

HAAL AHWAL

Monthly News Reviews on Food and Agriculture

April, 2024

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
AFCs	Assistant food controllers
BOP	Bank of Punjab
CACs	Central Asian countries
CPPA	Central Power Purchasing Agency
CEMB	Centre of Excellence in Marine Biology
CPP	Communist Party of Pakistan
CCP	Competition Commission of Pakistan
CRSs	Crop Reporting Services
DFA	Digital Financing for Agriculture
DFC	District Food Controller
ECC	Economic Coordination Committee
ETPB	Evacuee Trust Property Board
FFCL	Fatima Fertiliser Company Ltd
FFC	Fauji Fertiliser Company
FCA	Federal Committee on Agriculture
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
FSVPS	Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance
FMPAC	Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council
FRC	Fertiliser Review Committee
FY	Fiscal Year
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEA	Foreign Economic Assistance
FCA	Fuel Cost Adjustment

GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HEC	Higher Education Commission
HSD	High-Speed Diesel
Hesco	Hyderabad Electric Supply Company's
IFEM	In-Country Freight Equalisation margins
IARI	Indian Agricultural Research Institute
IRSA	Indus River System Authority
AIIB	Infrastructure Investment Bank
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
TIFA	Investment Framework Agreement
KGTML	Karachi Gateway Terminal Multipurpose Limited
KPT	Karachi Port Trust
KWGA	Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association
LSM	Large-Scale Manufacturing
MAF	Million Acre-Feet
MEA	Ministry of Economic Affairs
NFL	National Foods Limited
NPLs	Non-Performing Loans
Ogra	Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority
OMCs	Oil Marketing Companies
OICCI	Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
PBC	Pakistan Business Council
PBF	Pakistan Business Forum

PDU	Pakistan Development Update
PFMA	Pakistan Flour Mills Association
PHDEC	Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company
Pide	Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
PKI	Pakistan Kissan Ittehad
PMD	Pakistan Meteorological Department
PSMA	Pakistan Sugar Mills Association
PLF	Palestine Foundation Pakistan
PIK	Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research
PITB's	Punjab Information Technology Board
RBL	Results-Based Loan
ROE	Return on Equity
SAI	Sindh Abadgar Ittehad
SWF	Sovereign Wealth Fund
SIFC	Special Investment Facilitation Council
SBA	Stand-By Arrangement
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
TDS	Total Dissolved Solids
TIM	Turkish Exporters Assembly
Wapda	Water and Power Development Authority
WB	World Bank
WEO	World Economic Outlook
WHO	World Health Organisation

Points to Ponder

Wheat as Food or Wheat as Lucre?

The country is going through a period of dismal debt and economic crisis that is further worsened by the climate crisis. Government policies do not necessarily help in alleviating the dire situation. While the government had been expecting a bumper wheat crop, and directives were given for ‘good price’ for the farmers, and ensure availability of the staple crop in the market, the final result can be considered anything but successful. While the crop itself was damaged due to heavy rains in parts of Pakistan, there were bureaucratic delays in setting procurement centers in various points in Sindh, resulting in farmers selling their produce at PKR 3,500/40kg, which was much less than the government procurement price of PKR 4,000/40kg. According to another report, the procurement price set by Sindh government was at PKR 4,600/40kg.

In Punjab, farmers also voiced their dissatisfaction with the support price set by the Punjab government at PKR 3,900/40kg, which was the same as last year. According to news reports, millers and stock buyers were offering PKR 2,800/40kg as compared to the official support price of PKR 3,900/40kg.

Rich farmers’ representatives like the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), have rejected the price set by the Sindh government. The economic and debt crisis has led to huge price increase for agriculture inputs including chemical fertilizers, petrol and diesel, and even though with a good bumper crop, farmers suffered losses due to traders’ monopoly. Farmers in Punjab, as well as the Pakistan Business Forum also critiqued the high input prices, while also pointing out the possibility of wheat smuggling by hoarders and smugglers. Sindh Abadgar Itehad (SAI) has also accused the agriculture extension department of corruption having ‘stomached’ PKR 4 billion that had been earmarked for flood impacted farmers in 2022, and has demanded a ‘high-profile inquiry’ for misuse of public funds. Allegations against corporations have been levied for charging over-market prices for fertilizer. These allegations do have credence as an inquiry by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has revealed that the fertilizer sector secured a whopping subsidy on gas to the tune of Rs152 billion but never passed the benefits on to the consumers.

