscored the need for a joint memorandum of understanding (MoU) between agricultural institutions and local and Chinese private sector for growth of certified seeds and new seed commodities.
- The gov has withdrawn subsidy to agriculture and five zero-rated sectors from March 1, 2023 as a pre-condition of IMF program, which will save Rs65b.
- Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari inaugurated 'Seed Subsidy Programme: Reimbursement for wheat Seed' and transferred Rs8.39 billion to Benazir Income Support Program which started disbursing an amount of Rs5000 per acre to the small growers holding agricultural land up to 12 acres.

Agricultural Outputs

- The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has rejected the official price of cotton fixed by federal government at Rs8,500 per 40kg and demanded revising the rate upward to Rs15,000 per 40 kg.
- ECC of the cabinet has approved a uniform procurement price of wheat crop 2022-23 at Rs3,900/40 kg.

Non-Agricultural Productions

- Rehabilitation of the Karachi Fish Harbour was under way with the cost of over Rs1.5 billion since 2019.
- With a bilateral trade volume of \$12 billion, the US remains Pakistan's largest trading partner and export destination.

- The US produced approximately 120m tonnes of soy annually, with 60pc exported globally. Soy exports to Pakistan are less than 1m tonnes annually.
- Pakistan’s trade deficit narrowed by 33.18 percent to \$21.3 billion during the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year 2022-23.
- The country’s exports during July-February (2022-23) were recorded at \$18.793 billion against the exports of \$20.573 billion in July-February of 2021-22, showing a decline of 8.65 percent.
- The imports decreased by 23.56 percent during the period under review by going down from \$52.452b last year to \$40.039 billion during the current year.
- Exports from Pakistan will take a day less if compared to Dubai, making the trade more efficient and cost effective.
- Pakistan’s exports of merchandise shrank for the sixth month in a row dipping by 18.67 per cent year-on-year to \$2.30 billion in February, stoking fears of massive layoffs in the industrial sector. In the first eight months (July to February) of 2022-23, exports were down 8.65pc at \$18.79bn
- Imports dipped 31.51pc to \$4.009bn in February compared to \$5.85bn. In the first eight months, the imports fell 23.56pc to \$40.09bn this year from \$52.45bn over the corresponding period last year.
- The government of Pakistan allowed the export of 250,000 metric tons of sugar last month.
- Pakistan’s exports of textile and clothing fell 29.76 percent in Feb to \$1.18b.
- Pakistan’s exports of non-textile products decreased 6.16 per cent year-on-year to \$7.46 billion in the first eight months of FY23.
- Pakistan’s exports to nine regional countries shrank 18.28 per cent in the first eight months of FY23 mainly driven by a drop in shipments to China
- Pakistan’s exports to the Middle East shrank 11.87 per cent on a year-on-year basis to \$1.491 billion in the first eight months of FY23 mainly driven by a substantial decline in exports to the United Arab Emirates.
- A Russian ship carrying 50,000 tonnes of wheat reached Gwadar Port. “Russia would supply 4,50,000 tonnes of wheat to Pakistan through nine cargo ships,”
- Foreign exchange reserves of the central bank are hovering around \$3.8 billion, barely enough for even one month of import cover.
- With total foreign exchange reserves of \$4.3 billion as of 9th March 2023 Pakistan requires a total of \$ 8.5 billion to meet its fuel requirements and other critical imports of March- September 2023.

International Aid / Loan

- The government has borrowed \$6.134 billion from multiple financing sources including \$1.166 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the first seven months (July-January) of 2022-23.

- The Japanese government has decided to provide grant assistance equivalent to about Rs76.4 million to five NGO development projects in Pakistan.
- The foreign economic assistance of \$20.073 billion was undisbursed balance as of end September 2022.
- The government has borrowed \$7.407 billion from multiple financing sources, including \$900 million from foreign commercial banks, during the first eight months (July-February) of 2022-23.
- The United States announced a \$4.5 million Fertiliser Right project that will be implemented over the next four years to help Pakistani farmers enhance fertiliser use efficiency.
- Pakistan has received \$242 million from the United States to support flood relief, recovery efforts, disaster resilience and food security and the US-Pakistani diaspora contributed about \$42m to the total.
- Pakistan has received \$500 million from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd (ICBC),

International Financial Institutions (IFIs)

- The government of Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank signed grant agreement of five million dollars for Emergency Flood Assistance Project.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has carried out a study that led to the preparation of a ‘Climate Investment Roadmap’ for Peshawar.
- Officials have also suggested that the IMF wanted to support the poor publicly, but had been insisting on some measures that would ultimately hit the low-income segments.
- The sources said the IMF publicly wanted taxes on the rich and support to the poor but insisted on increasing general sales tax rates that were inflationary and impacted the poor, while taxes on high earners like banks through foreign exchange transactions were opposed.
- United States has offered to deepen its economic partnership with Pakistan but has also urged the cash-starved country to work with the International Monetary Fund to “unlock the IMF funding”.

Policy

- The Central Development Working Party (CWDP) approved six development projects, mostly of provincial jurisdiction, at a total cost of Rs21.28 billion, projects related to climate change, aviation division and provincial schemes.
- Pakistan’s efforts to tackle air pollution have taken a significant step forward as the country’s first National Clean Air Policy (NCAP) was approved this week by the federal government, aiming to improve air quality in the country by reducing pollution.

- Following the assessment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s 58 more “low-performing” public sector hospitals by the World Bank, the health department is awaiting the cabinet’s go-ahead for agreements with private organisations to operate those healthcare facilities through public-private partnerships.
- Punjab Cabinet accorded approval to ‘Wheat Purchase Policy for 2023- 2024’.

Environment

- The country’s five leading oil and gas companies joined hands to delve into green energy projects as the world moves towards an energy transition away from fossil fuels.
- Central Development Working Party (CWDP) has approved three health projects worth Rs 11.25 billion.
- Over 4,000 flood victims suffering from gastroenteritis, urticarial and malaria reported at a one-day.
- Around six hundred people contract tuberculosis (TB) every year in Pakistan but over 45 per cent TB patients in the country remain undiagnosed and do not get any treatment.
- As many as 129 patients have lost their lives to rabies in over a decade at two major tertiary care hospitals of the city. Most of the victims travelled by road to Karachi after failing to receive treatment at health facilities in the interior parts of Sindh.

Socio-Economical Condition

- Despite fiscal tightening, the government’s borrowing for budgetary support surged to Rs1.8 trillion during the first seven and half months of domestic debt servicing for the entire fiscal year was estimated at Rs3.95tr, but with the recent 300bps hike in the interest rate, it would surge to Rs5.4tr.
- Private sector credit offtake during first seven and half months fell to Rs467bn.
- The central government debt jumped by Rs4 trillion, or around 7.7 per cent, in January to reach close to Rs55tr, the State Bank of Pakistan data showed. Domestic debt rose to Rs34.3tr by end-January, 3.4pc higher External debt stood at Rs20.69tr, recording a jump of 15.7pc in a month and 38pc in a year.
- The central government domestic debt rose by Rs3.218tr, an increase of 10.4pc. The government’s borrowings through long-term, high-cost Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs) reached Rs20.9tr by the end of January from Rs15.59tr a year ago, recording an increase of 34pc.
- The SBP data also showed that the central government’s total debt, including both the domestic and external debt, increased by 15pc (Rs7.158tr) during July-January.

- The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet allocated Rs201 billion procurement of 1.8 million tonnes of wheat through Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) to bridge the shortages. The provincial Crop Reporting Services (CRS) had reported total wheat sowing on 21.94 million acres or about 96pc of the target area.
- Malnutrition remains a great concern in the province where this year an estimated seven million have been screened for malnutrition, the total number of children treated for ‘severe acute malnutrition’ last year was 755,038 while 1.9 million children were treated for ‘moderate acute malnutrition.’
- The number of malnourished children treated with complications was 31,117.
- More than 400,000 households fall into poverty every year due to expenditures incurred on the treatment of one or more family members. Inaccessibility to treatment has resulted in the deaths of more than 460,000 children under the age of five due to cancer, malnutrition and infectious diseases.
- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will begin this year a new five-year programme in Pakistan to target 1.5 million poor rural households representing 10 million people comprising households living in chronic poverty and small-scale farmers.
- Highlighting pressures on food and non-food prices in coming months, the finance ministry further increased its inflation forecast to 30 per cent from its earlier projection of 26pc before easing out gradually.
- As short-term inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Index, hit 41.07 percent in week ended on March 2, the Consumer Price Index for Feb jumped to 31.
- Short-term inflation, based on the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), rose to an unprecedented 46.65 per cent year-on-year for the combined income group for the period ending March 22.

Climate Change

- The United States and Pakistan committed to partner with each other in various areas, including a \$4.5m programme from the US Department of Agriculture to strengthen fertiliser efficiency and effectiveness for local farmers.

International News

Non-Agricultural Productions

- The UAE and Turkey signed an agreement in Abu Dhabi which aims to increase trade between the two countries to \$40 billion in the next five years.

- The UAE kicked off negotiations with Turkey on a bilateral trade deal last year after a warming in political relations following UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed’s visit to the country in 2021, during which the UAE set up a \$10 billion investment fund.
- Global trade was worth a record \$32 trillion in 2022.
- Defying the downward trend, trade in such goods grew by about 4pc in the second half of the year. Their combined value hit a record \$1.9tr in 2022, adding more than \$100bn compared to 2021.
- The organisation, in its recent Technology and Innovative Report 2023, projected the global market for electric cars, solar and wind energy, green hydrogen and a dozen other green technologies to reach \$2.1tr by 2030.

Corporate Sector

- German chemicals giant its net profit in 2022, Net profit climbed to 4.15 billion euros (\$4.3 billion) in 2022, up from 1.0 billion a year earlier. Group sales rose by 8.7 percent to 50.7 billion euros,

International Aid / Loan

- An unprecedented economic crisis has seen Sri Lanka’s 22 million people suffer acute food, fuel and medicine shortages, along with extended blackouts and runaway inflation. Government has been working to repair Sri Lanka’s ruined finances and secure the sorely needed IMF rescue package.
- Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46-billion foreign debt last April. Just over \$14 billion of that is bilateral debt owed to foreign governments, of which China holds 52 percent. Wickremesinghe’s government entered into a staff-level agreement with the IMF for a \$2.9 billion rescue package in September.
- Just \$1.4 billion in new loans and grants were promised at a UN summit devoted to the world’s poorest nations where UN leader Antonio Guterres had appealed for massive aid.
- Guterres started the summit by saying the 46 poorest states need a \$500 billion a year stimulus to reach the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), a blueprint to end poverty and boost health and education by 2030

International Financial Institutions (IFIs)

- The World Bank warned that the global economy’s “speed limit” maximum long-term rate at which it can grow without sparking inflation is set to slump to a three-decade low by 2030 and advocated an ambitious policy push by national economies to boost productivity and the labour supply, ramp up investment and trade, and harness the potential of the services sector

- As a result, between 2022 and 2030 average global potential GDP growth is estimated to decline by roughly a third from the rate that prevailed in the first decade of this century — to 2.2pc a year.
- Countries need to work together to reinvigorate international trade in an equitable way for more people to benefit from globalisation, and diversify supply chains based on economic logic

Environment

- Low levels of oxygen in Australia’s second longest river were to blame for a mass fish die-off recently in a remote part of New South Wales State.
- Thousands of dead fish have been found this week in the Darling River near town of Menindee, around 1,000km west of the state capital Sydney. It follows fish deaths in same area in 2018 and 2019 where up to a million fish died from poor water flow, poor water quality, and sudden temperature changes.
- Plastic pollution in the world’s oceans has reached “unprecedented levels” over the past 15 years, a new study has found.
- Research found that there are an estimated 170tr pieces of plastic, mainly microplastics, on surface of world’s oceans, much of it discarded since 2005.
- On current trends, plastic use will nearly double from 2019 across G20 countries by 2050, reaching 451 million tonnes each year
- Cancer-causing chemical compounds called nitrosamines have been detected in a range of everyday foods and could pose a health risk to consumers.

Socio-Economical Policy

- Fossil fuel giants are raking in huge profits, while millions in your countries cannot put food on the table.” Guterres said the poorest nations were being left behind in the “digital revolution” and the Ukraine war had fuelled their food and fuel prices.
- The world wealth and income data show a very high level of inequality around the world, where the share of the bottom 50 per cent of the world population in total global wealth is just 2pc, while the share of the top 10pc is 76pc.
- The global income is also not evenly distributed, where the bottom 50pc of the poorest global population earn just 8.5pc of the total global income, whereas the richest top 10pc earn 52pc of the global income.
- Gender inequality is also very high; women make up only 35pc of the global labour income, whereas men make up the remaining 65pc.
- The report analyses 200 years of data from 1820 to 2020 and concludes that global inequality increased from 1820 to 1920 due to colonialism.

- The Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 129.8 points last month against 130.6 for January. It was the lowest reading since September 2021.
- The UN report says that in just five decades bottled water has developed into “a major and essentially standalone economic sector”, experiencing 73 percent growth from 2010 to 2020, and sales are expected to almost double by 2030, from \$270 billion to \$500 billion.
- Report says providing safe water to roughly 2b people without it would require an annual investment of less than half \$270b spent every year on bottled water.
- Of the country’s severe humanitarian crisis, adding the UN food agency urgently needs \$93 million in funding to reach 13m people in Afghanistan in April. Since the Taliban took over in 2021.
- The UN estimated that around 90pc of Afghans cannot afford enough food.
- Globally, 2 billion people do not have enough safe drinking water and 3.6 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation, according to a UNESCO report released ahead of the conference.
- The consumer price inflation for food items in Pakistan was 45.1 per cent in February 2023 on a year-on-year basis – the highest in South Asia after Sri Lanka with 54.4 per cent, says the World Bank.
- In Pakistan, wheat flour prices in January 2023 reached record highs and were 20 to 140 percent higher year on year.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO) attributes the high prices to generally stagnant production since 2018, stock losses and disrupted trade flows due to the 2022 floods, high agricultural input and transportation costs, and high headline inflation.

Climate Change

- The outgoing La Nina phenomenon, a cooling of surface temperatures that can have a widespread impact on global weather conditions, started in September 2020. However, despite La Nina’s cooling effect, both 2021 and 2022 were warmer than any year prior to 2015.
- Smoke from monster wildfires in Australia caused a chemical reaction that widened ozone hole 10 percent, raising fears that increasing forest fires could delay recovery of Earth’s atmospheric protection against deadly UV radiation.
- An estimated 171 trillion plastic particles were afloat in the oceans by 2019, according to peer-reviewed research led by the 5 Gyres Institute, a US organisation that campaigns to reduce plastic pollution.
- Marine plastic pollution could rise 2.6 fold by 2040 if legally binding global policies are not introduced, it predicted. The study looked at surface-level plastic pollution data from 11,777 ocean stations in six major marine regions covering the period from 1979 to 2019.

Climate Disaster

- An estimated 387 natural hazards and disasters resulted in the death of 30,704 people and caused economic losses of around \$223.8 billion all over the world in 2022. The disasters-According to the database, heat waves caused over 16,000 deaths in Europe,
- The floods in Pakistan from June-September 2022 affected 33m people, causing 1,739 deaths and an economic damage of \$15bn. Monsoon floods also struck India (2,035 deaths, \$4.2bn losses), Bangladesh (7.2m people affected), and China (\$5bn in economic losses).
- Fifty three residents of the isolated Gulf Country town of Burketown, about 2,115 km northwest of state capital Brisbane, had been evacuated since heavy rain triggered floods earlier this week. The flood topped the March 2011 record of 6.87 metres after up to 293 mm of rain fell.
- At least 14 people have been killed in southern Somalia after torrential rains triggered flash floods that have caused havoc in several towns and villages. 14 people were killed including three members of the same family.
- At least 23 people were killed and dozens injured after a tornado and strong thunderstorms ripped across Mississippi, leaving hundreds without shelter. Four people were missing following the twister, which left a trail of damage for more than 100 miles (161 km).

Natural Disaster

- A devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria killed more than 50,000 people that includes figures from both government and rebel-controlled parts of war-torn Syria. A total of 5,951 people were killed across Syria, while Turkey recorded 44,374 deaths after the February 6 earthquake.
- Torrential rain triggered the mudslide that buried dozens of homes and injured more than 30 people in the village of Alausi some 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of the capital Quito. There were 67 people still missing, adding that 163 homes have been affected.

National News

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Merchandise exports shrink 19pc in February

ICCI chief underscores need for promoting G-B dry fruit exports

Customs sets up cell to monitor sugar export

Country needs to boost exports to \$100bn in 5-8 years: minister

Textile exports plunge almost 30pc

Sugar Export: Shipment period extended on exporters' plea

Non-textile exports dip 6pc to \$7.4bn

Exports to nine regional states dip 18pc

Pakistan's exports to Middle East fall 12pc

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Economic support by Gulf countries: Pakistan hopes for positive outcome: FO

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Projects worth billions of dollars, AIIB voices concern over undue delay

France pledges \$55m to fight polio in Pakistan

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7.1 # America

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US investment coming to Pakistan more and more every year, says Blome

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PM banking on ADB support to stabilise economy

\$5m flood emergency grant signed with ADB

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Govt unhappy as IMF ‘shifts goalposts’

US asks Pakistan to work with IMF to ‘unlock funding’

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World Bank willing to fund fan replacement plan

WB’s \$200m Punjab project makes little progress

WB asks govt to exempt projects funded by IFIs

WB links release of \$400m to GST dispute settlement

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58 more govt hospitals to be outsourced

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AJK govt committed to promoting agri sector, says PM

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Five oil firms join hands for green energy

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Health officers ‘mopped up’ budget of non-functioning hospital for 13 years

Punjab home department highlights shortage of dozens of medicines

CWDP approves Rs11bn healthcare projects

Half of dialysis machines at CMCH remain out of order

Dadu flood victims suffer from gastro, urticaria, malaria

Children still at risk of contracting RTIs

45pc of TB patients in Pakistan are not diagnosed, event told

129 died of rabies at Indus Hospital, JPMC in 10 years: study

Traces of plastic, rubber additives found on Keamari victims’ remains

Sehat programme faces risk of closure in Punjab over non-payment of Rs83bn dues

37 THQ hospitals, six highway trauma centres without anaesthetists in Punjab

Pakistan far from being declared malaria-free country

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People throng Indus River to highlight water pollution

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Govt borrowings from banks surge to Rs1.8tr

Total debt jumps by Rs4tr in a month

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Sindh millers opt out of Ramazan package

Lahore mills sell subsidised flour to Lalamusa trader

15.8m households in Punjab to get wheat flour free of cost

185,000 families of capital to get free wheat flour

Free wheat flour for the Faisalabad poor through 240 points

11.2 # Food Scarcity

Consumers brace for flour shortage

Passco allocated Rs201bn to bridge wheat shortages

Growers allege wheat smuggling by officials, traders

Pakistan's food security at stake: PKI

Malnutrition remains serious concern in Sindh: minister

11.3 # Poverty

'Health expenses push 400,000 households into poverty every year'

Poverty, lack of potable water among major causes of stunting: report

Reeling under burgeoning inflation, jobless man poisons wife, two daughters, tries to end his life

Woman dies, two faint in mayhem at free flour points

Flour distribution stampedes kill one, injure several in Charsadda, Kohat

IFAD to begin new programme to reduce poverty, raise food security

Two more die, 56 injured in stampedes at free flour centres in Punjab

11.4 # Inflation

Ministry jacks up inflation forecast

Inflation hits highest level on record, will rise further

Sharjeel admits sale of expensive wheat led to hike in flour price

Inflation so high that ‘living seems unaffordable’

Wheat flour prices hit record high in Karachi

Case for hike in minimum wage in view of inflation

Skyrocketing inflation challenges age-old charity traditions

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Short-term inflation remains over 41pc

Weekly inflation spikes to 42.27pc

Short-term inflation hits record 45.64pc

Short-term inflation spikes to record 46.65pc

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US, Pakistan to jointly tackle climate change

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CM, NDMA agree on adopting technology to fight disasters

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Flood damages houses, roads, crops in Kohistan

Eight die in Awaran flash floods

13.2 # Heatwave

Heatwaves predicted for Mar-May period

13.3 # Rainfall

Windstorm, rain ruin wheat crop

Torrents sweep away 10 in Balochistan

Rain, hailstorm flatten wheat farms in districts of south Punjab

Rain, hailstorm hit parts of Balochistan

Rain, hailstorm lash Lakki Marwat

Five killed across KP as houses collapse in heavy rain

Rain, hailstones damage crops, houses in Bannu

One dead as rains wreak havoc in Balochistan

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Powerful quake rattles parts of KP, Afghanistan

Quake jolts several Punjab cities

6.8 magnitude earthquake: 11 killed and 172 houses damaged: NDMA

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Three labourers killed in Khyber landslide

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Gilgit residents protest wheat, electricity shortage

Power protesters storm grid station in Jamrud

Students, civil society protest police crackdown on QAU

Protest held against allotment of land to 'non-natives' in Winder

Angry protesters suspend power supply to entire Landi Kotal

Peasants protest 'kidnapping' of four fellows after being freed on court's order

No activities in Peshawar varsity as employees go on strike

Power protesters take to streets in Mohmand

Women march for their rights in Lahore, Multan

Marchers defy hurdles to record protest

Peshawar varsity teachers, students continue protest

Women's struggle termed war against capitalist dominance

Peasant women urged to stand up for their rights in Aurat March

Harassment, patriarchy and inflation come under fire in Aurat March

Thousands of fish, cattle heads die after mill releases toxic runoff into canal

Women march in Gwadar for HDT chief's release

Dalits hold rally over 'forced conversion', other woes

National News

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

CPAC to bring socio-economic improvements for farmers: Xiang

The China-Pakistan Agricultural Corridor (CPAC) project would bring socio-economic development for farmers in the country and further pave the way for a new era of collaboration between the two all-weather strategic partners. Director China Study Center of the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) Xiang Yang said that NUST had signed three documents of understanding with various Chinese institutions to boost agriculture productivity in Pakistan. She said that this collaboration would enable to share resources, expertise and knowledge between China and Pakistan, and work together towards common goals of improving and promoting sustainable methodologies in agriculture sector. She said that the agriculture, in the South Asian countries, was struggling with low productivity, supply shortfalls, low returns to farmers, lack of advanced technology and trained professionals and thus threatening food security in the region.

As per the agreements, the institutions would carry out research on the construction of whole agricultural industry chain system between China and Pakistan, research on industrial development strategy, industrial demand analysis and development prospect forecasting. They would help in deep processing and industrialization development of local agricultural products besides research and development and integrated innovation of key technologies for efficient standardized cultivation of crops in Pakistan. They would build an agricultural laboratory and test field in Pakistan to experiment with and promote advanced Chinese agricultural technology besides precise fertilization of crops and harvest loss reduction technology exchange and cooperation. (*Business Recorder, March 13th, 2023, Page 4*)

Agri event today

Agri Connection 2023, national level agriculture conference, is set to take place Thursday (Mar 16), will be attended by government officials, farmers, and experts from the financial sector, food processing, agri tech, and public sector to discuss the development of agriculture in Pakistan. The conference is organized by the Pakistan Agriculture Council (PAC) and the theme for this year's conference is "Agri Connection 2023". Kazim Saeed, Strategy Advisor of PAC informed that Pakistan's agriculture needs massive transformation based on research and development and the use of modern technology. (*Business Recorder, March 16th, 2023, Page 3*)

1.1 # Land

Army handed over 45,000 acres for ‘corporate farming’

The caretaker government of Punjab has signed an agreement to hand over at least 45,267 acres of land in three districts Bhakkar, Khushab, and Sahiwal — of the province to the Pakistan Army for ‘Corporate Agriculture Farming’. According to a document, the military’s land directorate wrote to the Punjab chief secretary, Board of Revenue and secretaries of the agriculture, forest, livestock and irrigation departments for handing over of 42,724-acre land in tehsils Kaloor Kot and Mankera in Bhakkar, 1,818 acres in tehsils Quaidabad and Khushab in Khushab, and 725 acres in tehsil Chichawatni of Sahiwal. According to informed sources, the JV has been signed between the military, the Punjab government, and private firms dealing with corporate farming.

The sources said that the Punjab government will provide the land while the army will utilise its resources and retain the management of the project. The private sector, on the other hand, will invest and provide auxiliary support, including the supply of fertilisers. Military sources confirmed this development and said that the army was “not taking over the ownership of the land as it will remain the property” of the Punjab government. “The intervention of the army will provide a coherent administrative structure,”

They said that the land in question is mostly barren, uncultivated, and under-cultivated and added that the army with the assistance of the relevant stakeholders, including its JV partners and locals, will turn this into fertile land. The sources said that the Punjab Board of Revenue has conducted surveys for months and identified these lands for corporate farming purposes. The project will be managed by retired army officers and the army will not get any pecuniary benefit out of this project rather the profit from the farming will go to the locals, the Punjab government, and firms that will invest in the project. At least 40pc of the revenue generated from the cultivation will go to the Punjab government, 20 per cent will be spent on modern research and development in the agriculture sector, while the remaining will be used for the succeeding crops and expansion of the project.

Citing the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, said that at least 27pc of the total cultivated land of Pakistan was not being utilised. In order to deal with this situation, the Punjab government has made a plan to restore the agriculture sector with the help of the Pakistan Army. With use of modern agricultural methods, machinery, and high-quality seeds, agricultural production will be increased manifold. In first phase of project, different varieties of pulses, millets and rice will be cultivated. This will be followed by large-scale cultivation of canola and wheat. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2023, Page 12*)

Corporate farming: Punjab BoR asked to hand over 45,267 acres of state land to army

The General Headquarters Lands Directorate has asked the Board of Revenue, Punjab to handover state lands of 45,267 acres to the Pakistan Army for corporate agriculture

farming. The lands may be handed over as per details including; (a) 10,273 acres of Livestock department in Rakh Ghulaman Mouza of tehsil KallorKot in district Bhakkar on 17th March 2023; (b) 23,027 acres of Forest department in Rakh Gohar Wala of tehsil KallorKot in district Bhakkar on 18th March 2023; (c) 9,424 acres of Livestock department in Rakh Mahni of tehsil Mankera in district Bhakkar on 15th March 2023; (d) 981 acres of Livestock department in Chak 61 MB of tehsil Khushab in district Khushab on 17th March 2023; (e) 837 acres of Agriculture department in Chak 5 MB of tehsil Quaidabad in district Khushab on 18th March 2023, and (f) 725 acres of provincial government in Chak 13/11L of tehsil Chichawatni in district Sahiwal on 15th March 2023. Due to poor land reforms, ineffective agricultural policies, climate change and increasing population, the annual growth of the agriculture sector in Pakistan's economy, which was 4 percent in 1960, has reduced to 2.5 percent in 2022. (*Business Recorder, March 17th, 2023, Page 3*)

BHC stops land allotment in Winder

A division bench of the Balochistan High Court (BHC) has stopped allotment of 15,000 acres of land in the command area of Winder town in Hub district. Mohammad Aslam Bhootani, member of the National Assembly had filed a constitutional petition, challenging the allotment of 15,000 acres of land in the command area of Winder. (*Dawn, 18th March 2023 Page 5*)

The history of land ownership

Soon after independence, one of the questions that attracted the attention of legislators was whether ownership of lands could be limited to a certain level or should there be no limit at all. The legislation was implemented but later failed. Meanwhile, India achieved substantial success by abolishing the zamindari system. Following such reforms, 2.3 million acres were declared as surplus, and through this process, 1.3m acres were redistributed all over India.

Later, in 1959, reformative laws regarding the limitation of land ownership were introduced by Ayub Khan. Regarding irrigated and non-irrigated lands, 500 and 1,000 acres were set as the limit. The main issue with the proportionate application of these reforms was that their numbers were ordained for individuals rather than families. This, in turn, facilitated the interests of landlords who distributed their ownership of lands to their real and factious family members and servants. It also enabled the landlords to retain their ceiling up to 36,000 Produce Index Units (PIUs). PIU were introduced in the colonial era as a parameter to measure the gross value of output per acre. The problem with this parameter was the low gross value of output per acre, and that was because of the higher labour intensity and lack of machinery and technology in that era. As a result, the average area per declarant reached 11,810 and 7,028 acres in Punjab and Pakistan, respectively, in the 1959 reform. Through this process, the government could only collect an area of 1.9m acres (35 per cent of farmland). The government had to pay Rs89.2 million for the uncultivated land the landlords were not using.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto announced his land reforms on March 1, 1972. The reform was regulated under the Martial Law Regulation Act 115. According to the reform, 150 and 300 acres were set as limits for irrigated and non-irrigated lands, respectively. Later in his updated Land Reforms Ordinance, these limits were further reduced to 100 and 300 acres in 1977. Its equivalent amount on the parameter was up to 12,000 PIUs. An additional bonus of 2,000 PIUs was granted to the owners of tractors and tube wells which enabled a de facto ceiling for landlords' properties. Due to outdated PIUs, the actual limits of Bhutto's reform were 466 and 560 acres for Punjab and Sindh, respectively. Thus, the government could only collect an area of 0.6m acres. This collection was even lesser than the summed-up collection of government-owned land area under the 1959 reforms. Moreover, in the case of Punjab, 59pc of the area collected by the government was uncultivated.

The mutual romance of the religious and political elite reached its epoch soon after the announcement of land reform. The first coalition emerged in the form of Anjuman Tahafuz Haqooq-e-Zamindara Tahat-al-Shariah. This coalition launched a nationwide campaign to oppose land reforms. This movement was led by Pir Aminul Hasanat, known as Pir Sahib of Manki Sharif. Maulana Maududi also wrote a book "Masala e Milkiyat Zameen" published in 1950. In this book, he constructed a separate narrative against the land reforms and gave it an Islamic touch by associating its principles with the principles of socialism. Considering land reforms as a tool for spreading socialism, the state of Pakistan always maintained its anti-socialist policies. For example, Pakistan was a key member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, which was formed to counter the expansion of Soviet influence in the region. Thus, it can be said that the state policies could not support the socialist nature of reforms.

On the political front, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan was among the leading political figures to show strong resistance against reforms. He organised rallies and mobilised the zamindar community to fight for their rights. He organised a famous 'Zamindar Convention' attended by thousands of zamindars from all over Pakistan. Regarding anti-reform sentiments, the powerful coalition of religious and political leaders showed its true colours in the 1980s.

Qazalbash Waqf filed an appeal against these reforms in the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court in 1989. The Bench consisting of Justice Nasim Hassan Shah, Justice Shafiur Rahman and Justice Afzal Zullah, Mufti Taqi Usmani and Pir Karam Shah gave its verdict after nine years against land reforms by declaring them "unIslamic". According to Mufti Taqi, Shariah law has not put any limits on legitimate ownership. It allows any individual to own an indefinite number of lands and properties acquired through legitimate means. This verdict gives rise to the two most burning questions about how the awarding of lands by the British government could be considered as the ones acquired through legitimate means and on what grounds huge chunks of land were granted to specific individuals.

The implementation of the decision of the Bench started on March 23, 1990. Through this verdict, the land elite regained their uncultivated lands (more than 1.5m acres) in cultivated forms from the hard-working farmers without paying back the million rupees to the government, which were earned against the land reform. This productive development of events made them more powerful on political fronts. It also reopened several venues for the aristocracy in terms of dynastic politics, wealth accumulation through real estate and reinforcement of their position as powerful political players who continue to derive their power from land ownership. (*Dawn, 20th March, 2023, Business & Finance Page 2*)

Agri land: PBC demands withdrawal of ‘notification’

The Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) has demanded immediate withdrawal of the notification regarding handing over of 45,267 acres of agricultural land to the Pakistan Army. They said that this illegal practice of donating out of public resources to the Army is neither justified nor acceptable to the people of Pakistan. Therefore, they demanded the purported notification shall be withdrawn immediately. In case of failure to withdraw the illegal notification, the PBC shall file an appropriate petition before the competent Court of Law in accordance with the law and Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973. (*Business Recorder, March 28th, 2023, Page 48*)

1.2 # Peasants

‘Govt looks the other way as landlords trap flood-hit peasants in debt bondage’

The Sindh government’s failure to implement the Sindh Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 2015, in letter and spirit has led to an exponential increase in bonded labour in the wake of last year’s devastating floods making homeless and penniless peasants an easy prey for landlords and farm input dealers. This was stated by Akram Ali Khaskheli, president of Hari Welfare Association. He said that bonded labour had increased poverty and malnutrition among the poor. As many as 190 bonded labourers had been liberated on courts’ orders, including 56 children and 63 women, so far since the calamity struck the province. He deplored that only 14 district vigilance committees (DVCs) were formed under law in 29 districts last year and those too remained largely dysfunctional. He called for implementation of law and said DVCs were direly needed, especially during & after floods, because of increased chances of bonded labour.

Most government officials concerned were unaware of both the Prevention of Persons in Trafficking Act (PoPA), 2018, and law against bonded labour. Khaskheli said that Sindh and federal governments had turned a blind eye to peasants and workers who lost crops, wages, cattle and houses to devastating floods. He said that poor families were forced to obtain loans from landlords to survive. Such arrangements resulted in debt bondage which was already on the rise without check and monitored by the non-existent DVCs. He said that the governments instead of helping peasants by providing them livelihood opportunities had turned flood-hit peasants and workers into beggars.

Thousands of children under five years of age might die by the end of 2023 from malnutrition, hunger, waterborne diseases and malaria if they did not get adequate government support. He said that peasants constituted over 70 per cent of labour force in agriculture farms and kilns but they were not given priority by the government. A rural worker received hardly Rs6,000 to Rs8,000 per month instead of Rs25,000 minimum wage. He said that Sindh Industrial Relations Act, 2013, allowed peasants to join unions but the government was doing nothing to ensure their unionisation in agriculture sector and kilns. He said that like Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act, there were also other laws that could help protect women against abuse, exploitation, and marginalisation in feudal and tribal societies.

Khaskheli demanded the Sindh government ensure that Rs25,000 wage was paid to all workers and punishment was awarded to violators of the minimum wage law. The government should strengthen monitoring mechanisms by increasing number of labour inspectors and labour courts so that workers could approach them for protection of their rights. He urged the federal and provincial governments to provide relief and support to peasants and workers rather than the rich landlords. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 15*)

1.3 # Water

Growers' body calls for closure of link canals of Indus River

Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has strongly opposed opening of link canals on Indus river after end of flood season and called for closing them immediately. The SAI leaders noted that the link canals of Tausna-Panjnad and Chashma-Jhelum were opened and water flows were being diverted to them. The canals could only work when there was flood in the river. It expressed concern over increasing electricity tariff after withdrawal of subsidy and said it would certainly increase cost of production. The meeting said that last year's floodwater had not yet been drained out while another monsoon was round the corner. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023, Page 14*)

Wasa prepared to start dredging of Leh Nullah

The Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) will start the cleanliness of Leh Nullah to the tune of Rs30 million from next month to avoid a flood-like situation in the garrison city during monsoon season. The last flood that the Leh witnessed was on July 23, 2001; just a few hours of 620mm of rain resulted in the worst floods in the city's history. As many as 35 people lost their lives while many slums were swept away resulting in financial loss worth millions. (*Dawn, 5th, March, 2023, Page 4*)

Jacobabad sounds alarm on need for drainage system

The administration of Sindh's Jacobabad district has written to the irrigation department to initiate a storm water drainage scheme under the climate change mitigation and adaptation plan. Months after the floods, the district (Jacobabad) is still facing permanent water logging, which is damaging cultivable lands. The district administration has said a further delay on part of the irrigation department may lead to

food insecurity and poverty in Jacobabad. The district was one of the worst-hit areas during the last year's floods. According to the post-flood damage assessment, as many as 115,000 houses, 200,000 agriculture acres, 83,000 livestock, 162 major and minor farms to market roads, 37 health facilities and 392 schools have been washed away. District administration claimed that permanent water logging has directly damaged around 70,000 acres of cultivable land & could affect over 100,000 acres of fertile land.

Many districts in Sindh are facing water logging months after the floods. PDMA Sindh has declared an urgent need for dewatering activities in the districts of Nausharo Feroze, Khairpur, Sukkur, Jhatta, and Ghotki. To achieve this, five excavators, dewatering pumps, and fuel are required to complete the dewatering process and provide people with appropriate livelihood standards.

According to the latest situation report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) approximately 1.8m people are still living near contaminated and stagnant flood water pools six months after the government declared a national emergency. The UNOCHA report further stated that flooding in Balochistan continued to affect vulnerable populations, with stagnant water remaining visible in some UCs of Nasirabad division. Malaria and other waterborne diseases are becoming an increasingly concerning issue, with Vector Borne Disease positivity rates at 74pc in Sohbatpur, 62pc in Jhal Magsi, 52pc in Nasirabad, 52pc in Jaffarabad and 41pc in Kacchi district. Nutrition, food security and public health are major concerns as many of these people in temporary shelters lack basic food items (at risk of sliding into an emergency level of hunger) and increased cases of malnutrition.

Pakistan has the twenty-fifth highest infant mortality rate globally, with almost half of all deaths in children under 5 being caused by undernutrition. More than 1.5m children were lacking severe acute malnutrition services, with 170,000 of them suffering from SAM with complications and lack of stabilisation treatment. According to International Labour Organization, the floods in Pakistan have had a devastating effect on workforce, with 4.3m workers in affected districts experiencing job losses and disruptions. This amounts to 20pc of the pre-flood workforce. Agriculture sector was most significantly impacted, with 43pc (1.9m people) affected, followed by services industry 36pc (1.5m people), and industry 21pc (0.9m people). (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Page 3*)

Early river diversion for Mohmand Dam ordered

Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) chairman retired Lt Gen Sajjad Ghani ordered the diversion of the Swat River in the current year as part of the Mohmand Dam project. The project team told him that work was under way simultaneously at the diversion system, dam, spillway, re-regulation pond, switch yard and other key sites. The officials said besides supplementing 160,000 acres of existing land, the dam would also irrigate 18,237 acres of land in Mohmand and Charsadda districts. (*Dawn, March 23rd, 2023, Page 8*)

UN warns scarcity of water is fast becoming ‘endemic’

A United Nations report said water scarcity is becoming endemic as a result of the local impact of physical water stress, coupled with the acceleration and spreading of freshwater pollution. ‘World Water Development Report 2023’ said that as a result of climate change, seasonal water scarcity will increase in regions where water is currently abundant and worsen in regions where water is already in short supply.

On average, 10 percent of the global population lives in countries with high or critical water stress, adding that water use has been increasing globally by roughly one per cent per year over the last 40 years and is expected to grow at a similar rate through to 2050, driven by a combination of population growth, socio-economic development and changing consumption patterns. The bulk of this increase is concentrated in middle- and lower-income countries, particularly in emerging economies.

Low-, middle- and high-income countries all show signs of risks related to water quality. Poor ambient water quality in low-income countries is often related to low levels of wastewater treatment, whereas in higher-income countries runoff from agriculture is a more serious problem. However, water quality data remains sparse, due in large part to weak monitoring and reporting capacity. This is especially true in many of the least developed countries in Asia and Africa. According to the latest figures from 2020, 26pc of the world’s population (two billion people) did not have access to safely managed drinking water services, and an estimated 46pc (3.6bn) lacked access to safely managed sanitation. (*Dawn, March 23rd, 2023, Page 9*)

Humanity has ‘broken the water cycle’, says UN chief

The future of humanity’s “lifeblood” — water — is under threat worldwide, the UN secretary-general warned. “We’ve broken the water cycle, destroyed ecosystems and contaminated groundwater,” Antonio Guterres said. “We are draining humanity’s lifeblood through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating,” Guterres told.

A report by UN-Water and Unesco warned of too little or too much water in some places and contaminated water in others conditions it said highlight the imminent risk of a global water crisis. According to UN climate study, “roughly half of world’s population currently experience severe water scarcity for at least part of year.” “At least 2bn people (globally) use a drinking water source contaminated with faeces, putting them at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid & polio”. (*Dawn, March 23rd, 2023, Page 12*)

Relentless groundwater pumping by Pakistan, India has lowered groundwater table

Pakistan and India are drawing water from the Indus aquifer faster than the rate of water recharges back into the aquifer, leading to a lowering of the water table back to or below pre-colonial times. This was disclosed by The State of Pakistan’s Agriculture Report 2023 jointly launched by the Pakistan Agricultural Coalition and Pakistan Business

Council. “Neither the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 with India nor Pakistan’s inter-provincial Water Accord of 1991 deal with the allocation of groundwater from the Indus aquifer. Both instruments should be upgraded to make them comprehensive,” stated the report. The report stated that Pakistan has an estimated 200 million acre-feet of total renewable freshwater including groundwater sources and Pakistan withdraws over 70% of these freshwater resources each year which is among the highest among comparator countries in the world. China and India both withdraw more water every year than Pakistan, but only 21% and 36% of their total freshwater resources, respectively. “With an enormous proportion of water being withdrawn for Pakistan’s agriculture, water use efficiency in both irrigation and agriculture must be prioritized,” suggested the report.

Pakistan is the world’s fourth largest user of groundwater and meets nearly half of the irrigation requirement with groundwater. “Nearly 90% of the tube wells are in Punjab due to lower salinity and relatively higher water quality. Most of Sindh has saline groundwater which means that any water that flows into the aquifer is lost forever”. Canal tail users are caught in a feedback loop of increased reliance on groundwater when canal water is insufficient but also are farming in the reaches of the aquifer that are least fed by seepage. And increasing fuel and energy prices have also increased operational costs, straining the farmers’ ability to withdraw needed water. (*Business Recorder, March 24th, 2023, Page 2*)

Severe water shortage in Skardu as key dam falls to dead level

The residents of Skardu are expected to face severe water shortage as the water level in Sadpara dam has fallen to a dead level. The dam, southwest of Skardu, is the city’s only water source which caters to the residents’ drinking, irrigation and other needs and also generates electricity. The official said the dam receives water from melting glaciers during the summer season. The inflows remain normal from May to October, enough for electricity generation and to fulfil irrigation and drinking water needs. However from October to May, inflows reduce considerably and the officials rely on stored water to fulfil the needs of locals, the Wapda official told. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 3*)

Massive water shortage likely months after unprecedented floods

In the coming Kharif season, beginning on April 1, the country is heading towards a ‘massive water shortage’, somewhere between 27 per cent and 35 per cent, only months after unprecedented floods submerged large swathes of lands across Sindh and southern Punjab, Irsa sources told *Dawn*. Informed sources said that two major stakeholders — Sindh and Punjab — were poles apart on water conveyance losses — the quantum of available water that remains unaccounted for and lost to theft, leakage, evaporation or absorbed by soil or canals and could not reach farm lands. Punjab believes that system losses or conveyance losses were around 7pc and 8pc, given the huge water quantities absorbed by the farmlands in super floods in Rabi season that has just ended, whereas Sindh insists system losses ranged between 35pc and 40pc, particularly in its territories between Chashma and Kotri barrages. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2023, Page 1*)

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

2.1 # Agricultural Finances

Need stressed for investments in agri sector

An Agriculture Investment Symposium was held to bring together key stakeholders, including investors, policymakers, farmers, development partners, and researchers to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences to drive investment in the agriculture sector. Attended by more than 300 participants, the symposium provided a platform for matchmaking and exploring opportunities for private investors and financial institutions to invest in the agricultural sector. Booths for B2B meetings were setup, which served as an avenue for investors to connect with agriculture companies to exchange knowledge and access to available options related to technologies and bankable products. Several memorandums of understanding were signed or pledged at the B2B meetings. Jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Finance Corporation (IFC), Asian Development Bank (ABD) and Federal and Provincial Boards of Investment (BOI), the symposium catalyzed investments, partnerships, and collaborations for sustainable and inclusive growth in the sector, leveraging digitalization while managing the adverse impacts of climate change. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 2*)

Fix agriculture to get rid of external deficit: Salim

Former central bank governor Syed Salim Raza said fixing the agriculture sector can eliminate the food trade deficit in three years and lead to a production surplus. At a conference organised by the Pakistan Agricultural Coalition (PAC), Mr Raza said developing the agriculture sector is the only way to rid the country of its perennial external deficit and increase dollar earnings in the long run. “[Agriculture] is all that we have,” he said in an implicit reference to the sector’s relatively less dependence on imported raw materials and high export potential.