In addition, the supply of *bardana* has been curtailed and hence farmers were unable to sell wheat at government set support price. What is to come in future is clear from Balochistan government’s announcement that starting from next year, it will not provide *bardana* to the farmers but support them to buy the bags from the market. Such measures leaves farmers wide open to market shocks, a market that is monopolized by the rich and the powerful.

Before wheat harvest had started, government had allowed the private sector to import about 3.2 million tons of wheat. Unlike the farmers, millers were happy with the

government's policy allowing wheat import by the private sector, as according to them, it has given them freedom from 'Sindh government's blackmailing practices.' Whether, these allegations are true or not, there is no disputing the fact that the bulk of small farmers have suffered hugely through increased agriculture input prices as well as lack of government support in selling their harvest, and falling wheat grain prices in the market; all of these factors have combined in pushing them further into debt and increased hunger, especially landless farmers and the urban poor.

Apart from the wheat fiasco, there is general crisis in the agriculture sector. The agriculture growth target of 3.5 percent set for 2023-24, is in doldrums due to ongoing rains impacting major crops including wheat. Other Rabi crops such as mustard and canola, and gram have also suffered, though sugarcane is expected to benefit. On one hand, there is high input cost, while on the other hand, the commodity prices for major crops such as wheat, cotton and maize have dropped by 25%. The protests by the farming community seem to have been heard, but really to no avail. The final conclusion by political big wigs was that the caretaker government was at fault, as it had allowed for the import of wheat in the first place.

One can point out the fact that it is the elected government that has increased gas prices causing an increase of urea price by around PKR 1,000/bag. This step is going to impact cotton yield, as farmers will not be in a position to cultivate the cotton crop to the capacity required. It is being reported that the outlook for the upcoming cotton crop is not very promising due to difficult weather conditions, irrigation water scarcity, and the sky rocketing prices for agricultural inputs. Cotton contributes more than 60 percent to the total national exports, and ultimately this further hike in production cost will result in lower cotton yields impacting industrial production.

An interesting editorial in DAWN points out the fallacy of allowing support provided to farmers on wheat production, as it diverts farmers attention from value added crops to wheat; instead of providing support to farmers on wheat production, there should be complete deregulation of the wheat economy and linking it to the global grain market.

Such policy emphasis of course comes from those who support monopoly capital, and are heedless to escalating food prices which leaves millions suffering from hunger and grinding poverty. Actors pursuing neoliberalism and free market ideology are also not bothered about the millions of small and landless farmers who have played a pivotal role in wheat production, but are unable to buy the grain for their households. It should be noted that raw food exports that continued to expand in March, with a 16.35 percent increase to \$685.03 million, up from \$588.76m in the same month last year, has led to high food prices for local population.

Might is Right!

For many decades now, there has been unabating pressure from international financial institutions to adopt neoliberal policies for economic growth, including in the agriculture sector. From digital agricultural loans to farmers through organizations like Karandaaz (a non-profit receiving funds from Melinda & Bill Gates, that promotes digitalization of financial services including digitalization of the tax system), to modern agriculture warehousing through Electronic Warehousing Receipt (EWR) financing, all measures that allows agricultural commodities to be traded nationally and internationally. Digital marketing is in essence for the richest segment of farmers in the agriculture economy, and marginalizes the small and landless farmers.

In the same vein, there is continued push for enabling environment for private sector investment in aquaculture value chains for national and international markets. VC Dr. Dr. Iqar Ahmad, Vice Chair Faisalabad Agriculture University has also urged the private sector to invest in high-efficiency irrigation.

Trade liberalization in agricultural production continues, allowing corporate farming and joint ventures with other countries. According to Saudi Arabia, Saudi agriculture corporations are interested in joint ventures for improving value chains in the agriculture sector, with a lofty vision of Pakistan becoming a ‘bread basket for the kingdom’ as well as for the entire region.

Pakistan and Iran are also bolstering their trade relationship, with annual trade volume to be increased to \$10 billion. The relationship has been stagnating under the impact of geopolitics directed by trade sanctions by the US on Iran. While, Pakistan is on a path to increasing trade with Iran, US and Pakistan have renewed a key framework to promote bilateral trade, the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA).

It is indeed interesting that though free market economy seems to be the bible for international trade forcefully thrust by US and other G7 economies, but when it comes to trading with Iran, a different beat is heard. Pakistan and Iran’s bilateral trade plans, especially in context to “setting up of joint border markets, economic free zones, and new border openings”, is raising hackles in certain quarters, The US Department of State has been warning Pakistan about trade with Iran, to the extent of sanctions that are designed for putting an end to political and economic relations with Iran. Hence a ‘free market economy’ is not really a free market economy, but hinged on dictates of those in power. No doubt, the idiom ‘*might is right,*’ is based on such show of political and military strength, often used by imperialist forces.