According to the State of Pakistan’s Agriculture 2023 report that the PAC and the Pakistan Business Council (PBC), 80 per cent of Pakistani farms lack direct access to bank credit. Moreover, at least 75pc of credit demand for crops isn’t being met through banking credit. The study referred to a survey conducted by Karandaaz that showed two-thirds of the farmers said the reason for not borrowing directly from the banking sector was either complex documentation requirements or a lack of knowledge about getting a bank loan. As a result, two-thirds of the farmers borrow informally from family, friends, money lenders or loan sharks. Some 14pc of them borrow from Zarai Taraqiati Bank Ltd, 12pc from microfinance banks and only 4pc from commercial banks, which cater mainly to larger farmers.

Using a simplified method to assess credit demand by farms, the PAC study came up with a figure of Rs2.6 trillion for 2019-20 for the five major field crops only. In contrast, the actual disbursement was just Rs638bn for all crops in the same year. The breakdown

of the credit demand estimate by farm size showed a demand of Rs338bn for farms above 50 acres, which is comparable to the Rs384bn figure for the actual disbursement to the farms of this category in 2019-20. However, estimated credit demand for farms of 12.50-50 acres was Rs843bn versus only Rs73bn that was actually disbursed. Credit demand for farms below 12.5 acres was Rs1.45tr, which was eight times the Rs181bn that banks actually disbursed to smallholder farmers. “The smallholder farmers are the ones beholden to the middlemen”. PAC CEO said economic growth targets must include 4pc real GDP growth in agriculture. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2023, Page 9*)

Agriculture sector: Mastercard to partner with Digitt+ to promote financial inclusion

The Akhtar Fuiou Technologies (AFT) has signed an agreement with Mastercard underlining its commitment to participate in the Mastercard Community Pass Programme. Digitt+, Pakistan’s first regulated agri-fintech company that’s powered by AFT, intends to connect untapped agricultural markets with digital payment solutions and become the first entity to launch Mastercard in Pakistan. About half of Pakistan’s workforce is employed in agriculture sector; however, insufficient infrastructure in agricultural communities hinders financial services and other organisations from serving these individuals. Pakistan is also home to 8 percent of the world’s unbanked adults. Commerce Pass will help bring these individuals into the formal economy by providing a record of transactions to facilitate access to credit and other financial services. This digital payment solution will also help support financial resilience for the 63 percent of Pakistanis who live in rural areas and are otherwise dependent upon informal lending channels. (*Business Recorder, March 17th, 2023, Page 2*)

2.2 # Agricultural Machinery

Minister underscores need for improving agri productivity through farm mechanisation

Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Syed Murtaza Mahmud has stressed the need for improving agricultural productivity through farm mechanisation and promote agricultural credit for the rural economy especially to enable growers to purchase modern agriculture technologies. He stressed on the use of productive irrigation methods such as drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, optimum use of Intermediate inputs like fertilizers, seeds and pesticides for better produce of crops. He suggested to promote low-cost enterprise development programs like honey bee keeping and floriculture etc. (*Business Recorder, 14th March, 2023, Page 2*)

2.3 # Agricultural Tax

Tax officers accused of imposing penalties against agri income

The Income Tax department has been found imposing penalties and default surcharges for late payment of agriculture income tax which, according to the tax experts, is illegal because the taxation of agriculture income is not a subject of Income Tax Ordinance,

2001. According to sources, the tax authorities were issuing notices under the garb of absence of a proof for payment of provincial agriculture income tax and considering it as “income from other sources,” and not as agriculture income. (*Business Recorder, March 26th, 2023, Page 1*)

2.4 # Industrial Production of Agriculture

Aeroponic production of potato seed begins

Pakistan’s dependence on imported potato seed is now set to substantially reduce with the application of aeroponics technology introduced in the country with the assistance of South Korea, as the second crop of potato seed is now ready to be harvested at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) in Islamabad. The aeroponic potato seed production system will help achieve higher productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, initiate farm level processing, human resource development and create immense job opportunities, agricultural scientists told reporters in Islamabad.

In Pakistan, potato seed is mostly imported from Holland which is not only costly but also the above fifth generation which negatively affects potato productivity. On an average, the country spends around Rs3 billion on importing 15,000 to 20,000 tonnes of potato seed. Potato is one of the major cash crop of the country and during 2022 it was cultivated on an area of 313,000 hectares with a total production of 79,37,000 tonnes. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 5*)

2.5 # Seed

MoU advised with Chinese firms for growth of new, certified seeds

Experts underscored the need for a joint memorandum of understanding (MoU) between agricultural institutions and local and Chinese private sector for growth of certified seeds and new seed commodities. They called for increasing research budget for the development of agriculture to meet demand for pure seeds and proposed that experimental fields be set up on farmers’ land. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2023, Page 15*)

2.6 # Subsidies

Subsidy to agri, zero-rated sectors withdrawn

The government has withdrawn subsidy to agriculture and five zero-rated sectors from March 1, 2023 as a pre-condition of the IMF program, which will save Rs 65 billion. Of Rs 65bn, Rs 53bn subsidy will be withdrawn from five zero rated sectors whereas impact of agriculture sector is around Rs 12 billion from March to June 2023. The government was providing relief to the electricity consumers in the form of different subsidy schemes (TDS, ISP, ZRI, FATA, AJK, etc.) With withdrawal of subsidy, tariff for five zero-rated sectors will be Cents 9 per unit whereas agriculture sector will have to pay Rs 16.60 per unit. (*Business Recorder, March 2nd, 2023, Page 1*)

2022 Floods have caused Rs421bn agri losses in Sindh, Bilawal told

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari inaugurated ‘Seed Subsidy Programme: Reimbursement for wheat Seed’ and transferred Rs8.39 billion to Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) which started disbursing an amount of Rs5000 per acre to the small growers holding agricultural land up to 12 acres. Earlier, Bilawal Bhutto, through a presentation was told that the floods of 2022 destroyed 3.6 million acres of Kharif crops out of 4.4 million acres. The farmers suffered a loss to the tune of Rs. 421 billion.

The Chief Minister said that Rs 13.5 billion were required to finance the seed subsidy program. “The Sindh government contributed Rs8.39 billion and the federal government had committed Rs 4.7 billion,” he said and added due to funding deadlock with the federal government and lack of authentic data on farmers, the initial program of providing free seed was revisited when the sowing season had commenced. Shah said that backing out of the federal government from providing their share constrained his government to limit the subsidy to the farmers holding the land up to 12.5 acres in the first phase and 25 acres in the second phase. He said that he was keen to reimburse the amount in lieu of seed to all the farmers, but the federal government did not fulfil its commitment, therefore his government has limited reimbursement to the small growers holding 12 acres in the first phase. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 16*)

3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

3.1 # Cash Crop

Cotton: cabinet approves raise in support price

The federal cabinet approved the decision to increase the support price of cotton to Rs8,500 per maund (40kg). (*Business Recorder, March 18th, 2023, Page 8*)

Growers’ body rejects official price of cotton

The Sindh Chamber of Agriculture (SCA) has rejected the official price of cotton fixed by federal government at Rs8,500 per 40kg and demanded revising the rate upward to Rs15,000 per 40 kg. The chamber noted that cost of farm inputs had jumped manifold thus the rate of Rs8,500 for cotton crop was unacceptable.

The chamber expressed concern over drop in the price of 15kg bag of tomato to Rs100 only and demanded the federal government allow export of tomatoes to save growers from losses. It said that small loans should be provided to farmers in tomato growing areas of Badin, Jhuddo, Tando Allahyar and Naushahro Feroze so that they could set up cold storage and small industry for producing tomato ketchup.

It demanded de-silting of 13 main canals in the province and warned if it was not done in time it might lead to water shortage in May and June. SCA hailed the government’s decision to fix sugar cane indicative price for 2023-24 season at Rs450 per 40 kg and said it would provide relief to flood-hit farmers. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 15*)

Cotton: huge output shortfall projected

Cotton production will be merely 4.78 million bales (arrivals till 3rd March 2023) against the target of 09 (nine) million bales due to damage by the floods and decline in area owing to slim profit margin in cotton. Pakistan has the potential to increase cotton production to 15 million bales in a short period of time if the old cotton area is re-gained; farmers are supported with appropriate technology and they receive a fair and stable price. Over the last five years, the import bill of raw cotton has exceeded Rs56 billion. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2023, Page 1*)

3.2 # Food crop

ECC approves uniform wheat support price

ECC of the cabinet has approved a uniform procurement price of wheat crop 2022-23 at Rs3,900/40 kg, and decided to waive off all the charges of storage of stuck up containers, cargos at Karachi Port Trust. (*Business Recorder, March 2nd, 2023, Page 1*)

4 # NON-AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

4.1 # Fisheries

Karachi harbour uplift project under way since 2019, PA told

The Sindh Assembly was informed that the rehabilitation of the Karachi Fish Harbour was under way with the cost of over Rs1.5 billion since 2019. Livestock and Fisheries Minister Abdul Bari Pitafi said that Rs1.5bn had been allocated for the “Rehabilitation and Renovation of Karachi Fish Harbour — External Services”. The minister said that the European Union in 2007 had delisted Pakistani firms from exporting fish products to EU countries after their inspectors visited the country and reported a number of deficiencies in the system.

The minister informed the house that the number of palla fish — an anadromous fish, which lives in the sea and migrates into freshwater to lay eggs — was drastically falling and nearing extinction in the Indus River due to acute shortage of water at downstream Kotri because the province was not getting its due share of water as per the Water Accord for the past many years. He said that “It only breeds in the flow of water, hence its breeding in fish hatcheries is not possible”. Mr Pitafi added that the provincial government did not allot land on discounted rates for fish farming, saying that the livestock and fisheries department did not have the provision of land allotment.

The minister said that most of the coastal fishermen villages in district Thatta were deprived of basic facilities, including drinking water supply, drainage system, electricity, gas, schools and primary health centres. “Main reason is the location of these coastal villages as they are settled in creeks far away from main roads, towns and cities”. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2023, Page 13*)

4.2 # Livestock

'Expired' vaccines kill 10 animals

Ten cows and buffaloes died and condition of five other buffaloes turned critical after doctors of livestock department, Jamshoro, allegedly administered expired vaccines to them. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2023, Page 15*)

5 # TRADE

Pakistan committed to expanding trade ties with US

Pakistan remains committed to expanding trade ties with the United States and is modifying the regulatory regime to do so, says the country's US ambassador. With a bilateral trade volume of \$12 billion, the US remains Pakistan's largest trading partner and export destination. In 2022, Pakistan exported more than \$5.9bn worth of goods to the US while importing more than \$3.17bn worth of goods from the US. The council represents the entire range of the US Soy supply chain including farmers, processors, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusinesses, and agricultural organisations. Working in 80 countries across the globe, USSEC plays a leading role in soy market development and meeting requirements for human consumption, aquaculture, and livestock feed. The US produced approximately 120 million tonnes of soy annually, with 60pc exported globally. Soy exports to Pakistan are less than a million tonnes annually. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 9*)

Jul-Feb trade deficit narrows 33.18pc YoY

Pakistan's trade deficit narrowed by 33.18 percent to \$21.3 billion during the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year 2022-23 as compared to \$31.879 billion during the same period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) said. The country's exports during July-February (2022-23) were recorded at \$18.793 billion against the exports of \$20.573 billion in July-February of 2021-22, showing a decline of 8.65 percent. The imports decreased by 23.56 percent during the period under review by going down from \$52.452 billion last year to \$40.039 billion during the current year.

On a year-on-year basis, exports witnessed a decline of 18.67 percent and were recorded at \$2.305 billion in February 2023 against the exports of \$2.834 billion in February 2022. The imports also decreased to \$4.009 billion in February 2023 from \$5.853 billion in February 2022, showing negative growth of 31.51 percent. The trade deficit narrowed by 43.56 per cent on a YoY basis to \$1.704 billion in February 2023 compared to \$3.019 billion in February 2022. (*Business Recorder, 2nd March 2023 Page 1*)

To lessen pressures on rupee: PDP calls for trade in currencies other than dollar

Chairman of the Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Altaf Shakoor has said that to tackle the ongoing economic crisis and lessen pressure on Pakistani rupee it is necessary to opt for external trade in currencies other than dollar wherever possible. He said it's a fact that the US dollar is dominant in global trade, but bilateral trade with Russia, China,

Iran, the Gulf states and many other countries can be conducted in other currencies. Quoting UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at LDCs conference in Doha, he said the rich countries are exploiting the poor nations cruelly. He said that the wealthy nations should provide \$500 billion a year to help others “trapped in vicious cycles”. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 7*)

Cargo processing: FBR enforces Pak-Uzbek transit trade agreement

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has enforced Uzbekistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement for processing of transit trade cargo through the customs-ports and terminals between Karachi Port, Port Muhammad Bin Qasim, Gwadar Port, and Uzbekistan. (*Business Recorder, March 7th, 2023, Page 14*)

Vietnam envoy for facilitating businesspeople to increase volume of trade

Ambassador of Vietnam Nguyen Tien Phong has said that to increase the volume of trade, both the countries need to facilitate the business people and share the relevant information. The Ambassador shared that 90 percent of cotton and 60 percent of yarn being imported from Lahore. He said with this Vietnam also exports fisheries, tea, paper, chemicals, ginger & other products to Pakistan which are not more than 0.5% of our total exports. Similarly, Vietnam imports pharmaceuticals, cotton, leather products, volume of which is also very low. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2023, Page 2*)

B2B bartering with China to boost exports: minister

The dollar-strapped Pakistan is now expecting a Business-to-Business (B2B) bartering with the neighbouring China to give a boost to its dwindling exports, Federal Commerce Minister Syed Naveed Qamar said. (*Business Recorder, March 18th, 2023, Page 1*)

Trade between Pakistan and UAE: Khor Fakkan port to be more efficient

Khor Fakkan Container Terminal (KCT) is the only fully-fledged operational container terminal within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that is located outside the Strait of Hormuz and an official said exports from Pakistan will take a day less if compared to Dubai, making the trade more efficient and cost effective. Due to its unique geographic location, KCT has been one of the most important trans-shipment hubs for the Arabian Gulf, the Indian sub-continent, the Gulf of Oman and the East African markets. (*Business Recorder, March 23rd, 2023, Page 7*)

5.1 # Exports

Merchandise exports shrink 19pc in February

Pakistan’s exports of merchandise shrank for the sixth month in a row dipping by 18.67 per cent year-on-year to \$2.30 billion in February, stoking fears of massive layoffs in the industrial sector. In the first eight months (July to February) of 2022-23, exports were down 8.65pc at \$18.79bn compared to \$20.57bn in the corresponding period last year. The drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the export target this fiscal year. Imports dipped 31.51pc to \$4.009bn in February compared to \$5.85bn

over the corresponding month of last year. In the first eight months, the imports fell 23.56pc to \$40.09bn this year from \$52.45bn over the corresponding period last year. Between July and February FY23, the trade deficit decelerated 33.18pc to \$21.30bn from \$31.87bn over the corresponding months of last year. In February trade deficit fell 43.56pc to \$1.70bn on a year-on-year basis.

The export proceeds are declining mainly because of internal and external factors raising fears about the closure of industrial units, especially textile and clothing. The exports started posting negative growth in the first month of the current fiscal year — July — barring August when a slight increase was recorded because of the backlog of the preceding month. Export contraction is a worrisome factor, which will create problems in balancing the country's external account.

The government discontinued subsidised electricity to the export sector. This will further add to the cost of the export sector and will render it uncompetitive on the world markets, especially against its rivals from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Buyers are sceptical about Pakistan's economy after rating downgrades by the international rating agencies in the past few months. Exporters believe that one of the main reasons behind falling exports was the exchange rate instability. The discontinuation of duty drawbacks on local taxes and levies by the government has also created liquidity issues for the export sector. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 9*)

ICCI chief underscores need for promoting G-B dry fruit exports

President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, said that Gilgit-Baltistan region can earn millions of dollars from the export of almonds, walnuts, apricots, cherries and many other dry fruits, as the annual production of almonds alone in the region is over 120,000 tons. He demanded that the government should extend full cooperation to the private sector in promoting the export of dry fruits to potential markets. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 13*)

Customs sets up cell to monitor sugar export

Pakistan Customs has established a special cell at the Port Qasim Collectorate to monitor the exports of 250,000 metric tons of sugar from the country. This comes after the government of Pakistan allowed the export of 250,000 metric tons of sugar through an Office Memorandum issued by the Ministry of Commerce last month. (*Business Recorder, March 12th, 2023, Page 8*)

Country needs to boost exports to \$100bn in 5-8 years: minister

Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal has said Pakistan needs to curb tax evasion, increase tax collection and boost its exports from around \$ 30 billion to \$ 100 billion in the next five to eight years. He said if there is a conflict in society, no policy will be successful. Pakistan's 75-year history shows that we made robust policies. (*Business Recorder, March 12th, 2023, Page 8*)

Textile exports plunge almost 30pc

Pakistan's exports of textile and clothing fell 29.76 per cent in February to \$1.18 billion compared to \$1.68bn over the same month last year, the highest decline in a single month since Covid-19, data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). The textile and clothing exports in 8MFY23 dipped 11.09pc to \$11.21bn this year against \$12.61bn over the corresponding months of last year. The overall export proceeds shrank for the sixth consecutive month in a row. The drop shows the government would find it difficult to achieve the export target this fiscal year leading to more pressure on foreign exchange reserves of the country. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 9*)

Sugar Export: Shipment period extended on exporters' plea

The gov has increased shipment time for export of sugar after sugar exporters expressed concern that the revision of terms and conditions and the closure of the Torkham border were causing delays in shipment. (*Business Recorder, 18th March, 2023 Page 1*)

Non-textile exports dip 6pc to \$7.4bn

Pakistan's exports of non-textile products decreased 6.16 per cent year-on-year to \$7.46 billion in the first eight months of FY23. In FY22, the non-textile exports posted a growth of 25.85pc. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 9*)

Exports to nine regional states dip 18pc

In what appears to be a steady decline, Pakistan's exports to nine regional countries shrank 18.28 per cent in the first eight months of FY23 mainly driven by a drop in shipments to China, data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan. The decline is not confined to exports but imports especially from China also saw a deep decline during the current fiscal year. Country's exports to Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan & Maldives dipped to \$2.414bn just 12.92pc of Pakistan's total exports of \$18.bn in July-February FY23. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 9*)

Pakistan's exports to Middle East fall 12pc

Pakistan's exports to the Middle East shrank 11.87 per cent on a year-on-year basis to \$1.491 billion in the first eight months of FY23 mainly driven by a substantial decline in exports to the United Arab Emirates. UAE has emerged as leading country for Pakistan's export of goods as nearly 64pc of total exports to the region go to UAE market alone, however, it suffered a decline of 19.91pc to \$0.945bn in 8MFY23 from \$1.180 over corresponding months last year (FY22). (*Dawn, March 26, 2023 Page 9*)

5.2 # Import

Russian wheat arrives at Gwadar

A Russian ship carrying 50,000 tonnes of wheat reached Gwadar Port. The government has started importing wheat from Russia after Pakistan witnessed a wheat shortage and the resultant flour crisis in the country. Gwadar Port Authority Chairman Pasand Khan Buledi said it was the second Russian ship carrying wheat anchored at the port. "Russia

would supply 4,50,000 tonnes of wheat to Pakistan through nine cargo ships,” (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023 Page 5*)

Easing of import curbs sought

Curbs on the import of raw materials have brought the production of Dawlance to “almost zero” since the beginning of 2023. The privately held company has joined a steadily growing number of firms that’ve either shut down their plants or scaled back operations because the country has run out of dollars to pay for the import of industrial raw materials. Foreign exchange reserves of the central bank are hovering around \$3.8b, barely enough for even one month of import cover. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023 Page 11*)

Mar-Sept key imports: govt needs \$8.5bn

With total foreign exchange reserves of \$4.3 billion as of 9th March 2023 Pakistan requires a total of \$ 8.5 billion to meet its fuel requirements and other critical imports of March- September 2023. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2023 Page 1*)

SBP withdraws all cash margin requirements on imports

The State Bank of Pakistan has removed all cash margin requirements on imports it had previously imposed under six circulars from 2017 to 2022, fulfilling another condition of the IMF to reach a staff-level agreement. The announcement comes as the central bank’s foreign exchange reserves increased by \$280 million to \$4.6 billion during the week ending on March 17 on the back of inflows from China. Cash-strapped Pakistan is in a race against time to implement measures to reach an agreement with the IMF on the completion of the ninth review of a \$7bn loan programme, which began in 2019. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2023, Accessed from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1703491>*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

6.1 # Fertilizer Company

ECC orders gas for two urea plants

Amid persistent dearth of foreign exchange, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet decided to provide indigenous gas to two Punjab-based fertiliser plants (Fatima Fertiliser, Sheikhpura and Agritech, Mianwali) to meet a 300,000-tonne gap of urea fertiliser through domestic production for the upcoming Kharif season instead of imports.

The meeting was told that a Fertiliser Review Committee (FRC) had projected total urea demand for Kharif crops at 3.2mil tonnes but estimated total availability of about 2.9m tonnes including carryover stocks from Rabi season. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2023, Page 9*)

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN

Jul-Jan: \$6.134bn borrowed from multiple sources

The government has borrowed \$6.134 billion from multiple financing sources including \$1.166 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the first seven

months (July-January) of 2022-23 compared to \$12.022 billion borrowed during the same period of last fiscal year. The country borrowed \$200 million from foreign commercial banks during the first seven months of the current fiscal year 2022-23 and that was borrowed in October 2022. However, the country had received \$2.623 billion from foreign commercial banks during the same period of last year, shows the EAD data. Further contrary to past practices, the EAD data does not mention from which commercial bank the \$200 million was borrowed in October 2022.

Further contrary to past practices, the EAD has also listed the loans taken from the IMF. If the IMF loan is excluded then the country received \$4.9689 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year compared to \$12.022 billion during the same period of last fiscal year, indicating the slowdown in inflows. The government procured \$294.54 million external loans in January 2023. The country received \$466.35 million under the head of “Naya Pakistan Certificate” during the first seven months of the current fiscal year including \$71.55 million in January 2023. The government has budgeted foreign assistance of \$22.817 billion for the current fiscal year including \$7.5 billion foreign commercial banks. The country received \$3.463 billion from multilaterals and \$838.67 million from bilateral and \$1.166 billion from IMF during July-January 2022-23.

The non-project aid was \$5.145 billion including \$4.277 billion for budgetary support and project aid was \$989.26 million. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) disbursed \$1.916 billion during the period under review compared to the budgeted \$3.202 billion for the entire fiscal year. The ADB disbursed \$11.41 million in January 2023. China disbursed \$54.93 million in during the first quarter against the government budgeted estimates of \$49.02 million for the current fiscal year, however, no money was received in October, November, December, and January. Saudi Arabia disbursed \$690.11 million against the budgeted \$800 million.

The USA disbursed \$18.71 million during the period under review against the budgeted \$32.49 million for the current fiscal year. Korea disbursed \$19.79 million and France \$21.82 million during the first seven months of the current fiscal year. The IDA \$684.16 million against the budgeted \$1.4 billion, IBRD \$96.55 million against the budgeted \$1.246 billion and Islamic Development Bank disbursed \$16.81 million against the budgeted \$3.38 million for the current financial year. The IsDB (short-term) disbursed \$161 million in the current fiscal year. The AIIB disbursed \$538.46 million in the current fiscal year so far. (*Business Recorder, March 3rd, 2023 Page 1*)

Five NGOs to get over Rs76.4m Japanese grant

The Japanese government has decided to provide grant assistance equivalent to about Rs76.4 million to five NGO development projects in Pakistan. The grant agreements were signed between Charge d’Affaires of Japanese embassy, Ito Takeshi and representatives of the five NGOs in Islamabad. The five NGOs - Rural Aid Pakistan, Rumbur Development Welfare and Conservation Society, Hana Development Council,

Saibaan Development Organisation and Dir Area Development Organisation - will implement the projects.

Rural Aid Pakistan will receive a grant of about Rs17 million to install solar power irrigation systems in four agricultural villages in Narowal. Rumbur Development Welfare and Conservation Society will receive a grant of about Rs13.4 million to construct check dams and protection walls for disaster prevention and an incinerator for hygienic environment in Lower Chitral district. Hana Development Council will receive a grant assistance worth Rs12.8 million to install electricity facilities in seven villages in Mandi Bahauddin district. Saibaan Development Organisation will receive grant of Rs14.6 million to pave one kilometre of link road in Mansehra district. Dir Area Development Organisation will receive Rs18.6 million to construct a micro hydropower station in Upper Dir. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2023, Page 4*)

Economic support by Gulf countries: Pakistan hopes for positive outcome: FO

Pakistan commended the economic support extended by friendly countries, including China and Middle Eastern countries and expressed the hope for a positive outcome of the ongoing engagements with many Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar with regard to the financial assistance and massive investments. (*Business Recorder, March 10th, 2023, Page 1*)

\$20.073bn undisbursed balance as of end Sept 2022: EAD

The foreign economic assistance of \$20.073 billion was undisbursed balance as of end September 2022, says the Economic Affairs Division (EAD). The Division, in quarterly statistical bulletin on foreign economic assistance, noted that the undisbursed balance was \$21.121 billion as of end June 2022. During July-September 2022, disbursement was \$2.238 billion including \$1.166 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The total disbursement amount included \$653.57 million from foreign commercial banks, \$13.817 billion from multilateral and \$5.602 billion from bilateral. Further, a total of \$421.16mil commitments were made during July-September 2022 including \$412.60 million loans and \$8.56 million grants. Bank of China committed 200 million as commercial loans. (*Business Recorder, March 10th, 2023, Page 1*)

Projects worth billions of dollars, AIIB voices concern over undue delay

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has reportedly expressed concerns on undue delay in projects worth billions of dollars, urging concerned authorities to expedite their completion. The AIIB projects review meeting was co-chaired by Vice President AIIB and Additional Secretary-II Economic Affairs Division (EAD).

On *Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project (T5HP)*: Discussion on commitment of \$ 300 million financing, Additional Secretary EAD and AIIB highlighted the delays faced by the project since its signing on January 18, 2017.

Karachi Water and Sewerage Service Improvement Project: The project's commitment was \$ 40 million, of which disbursement was \$ 16.01 million (40.3 per cent disbursement). Project authorities stated that funds amounting to \$ 29 million are being utilized for rehabilitation works after floods and further contended that \$ 15.5 million will be further disbursed from the AIIB loan till June, 2023.

Karachi BRT Red Line: Project authorities stated that 45 percent of signed civil work contract (Lot 1) were related to the two bus depots that were under the use of Sindh Rangers. On commitment of \$ 71.8 million financing, it was noted that after an agreement with the Rangers, contractor has mobilized on Malir Halt depot site.

Balakot Hydropower Project: The AIIB has made commitment of \$ 250 mil for project, of which \$ 0.625mil has been disbursed, which is 0.25 percent of total commitment. Other projects which were discussed are: (i) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project; and (ii) Resilient Institutions Sustainable Economy-II with a commitment of \$ 250 mil, Karachi Water & Sewerage Services Improvement Project-2 and Lahore Water and Wastewater Management Project. (*Business Recorder, March 18th, 2023, Page 1*)

France pledges \$55m to fight polio in Pakistan

The French Development Agency (AFD) has joined global polio eradication partners with its commitment to filling the funding gap of Pakistan government in its efforts to eradicate polio. According to a statement issued by the health ministry, a delegation of the AFD and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation met the special health secretary and visited the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) for Polio Eradication. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2023, Page 12*)

\$7.407bn borrowed from multiple financing sources in 8 months

The government has borrowed \$7.407 billion from multiple financing sources, including \$900 million from foreign commercial banks, during the first eight months (July-February) of 2022-23 compared to \$12.178 billion borrowed during the same period of last fiscal year. The country borrowed \$900 million from foreign commercial banks during the first eight months of the current fiscal year 2022-23 including \$700 million in February. However, the country had received \$2.623 billion from foreign commercial banks during the same period of last year, shows the Economic Affairs Division data. Further, contrary to the past practices, the EAD data does not mention from which commercial banks the \$900 million was borrowed.

The country received \$1.166 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the first eight months (July-February) of 2022-23. Contrary to past practices, the EAD has also listed the loans taken from the IMF. If the IMF loan is excluded, then the country received \$6.241 billion during the first eight months of the current fiscal year compared to \$12.178 billion during the same period of the last fiscal year, indicating the slowdown in inflows.

The government has budgeted foreign assistance of \$22.817 billion for the current fiscal year including \$7.5 billion foreign commercial banks. The country received \$3.852 billion from multilaterals, \$949.66 million from bilateral and \$1.166 billion from IMF during July-February 2022-23.

The non-project aid was \$6.084 billion including \$5.124 billion for budgetary support and project aid was \$1.322 billion. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) disbursed \$1.929 billion during the period under review compared to the budgeted \$3.202 billion for the entire fiscal year. ADB disbursed \$12.85 million in February 2023. China disbursed \$54.93 million in during the first quarter against the government budgeted estimates of \$49.02 million for the current fiscal year, however, no money was received in October, November, December, January and February. Saudi Arabia disbursed \$782.28 million against the budgeted \$800 million. The USA disbursed \$20.83 million during the period under review against the budgeted \$32.49 million for the current fiscal year. Korea disbursed \$19.79 million and France \$27.36 million during the first eight months of the current fiscal year.

The IDA \$1.019 billion against the budgeted \$1.4 billion during the first eight months including \$338.63 including in February, IBRD \$135.02 million against the budgeted \$1.246 billion and Islamic Development Bank disbursed \$16.81 million against the budgeted \$3.38 million for the current financial year. The IsDB (Short-term) disbursed \$161 million in the current fiscal year. The AIIB disbursed \$539.02 million in the current fiscal year so far. (*Business Recorder, March 21st, 2023, Page 1*)

7.1 # America

USAID hands over ‘Enterprise Resource Planning’ to KPRA

USAID funded Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Mobilization (KPRM) activity handed over Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority (KPRA). KPRA has identified a total 13 modules for its ERP out of which 5 modules have been completed and deployed on KPRA Data Center. The ERP is being developed with the financial and technical support of KPRM. The remaining 8 modules will be developed in the later phases. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 16*)

US unveils \$4.5m fertiliser right project

The United States announced a \$4.5 million Fertiliser Right project that will be implemented over the next four years to help Pakistani farmers enhance fertiliser use efficiency. The Fertiliser Right project is part of the US-Pakistan Green Alliance framework, which helps our countries jointly face the climate, environmental, and economic challenges of the future. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2023, Page 5*)

US investment coming to Pakistan more and more every year, says Blome

US Ambassador Donald Blome has said that the US is Pakistan’s largest export market, and the US investment is seen coming to Pakistan more and more every year.

Ambassador Blome said that one of the top priorities of the US government was promoting inclusive economic growth and increasing trade and investment between the United States and Pakistan. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2023, Page 9*)

US contributes \$242m for flood relief

Pakistan has received \$242m from the United States to support flood relief, recovery efforts, disaster resilience and food security and the US-Pakistani diaspora contributed about \$42m to the total. The ambassador said the US government has pledged over \$200m to date to support flood relief and recovery efforts, disaster resilience, and food security. USAID signed three MoUs with a Pakistan-based US company and US-Pakistani diaspora entities, mobilising \$78m. (*Dawn, March 22nd, 2023, Page 9*)

7.2 # China

Pakistan receives \$500m financing from Chinese bank

Pakistan has received \$500 million from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar confirmed. The finance minister announced that the Chinese Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd (ICBC) has completed all formalities and approved the rollover of \$1.3 billion facility that Pakistan repaid in recent months. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 1*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

8.1 # Asian Development Bank (ADB)

PM banking on ADB support to stabilise economy

Raising hopes for a semblance of economic stability, the prime minister has claimed the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was willing to help Pakistan, and that a deal with the IMF will be signed in the next few days. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2023, Page 1*)

\$5m flood emergency grant signed with ADB

The government of Pakistan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed grant agreement of five million dollars for Emergency Flood Assistance Project (Additional Financing). The \$5 million grant is from Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific administered by ADB to Pakistan for the Emergency Flood Assistance Project—Additional Financing. The additional financing will be used to expand the scope of the original project, particularly to support (i) urgent provision of climate-resilient seeds for staple crop cultivation and (ii) women-led livelihoods to meet basic household needs. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2023, Page 12*)

ADB proposes ‘roadmap’ to make Peshawar eco-friendly

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has carried out a study that led to the preparation of a ‘Climate Investment Roadmap’ for Peshawar. The roadmap comprises three core components including multi-year programmes that can be financed with a combination

of city, public sector and private climate-focused financing; development of a City Climate Dashboard (CCD) and City Climate Committee (CCC).

In the first phase, the investment plan proposes \$100 million for greenways prioritising worst urban flooding and transport disruption; \$80m for green energy to save energy through photovoltaic (PV) government building through public-private partnership; \$200m for green transport for low-carbon and creating additional capacity and feeders involving public-private partnership; and \$200m for water and watershed management and peri-urban agriculture and smart agriculture. The investment for the priority programmes being the Peshawar renewable energy and energy efficiency in the second phase involves \$100m for greenways; \$80m for green energy; \$100m for green transport; and \$200m for water and watershed management, and peri-urban agriculture.

A significant fraction of climate financing is anticipated to be sourced from the private and institutional sectors through the international and national capital markets. The total carbon emissions of the Peshawar district till 2030 are expected to be around 11.76 million tons. Of these emissions, the energy sector contributes zero emissions, whereas the transport sector is on the top of all other sectors with 6.98m tons (59.3% of overall emissions) of GHG emissions in Peshawar. The agriculture and livestock sector ranks second, with 4.25m tons (36.1% of overall emissions), while the waste sector emits 0.53m tons (4.6% of overall emissions). These actions include the reduction of GHG emissions in transport sector by adopting public transport, improvements of roads, replacement of 30% vehicles with electric vehicles (EVs), adopting climate-friendly agriculture practices along with urban forestation. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 9*)

8.2 # International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Govt unhappy as IMF ‘shifts goalposts’

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has changed interpretations of at least four prior actions ahead of reaching a staff-level agreement (SLA) on the direly needed economic bailout. Sources say the authorities are extremely annoyed at the latest situation, describing it as ‘maltreatment’.

Officials have also suggested that the IMF wanted to support the poor publicly, but had been insisting on some measures that would ultimately hit the low-income segments. The IMF is reported to have estimated an all-inclusive financing gap of about \$7bn for the current fiscal year against Pakistan’s projection of \$5bn. However, one official hoped that the State Bank of Pakistan’s foreign exchange reserves would go beyond \$10bn by the end of June from little over \$3.1bn at present. As per the sources, authorities have secured \$1.3bn inflows in three tranches from Chinese banks, on top of the \$700 million that has already been received. This would flow in two equal instalments of \$500m and then \$300m with a gap of a few days. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates would also be made available over \$3bn.

The sources said the IMF publicly wanted taxes on the rich and support to the poor but insisted on increasing general sales tax rates that were inflationary and impacted the poor, while taxes on high earners like banks through foreign exchange transactions were opposed. Likewise, the flood levy on high-end groups were opposed on the premise that these were not quality measures. The prior actions are always set to be completed before the executive board meeting of the IMF for approval of quarterly review but this time this had been linked to the staff-level agreement. “This is also unusual,” an official said. *(Dawn, March 1st, 2023, Page 1)*

US asks Pakistan to work with IMF to ‘unlock funding’

United States has offered to deepen its economic partnership with Pakistan but has also urged the cash-starved country to work with the International Monetary Fund to “unlock the IMF funding”. *(Dawn, March 10th, 2023, Page 3)*

Dar says IMF seeking \$3bn ‘guarantees’

Ishaq Dar said that Pakistan didn’t delay a single day in repayments. “All technical discussions have been completed, an agreement nearing with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)”. “The IMF is demanding, what was committed during the fifth and sixth review of the bailout,” Dar said. “The lender wants guarantees of three billion dollars from the UAE and Saudi Arabia”. *(Business Recorder, March 31st, 2023, Page 1)*

8.3 # World Bank (WB)

World Bank willing to fund fan replacement plan

The World Bank (WB) has shown willingness to extend financing for government initiative to replace inefficient fans which will cost over Rs300 billion. Power Division presented the initial concept of fan replacement program. He apprised that the program envisages replacement of 88 million fans (50m fans in rural households and 38m fans in urban households) at a cost ranging from Rs300 billion (25pc down payment and 75pc bank financing). *(Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 1)*

WB’s \$200m Punjab project makes little progress

The World Bank “Punjab Human Capital Investment Project (PHCIP)” worth \$200m made limited progress in the implementation of the components on social protection, education and health. The bank has rated the progress towards achievement of PDO and overall implementation progress as moderately unsatisfactory, while the overall project risk rating as substantial. The project components included health services quality and utilisation (cost \$115 million), economic and social inclusion (cost \$65 million), and efficiency and sustainability through social protection services delivery system and project management (cost \$20 million). *(Business Recorder, March 12th, 2023, Page 1)*

WB asks govt to exempt projects funded by IFIs

The World Bank has urged the Government to exempt IFIs (International Financial Institutions) funded projects from LC restrictions as such actions are delaying projects.

This issue was raised by a representative of World Bank at a meeting convened to review projects being funded by the Bank. Secretary, Economic Affairs agreed to take up matter with Finance Division. The following were project/ program wise discussions and decisions taken thereon; National Transmission Modernization (phase-1) project, CASA-1000 Electricity Transmission & Trade Project, Dasu Hydropower (transmission line) project & Dasu Hydropower (phase-1) project, Electricity Distribution Efficiency Improvement Project. (*Business Recorder, March 13th, 2023, Page 1*)

WB links release of \$400m to GST dispute settlement

World Bank (WB) has reportedly linked release of \$400 million of RISE-II program to resolution of dispute on GST collection between Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and Distribution Companies (Discos). (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2023, Page 1*)

Slow pace of \$304m PRIDE programme perturbs WB

The World Bank (WB) has expressed concern over the slow pace of the progress on simplification and automation of key business processes for tax administration and enhanced capacity for generating revenue from real estate in Punjab. The WB report on the Punjab Resource Improvement and Digital Effectiveness (PRIDE) Program for an overall allocation of US\$304 million aims at increasing own source revenue, and improving reliability of resource allocation and access to digital services for people and firms in the province of Punjab. The program focused on strengthened budget formulation and fiscal risk management; increased use of digital technology for delivery of selected public services and improved collection of own source revenue (OSR). (*Business Recorder, March 20th, 2023, Page 16*)

Militancy crisis: WB to mull over \$50m project for Fata, KP families' succor

The World Bank will consider the “Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)/Fata Citizen Centered Service Delivery Project” of worth \$50 million to support the early recovery of families affected by the militancy crisis, promote child health, and enhance citizen-centered service delivery in selected districts of KP province. The proposed project will bridge the financing gap for the continuity of the activities under the ongoing Fata Temporarily Displaced Persons Emergency Recovery Project (TDPERP), thereby, facilitating smooth transition of the programme to the province of KP. An additional financing to the ongoing project is not possible as it is under the old safeguards policies, the project documents noted. TDPERP was operationalised in Fata agencies in 2015 through the federal government funding. (*Business Recorder, March 26th, 2023, Page 1*)

9 # POLICY

9.1 # Developmental Policy

Six projects worth Rs21.3bn approved

The Central Development Working Party (CWDP) approved six development projects, mostly of provincial jurisdiction, at a total cost of Rs21.28 billion, projects related to

climate change, aviation division and provincial schemes. Under the current financial rules, the CDWP is empowered to approve projects costing no more than Rs10bn while the projects of higher estimated costs are approved by Ecnec once the CDWP clears them on technical grounds.

The CDWP also approved a 250-bed hospital (phase-1) at Skardu. The Ministry of Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs is the sponsoring agency of the project. The meeting also approved the establishment of excellence hubs in the field of renewable energy at Rs1.117bn. The provincial government of Punjab is the sponsoring agency of the project.

CDWP approved the construction of a road from Naag to Gichak, (revised) at Rs4.256bn. The provincial government of Balochistan is the sponsoring agency of the project. The meeting also approved construction of two lanes of D.I. Khan (part of a development package) proposed by the coalition partners in Islamabad at Rs3.097bn. The CDWP also approved a Rs2.086bn project for capacity building and institutional strengthening of the Planning Commission. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2023, Page 9*)

9.2 # Environmental Policy

First National policy formulated to tackle air pollution

Pakistan's efforts to tackle air pollution have taken a significant step forward as the country's first National Clean Air Policy (NCAP) was approved this week by the federal government, aiming to improve air quality in the country by reducing pollution. Federal Minister for Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman said that "Air pollution is a critical environmental and health issue in Pakistan, causing 235,000 premature deaths in 2019 alone and reducing the average life expectancy of our citizens by up to 2.7 years," Sherry Rehman said. "Our country consistently ranks among the world's most polluted, with cities like Lahore and Karachi particularly affected. The economic toll is staggering with the World Bank estimating that air pollution has cost Pakistan a staggering US\$ 47.8 billion".

The ministry said that NCAP had identified one priority intervention in each of the five major air polluting sectors: transport, industry, agriculture, waste, and residential. The Minister noted that the successful implementation of these five priority interventions is expected to make a substantial contribution to improving air quality, reducing emissions by 81 percent in 2040, compared to the baseline scenario, and by 70 percent compared to 2020 levels. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2023, Page 4*)

9.3 # Neo-Liberal Policy

58 more govt hospitals to be outsourced

Following the assessment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's 58 more "low-performing" public sector hospitals by the World Bank, the health department is awaiting the cabinet's go-ahead for agreements with private organisations to operate those healthcare facilities

through public-private partnerships. Health department had completed Phase I of the bidding process for the handover of those hospitals to NGOs under the Public Private Partnership Act 2016 for better operations.

The officials said the finance department had withheld Rs938 million dues of the outsourced hospitals for the June-December 2022 period and had refused to release them until the completion of the inquiry. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 8*)

Govt begins outsourcing of three major airports

The government kicked off outsourcing of operations and land assets at three major airports to be run through a public-private partnership. The Economic Coordination Committee has approved the hiring of the International Finance Corporation the private sector arm of the World Bank Group as a transaction adviser to outsource Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad airports to the private sector for at least 25 years. World Bank's IFC agreed to advisory service and finally reached an agreement for a transaction adviser early this month for a fee of about \$4m. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2023, Page 1*)

9.4 # Agricultural Policy

Islamabad proposes plan to ensure food security, implement climate agenda

Economic Affairs Minister Ayaz Sadiq proposed a comprehensive plan to “build forward better” that included ensuring global food security and implementation of the climate change agenda. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023 Page 3*)

Punjab approves wheat purchase policy

Punjab Cabinet accorded approval to ‘Wheat Purchase Policy for 2023- 2024’ under which a wheat purchase campaign will start from 10th of March across the province and during this drive 3.5m metric tonnes of wheat will be purchased through 395 centres. The Cabinet also approved a plan to reduce Rs 300bn in the circular debt with regard to food operation of Food Department. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 1*)

AJK govt committed to promoting agri sector, says PM

Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Tanveer Ilyas Khan said that the present government has taken effective measures to promote agriculture and livestock at the state level.

In order to preserve the agricultural land, he said that there would be a complete ban on construction on agricultural lands in the AJK. “A penalty worth fifty thousand rupees per kanal per year will be charged against the farmers who fail to bring their cultivable and fertile land for agricultural purposes”. He said that steps would be taken to grow fruit trees in Azad Kashmir. “In the next three to four years, Azad Kashmir will have all kinds of fruits produced at the local level”.

He said that silk worms would be distributed free of cost to the people. Regarding the uplift of the rural economy, “Cows, buffaloes, goats and angora rabbits will also be distributed free of cost to the people”. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 3*)

10 # ENVIRONMENT

10.1 # Atmosphere

Five oil firms join hands for green energy

For a change, the country’s five leading oil and gas companies joined hands to delve into green energy projects as the world moves towards an energy transition away from fossil fuels. The five public sector entities including Oil & Gas Development Company Ltd (OGDCL), Pak-Arab Refinery Ltd (Parco), Pakistan Petroleum Ltd (PPL), Mari Petroleum Company Ltd (MPCL) and Government Holdings Private Ltd (GHPL) formally signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to explore and pursue green hydrogen opportunities within and outside Pakistan. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2023, Page 9*)

10.2 # Health

Health officers ‘mopped up’ budget of non-functioning hospital for 13 years

Though work on the construction of district headquarters hospital continues at its ‘traditional’ pace for the past 13 years, the health officials have been drawing budget every year of the facility, which is merely an incomplete structure of concrete, steel and bricks to this day; and swallowing up the huge public money with complete impunity, according to sources. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 15*)

Punjab home department highlights shortage of dozens of medicines

Due to an unannounced production halt of several medicines by the local and multinational pharmaceutical companies in Pakistan, an acute shortage of medicines including life-saving and essential medicines has been pointed out by the intelligence officials of the home department of Punjab.