It is noteworthy that Pakistan’s merchandise exports to United States has come down by 10.14 percent to \$3.63 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year from \$4.04 billion over the corresponding period last year. At the same time, Pakistan’s

exports to China increased by 42 percent; it has increased to \$1.895 billion in July-February FY24 from \$1.334 billion over the corresponding period last year.

According to Punjab Livestock Secretary, Masaud Anwar, Pakistan has come to terms with China for exporting dairy products to China through a state-of-the-art farm developed in Sheikhpura.

In short, there is a continued shift in Pakistan's trade pattern, where it is now trading more and more within the region; whether this trend will continue in the long term is yet to be determined.

At the same time, the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in attracting investors to Pakistan remains central. Investors from UAE, Saudi Arabia continue to be in dialogue with Ministry for Finance and Revenue. At the same time, there is also invitation to Australia and France for investing in the country.

Climate Imperialism?

There is no doubt that Pakistan is facing diabolical damages based on climate change. Though the government bureaucracy is accepting the fact, and at least making speeches for addressing the issue, the context of putting the blame for this havoc on western industrialized nations carbon emissions seems to be lacking. According to the Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, climate change impact was emerging in shape of water scarcity and could be addressed through introducing new cropping patterns that includes low delta crops aimed at reducing water consumption and increasing efficiency in agriculture. Mitigations could also be carried out by introducing agricultural water conservation practices that could also include drip irrigation, sprinkle system, dry farming, conservation tillage and other methods.

Given the extreme dearth of water resources in the country, it is worth pointing out that Coca-Cola, a corporation that faces not only boycott but is also responsible for using up extensive water reserves has invested \$22 million in the beverage sector, specifically in technology upgrade, capacity enhancement of its export potential, and employment for over half a million local professionals along its chain.

In the end, the focus is on imported technology, and promotion of the same model of industrial development which is responsible for the catastrophic climate crisis. Our policy makers are blind to the rich source of local and indigenous knowledge embedded in our communities; the fact that the immense wealth generated by the agriculture sector is hinged on the immensely powerful productive force of small and landless farmers is totally ignored.

At the same time, the failure of government bureaucracy is abysmal. For instance, the Sindh Chief Secretary has acknowledged before the Sindh High Court that the timelines for implementation of Supreme Court-appointed water commission could not be met.

There were still 769 points from where different departments had been releasing waste into freshwater bodies. Such negligence in context to water sources is criminal lack of accountability seems to be the order of the day.

After decades of pursuing a free-market economy the economic strength of the country, and social condition of the Pakistani population, especially rural communities, the low-income urban masses continues to deteriorate. There is no doubt that the austere economic policies dictated by the international financial organizations are for the benefit of corporations and investors, not for the people. What is the way out is a question which need to be asked and answers sought.

NEWS EXCEPTS

NATIONAL NEWS

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS RESOURCES

- The Bank of Punjab and Karandaaz Pakistan join forces in a strategic alliance aimed at revolutionizing Pakistan's Agriculture Sector under Karandaaz's inaugural Digital Financing for Agriculture (DFA) Challenge 2023.
- HWA president that one of the major reason for debt bondage was that peasants, including women, did not know how much loan they had taken from contractors, landlords or brick kiln owners whereas lenders continued to inflate the actual loan amount paid to them.
- Sindh government has not yet withdrawn its appeal filed in Supreme Court against Sindh High Court's landmark pro-peasant judgement passed in 2019.
- Hari Welfare Association's president said Sindh Tenancy Act, 1950, was not implemented for around 74 years and in 2013 and onward the PPP government even changed certain provisions in Act to favour landlords.
- The peasants never benefited from subsidies the government provided during floods and in the event of rise in inflation and equally suffered losses in production whereas only landlords were paid compensation.
- Scores of peasants were forcibly evicted by landlords.
- Despite wheat harvesting season nearing its end in south Punjab, millions of farmers in the region are in a predicament as the government has not yet started procurement despite fixing the support price at Rs3,900 per maund.
- The procurement target to two million metric tonnes set by the Punjab Food Department for the year 2024-25 is already less than half of previous year as the government currently has a carryover wheat stock of 20m metric tonnes.
- The government imported 3.2 million tonnes of Ukrainian wheat at the cost of Rs3,100 per maund and subsequently sold in market for Rs4,500.
- The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) advisory committee has projected 30 percent water shortage for early Kharif 2024 and 7th% in late Kharif 2024 as a total of 59.94 MAF water will be available during Kharif season.
- PMD highlighted that during winter snowfall in the catchments of Indus and Jhelum recorded at 34.8 inches against the normal of 50.5 inches, ie, 31% less.
- Sindh Chief Minister expressing concern over the impact of climate change on water scarcity said that this could be addressed by introducing a new cropping pattern that includes low delta crops aimed at reducing water consumption and increasing efficiency in agriculture.
- It said that Pakistan is among the most water-stressed countries in the world, with rapidly declining per capita water availability.