At the same time other spurious drugs are also in circulation due to the non-availability of genuine drugs.

Pakistani pharmaceutical industry representatives saying no company could produce medicines on higher cost and sell them on less than the production cost. “Some MNCs and NCs stopped production because of severe losses due to the dollar appreciation. (*The News, March 5th, 2023, Page 3*)

CWDP approves Rs11bn healthcare projects

Central Development Working Party (CWDP) has approved three health projects worth Rs 11.25 billion – Islamabad Cancer Hospital, National Police Hospital and up-gradation of Radiology Department at Shaikh Zayed Postgraduate Medical Institute. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 1*)

Half of dialysis machines at CMCH remain out of order

Half the number of dialysis machines, 10 out of 20, at hemodialysis unit in the Chandka Medical College Hospital has gone out of order, adding to difficulties of patients suffering from kidney diseases. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2023, Page 15*)

Dadu flood victims suffer from gastro, urticaria, malaria

Over 4,000 flood victims suffering from gastroenteritis, urticarial and malaria reported at a one-day free medical camp organised by Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences (LUMHS) Jamshoro at the 450-bed district headquarters Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Hospital. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2023, Page 15*)

Children still at risk of contracting RTIs

The child population particularly infants in this region of the country is still at risk of contracting respiratory tract infections mainly because of a great variation in temperature. It is important that both the public and private sector healthcare facilities are already receiving a significant influx of child patients suffering from upper and lower respiratory tract infections. Around 30 to 40 per cent of the total child patients being presented at the paediatrics departments at Benazir Bhutto Hospital and Holy Family Hospital are either with lower RTIs including pneumonia or with upper RTIs involving colds, flu or sore throat. (*The News, March 19th, 2023, Page 5*)

45pc of TB patients in Pakistan are not diagnosed, event told

Around six hundred people contract tuberculosis (TB) every year in Pakistan but over 45 per cent TB patients in the country remain undiagnosed and do not get any treatment. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2023, Page 15*)

129 died of rabies at Indus Hospital, JPMC in 10 years: study

As many as 129 patients have lost their lives to rabies in over a decade at two major tertiary care hospitals of the city. Most of the victims travelled by road to Karachi after failing to receive treatment at health facilities in the interior parts of Sindh. Majority of the health facilities do not follow rabies prevention protocols, and most doctors and paramedics in emergency departments are neither trained nor equipped to give the PEP to dog-bite victims in an updated protocol. There is not even a place to wash the wounds properly. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2023, Page 13*)

Traces of plastic, rubber additives found on Keamari victims' remains

Traces of plastic and rubber additives have been detected in the remains of four Keamari toxic emission case victims whose bodies were exhumed over a month ago by a special medical board formed by the Sindh government on court orders. According to the reports, "No traces of any other toxic chemicals, toxic gases, heavy metals, sedatives, narcotics, psychotic substances, or poisonous substances were found". (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 13*)

Sehat programme faces risk of closure in Punjab over non-payment of Rs83bn dues

The State Life Insurance Company (SLIC) has hinted at the closure of the Sehat Sahulat Programme in Punjab due to the non-payment of pending liabilities to the tune of Rs83bn. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 3*)

37 THQ hospitals, six highway trauma centres without anaesthetists in Punjab

Because of what appears to be gross negligence on the part of the Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department, all the 64 sanctioned posts of the anesthesia specialists at the 37 Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals (THQs) in 20 districts of Punjab are lying vacant for the last many years. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2023, Page 2*)

Pakistan far from being declared malaria-free country

While Pakistan reported 3.4 million cases of malaria in 2022, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has certified Azerbaijan and Tajikistan malaria-free countries. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2023, Page 12*)

10.3 # Pollution

18 hospitalised after ammonia leakage from ice factory

Eighteen people were hospitalised and many more were affected by ammonia gas leakage from an ice factory running illegally in a residential area of Minchinabad, Bhutto Colony, when an addict broke into the factory and jammed the valve of the cylinder in an attempt to steal it.

Following the gas leakage incident, the locals gathered outside the factory and held a protest against the administration and factory owners. Talking to the media persons, they said that despite repeated written complaints, the administration was reluctant to take action against the factory owners. They demanded the immediate shutting down of the units running in the residential area and their shifting out of the city.

The sources told almost a dozen ice factories, most of them unregistered, were operating in the residential areas by violating all the standard operating procedures (SOPs) and security measures with the connivance of local administration, including the Civil Defence and environment department. The gas leakage incidents often happened due to substandard material used in making cylinders. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2023, Page 2*)

Dismal AQI earns Lahore ‘most polluted city’ title

On the day the Punjab capital topped the charts as the most polluted city in the world, environmental experts called out the agency tasked with curbing pollution for its chronic incapacity and lack of manpower. Lahore jumped more than 10 places to become the city with the worst air quality in 2022, according to an annual global survey by a Swiss maker of air purifiers. According to the report published by IQAir, the central African country Chad replaced Bangladesh as the country with the most polluted air last year. The US embassies and consulates across the world have reference-standard monitors

and within those locations, Lahore was the most polluted, beating both New Delhi and Beijing US embassy locations. Situation in Lahore and other cities like Peshawar (ranked as the 5th most polluted city) has incrementally got worse in the past five to eight years. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2023, Page 1*)

People throng Indus River to highlight water pollution

Scores of people wearing Saraiki Ajrak and carrying flower petals arrived from Tank, Prova, Paharpur and other adjoining areas to express concern over pollution in the Indus River. (*Dawn, 20th March 2023 Page 9*)

11 # SOCIO-ECONOMICAL CONDITION

Govt borrowings from banks surge to Rs1.8tr

Despite fiscal tightening, the government's borrowing for budgetary support surged to Rs1.8 trillion during the first seven and half months of FY23 against a net retirement of Rs245.8 billion during the same period last year. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) data for the period beginning July 1, 2022 to Feb 17, suggested that the government could set a record by end of FY23 if it maintains the aggressive borrowing trend from banks. There was a net retirement of debt in the first seven and half months, but the FY22 ended with Rs3.133tr budgetary borrowing.

Bankers believe the government would borrow heavily in the last quarter of the current fiscal year to meet the expenses. So far the revenue collection is short of target despite additional taxes, petroleum price rises and 1pc hike in general sales tax to 18pc. The budget for FY23 estimated net federal government revenue of Rs7.47 trillion but it is difficult to achieve. Domestic debt servicing for the entire fiscal year was estimated at Rs3.95tr, but with the recent 300bps hike in the interest rate, it would surge to Rs5.4tr, according to analysts. The IMF says the primary deficit is 0.9pc of GDP or around Rs840bn but the government puts it at 0.45pc or around Rs450bn.

The private sector credit offtake during the first seven and half months fell to Rs467bn against Rs849bn in the same period of last year reflecting the lending pattern of banks. Banks have been investing heavily in government papers that now offer 21pc profit on treasury bills. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2023, Page 9*)

Total debt jumps by Rs4tr in a month

The central government debt jumped by Rs4 trillion, or around 7.7 per cent, in January to reach close to Rs55tr, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) data showed. The figure was Rs42.39tr in January 2022, which means it has increased by 30pc over the past year. Meanwhile, domestic debt rose to Rs34.3tr by end-January, 3.4pc higher than it was a month ago and around 25pc higher than the year-ago figure. External debt stood at Rs20.69tr, recording a jump of 15.7pc in a month and 38pc in a year. The SBP's data shows that during the first seven months (July to January) of the current fiscal year, the central government domestic debt rose by Rs3.218tr, an increase of 10.4pc. The

government's borrowings through long-term, high-cost Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs) reached Rs20.9tr by the end of January from Rs15.59tr a year ago, recording an increase of 34pc. The central government's external debt increased more aggressively during the year through January 2023, rising by 38pc. During the current fiscal year up to January, the external debt increased by 23.5pc, or Rs3.939tr. Due to the rupee's devaluation, the external debt has increased at a much higher pace and will increase significantly over the next month. The SBP data also showed that the central government's total debt, including both the domestic and external debt, increased by 15pc (Rs7.158tr) during July-January. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2023, Page 9*)

11.1 # Food

Sindh millers opt out of Ramazan package

Flour miller owners in Sindh have refused to cooperate with the provincial government for its intended `Ramazan package,` calling it impractical and political gimmickry. (*Dawn, March 12, 2023 Page 9*)

Lahore mills sell subsidised flour to Lalamusa trader

Kharian Assistant Commissioner Sajid Muneer Kalyaar recovered 3,000 bags of government's subsidised flour from the warehouse of a local trader in Lalamusa. The warehouse was sealed and the owner was imposed a hefty fine of Rs500,000 on the spot whereas other legal proceedings have also been initiated against the culprit. (*Dawn, March 14th, 2023, Page 2*)

15.8m households in Punjab to get wheat flour free of cost

Around 15.8 million households of Punjab would get wheat flour free of charge during the holy month of Ramazan. Free flour would be distributed through 8,500 Utility Stores while another 20,000 flour distribution points would also be set up to facilitate the people. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2023, Page 1*)

185,000 families of capital to get free wheat flour

The government decided to start distribution of free wheat flour among 185,000 families of the Federal Capital by March 18, as part of an initiative to provide relief to inflation-hit poor people during Ramazan. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 4*)

Free wheat flour for the Faisalabad poor through 240 points

Under the Ramadan special package of the caretaker government of Punjab, 240 points are being established in the district to provide free flour to the eligible people registered under the Benazir Income Support Program and Punjab Social Protection Authority (PSPA), where three bags per household will be provided in a phased manner in the month of Ramadan. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2023, Page 1*)

11.2 # Food Scarcity

Consumers brace for flour shortage

Already struggling to survive under unprecedented food inflation, Sindh millers multiplied consumers' plight by further increasing the flour prices as well as suspending supplies. Pakistan Flour Mills Association Sindh Zone Chairman Amir Abdullah told that the Sindh Food Department had been supplying poor quality wheat in insufficient quantities and forcing millers to provide flour at low rates to the consumers. He said the food department was also using other pressure tactics and sealing mills in Karachi and interior Sindh on alleged hoarding charges. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023, Page 9*)

Passco allocated Rs201bn to bridge wheat shortages

With lower-than-targeted wheat sowing, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet allocated Rs201 billion procurement of 1.8 million tonnes of wheat through Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) to bridge the shortages. The provincial Crop Reporting Services (CRS) had reported total wheat sowing on 21.94 million acres or about 96pc of the target area. The shortfall was mainly because of crop substitution in Punjab — mostly a shift to sugarcane — and less sowing in Sindh due to standing rain and flood waters. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023 Page 11*)

Growers allege wheat smuggling by officials, traders

Corrupt officials of food department and local traders are smuggling wheat unchecked to other parts of the country and Afghanistan from Dadu, Jamshoro and other districts of Sindh, causing a shortage of the commodity and subsequent rise in its price in local markets, according to growers. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 15*)

Pakistan's food security at stake: PKI

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) President Khalid Mehmood Khokhar has warned that Pakistan's food security could be at stake if agricultural production is not boosted and its issues remain unaddressed. He regretted that we're importing low-quality wheat while having the potential to grow world's best grain, adding that despite being an agrarian economy Pakistan has to spend billions of dollars annually on food imports, including those of wheat, sugar and vegetables, to bridge local shortfall. The PKI president emphasised that Pakistan must adopt modern agriculture technologies as was done by countries like India, Malaysia and Brazil to develop a sustainable source of food supplies. (*Dawn, March 30, 2023 Page 9*)

Malnutrition remains serious concern in Sindh: minister

Malnutrition remains a great concern in the province where this year an estimated seven million have been screened for malnutrition, shared Sindh Health Minister Dr Azra Pechuho. The total number of children treated for 'severe acute malnutrition' last year was 755,038 while 1.9 million children were treated for 'moderate acute malnutrition' (also known as wasting). The number of malnourished children treated with complications was 31,117. "Malnutrition is best treated preventatively. Therefore, at

total of 1.8m pregnant and lactating women were counselled and referred for antenatal care”. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2023, Page 14*)

11.3 # Poverty

‘Health expenses push 400,000 households into poverty every year’

Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures have become a major financial burden in Pakistan, where more than 400,000 households fall into poverty every year due to expenditures incurred on the treatment of one or more family members. Inaccessibility to treatment has resulted in the deaths of more than 460,000 children under the age of five due to cancer, malnutrition and infectious diseases, and over 200,000 women die from pregnancy complications and childbirth. (*The News, March 12th, 2023, Page 15*)

Poverty, lack of potable water among major causes of stunting: report

Chronic poverty, poor access to water, poor hygiene and sanitation practices, seasonal migration, early marriages, low birth spacing, lack of connectivity of transport and inadequate human resource are major risk factors behind stunting and malnutrition in Tharparkar, said the report of a study, titled Assessment of Stunting in Tharparkar. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah stated that the province’s stunting rate was gradually decreasing as it was 48.9 per cent as per the National Nutrition Survey-2011 and 45.5pc as per NNS-2018. (*Dawn, March 14th, 2023 Page 13*)

Reeling under burgeoning inflation, jobless man poisons wife, two daughters, tries to end his life

In a heart-wrenching incident, a jobless man fed up with unemployment, rising inflation and poverty poisoned his wife and two little daughters by lacing their drinking water with some deadly substance and attempted suicide in their rented home (Karachi). (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 13*)

Woman dies, two faint in mayhem at free flour points

A 50-year-old woman died as she was trying to get flour from the Punjab government’s free flour point at Chowk Sarwar Shaheed while two fainted at Baseera city flour point. The incidents occurred due to the huge rush of people and lack of facilities at the points set up by the government to distribute free wheat flour among the citizens under its Ramazan Package. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2023, Page 2*)

Flour distribution stampedes kill one, injure several in Charsadda, Kohat

A man was killed and several people injured during free flour distribution stampedes in Charsadda and Kohat districts. Meanwhile, several people, including women, were injured when the police baton-charged people at a flour distribution point in Gumbat area on the outskirts of Kohat city. The women, who suffered head injuries, were shifted to a local hospital. Flour bag snatching and scuffles were also reported at the only two distribution points set up in the district for a scattered population of 2.5 million. Hundreds of people blocked the Kohat-Gumbat section of the Kohat-Rawalpindi Road

for hours complaining they're struggling to benefit from the government's free flour scheme. They, including both men and women, said they waited for long hours in queues while keeping fast. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023 Page 8*)

IFAD to begin new programme to reduce poverty, raise food security

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will begin this year a new five-year programme in Pakistan to target 1.5 million poor rural households representing 10 million people comprising households living in chronic poverty and small-scale farmers. The Country Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOP) covering the 2023-2027 period with projects worth \$231 million in commitment and co-financing has now been placed before the IFAD executive board for final approval. The COSOP sets out IFAD's strategy to support the government in transforming smallholder agriculture and eradicating rural poverty within a systematic framework to build climate resilience, adaptation, mitigation and response. Besides focusing on small farmers and rural people living in extreme poverty, the new programme in Pakistan will cover mainstream themes of women, youth, nutrition, climate change, persons with disabilities and indigenous people. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 5*)

Two more die, 56 injured in stampedes at free flour centres in Punjab

An old woman and a man died while 56 people, including 45 women, were injured in stampedes at free flour centres in Sahiwal, Bahawalpur, Muzaffargarh and Okara districts of province as the mismanagement in distribution continues since government began activity & people started dashing to distribution points. A 73-year-old man who had come to get free flour at a distribution point at Govt High School Taranda Muhammad Pannah of tehsil Liaquatpur died. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2023, Page 2*)

11.4 # Inflation

Ministry jacks up inflation forecast

Highlighting pressures on food and non-food prices in coming months, the finance ministry further increased its inflation forecast to 30 per cent from its earlier projection of 26pc before easing out gradually. Consumer Price Index-based inflation on a year-on-year basis will be 28-30pc in coming months. In January's outlook, the ministry had revised up by more than double its inflation projection to 26pc from budgeted 11.5pc.

Rabi wheat sowing target for 2022-23 has almost been achieved at 96pc covering 21.94 million acres. Moreover, the increased disbursement of agriculture credit is expected to help exceed the 28.4 million tonnes target. The report observed the contraction in imports allowed the current account deficit to decline significantly to \$3.8bn for July-January FY23 compared to \$11.6bn in the same period last year. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2023, Page 9*)

Inflation hits highest level on record, will rise further

Last month, prices rose at the fastest pace ever in the country's history, according to available data, with food, beverage and transport costs driving inflation to a point where analysts fear "families will have to make choices and sacrifices". Monthly inflation, measured by a basket of products called the Consumer Price Index (CPI), jumped to 31.6 per cent in February year-on-year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics said. This was the highest annual rate since available data, i.e. July 1965, according to the research firm Arif Habib Ltd, and is also expected to rise even further in the coming months. Inflation surpassed 30pc last month after having stayed above 20pc for eight months from June to January. Inflation was 12.2pc in February last year. Prices in February rose 4.3pc compared to January, the highest rate since October's 4.7pc. The government passed a supplementary bill last month that lifted the goods and services tax to 18pc from 17pc to help raise Rs170 billion (\$639 million) in extra revenue for the fiscal year through July. Core inflation increased 17.1pc and 21.5pc year-on-year for urban and rural centres, respectively. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023 Page 1*)

Sharjeel admits sale of expensive wheat led to hike in flour price

Sindh Minister for Information Sharjeel Inam Memon has said that he will look into why the wheat procured at Rs58 per kg in 2021-22 season has been released to flourmills and chakkis at Rs85 per kg this year, which has in reality contributed to price hike. Wheat's support price increased to Rs4,000 this season from Rs2,200 per 40kg to encourage farmers to go for massive wheat sowing and grain should not have been imported like previously done. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023 Page 15*)

Inflation so high that 'living seems unaffordable'

As short-term inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Index, hit 41.07 per cent in the week ended on March 2, life for the overwhelming majority of Pakistan becomes next to impossible as international lenders have also warned against looming social unrest. Also, the Consumer Price Index for February jumped to 31.50pc —the worst since June 1975. It was followed by a sharp decline in rupee value, with the government raising energy prices and taxes to meet the IMF's loan conditions. All these factors set the platform for a new inflation record. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2023, Page 9*)

Wheat flour prices hit record high in Karachi

All records of wheat flour prices in Karachi and other parts of the country have been broken as the price a 20-kg bag of wheat flour has reached to Rs3,100 for the first time in the history of Pakistan. According to a report, the citizens of Karachi are forced to buy the most expensive flour in the country. It seems that there is no check and balance system in the country, where people are already reeling from worst economic crisis. (*Business Recorder, 20th March 2023 Page 3*)

Case for hike in minimum wage in view of inflation

In the wake of rising inflationary pressures whereby weekly prices witnessed a surge close to 50 per cent, the government has not yet revised upward the minimum wages of Rs25,000 for workers to ward off the negative impacts of price hike. (*The News*, 26 March, 2023 Page 12)

Skyrocketing inflation challenges age-old charity traditions

Commodity traders claim sale of various food items used for preparing ration packs has remained highly subdued this Ramazan as compared to the last year due to skyrocketing prices and shrinking purchasing power of the people. There is a tradition that people prepare ration packets and distribute them among the needy especially during Ramazan. However, inflated electricity bills, gas tariff and rising petroleum prices are not allowing a large number of people to take the good step in helping out the poor this year. (*Dawn*, March 30th, 2023, Page 13)

11.4.1 # Weekly Inflation

Short-term inflation remains over 41pc

The weekly inflation rose to 41.07 per cent on a year-on-year basis on the back of edible oil, sugar and vegetables, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). Short-term inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), was still on the higher side and will further increase when the full impact of power tariff hikes will be passed on to the consumers. Though week-on-week inflation eased 0.30pc for the week that ended on March 2.

The government has been taking strict measures under IMF conditions that are likely to further cool the economy and stoke inflation. The increase in policy rate, general sales tax from 17pc to 18pc will further increase retail price of consumer goods. The government has already taken a string of measures, including adopting a market-based exchange rate; a hike in fuel and power tariffs; the withdrawal of subsidies, and more taxation to generate revenue to bridge the fiscal deficit. As a result of these measures, the government has raised its annual inflation rate to 31pc from an earlier projection of 26pc. (*Dawn*, March 4th, 2023, Page 9)

Weekly inflation spikes to 42.27pc

The recent hikes in Weekly inflation clocked in at 42.27 percent year-on-year owing to the rising prices of edible oil, pulses and vegetables. Short-term inflation, measured by Sensitive Price Index, is expected to intensify further as full impact of depreciation, hike in general sales tax rate and higher energy prices has yet to reflect in official data. Week-on-week inflation remained 1.37pc for the seven-day period ending on March 9. The weekly inflation number is the highest since the week ending on Sept 8, 2022, when SPI was 42.7pc. It stayed above 40pc for the first time since Sept 15 last year when the reading was 40.58pc. The increase in the policy rate to 20pc, general sales tax rate from 17pc to 18pc on most items and to 25pc on more than 800 imported food and non-food

items will further increase retail prices of consumer goods. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2023, Page 9*)

Short-term inflation hits record 45.64pc

Short-term inflation, based on the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), saw a record increase to 45.64 per cent for the combined income group on a year-on-year basis for the week ending March 16 fuelled by consistent increase the price of essential commodities. However, on a week-on-week basis, the short-term inflation increased by 0.96pc. Earlier the year-on-year SPI surged to 45.5pc during the week ended on Sept 1, 2022. It stayed above 40pc for the first time since Aug 18 last year when the reading was 42.31pc. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 9*)

Short-term inflation spikes to record 46.65pc

Short-term inflation, based on the Sensitive Price Index (SPI), rose to an unprecedented 46.65 per cent year-on-year for the combined income group for the period ending March 22. However, on a week-on-week basis, the weekly inflation rose sharply by 1.80pc with food items getting costlier. The SPI is expected to intensify further as the worse impact of inflation in the wake of Ramazan-related demand spiral, rupee devaluation, costly petroleum products, hike in general sales tax and higher electricity and gas tariffs is yet to reflect in official data. The commodity prices are expected to show a rapid increase with rising demand in the coming week. Earlier, the year-on-year SPI surged to 45.5pc during the week ending Sept 1, 2022, and it stayed above 40pc for the first time since Aug 18 last year when the reading was 42.31pc. The increase in the SBP policy rate to 20pc, sales tax from 17pc to 18pc on most items and 25pc on more than 800 imported food and non-food items will further increase retail prices of consumer goods. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2023, Page 9*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

US, Pakistan to jointly tackle climate change

The United States and Pakistan committed to partner with each other in various areas, including a \$4.5 million programme from the US Department of Agriculture to strengthen fertiliser efficiency and effectiveness for local farmers. The commitment was made at the conclusion of the second meeting of the Climate and Environment Working Group. Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman and the US Department of State's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Monica Medina led their respective delegations at the meeting. Officials and experts of the two countries discussed the impacts of the last year's devastating floods in Pakistan and emphasised the importance of building resilience to the impacts of climate change. The US expressed support for Pakistan's Living Indus Initiative to restore the ecological health of the Indus River Basin. The two governments recommitted to tackling the climate crisis through cooperation on climate change mitigation and adaptation. They resolved to continue deepening their bilateral

partnership through the US-Pakistan Green Alliance framework. Regarding agriculture, the delegations discussed the importance of adopting modern farming practices and innovative seed varieties to bolster resilience against climate change. On water management, the two governments identified technical assistance, governance, and water efficiency mechanisms as areas ripe for cooperation. Through the Climate and Environment Working Group, the two governments made new commitments to partner together. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2023, Page 3*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTER

CM, NDMA agree on adopting technology to fight disasters

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Chairman Lt Gen Inam Haider agreed in their meeting at the CM House that modern technology would be adopted for disaster management in the country. The NDMA chief said his organisation had developed close coordination with international agencies working on forecasting weather and its related impacts. He said the NDMA itself was installing latest weather-related equipment and gadgets to assess the weather and the patterns of disasters during the past few decades.

Shah said that his province has been facing disasters since the 2010 floods, then came the flash floods in 2011, followed by urban floods, and more recently, heavy rains and floods last year. “We must learn lessons from these natural disasters, and must equip and strengthen our institutions to mitigate the impact of such disasters through contingency plans and timely forecasts.” (*The News, March 12th, 2023, Page 13*)

13.1 # Flood

Flood damages houses, roads, crops in Kohistan

The downpour-induced flash floods damaged houses, roads, standing crops, riverside power units and water schemes in Razika valley of Upper Kohistan district. A local stream burst its banks causing massive devastation in Razika valley besides cutting off the area from the rest of the district. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2023, Page 8*)

Eight die in Awaran flash floods

Eight members of a family, including children, died when flash floods swept away their vehicle in the Awaran district of Balochistan. Levies sources said the family was travelling to Jhao tehsil of Awaran when their vehicle was swept away by the deluge. The victims included three young girls, as many boys, and two men. (*The News, March 19th, 2023, Page 12*)

13.2 # Heatwave

Heatwaves predicted for Mar-May period

The Met Office has forecast a series of heat waves spells for the most parts of the country during March to May period because of the rising temperatures. The growing

mercury levels are also likely to scale up water stress for the agricultural and domestic needs over the period, it said in its weather forecast for Mar, April and May 2023. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 2*)

13.3 # Rainfall

Windstorm, rain ruin wheat crop

Wheat crop was ruined by a strong gale & a rain in Toba Tek Singh. Heavy windstorms and rain flattened the wheat crop just one month before it was scheduled to be harvested. According to reports, there were several villages in Toba Tek Singh, Rajana, and Pirmahal where wheat harvest had nearly entirely collapsed. Hail, rain and thunderstorm that followed devastated Okara's wheat harvest. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 2*)

Torrents sweep away 10 in Balochistan

Eight-member family was among 10 people who were swept away by a torrent following spell of heavy rain in Awaran and Zhob areas of Balochistan. There are reports that some mud houses were also damaged in the rains. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 1*)

Rain, hailstorm flatten wheat farms in districts of south Punjab

Wheat fields on millions of acres were destroyed and highways flooded in the districts of Multan, Vehari, Lodhran, Muzaffargarh, Kot Addu, and Layyah due to sporadic rain and hailstorms. The storms also affected vegetable and fodder harvests. A layer of water covered the crops. At several places, the harvest process of wheat has been stopped. Moreover, hailstorms destroyed flowers in mango orchards, reducing output. Several areas of Muzaffargarh, Kot Addu and Layyah districts also remained cloudy and rain and hailstorms hit their several areas. Wheat crop on several scores of acres was damaged in the three districts. The crop was ready for harvesting but the bad weather levelled the farms. (*Dawn, March 22nd, 2023, Page 2*)

Rain, hailstorm hit parts of Balochistan

Heavy rains, thunderstorms and hailstorms lashed several areas of Balochistan, including Quetta and many districts, disrupting lives and traffic and dropping the mercury. The weather caused urban flooding in some areas, submerging main roads and streets. Ziarat and some other areas, including Kan Mehtarzai, Muslim Bagh and Khanozai were hit by snowfall, while Quetta and its surrounding areas received hailstorms. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 5*)

Rain, hailstorm lash Lakki Marwat

Torrential rain coupled with hailstorm lashed parts of Lakki Marwat district, causing power outage and adding to the troubles of local residents, especially farmers. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 8*)

Five killed across KP as houses collapse in heavy rain

Five people were killed and 23 injured in rain-related incidents in Mardan, Peshawar, South Waziristan and Khyber districts. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 8*)

Rain, hailstones damage crops, houses in Bannu

Heavy rain coupled with hailstones played havoc in parts of Bannu district, damaging standing crops, houses and roads. Roofs and boundary walls of several houses also collapsed during the two-day-long rain spell. Downpour also badly affected the standing wheat and gram crops and fruit orchards, besides disrupting business activities. Local farmers said they were hardest hit as rain and hailstones damaged their crops. They said harvest of gram crop would be delayed due to rains. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 9*)

One dead as rains wreak havoc in Balochistan

As heavy rainfall continued to lash most parts of Balochistan, one person was killed in Gwadar after being hit by a thunderbolt, while traffic between the southwestern province and Sindh remained suspended after a temporary bridge on Bolan River was washed away in a flash flood. According to reports received from different areas of the province, rainstorms played havoc in Zhob, Loralai, Pishin, Chaman, Qila Abdullah, Toba Achakzai, Ziarat, Dukki, Qila Saifullah, Kalat, Mastung, Khuzdar, Sibi, Bolan, Lasbela, Nasirabad, Kachhi, Dalbandin, Taftan, Noshki, Gwadar, and many parts of the Makran division. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2023, Page 5*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTER

14.1 # Earthquake

Powerful quake rattles parts of KP, Afghanistan

A strong earthquake rattled the capital and other parts of the country, sending panicked residents fleeing homes and offices and frightening people even in remote villages. The 6.8 magnitude quake was primarily felt in northern parts of the country, including Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Muzaffarabad, Peshawar, Haripur, Mardan, Chitral, Charsadda and others. There were also reports of several injuries. Around 150 people were injured in Swat, where hospitals had declared a state of emergency. The earthquake also jolted different cities in Punjab, though no loss of life was immediately reported. Shocks were felt in Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Muzaffargarh, Sahiwal, Okara and other cities. The US Geological Survey said the quake was centred near Jurm town in north-eastern Afghanistan in the Hindukush region and had a depth of 187 kilometres. The Pakistan Meteorological Department said the quake was a magnitude 6.8, whereas the USGS put the magnitude at 6.5. The earthquake also jolted the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), where the resultant landslides created fear. Besides, landslides have blocked the Karakoram Highway near the border with GB's Diamer district. (*Dawn, March 22nd, 2023, Page 1*)

Quake jolts several Punjab cities

Citizens were panicked after a 4.4 magnitude earthquake rocked several cities of the central Punjab. Its epicentre was 30 km southwest of Sargodha. The residents were panicked as strong tremors were felt in major cities including Lahore, Chichawatni, Chunnia, Burewala, Kamoke, Hafizabad, Pindi Bhattian, Faisalabad, Nankana Sahib,

Mianwali and Sargodha. The intensity of the earthquake was strong enough to cause people to rush out of their homes. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 2*)

6.8 magnitude earthquake: 11 killed and 172 houses damaged: NDMA

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) issued a detailed report on damages and losses due to the recent earthquake of 6.8 magnitude that shook the northern parts of the country leaving 11 dead and 79 injured and 172 houses damaged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The NDMA in the aftermath of 6.8 magnitude earthquake from Hindukush region of Afghanistan, issued the situation report based on its initial or preliminary assessment. (*Business Recorder, March 24th, 2023, Page 3*)

14.2 # Landslide

Three labourers killed in Khyber landslide

Three labourers were killed and another was critically injured when they were buried under a landslide while quarrying stones in Jamrud tehsil. They said a group of workers was busy excavating stones in Sarkai hilly area of Sur Kamar on the outskirts of Jamrud when a huge portion of soil and stones came down on them. They said four workers were buried under the debris, adding bodies of three were retrieved while the fourth one was pulled out in critical condition. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Page 9*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Gilgit residents protest wheat, electricity shortage

Several people protested in Gilgit and Ghanche districts over a persistent shortage of electricity and wheat. In Gilgit, many residents, including women, of the Zulfiqarabad neighbourhood gathered at a main intersection and blocked Shahrah-i-Quaid-i-Azam to protest up to 22 hours of daily power outages in their area. The demonstrators, who gathered at Zulfiqarabad Chowk, chanted slogans against the government and said the crisis had been going on for the last two weeks. The residents said they were sometimes deprived of even two hours of daily electricity supply, making their lives difficult amid winter. On top of it, they were also faced with wheat shortage, the protesters said and blamed the government for failing to provide even necessities to people. Meanwhile, the residents of Ghanche's Barah village also staged a protest against the wheat shortage. The demonstrators blocked Siachen Road and staged a sit-in to press the government to fulfil their demands. The protesters slammed the GB food department for its "incompetence and carelessness". The protesters ended their sit-in only after food department officials negotiated with them and assured them of solving their problems urgently. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2023, Page 3*)

Power protesters storm grid station in Jamrud

Angry tribesmen stormed Jamrud grid station and forcibly switched off power supply to all industrial units in the tehsil in protest against prolonged suspension of electricity

to domestic consumers. The protesters staged a sit-in at the grid station and also blocked the busy Peshawar-Torkham Highway to traffic for several hours. The promise was made during final agreement about power supply mechanism and installation of digital electricity meters by the domestic consumers. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 8*)

Students, civil society protest police crackdown on QAU

Student organisations and civil society activists gathered outside the National Press Club to protest against the recent crackdown on students at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU). In a press release issued here said the protest was called after an operation against the Quaid-i-Azam University students, the deployment of Rangers, anti-terrorist squads and police forces on the campus. The protestors demanded that the state should release all arrested students immediately and reopen the university so that students from far-flung areas can continue their education in peace. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023, Page 4*)

Protest held against allotment of land to ‘non-natives’ in Winder

Political activists and civil society representatives took out a huge rally in the Winder town of Hub district to protest against what they called the illegal allotment of land to the non-natives. The dispute was over 15,000 acres of land in the command area of the under-construction Winder Dam. The rally was arranged by the Winder Action Committee in which the protesters carried placards and chanted slogans against the government and officials of the department. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023, Page 5*)

Angry protesters suspend power supply to entire Landi Kotal

The supply of electricity to entire Landi Kotal tehsil was suspended when protesters besieged the local grid station, switched off all power feeders and later threw an iron chain at the main transmission line. The residents of the area were protesting against the new schedule of 22 hours daily power loadshedding. Supply of electricity to the entire Jamrud tehsil also remained suspended as residents continued their protest sit-in at the grid station and stopped staff from entering premises. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2023, Page 8*)

Peasants protest ‘kidnapping’ of four fellows after being freed on court’s order

A group of liberated peasant families staged a protest demonstration outside the local press club (Hyderabad) along with a representative of the HRCP seeking legal protection. HRCP coordinator Ghufrana Arain said that Shrimati Gudi, her husband Krishan and other peasants had gone missing some time back and were found in the captivity of a landowner. She said that they were kept in wrongful confinement by the landowner who did not pay them their dues for three years and was forcing them into bonded labour. She said under court’s order, they were freed with HRCP’s assistance but after their release, an attempt was made to kidnap them again from near Karachi railway station. She said they reached some other place but four of them were kidnapped. She said they needed legal protection and release of remaining peasants, including Shiva, Manu, Parkash and Raju Bheel. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2023, Page 15*)

No activities in Peshawar varsity as employees go on strike

The teaching and non-teaching staff of University of Peshawar observed complete strike against the killing of security supervisor of the university, Saqlain Bangash. They demanded of the government to remove the vice-chancellor and conduct judicial inquiry into the killing of the security supervisor, who was killed due to firing by a security guard. No academic and administrative activities took place on the campus. The employees of the university staged a sit-in at Puta Chowk that continued till afternoon. *(Dawn, March 8th, 2023, Page 8)*

Power protesters take to streets in Mohmand

All markets, roads and bazaars remained closed in Mohmand tribal district as people took to streets in a large number against the prolonged power loadshedding. The protesters blocked the main Peshawar-Bajaur road to traffic in front of Ghalanai grid station. They complained that duration of power loadshedding in rural areas was increased up to 23 hours per day during the past few months. They also alleged that supply of electricity to several remote areas of the district was suspended. People staged protest in all the major markets. *(Dawn, March 8th, 2023, Page 8)*

Women march for their rights in Lahore, Multan

Women and girls from Lahore and Multan marched in their respective cities to mark the International Women's Day to raise their voice for equal rights and an end to the systemic discrimination against them. *(Dawn, March 9th, 2023 Page 2)*

Marchers defy hurdles to record protest

Despite facing barbed wires, containers and the baton charges by the police, participants of Aurat March managed to reach the federal capital's most prominent destination for political and rights movements, D-Chowk. The incident wherein the police charged protesters sparked anger among politicians and activists who condemned it along with a large number of people on media. *(Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 4)*

Peshawar varsity teachers, students continue protest

The teaching and non-teaching staff of the University of Peshawar (UoP) continued their strike for the third day against the killing of security supervisor of the varsity, Saqlain Bangash. All employees of the university and students took out a procession, which emerged from Islamia College University (ICU) and ended at the Puta Chowk of UoP, where they staged a sit-in. *(Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 8)*

Women's struggle termed war against capitalist dominance

There were a number of programmes, including rallies, press conferences and seminars held in the city (Karachi) in accordance with International Women's Day. One of the biggest events of the day was the Mehnatkash Aurat Rally with the demand to abolish all anti-women laws and fixing the minimum wage at Rs50,000 per month. The rally was participated by hundreds of women from different parts of Sindh, including peasant women, labourers, office workers, political leaders and transgender persons all of whom

chanted slogans in favour of their demands and held red flags, banners and placards. About 20 million women and children have been pushed beneath the poverty line and it is feared that 10 million more women would be pushed beneath the poverty line by next year. They said that the rulers at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) had come up with policies to reduce the real income of workers by sixty per cent. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 15*)

Peasant women urged to stand up for their rights in Aurat March

Rights activists, students, working women & members of general public staged marches in Hyderabad and Ghotki towns and different programmes were organised across province to mark 113th anniversary of International Women's Day. The gathering adopted several resolutions, calling for elimination of violence, economic justice, political rights, educational rights, climate justice, health and reproductive health rights, rights of minorities, social and legal rights. Resolutions demanded fixation of minimum wage for women working in farm sector and factories & as domestic help in houses & registration of women workers in informal sectors. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 17*)

Harassment, patriarchy and inflation come under fire in Aurat March

Raising voice over the many injustices in society, raising awareness on multiple issues, standing up for each other, Hum Aurtein managed to gather, in no particular order, women, men, transgender persons, workers, peasants, members of minority communities, students and children at the sixth Aurat March in all its unapologetic, unabashed brazenness at the Burns Garden. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Page 13*)

Thousands of fish, cattle heads die after mill releases toxic runoff into canal

Thousands of fishes and scores of cattle heads died after a local sugar mill released toxic wastewater into Karo Naro canal near Khanpur Mahar town in Ghotki district, sparking protest by affected villagers. The protesters belonging to the worst hit Dato Mahar village staged a demonstration against the mill administration and said the poisonous wastewater had wreaked havoc in the villages of Dato Mahar, Wadan Mahar, Ali Mahar, Mitho Arfani and Jumo Mahar along both the sides of canal's banks. The protesters appealed to authorities to take action against the mill management. They urged the government to direct local administration to immediately stop the mill from releasing the toxic wastewater into the canal. They said that the affected villagers whose cattle heads had died after drinking the toxic canal water should be compensated for their loss. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Page 15*)

Women march in Gwadar for HDT chief's release

Following the arrest of Haq Do Tehreek (HDT) chief Maulana Hidayatur Rehman in mid-January, the situation in Gwadar has been calm so far. But after the lifting of section 144 in the town, protests against the Maulana's arrest have simmered again. Deserving special mention was a demonstration by Burqa-clad women who raised their voice for Maulana Hidayat's release. Maasi Zainab is the female face of the Gwadar agitation

that has grabbed the nation's attention for over a year. According to her, the HDT chief was put behind bars for no reason. "He is being punished for speaking out against the injustice meted out to the people of Gwadar". "Our fishermen were not being allowed to go out to the sea due to security considerations. Families had to go without a square meal for days together". "But after the protests led by Maulana Hidayat, the authorities provided a little relief to fishermen. Now we are able to make ends meet." (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 3*)

Dalits hold rally over 'forced conversion', other woes

An alliance of Dalits in Pakistan took out a rally from the Karachi Press Club to the Sindh Assembly building to highlight a host of issues, ranging from alleged forced conversion to the suspension of the Thar Express. Hundreds of people participating in the rally under a banner of the Pakistan Darawer Ittehad' also staged a sit-in outside the provincial legislature. The leaders accused the government and political parties of taking no serious steps to address the issue of "forced" conversion of underage Hindu girls seriously. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2023, Page 13*)

International News

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

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4 # NON-AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

Two new vaccines effective against bird flu: Dutch lab

5 # TRADE

Turkey, United Arab Emirates sign trade agreement

Driven by green goods, global trade hits record \$32tr

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

Higher prices for herbicides boost Bayer profits in 2022

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN

Sri Lanka president says China agrees to restructure loans

Poor states' summit promised just \$1.4bn, says UN

UN grants one-year extension to Afghanistan mission

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

IMF board poised to approve \$2.9bn

World Bank warns of 'lost decade' in global growth

Countries in stronger position should help others with debt woes: IMF

9 # POLICY

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10 # ENVIRONMENT

Low oxygen levels behind mass fish death in Australian river

Rise in ocean plastic pollution over 15 years termed 'unprecedented'

Cancer-causing compounds found in everyday food: study

11 # SOCIO-ECONOMICAL POLICY

UN chief slams rich countries' treatment of poor states

The spectre of inequality

11.1 # Food

World food prices fall for 11th month running in Feb: FAO

11.2 # Food Scarcity

Bottled water masks world's failure to supply safe water to all, says UN

UN cuts ration for millions of Afghans as funds dry up

UN chief calls for urgent action to combat drinking water shortage

11.3 # Inflation

Consumer price inflation in Pakistan second highest in South Asia: WB

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

La Nina ending, but warming El Nino may strike soon, says UN

Governments vet crucial UN climate science report

12.1 # Climate Crisis

Australia wildfires widened Antarctic ozone hole: study

Plastic entering oceans could triple by 2040 if left unchecked: study

Antarctic sea ice cover reaches record low

13 # CLIMATE DISASTER

Natural disasters caused 30,000 deaths, \$220bn losses in 2022

13.1 # Wildfire

Early wildfire in Spain rages out of control

13.2 # Rainfall

Lack of rainfall set to hit crop outputs in India, Pakistan

Heavy rain triggers flood in Australia

13.3 # Flood

14 killed in Somalia flash floods

13.4 # Storm

California storm leaves two dead, breaks levee

California storm leaves five dead from fallen trees in Bay area

23 killed as tornado, storms rip through Mississippi

14 # NATURAL DISASTER

Quake killed more than 50,000 in Turkey, Syria: revised toll

Indonesia's Merapi volcano erupts, again

Ecuador landslide death toll rises to 12

15 # RESISTANCE

Police break up Norway wind farm protest by Thunberg

Students hold sit-ins over Greek train tragedy

Protesters rally after clashes in Georgia

Greek PM under pressure as tens of thousands protest train tragedy

Women march as rights under threat across the globe

Garbage piles up in Paris as Macron vows to push through pension reform

French protesters back on streets against pension plan

Thousands of hospital doctors walk out in latest UK strike

Cost-of-living crisis bites rich and poor nations alike

Indonesian farmers fight for their land in nickel mining boom

50,000 teachers go on strike in New Zealand over cost of living

Resist Racism March

Protests, strikes, fuel shortages as pensions fury rages in France

Construction of water reservoirs sparks violent protests in France

Protester fighting for life after France clashes

'Mega-strike' disrupts travel in Germany

International News

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4 # NON-AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

Two new vaccines effective against bird flu: Dutch lab

Two vaccines tested by a Dutch veterinary research centre have proved effective against highly infectious bird flu in a first experiment conducted under a controlled environment. Some countries including China already vaccinate against bird flu and as the virus seems to have become endemic some other governments around the world that have opposed vaccines are reconsidering. Their opposition centered on fears a vaccine could mask the spread of bird flu but tests indicate it would not be the case with the two vaccines tested in Netherlands. As part of a European programme, the Netherlands has been testing bird flu vaccines for egg-laying hens while France is carrying out tests on ducks, Italy on turkeys & Hungary on Pekin ducks. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 11*)

5 # TRADE

Turkey, United Arab Emirates sign trade agreement

The United Arab Emirates and Turkey signed an agreement in Abu Dhabi which aims to increase trade between the two countries to \$40 billion in the next five years, according to UAE projections. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, said the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement will take economic and trade relations between the two countries to a new phase. The UAE kicked off negotiations with Turkey on a bilateral trade deal last year after a warming in political relations following UAE President Visit to the country in 2021, during which the UAE set up a \$10bn investment fund. The CEPA is expected to focus on strategic sectors such as agritech, food security, and clean energy, as well as continued cooperation on construction & real estate projects. Bilateral trade between two nations hit \$18.9bn last year, up 40% from previous year, & Turkey is now UAE's sixth largest trading partner for non-oil trade. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 1*)

Driven by green goods, global trade hits record \$32tr

Global trade was worth a record \$32 trillion in 2022, but amid deteriorating economic conditions and rising uncertainties, growth turned negative in the second half of the year and is set to stagnate in the first half of 2023. The silver lining was the strong

performance of trade in “green goods”, whose growth held strong throughout the year, says UNCTAD’s latest Global Trade Update. Green goods, also called “environmentally friendly goods”, refer to products that are designed to use fewer resources or emit less pollution than their traditional counterparts.