- 769 points from where different departments had been releasing waste into freshwater bodies.
- India has the right to River Ravi water under Indus Waters Treaty and Pakistan is legally bound not to move International Court of Justice (ICJ) against neighbouring country's "water aggression".

AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

- Pakistan's rice scientists have rejected an Indian claim that 'two high-yielding basmati varieties being sown in the country are stolen from India'.
- OICCI recommended exploring the imposition of taxation on agricultural income despite this being a provincial subject.
- Riyadh told Islamabad that Saudi agriculture companies were looking at Pakistan with great interest and expressed the hope that both countries would benefit from joint ventures for improving value chain of agriculture economy.
- PM Shehbaz said his government would promote agriculture through modern technology and by providing best seeds and fertilisers to farmers.

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

- KP CM has ordered necessary steps for cultivation of saffron in suitable lands in upcoming season.
- The country may face significant challenges in meeting the agriculture growth target of 3.5 percent set for 2023-24, as ongoing rains have negatively impacted on major crops including wheat.
- The wheat production target of 32.2 million tons set for the current season is at high risk, owing to ongoing rainfall, which has delayed the harvest as well as damaged standing crops.
- The agriculture is again facing hard times as farming community is experiencing a double jeopardy; on one hand, cost of production has doubled since 2023 and, on other, commodity prices of major crops (wheat, cotton and maize) have slid by 25% on an average basis.
- During 2023 farmers paid a huge amount of Rs300 billion (over and above to the MRPs, prescribed by the fertiliser industry) to the market exploiters on account of black marketing of urea.
- FCA decided to set production targets for cotton at 10.8 million bales, 8.7m tonnes for rice, 9.3m tonnes for maize, and 76.7m tonnes for sugarcane.
- Wheat production is estimated at 29.69m tonnes from an area of 9.6m hectares, a 5.4pc increase over the last year.
- Country is likely to miss agriculture growth target of 3.5 percent set for 2023-24, as ongoing rains will negatively impact Kharif crops owing to delayed sowing of some of major Kharif crops and a decline in fruit production.

- Pakistan produced 29.69 million tons of wheat against the set target of 32.2 million almost eight percent reduction for the Rabi Season 2023-2024.
- Sindh Abadgar Ittehad accused deputy commissioners concerned of all areas, where cultivation of paddy was banned under the law, of allowing rice cultivation on a massive scale.
- Sindh Abadgar Ittehad demanded audit in agricultural engineering department for corruption and political intervention and rejected corporate farming.
- Sindh Abadgar Ittehad condemned Sindh government's decision to purchase wheat from traders instead of farmers and said there was no transparency in ongoing distribution of gunny bags.
- Department had stomached in 2022 Rs4bn out of which Rs5,000 per acre subsidy was to be provided to flood-hit farmers for wheat cultivation as well as subsidy for agricultural machinery, which too had fallen prey to corruption.
- Sindh government demanded of federal government to increase support price for cotton up to Rs 11,000 per maund to incentivize farmers to cultivate more cotton.
- Current target for cotton cultivation in Sindh, stands at 640,000 hectares. Sowing of cotton in Sindh has declined by 20%.
- The outlook for the upcoming cotton crop season appears bleak due to unfavourable weather conditions, insufficient irrigation water, and the government's tepid response to resolve the growers' issues.
- Observing over 100% higher production in Sindh due to early sowing last year, Punjab agriculture authorities decided to adopt a similar strategy this season.
- Over one million acres had been brought under early cotton cultivation.
- The Punjab government has set cotton production target this season at 6.5 million bales besides fixing the sowing the crop over 04 million acres of land.
- Heavy rain accompanied by strong winds damaged standing wheat crop across Swabi, causing a considerable financial loss to farmers.
- An inordinate delay in setting up wheat procurement centres at many places in Sindh has caused huge losses to growers.
- Growers were compelled to sell away their crop at a rate of around 3,500 a maund, far less than the official price of Rs4,000 a maund, to middlemen and hoarders.
- The Punjab cabinet has fixed wheat support price at Rs3,900 per 40kg.
- Huge wheat imports by private sector have continued to bring down the prices of various flour varieties, but many retailers are not passing on the relief to consumers.
- PFMA, Sindh Zone, Chairman Aamir Abdullah said that allowing the private sector to import wheat last year was the best decision of the federal government and shielded the millers from the Sindh government's blackmailing practices, which have been in vogue for the last three years

- SindhAbdgar Board has rejected wheat support price declared by provincial government and demanded it revise price to between Rs4,500 and Rs5,000 per 40 kilogram otherwise growers will be compelled to launch province-wide protest after Eid.
- Instead of transferring benefits to growers the government had imported 3.2 million tonnes of poor quality wheat at the rate of Rs7,000 per 40 kg.
- Farmers across Punjab have voiced their disappointment following CM's decision to retain previous year's wheat support price and threatened legal action and protests if the government failed to address the issue.
- Pakistan likely to produce 29m tons of wheat this season against a target of 32m tons due to high input costs wheat; however, the wheat consumption is 33m tones excluding requirement to feed Afghanistan.
- Farmers criticized (Punjab) provincial government decision of maintaining the wheat support price at previous year of Rs 3900 per maund and asked for an upward revision and fix it at Rs 5000 per maund.
- Policies of the present government would only benefit a few while economy of farmers would eclipse.
- Biofortified, zinc-enriched wheat approximately 42% of Pakistan's wheat cropping area was dedicated to "Akbar 2019" during 2023-24 season, covering about 3.78 million hectares and expecting a yield of nearly 15m metric tons.
- Punjab agriculture department claims, recent rains have insignificantly affected wheat crop. Rain spells have slightly delayed grain harvesting process.
- Divisions like Multan and Bahawalpur have produced 7 million tons of wheat, but due to market manipulation, the grain is being purchased at merely Rs 2200-2800 per maund, inflicting severe financial distress on farmers.
- The Balochistan cabinet has decided to fix the wheat support price equal to that in Sindh to curb smuggling, also approved the procurement of 500,000 tonnes of wheat this year.
- Punjab government had announced that farmers could apply for empty bags (bardana) through their android cell phones using the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB's) 'Bardana App'.
- Agriculture minister Ashiq Kirmani held the caretaker government responsible for the situation, claiming the caretakers had imported wheat unnecessarily when the province had enough grain in its stock.
- KP cabinet, 600,000 metric tons of wheat will be procured at rate of Rs3,900 for 40kg.
- The country has missed the wheat production target as the estimated production of the commodity is 29.69 million tons against the set target of 32.2 million for the Rabi Season 2023-2024 from an area of 9.6m hectares of land.
- Country missed the fixed wheat production target, but the production of wheat showed an increase of 5.4 per cent over the last year.

- Prime Minister has ordered an increase in the wheat procurement target from 1.4 million tonnes to 1.8 million tonnes after protests by farmers over delays in the grain’s buying process.
- Sindh and Balochistan governments have set the support price at Rs4,000 per 40kg, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab governments Rs3,900 per 40kg.

SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

- Wholesale poultry traders in the metropolis are selling chicken to retailers at exorbitant price while circulating fake official rate list.

TRADE

- Export reached \$2.55b in March, up 7.99pc from \$2.36bn over corresponding month of last year.
- The trade deficit widened year-on-year by 56.30pc to \$2.17bn in March.
- Imports rose by 25.86pc to \$4.73bn from \$3.75bn in March 2023.
- Pakistan’s trade deficit with the Middle East narrowed 22.62 per cent to \$8.525 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year from \$11.017bn in the corresponding period of last year.
- Pakistan and Iran committed to increasing their annual trade volume to \$10 billion over the next five years.
- Pakistan and Iran are aiming to achieve this ambitious target through “setting up of joint border markets, economic free zones, and new border openings”, finalisation of Free Trade Agreement, and operationalising barter trade, electricity trade, installation of power transmission lines and implementation of Iran-Pakistan pipeline project.
- US Department of State had issued a warning to Pakistani government about entering into business deals with Iran. US threats of sanctions are strategically designed to deter Pakistan from enhancing its economic ties with Iran.
- US and Pakistan renewed a key framework to promote bilateral trade.
- US State Department spokesperson, Vedant Patel, said: “We advise anyone considering business deals with Iran to be aware of potential risk of sanctions.”
- Pakistan Business Council (PBC) has proposed a five-year exports charter and import substitution plan to Commerce Ministry. The plan includes moratorium on signing of new trade agreements.
- The country’s merchandise trade deficit with the nine regional countries widened by 17.92% to \$6.193 billion in the first nine months of the current fiscal year compared to \$5.252bn in the same period last year.
- With sugar prices already up 42% over last year, the influential sugar industry has started lobbying for major exports – at least one million tonnes – to “ensure payments to farmers”.