Defying the downward trend, trade in such goods grew by about 4pc in the second half of the year. Their combined value hit a record \$1.9tr in 2022, adding more than \$100bn compared to 2021. Among green goods that performed especially well were electric and hybrid vehicles, non-plastic packaging and wind turbines. The good news comes just days after the UN released its latest climate report, in which scientists have delivered a “final warning”, saying rising greenhouse gas emissions are pushing the planet to the brink of irreversible change, report says. UNCTAD expects green industries to boom as countries scale up efforts to fight climate change and cut emissions.

The organisation, in its recent Technology and Innovative Report 2023, projected the global market for electric cars, solar and wind energy, green hydrogen and a dozen other green technologies to reach \$2.1tr by 2030 – four times more than their value today. While imports and exports of green goods held strong throughout 2022, most products saw their trade start to decline in the second half of the year — and the downturn continued in the fourth quarter. The report shows that global trade in goods, worth \$25tr in 2022, declined by 3pc in the fourth quarter. But trade in services remained almost constant, finishing the year at \$7tr. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 9*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

Higher prices for herbicides boost Bayer profits in 2022

German chemicals giant its net profit in 2022, in part thanks to higher prices and strong demand for its glyphosate-based weed killers. Net profit climbed to 4.15 billion euros (\$4.3 billion) in 2022, up from 1.0 billion a year earlier. Group sales rose by 8.7 percent to 50.7 billion euros, in line with analyst expectations. “2022 was a very successful year for Bayer despite the challenging environment,” The results were boosted by record sales in the company’s agricultural division, up more than 15 percent year-on-year to 25 billion euros. This was “in particular thanks to higher prices” for herbicides in all regions, at a time when “supply for glyphosate-based products was tight”. But with supply chain constraints easing, those prices are likely to fall this year, Bayer added. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2023, Page 11*)

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN

Sri Lanka president says China agrees to restructure loans

Sri Lanka’s president said that China had agreed to restructure its loans to the bankrupt island nation, clearing the final obstacle to a long-awaited International Monetary Fund bailout. An unprecedented economic crisis has seen Sri Lanka’s 22 million people suffer acute food, fuel and medicine shortages, along with extended blackouts and runaway

inflation. Government has been working to repair Sri Lanka's ruined finances and secure the sorely needed IMF rescue package. But it was held up by debt negotiations with China, its largest bilateral creditor. Beijing had now agreed to a restructure and that he expected the first tranche from the Washington-based lender's promised \$2.9 billion in funds to be released within the month.

There was no immediate confirmation of the announcement from the bank or IMF. Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46bn foreign debt last April. Just over \$14bn of that is bilateral debt owed to foreign governments, of which China holds 52 percent. Wickremesinghe's government entered into a staff-level agreement with the IMF for a \$2.9 billion rescue package in September, but the release of it was held up pending "financial assurances" from creditors. Japan and India, its other biggest creditors, along with a host of others known as the "Paris Club" creditor nations, had given assurances earlier this year, leaving only China to give its assent. (*Business Recorder, March 8th, 2023, Page 1*)

Poor states' summit promised just \$1.4bn, says UN

Just \$1.4 billion in new loans and grants were promised at a UN summit devoted to the world's poorest nations where UN leader Antonio Guterres had appealed for massive aid. Guterres started the summit by saying the 46 poorest states need a \$500 billion a year stimulus to reach the UN sustainable development goals, a blueprint to end poverty and boost health and education by 2030. The Doha meetings saw Saudi Arabia offer \$800m in loans to LDCs. Germany said it would make an extra \$210m of financing available and the European Union announced investment agreements worth \$135m. Qatar said it would give \$60 million for UN projects and Canada \$59 million for vitamin supplements and conservation efforts in LDCs. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2023, Page 11*)

UN grants one-year extension to Afghanistan mission

The Security Council renewed the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for another year, while also asking for recommendations on the best way for the international community to continue its work in the Taliban-ruled country. The 15-member council unanimously adopted two resolutions, both drafted by the United Arab Emirates and Japan. The first "stresses the critical importance of a continued presence of UNAMA" and other UN agencies within Afghanistan, which has been under Taliban rule since the hardline Islamist group took control of Kabul in August 2021. The report should include information on addressing "humanitarian (challenges), human rights and especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, security and terrorism, narcotics, development, economic and social challenges, dialogue, governance and the rule of law." (*Business Recorder, March 17th, 2023, Page 12*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

IMF board poised to approve \$2.9bn

IMF said Sri Lanka has secured financing assurances from all major bilateral creditors, paving the way for the IMF board to consider approval of a long-awaited \$2.9 billion

four-year bailout agreed last year. The IMF said its board will meet on March 20 to review a preliminary staff-level agreement first signed in September, offering a lifeline to the South Asian country which faces its worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. A source familiar with the matter said China had agreed on Monday to back Sri Lanka's debt restructuring with stronger financial assurances, allowing the IMF to move forward. The announcement comes days after the IMF praised Sri Lanka's surprise decision on March 3 to raise interest rates and move toward a market-determined exchange rate as evidence of a commitment to reducing inflation and enacting reforms. Sri Lanka, which has been facing shortages of food, fuel and medicines, has been waiting for more than 180 days for approval of the IMF loan, mostly due to IMF concerns over the quality of the initial financing assurances offered by China and other bilateral creditors, and its insistence on painful reforms. (*Business Recorder, March 8th, 2023, Page 17*)

World Bank warns of 'lost decade' in global growth

The World Bank warned that the global economy's "speed limit" — the maximum long-term rate at which it can grow without sparking inflation — is set to slump to a three-decade low by 2030 and advocated an ambitious policy push by national economies to boost productivity and the labour supply, ramp up investment and trade, and harness the potential of the services sector. The report, "Falling Long-Term Growth Prospects: Trends, Expectations, and Policies," launched offers the first comprehensive assessment of long-term potential output growth rates in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These rates can be thought of as the global economy's "speed limit."

The bank noted that nearly all the economic forces that powered progress and prosperity over the last three decades were fading. As a result, between 2022 and 2030 average global potential GDP growth is estimated to decline by roughly a third from the rate that prevailed in the first decade of this century — to 2.2pc a year. For developing economies, the decline will be equally steep: from 6pc a year between 2000 and 2010 to 4pc a year over the remainder of this decade. These declines would be much steeper in the event of a global financial crisis or a recession. The analysis shows that potential GDP growth can be boosted by as much as 0.7 percentage points — to an annual average rate of 2.9pc — if countries adopt sustainable, growth-oriented policies. That would convert an expected slowdown into an acceleration of global potential GDP growth. The report asked the economies on the national level to align monetary, fiscal, and financial frameworks as robust macroeconomic and financial policy frameworks can moderate the ups and downs of business cycles. "Policymakers should prioritise taming inflation, ensuring financial-sector stability, reducing debt, and restoring fiscal prudence". (*Dawn, March 28th, 2023, Page 9*)

Countries in stronger position should help others with debt woes: IMF

Countries in a relatively stronger position should help vulnerable nations especially those under debt distress, The IMF chief said such assistance would be particularly important against the backdrop of high interest rates and currency depreciation. Countries need to work together to reinvigorate international trade in an equitable way for more people to benefit from globalisation, and diversify supply chains based on economic logic. IMF research showed the long-term cost of trade fragmentation could be as high as 7% of global gross domestic product, and Asia as a highly integrated region would be the most adversely affected by runaway fragmentation. (*Business Recorder, March 31st, 2023, Page 1*)

9 # POLICY

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

10 # ENVIRONMENT

Low oxygen levels behind mass fish death in Australian river

Low levels of oxygen in Australia's second longest river were to blame for a mass fish die-off recently in a remote part of New South Wales state, environmental authorities said. Thousands of dead fish have been found this week in the Darling River near the town of Menindee, around 1,000km west of the state capital Sydney. It follows fish deaths in the same area in 2018 and 2019 where up to a million fish died from poor water flow, poor water quality, and sudden temperature changes. The NSW Department of Planning and Environment's water division said that "dissolved oxygen levels remain a concern for fish health" in the area. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 10*)

Rise in ocean plastic pollution over 15 years termed 'unprecedented'

Plastic pollution in the world's oceans has reached "unprecedented levels" over the past 15 years, a new study has found, calling for a legally binding international treaty to stop the harmful waste. Ocean plastic pollution is a persistent problem around the globe — animals may become entangled in larger pieces of plastic like fishing nets, or ingest microplastics that eventually enter the food chain to be consumed by humans. Research found that there are an estimated 170 trillion pieces of plastic, mainly microplastics, on the surface of the world's oceans today, much of it discarded since 2005. Researchers took plastic samples from over 11,000 stations around the world focusing on a 40-year period between 1979 and 2019. Fishing gear like nets and buoys often end up in the middle of the ocean, dumped or dropped by accident, while things like clothing, car tyres and single-use plastics often pollute nearer to the coast. On current trends, plastic use will nearly double from 2019 across G20 countries by 2050, reaching 451 million tonnes each year. Recycling, even in countries with advanced waste management systems, has done little to help the pollution problem since just a small percentage of plastics are properly recycled and much often ending up in landfills instead. If landfills

are not properly managed, plastic waste can leech into the environment, eventually making its way to oceans. (*Business Recorder, March 29th, 2023, Page 23*)

Cancer-causing compounds found in everyday food: study

Cancer-causing chemical compounds called nitrosamines have been detected in a range of everyday foods and could pose a health risk to consumers, the European Food Safety Agency warned. The 10 nitrosamines — which are not intentionally added to food but which can form during its preparation and processing — are carcinogenic and also genotoxic, which means they may damage DNA. “Our assessment concludes that for all age groups across the EU population, the level of exposure to nitrosamines in food raises a health concern,” said Dieter Schrenk, chair of the EFSA’s panel on contaminants in the food chain. Nitrosamines have been detected in foods including cured meat, processed fish, cocoa, beer and other alcoholic drinks, the EFSA said. The “most important food group” contributing to nitrosamines exposure is meat. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2023, Page 11*)

11 # SOCIO-ECONOMICAL POLICY

UN chief slams rich countries’ treatment of poor states

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres slammed the world’s rich countries and energy giants for throttling poor nations with “predatory” interest rates and crippling fuel prices. Guterres told leaders of more than 40 of the most deprived states that wealthy nations should provide \$500 billion a year to help others “trapped in vicious cycles” that block efforts to boost economies and vital services. The summit of Least Developed Countries (LDC) is normally held every 10 years but has twice been delayed since 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Afghanistan and Myanmar, two of the poorest countries, are not present at the Doha meeting of 46 LDC states because their governments are not recognised by UN members. No leader from any of the world’s major economies attended.

“Fossil fuel giants are raking in huge profits, while millions in your countries cannot put food on the table.” Guterres said the poorest nations were being left behind in the “digital revolution” and the Ukraine war had fuelled their food and fuel prices. “Our global financial system was designed by wealthy countries, largely to their benefit,” “Deprived of liquidity, many of you are locked out of capital markets by predatory interest rates,” the UN leader said. A host of presidents and ministers hit out at financing conditions for LDCs, whose debt has more than quadrupled in a decade to an estimated \$50 billion in 2021. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2023, Page 1*)

The spectre of inequality

The World Inequality Report 2022 shows a very dark picture of inequality around the world. The report discusses four types of inequalities: income inequality, wealth inequality, gender inequality, and carbon inequality. The world wealth and income data show a very high level of inequality around the world, where the share of the bottom 50

per cent of the world population in total global wealth is just 2pc, while the share of the top 10pc is 76pc. The global income is also not evenly distributed, where the bottom 50pc of the poorest global population earn just 8.5pc of the total global income, whereas the richest top 10pc earn 52pc of the global income. This shows that global wealth appears to be more unequally distributed than global income.

The bottom half of the world's population is almost entirely deprived of the capital. The judicious distribution of fruits of development is not possible in this high level of inequality. Though we see the economic growth figures published by all the governments, how equally the growth is distributed matters the most. GDP (the proxy of economic growth) does not capture the variations in human well-being and ignores inequality. Gender inequality is also very high; women make up only 35pc of the global labour income, whereas men make up the remaining 65pc. Gender parity is also a major issue around the globe. The same is the case with the fourth type of inequality discussed in the report, carbon inequality, where the top 10pc contribute 48pc to carbon emissions (personal carbon footprint). The historical evidence shows that this extreme level of inequality is not only high but is also persistent.

The report analyses 200 years of data from 1820 to 2020 and concludes that global inequality increased from 1820 to 1920 due to colonialism. The colonial domination of the world played a central role during that period. The data from 1910 to 1980 show a reduction in inequality due to increased social spending and progressive taxation. This period is considered the golden period for the social welfare states.

This trend changed between 1980 to 2020, when the inequality level again started to increase due to the neo-liberal policies enforced by global financial institutions like International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Due to this, the level of inequality in 2020 is the same as in 1910 (at the peak of colonialism). This neo-colonialism is also behaving in the same manner as classic colonialism did. Deregulation, privatisation, liberalisation and lower progressive taxation contributed to this extreme inequality. This has increased the economic polarisation around the world because the rise of social spending and redistribution was relatively slow over the last four decades due to the flawed trickle-down economics mantra.

The argument of trickle-down economics, adopted in the late 70s and early 80s, has not worked and is not working at all because global tax revenues and global social expenditures have decreased since 1980. This has resulted in an extreme level of inequality within countries. Concerning wealth inequality, North America is the unequal region of the world, whereas Europe is the equal region.

The world economic system has become extremely hierarchical both between countries and within countries. This shows that economic growth is not distributed fairly and the social safety nets are not wide and deep enough. The trend indicates that the net private

wealth is much higher than the net public wealth, which means there are fewer resources/revenues available to the governments to go for social spending.

The data shows a decrease in the level of net public wealth around the world, where China has the most net-public wealth, which is around 30pc of the total wealth and most developed countries even have negative net public wealth, i.e. the USA, the UK, and Japan. This means that individuals and corporations have become richer, but governments have become poorer. Without major economic policy changes, the future is bright for the global elite due to the existing system, which is highly archaic and supports the status quo.

This high level of income and wealth inequality leads to extreme concentration of economic power in a tiny segment of society. The report argues that inequality within a society is fundamentally a result of political choices rather than an inevitable phenomenon. This depends on how society decides to organise its economy, which means the rights given to and constraints imposed on different stakeholders & economic actors. Only public deliberation and political institutions can address all these problems.

Several policy options are suggested in the report to reduce this high level of inequality: progressive wealth and income tax, adoption of inheritance tax, increase in corporate taxes, ending tax evasion by multinational corporations and wealthy individuals, increase in public spending in education, health, and ecological transition (redistribution and socialisation of income and wealth), fairer economic policies and fairer development pathways. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Business & Finance Page 2*)

11.1 # Food

World food prices fall for 11th month running in Feb: FAO

The United Nations food agency's world price index fell in February for an 11th consecutive month, and is now down 19% from a record high hit last March. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 129.8 points last month against 130.6 for January. It was the lowest reading since September 2021. The monthly update said the decline in the index reflected lower prices for vegetable oils and dairy products, which more than offset a steep rise in sugar prices. (*Business Recorder, March 4th, 2023, Page 1*)

11.2 # Food Scarcity

Bottled water masks world's failure to supply safe water to all, says UN

A new United Nations report reveals that bottled water masks the world's failure to supply safe water for all and can slow the sustainable development. The rapidly-growing bottled water industry can undermine progress towards a key sustainable development goal of safe water for all. Based on an analysis of literature and data from 109 countries, the UN report says that in just five decades bottled water has developed into "a major and essentially standalone economic sector", experiencing 73 per cent

growth from 2010 to 2020, and sales are expected to almost double by 2030, from \$270 billion to \$500 billion.

Released ahead of the World Water Day (March 22), the report by UN University's Canadian-based Institute for Water, Environment and Health concludes that the unrestricted expansion of the bottled water industry "is not aligned strategically with the goal of providing universal access to drinking water or at least slows global progress in this regard, distracting development efforts and redirecting attention to a less reliable and less affordable option for many, while remaining highly profitable for producers". The report says providing safe water to roughly 2bn people without it would require an annual investment of less than half the \$270bn now spent every year on bottled water. "This points to a global case of extreme social injustice, whereby billions of people worldwide do not have access to reliable water services while others enjoy water luxury."

In mid- and low-income countries, bottled water consumption is linked to poor tap water quality and often unreliable public water supply systems. Beverage corporations are adept at marketing bottled water as a safe alternative to tap water by drawing attention to isolated public water system failures, says UNU-INWEH researcher and lead author Zeineb Bouhlel, adding that "even if in certain countries piped water is or can be of good quality, restoring public trust in tap water is likely to require substantial marketing and advocacy efforts". (*Dawn, March 18th, 2023, Page 5*)

UN cuts ration for millions of Afghans as funds dry up

The UN World Food Programme has been forced to cut rations to four million Afghans this month, it said in a statement due to a funding shortfall in the midst of the country's severe humanitarian crisis, adding the UN food agency urgently needs \$93 million in funding to reach 13m people in Afghanistan in April. Since the Taliban took over in 2021, the already poor country has plunged deeper into an economic crisis and foreign governments cut development funding and enforced sanctions on the banking sector. The United Nations estimated that around 90pc of Afghans cannot afford enough food. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 12*)

UN chief calls for urgent action to combat drinking water shortage

The world community needs to take action now to fight the global shortage of drinking water, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres warned as the UN Water Conference drew to a close. Member states, non-governmental organizations and business representatives had agreed to various, non-binding measures to combat the worldwide shortage of drinking water at the meeting co-hosted by the Netherlands and Tajikistan. The UN Water Conference was the first large UN event focusing entirely on water policy since 1977. Ahead of the conference, the UN had sounded alarm bells, warning that the world is facing a "global water crisis" due to population growth, socio-economic development and changing consumption patterns. Globally, 2 billion people

do not have enough safe drinking water and 3.6 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation, according to a UNESCO report released ahead of the conference. (*Business Recorder, March 26th, 2023, Page 1*)

11.3 # Inflation

Consumer price inflation in Pakistan second highest in South Asia: WB

The consumer price inflation for food items in Pakistan was 45.1 per cent in February 2023 on a year-on-year basis – the highest in South Asia after Sri Lanka with 54.4 per cent, says the World Bank. The bank in its latest, “Food Security Update”, stated that across South Asia, domestic grain and wheat flour prices remain volatile in the beginning of 2023 and well above their year-earlier levels. In Pakistan, wheat flour prices in January 2023 reached record highs and were 20 to 140 percent higher year on year. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO) attributes the high prices to generally stagnant production since 2018, stock losses and disrupted trade flows due to the 2022 floods, high agricultural input and transportation costs, and high headline inflation. The report noted that in January 2023, year-on-year consumer price inflation for food prices was 6.2 per cent in India, 7.8 percent in Bangladesh, and 5.6 percent in Nepal. Report noted that rice production in 2022 increased thanks to increases in several countries, including India, despite reductions in Pakistan & Tanzania.

The US Department of Agriculture also predicts a 4.5 percent contraction in rice shipments because a decrease in exports from Pakistan, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam, should more than offset an increase from India. Domestic food price inflation remains high around the world. Information from the latest month between October 2022 and February 2023 for which food price inflation data are available shows high inflation in almost all low- and middle-income countries, with inflation levels above five percent in 94.1 percent of low-income countries, 86 percent of lower-middle-income countries, and 87 percent of upper-middle-income countries and many experiencing double-digit inflation. In addition, about 87.3 percent of high-income countries are experiencing high food price inflation. The countries affected most are in Africa, North America, Latin America, South Asia, Europe, and Central Asia, stated the report. (*Business Recorder, March 16th, 2023, Page 1*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

La Nina ending, but warming El Nino may strike soon, says UN

An exceptionally long La Nina weather phenomenon that intensified drought and flooding is finally ending, the United Nations said — but what comes next might bring its own problems. The outgoing La Nina phenomenon, a cooling of surface temperatures that can have a widespread impact on global weather conditions, started in September 2020. However, despite La Nina’s cooling effect, both 2021 and 2022 were warmer than any year prior to 2015. Now El Nino, its warming opposite in the cycle, El Nino, could be on the way this year, the UN’s World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

The WMO said there was a 90 per cent probability of neutral conditions during March to May, decreasing to 80pc in the April-June window and 60pc in May-July. The chances of El Nino developing are forecast as 15pc in April-June, 35pc in May-July and 55pc in June-August. However, forecasts produced at this time of year come with a higher degree of uncertainty. Tracking the oscillation between the two phases helps countries prepare for their potential impacts, such as floods, droughts or extreme heat, he told. While El Nino and La Nina are a natural phenomenon, they take place “against a background of human-induced climate change, which is increasing global temperatures, affecting seasonal rainfall patterns, and making our weather more extreme”. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 10*)

Governments vet crucial UN climate science report

Diplomats from nearly 200 nations and top climate scientists began a week-long huddle in Switzerland to distil nearly a decade of published science into a 20-odd-page warning about the existential danger of global warming and what to do about it. The United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s synthesis report — to be released on March 20 — will detail observed and projected changes in Earth’s climate system; past and future impacts such as devastating heatwaves, flooding and rising seas; and ways to halt the carbon pollution pushing Earth towards an unliveable state.

The report card is not good. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to grow, even as science has cautioned that deadly consequences are coming sooner and at lower levels of warming than previously thought. Since the late 19th century, Earth’s average surface temperature has risen more than 1.1 degrees Celsius, enough to amplify a crescendo of weather catastrophes on every continent.

Under the 2015 Paris treaty, nations promised to collectively cap the rise in the planet’s average temperature at “well below” 2C, and at 1.5C if possible. But an already narrow pathway has become a tightrope. Humanity’s “carbon budget” for staying under the 1.5C barrier is less than 300 billion tonnes of CO₂, barely seven times current yearly emissions, according to IPCC. Two other special reports — one on oceans and Earth’s frozen zones, the other on forests and land use — will also be covered in the summary for policymakers under review in Interlaken. (*Dawn, March 14th, 2023, Page 10*)

12.1 # Climate Crisis

Australia wildfires widened Antarctic ozone hole: study

Smoke from monster wildfires in Australia caused a chemical reaction that widened the ozone hole 10 per cent, raising fears that increasing forest fires could delay the recovery of Earth’s atmospheric protection against deadly UV radiation. Severe summer heat and drought helped drive the deadly “Black Summer” fires from late 2019 to early 2020, which destroyed vast swathes of eucalyptus forest and enveloped Sydney and other cities in smoke and ash for months. In a new study, published in the journal *Nature*, researchers in the United States and China identified a previously unknown chemical

reaction in the wildfire smoke that increased the depletion of ozone — the atmospheric gas that reduces the amount of ultraviolet radiation reaching the Earth’s surface. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 12*)

Plastic entering oceans could triple by 2040 if left unchecked: study

Plastics entering the world’s oceans have surged by an “unprecedented” amount since 2005 and could nearly triple by 2040 if no further action is taken. An estimated 171 trillion plastic particles were afloat in the oceans by 2019, according to peer-reviewed research led by the 5 Gyres Institute, a US organisation that campaigns to reduce plastic pollution. Marine plastic pollution could rise 2.6 fold by 2040 if legally binding global policies are not introduced, it predicted. The study looked at surface-level plastic pollution data from 11,777 ocean stations in six major marine regions covering the period from 1979 to 2019. Microplastics are particularly hazardous to the oceans, not only contaminating water but also damaging the internal organs of marine animals, which mistake plastic for food. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 12*)

Antarctic sea ice cover reaches record low

Sea ice in Antarctica shrank to the smallest area on record in February for the second year in a row, continuing a decade-long decline, the European Union’s climate monitoring service. On February 16, the ocean surface covered by ice around the frozen continent shrank to 2.09 million square kilometres (800,000 square miles), the lowest level since satellite records began, according to figures provided by the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S). “Antarctic sea ice reached its lowest extent in the 45-year satellite data record,” Deputy Director of C3S. US government scientists have also confirmed a new record last month but indicated an even lower figure of 1.79 million sq km, a difference Copernicus attributed to “different sea ice retrieval algorithms”.

Sea-ice concentrations during the southern hemisphere summer were well below average in all sectors of the Southern Ocean. Startlingly, the record lows this year and in 2022 are about 30 percent below the 1981-2010 average. “These low sea-ice conditions may have important implications for the stability of Antarctic ice shelves and ultimately for global sea level rise,” said Burgess. “Polar ice caps are a sensitive indicator of the climate crisis.” Melting sea ice has no discernible impact on sea levels because the ice is already in ocean water. But diminished ice cover is nonetheless a major concern because it helps accelerate global warming, including in Arctic region.

About 90 percent of the Sun’s energy that hits white sea ice is reflected back into space. But when sunlight hits dark, unfrozen ocean water, nearly the same amount of that energy is absorbed instead, contributing directly to a warming planet. Both the North and South pole regions have warmed by roughly three degrees Celsius compared to late 19th-century levels, three times the global average. But unlike sea ice in the Arctic, which has diminished by three percent a year since the late 1970s, sea ice in Antarctica has remained relatively constant over the same period, albeit with large annual

variations. Until recently — over the last eight years — minimum sea ice extent in the Southern Ocean has consistently been below the average for the 1991-2020 period. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 14*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTER

Natural disasters caused 30,000 deaths, \$220bn losses in 2022

An estimated 387 natural hazards and disasters resulted in the death of 30,704 people and caused economic losses of around \$223.8 billion all over the world in 2022. The disasters, recorded by the Emergency Event Database (EM-DAT), affected 185m individuals. The EM-DAT has been maintained by the Brussels-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters since 1988. According to the database, heat waves caused over 16,000 deaths in Europe, while droughts affected 88.9m people in Africa. Hurricane Ian single-handedly caused damage of around \$100bn in the Americas. The human and economic impact of disasters was relatively higher in Africa, with 16.4 per cent of the total deaths taking place in the continent compared to 3.8pc in the previous two decades. In Nigeria, floods caused 603 deaths and resulted in an economic cost of \$4.2 bn, while there were 544 flood-related lives lost in South Africa.

The toll was relatively lower in Asia despite experiencing some of the most destructive disasters in 2022. The floods in Pakistan from June-September 2022 affected 33m people, causing 1,739 deaths and an economic damage of \$15bn. Monsoon floods also struck India (2,035 deaths, \$4.2bn losses), Bangladesh (7.2m people affected), and China (\$5bn in economic losses). The February flood in Brazil killed 272 people & floods in Eastern Australia in February & March resulted in an economic cost of \$6.6bn.

The number of catastrophic events in 2022 was slightly higher than average from 2002 to 2021 — 370. The death toll of 30,704 was three times higher than in 2021 but below the 2002-2021 average of 60,955 deaths, the latter being influenced by a few mega-disasters, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake (222,570 deaths). For a more useful comparison, the 2022 toll is almost twice the 2002-2021 median of 16,011 deaths. The heat wave-related excess mortality in Europe was estimated to be 16,305 deaths, accounting for over half of the total death toll in 2022. There were at least five record-breaking heat waves in Europe in 2022, with summer temperatures reaching 47C.

The drought-induced famine in Uganda caused 2,465 deaths, making it the second deadliest disaster event in 2022 after the European heat waves. In addition, droughts impacted 88.9m people in six African countries — Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Niger and Burkina Faso. Notable drought events also occurred in China where 6.1m people were affected, costing damage of around \$7.6b. The droughts in the US and Brazil had an economic cost of \$22bn and \$4bn, respectively.

The year 2022 was also marked by three major storm events, including two in the Philippines: Tropical Storm Megi in April (346 deaths) and Tropical Storm Nalgae in

October (3.3m people affected). Hurricane was the costliest disaster event with economic losses of \$100bn. As for earthquakes, three events stood out in 2022, with two of these ranking among the top ten deadliest disaster events: the southeastern Afghanistan earthquake in June (1,036 fatalities) and the November earthquake in Indonesia (334 fatalities). (*Dawn, March 20th, 2023, Page 5*)

13.1 # Wildfire

Early wildfire in Spain rages out of control

Some 700 firefighters were battling Spain's first major forest fire of the year, which was raging out of control 48 hours after it began, forcing 1,500 people to flee. 700 people have been mobilised for the operation (to fight the fire). It has affected 3,900 hectares and has a 35-kilometre perimeter, indicating the number of people forced out of their homes on Friday, some 1,500, had not changed. In 2022, which was a particularly bad year for wildfires in Europe, Spain was the worst-hit country with nearly 500 blazes that destroyed more than 300,000 hectares, according to figures from the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS). (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 11*)

13.2 # Rainfall

Lack of rainfall set to hit crop outputs in India, Pakistan

The drought-hit regions of northern and central India, all the way up to Pakistan, are staring at lower food output and high prices as the region is set to receive lower than normal rainfall due to the El Nino weather pattern in the second half of the year. The trend is likely to affect cereal and oilseed crops across Asia with the forecast of hot, dry weather. Chris Hyde, a meteorologist at US-based Maxar, said the central and northern parts of India are facing drought, so even slightly below-normal precipitation is likely to pose risk to crops. High temperatures are likely to impact vast swathes of farmland in Australia, Southeast Asia and India, while some growing regions in North and South America are likely to see more crop-friendly weather as there is more than a 50 per cent chance of the El Nino phenomenon occurring.

A dry winter in central and western parts of Australia could stress the wheat crop in the world's second-largest exporter of grain. The country produced record wheat crops for the last three years, thanks to higher-than-normal rainfall brought by the La Nina weather. In Southeast Asia, crucial for palm oil and rice exports, forecasters are expecting slightly below normal precipitation in June-August, although the region has ample soil moisture after heavy rains in recent months. Typically, China sees dryness in its corn growing northern region and more precipitation in the soybean producing northeast during El Nino. For the United States, the weather is expected to be favourable for the wheat crop. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2023, Page 3*)

Heavy rain triggers flood in Australia

Emergency services in Australia's Queensland state evacuated residents, as record-breaking floods sparked by heavy rain lashed the region's northwest. Fifty three residents of the isolated Gulf Country town of Burketown, about 2,115 km northwest of state capital Brisbane, had been evacuated since heavy rain triggered floods earlier this week. The flood topped the March 2011 record of 6.87 metres after up to 293 mm of rain fell. (*Dawn, March 12th, 2023, Page 11*)

13.3 # Flood

14 killed in Somalia flash floods

At least 14 people have been killed in southern Somalia after torrential rains triggered flash floods that have caused havoc in several towns and villages. Bridges, roads and houses have been damaged or destroyed and many people have been forced to flee their homes in search of safer ground. 14 people were killed including three members of the same family. It was very difficult to rescue these people because of the time the incident happened and the lack of resources in the town. The rains signal the early start of the April-June rainy season, and have brought some relief to areas of the country suffering from the worst drought in four decades. But the UN's humanitarian response agency OCHA warned in a statement of the risk of an increase in diseases such as cholera as living conditions likely deteriorate.

The Horn of Africa is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, and extreme weather events are occurring with increased frequency and intensity. Earlier this month, the WHO warned that nearly 100,000 people in Somalia were facing catastrophic levels of hunger due to the worst drought to hit the region in four decades. Five straight failed rainy seasons across swathes of Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia have killed millions of livestock, destroyed crops, and forced more than one million people from their homes in search of food and water. (*The News, March 26th, 2023, Page 10*)

13.4 # Storm

California storm leaves two dead, breaks levee

Another powerful storm pummelled California, forcing thousands to evacuate and resulting in at least two deaths, while causing a levee to give way in coastal Monterey County. Residents said they were alerted by local fire officials in the middle of the night that they needed to evacuate. Residents in several towns, mostly in the north, have been ordered to evacuate. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2023, Page 11*)

California storm leaves five dead from fallen trees in Bay area

The latest bout of harsh, wintry weather to lash California drifted into neighbouring states of the Desert Southwest as authorities reported at least five storm-related deaths in and around San Francisco, all from fallen trees. As California's onslaught of rain, wind and mountain snow subsided, downed power lines while lingering floods kept

14,000 people under evacuation orders. Five people were killed by trees toppled by high winds across California's Bay area. More than 20 other storm-related fatalities have been tallied across California from previous episodes of violent weather this winter. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 11*)

23 killed as tornado, storms rip through Mississippi

At least 23 people were killed and dozens injured after a tornado and strong thunderstorms ripped across Mississippi, leaving hundreds without shelter. Four people were missing following the twister, which left a trail of damage for more than 100 miles (161 km). The tornado struck Silver City, a town of 200 people in western Mississippi, as well as Rolling Fork, with a population of 1,700, which was hardest hit. Parts of the state remain under tornado warning. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2023, Page 10*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTER

Quake killed more than 50,000 in Turkey, Syria: revised toll

A devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria killed more than 50,000 people, in a toll revised by *AFP* that includes figures from both government and rebel-controlled parts of war-torn Syria. A total of 5,951 people were killed across Syria, while Turkey recorded 44,374 deaths after the February 6 earthquake. The new tally brings to 50,325 the total number of deaths caused by the disaster across both countries. The Syrian government said 1,414 people had been killed in areas under its control, while Turkish-backed officials in Syria have put the death toll at 4,537 throughout rebel-held areas of the country. The toll in areas outside government control includes deaths in territory held by rival rebel groups. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2023, Page 11*)

Indonesia's Merapi volcano erupts, again

Indonesia's Mount Merapi, one of the world's most active volcanoes, erupted and continued to spew hot ash and other volcanic material. Merapi also erupted last week, sending volcanic material 9,600 feet (3,000 metres) above the summit. Volcanic ash rain blanketed at least eight villages near the volcano after last week's eruption. Volcanologists said last week the volcano is experiencing its most active phase since 2021. The volcano's last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of some 280,000 residents. It was Merapi's most powerful eruption since 1930 when about 1,300 people were killed. An eruption in 1994 left about 60 people dead. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 10*)

Ecuador landslide death toll rises to 12

The death toll from a landslide in southern Ecuador has risen to 12, authorities announced, with dozens of people still missing. Torrential rain triggered the mudslide that buried dozens of homes and injured more than 30 people in the village of Alausi some 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of the capital Quito. There were 67 people still missing, adding that 163 homes have been affected. The same region was hit by an earthquake just over a week earlier in which 15 people were killed. After months of

heavy rains, the government last week declared a two-month state of emergency in 13 of the country's 24 provinces, allowing economic resources to be redistributed to affected areas. (*Business Recorder, March 31st, 2023, Page 77*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Police break up Norway wind farm protest by Thunberg

Activist Greta Thunberg and indigenous Sami activists were forcibly removed by police as they blocked access to Norwegian ministries in protest over wind turbines on reindeer herding land. Police started to break up the demonstrations by physically carrying away members of the group, who were protesting against the use of wind turbines on reindeer herding land in the Fosen region of western Norway. An indigenous minority of around 100,000 people spread over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, the Sami have traditionally lived off reindeer herding and fishing. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2023, Page 10*)

Students hold sit-ins over Greek train tragedy

Thousands of Greek students staged sit-ins and demonstrated in Athens and other cities to demand justice for the victims of the country's worst train tragedy. In the capital, over 5,000 people gathered outside the headquarters of operators Hellenic Train — which took over network operations in 2017 — to protest at decades of failure to improve rail network safety, despite close calls in past years. Many protesters carried black flags.

Many unaccounted for At least 57 people died when a passenger train collided with a freight train just before midnight, after running on the same track for several kilometres. There were over 350 people on board the passenger train and many are still unaccounted for. Most of the victims were students in their 20s returning from a long weekend. Students and pupils were staging sit-ins in over two dozen university faculties and schools around the country. Black sheets were draped at the entrances of several universities. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2023, Page 11*)

Protesters rally after clashes in Georgia

Thousands of people staged a second straight day of protests in the Georgian capital Tbilisi, rallying against a “foreign agents” law which critics say signals an authoritarian shift and harms Georgia's chances of closer ties with Europe. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 12*)

Greek PM under pressure as tens of thousands protest train tragedy

Greek police fired tear gas at firebomb-throwing protesters outside parliament as tens of thousands demonstrated over the country's worst rail tragedy and called on the prime minister to quit. Fifty-seven people were killed, and 14 others remain in hospital after a freight train crashed head-on with a passenger train, carrying mostly students, on Feb 28. The biggest protests were in Athens, where over 40,000 people flooded the streets,

waving banners that read “it’s not an accident, it’s a crime” and “it could have been any of us on that train”. Outside parliament, dozens of masked, black-clad youths hurled Molotov cocktails and stones at riot police, who responded by firing volleys of tear gas, Demonstrators also torched a van a few blocks away. In Greece’s second city of Thessaloniki, riot police fired tear gas at stone-throwing protesters outside the local railway station. More than 65,000 demonstrators took to the streets nationwide, according to police. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 12*)

Women march as rights under threat across the globe

Rallies marking International Women’s Day took place around the world after a year in which girls in Afghanistan were banned from education, mass women’s rights protests erupted in Iran and a landmark US abortion ruling was overturned. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2023, Page 12*)

Garbage piles up in Paris as Macron vows to push through pension reform

Garbage piled up in Paris streets and fuel deliveries were blocked from refineries as workers continued rolling strikes against pension reform, but President Emmanuel Macron refused to meet unions and said the reform must go ahead. As debate about the reform continued in the Senate, workers blocked fuel deliveries from leaving Total Energies and Esso refineries on Friday, while power supply was disrupted and maintenance at some nuclear reactors was delayed. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2023, Page 10*)

French protesters back on streets against pension plan

Demonstrators in France took to the streets for a seventh day of protest against President Emmanuel Macron’s pension reform plans, with police expecting up to a million people at rallies nationwide. Unions hope they can still force Macron to back down as parliament debates the draft law, with the National Assembly and the Senate moving towards a final vote as early as this month. Police said they expect between 800,000 and one million people at 230 planned demonstrations across France, of which up to 100,000 were likely to march in Paris. It was the second protest day called on a weekend, with unions hoping demonstrators would show up in greater numbers if they did not have to take a day off work. But counts around midday suggested the turnout could fall short of the 963,000 that protested.

Several sectors in the French economy have been targeted by union calls for indefinite strikes, including in rail and air transport, power stations, natural gas terminals and rubbish collection. In Paris, urban transit was little affected by stoppages, except for some suburban train lines. But uncollected rubbish has begun to accumulate in some of the capital’s neighbourhoods, and airlines cancelled around 20 percent of their flights scheduled at French airports. The French Senate, meanwhile, resumed debate of the reform whose headline measure is a hike in the minimum retirement age to 64 from 62. (*Dawn, March 12, 2023 Page 10*)

Thousands of hospital doctors walk out in latest UK strike

UK hospital doctors began a three-day strike over pay at the start of a week that will also see teachers, train staff and civil servants walk out, in the latest wave of industrial action. The doctors say years of below-inflation pay increases mean they have effectively had a 26 percent pay cut since 2008. (*Dawn, March 14th, 2023, Page 10*)

Cost-of-living crisis bites rich and poor nations alike

Thousands of demonstrators around the world took to the streets to demand better living conditions at a time inflation is making it even tougher for people to make two ends meet. The UK's capital crippled when teachers, London Underground train drivers and civil servants joined striking doctors in a mass stoppage as Britain's finance minister unveiled his tax and spending plans. With hundreds of thousands walking out, it was expected to be the biggest single day of industrial action since a wave of unrest began last year. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2023, Page 11*)

Indonesian farmers fight for their land in nickel mining boom

Three women with machetes stood guard at their farm hilltop on Indonesia's Wawonii Island, directing their blades towards the nickel miners working in the forest clearing below. "I pointed the machete at their faces. I told them: 'If you scratch this land, heads will fly, we will defend this land to the death,'" said 42-year-old villager Royani, recounting a recent encounter with some of the miners. The dig site is part of a huge rush to Indonesia, the world's largest nickel producer, by domestic and foreign enterprises to mine the critical component used in electric vehicle batteries.

Residents and rights groups told AFP the boom threatens farmers' land rights and harms the environment in areas like Wawonii in the resource-rich Sulawesi region, which is home to black macaques, maleo birds and tarsier primates. Facing the prospect of losing their land and livelihood, around a dozen Wawonii villagers take turns keeping watch from a hut surrounded by clove trees, waiting for trespassers as machinery roars below. Royani, who goes by one name, joined the effort to safeguard the land after an Indonesian firm cleared hundreds of her family's tropical spice trees in January. (*Business Recorder, March 16th, 2023, Page 6*)

50,000 teachers go on strike in New Zealand over cost of living

New Zealand teachers and early childhood educators gather outside Wellington's Parliament House as part of a nationwide strike for better pay and conditions, in Wellington, New Zealand, March 16, 2023. Around 50,000 teachers in New Zealand went on strike, after union talks with the Ministry of Education aimed at improving salaries and conditions stalled. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2023, Page 10*)

Resist Racism March

Protesters hold up placards as they take part in the Resist Racism March and Rally ahead of United Nations anti-racism day on March 21. Resist Racism marches will be held in London, Glasgow and Cardiff supported by the TUC. These events bring together

thousands of anti-racists, trade unionists, students and campaigners to support refugees and call for an end to racial discrimination. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2023, Page 10*)

Protests, strikes, fuel shortages as pensions fury rages in France

French citizens protested and downed tools again, with transport and refineries grinding to a halt as anger over a deeply unpopular pensions reform showed no sign of abating. As thousands took to the streets in protest, planes landing at Paris airports faced potential fuel shortages, rubbish kept piling up, and questions hung over a looming state visit by King Charles III. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2023, Page 10*)

Construction of water reservoirs sparks violent protests in France

French police again clashed with protesters as campaigners sought to stop the construction of reservoirs in the southwest, the latest in a series of violent standoffs as social tensions erupt nationwide. The protest movement against the pension reform have turned into the biggest domestic crisis of Macron's second mandate, with daily clashes in the streets of Paris and other cities between police and protesters. (*The News, March 26th, 2023, Page 10*)

Protester fighting for life after France clashes

A protester with trauma to the head was fighting for his life following clashes with police during a demonstration over water storage facilities in France, a prosecutor said. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2023, Page 11*)

'Mega-strike' disrupts travel in Germany

A major strike brought much of Germany's air traffic, rail service and commuter lines to a halt as workers demand wage hikes in the face of brisk inflation. Workers at airports, ports, railways, buses and metro lines throughout much of Europe's top economy heeded a call by the Verdi and EVG unions for the 24-hour walkout. (*Business Recorder, March 28th, 2023, Page 3*)

About Us

Roots for Equity was formed in 1997 and formally registered in 2000. The organization works with the most vulnerable, marginalized communities that include small and landless farmers, women and religious minorities in the rural and urban sector. The inequities in society are a result of the oppression and exploitative forces of feudalism, imperialist corporate hegemony often termed as globalization, and patriarchy.

We believe that a democratic base is essential for the social and economic development of the country. This is not possible without mobilization of communities themselves; no doubt only socially conscious and politically active communities can demand and achieve social justice. Roots remains committed to being an active part of communities' struggle to achieve political, social, environmental and economic justice.

Our Mission

Our mission is to strengthen communities and movements for attaining political, economic, social and environmental justice.

Our Vision

Our vision is a genuinely democratic society with its people free from inequities, marginalization and exploitation.

Our Objectives

- (i) Organizing and mobilizing grass root communities and movements for attaining basic rights;
- (ii) Action research in collaboration with impacted vulnerable communities on issues and impacts of globalization, patriarchy, and feudalism;
- (iii) Capacity building of grass root leaders and creating a grass roots knowledge base for attaining social justice;
- (iv) Engaging with people's organizations and movements to amplify the voices of the most marginalized sectors of our society, locally, nationally and internationally.

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