- PSMA also asked Commerce Minister to start approval process for exporting at least one million tonnes in two equal instalments as crop (sugar) output was almost 1.5 million tonnes higher than the domestic needs.
- Pakistan’s merchandise exports to US fell 10.14% to \$3.63 billion in first eight months of the current fiscal year from \$4.04bn over corresponding period last year.
- Pakistan’s exports to five Central Asian Countries (CACs) witnessed a growth of 21.17% during the first eight months of the current fiscal year.
- Pakistan will soon start exporting dairy products to China through a state-of-the-art farm developed in Sheikhpura.
- Agriculture Secretary Iftikhar Sahoo said incumbent government would invest Rs100 billion in the agriculture sector in two years.
- Pakistan spent some one billion dollars on the import of wheat during this fiscal year (FY24) to meet domestic demand and avoid shortage of the commodity in the domestic market.
- The Economic Coordination Committee of cabinet allowed the private sector to import wheat from the international market without involving any subsidy.
- As per government estimates after calculating the carry-forward stocks of 2022, there was a wheat shortage of about 2.5 million metric tons, while the country was facing a shortage of about 3 million metric tons of wheat during the last year.
- Amid continuously rising domestic prices, the government decided to import at least 200,000 tonnes of urea to meet ongoing kharif requirements.

CORPORATE SECTOR

- The revolutionary “Seed To Table” project, launched by National Foods Limited, has saved some \$2 million providing import substitute of the imported agricultural products.
- CCP has issued show-cause notices to the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council and six leading fertililiser companies for allegedly fixing urea prices.
- An inquiry conducted by Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) revealed that the fertiliser sector secured a whopping subsidy on gas to the tune of Rs152 billion but never passed the benefits on to the consumers.

INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) jumped by 51.7 per cent to \$258 million in March compared to \$170m in the same month last year.

- Pakistan received only about \$9.8bn in foreign loans and grants in the first nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year, far behind the annual target of \$17.4bn, amid major slippages in raising international financial support.
- The country borrowed \$6.899 billion from multiple financing sources during the first nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year 2023-24 compared to \$7.764 billion borrowed during the same period of 2022-23.
- Saudi Arabia has committed to fast-tracking the initial tranche of \$5 billion investment in Pakistan.
- Last year Saudi Arabia had promised to invest \$25bn within next five years under SIFC.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

- Executive Board of IMF approved immediate disbursement of approximately \$1.1 billion to Pakistan.
- Projecting Pakistan's economy growing by 1.8pc in the ongoing fiscal year, the World Bank warned that the nascent recovery was neither sustainable nor sufficient to address growing poverty (currently at 40pc) unless bold, steadfast and broad-based reforms were implemented on an urgent and sustainable basis.

POLICY

- Pide has asked the government to shift gear from bureaucratic permissions to rule-based market liberalisation,
- The health ministry has started working on outsourcing diagnostic services at Pims, rural health centres and basic health units.
- The government has expedited the process of deregulating petroleum product prices to shift the brunt of public criticism to oil marketing companies (OMCs).
- The major oil sector stakeholders — the regulator and the industry — have proposed gradual deregulation of petroleum prices over a period of two years to avoid the political pressure associated with pricing.

SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

- The government's borrowing from banks reached Rs4.7 trillion, with an addition of Rs700 billion within last two months.
- Projecting stagnant tax-to-GDP ratios over the next five years, IMF estimated Pakistan's fiscal deficit, gap between total resources and expenditures, for current FY at 7.4% of GDP, almost 1pc higher than 6.5pc target set by the federal government.
- Within a week, the government borrowed over Rs650 billion from banks to meet its rising expenditure, reflecting the consequence of high inflation.

- The non-performing loans (NPLs) of the banking sector increased by 7.6%, or Rs70 billion, during 2023.
- Inflation decelerated for third month in a row to 20.7% year-on-year in March.
- Consumers will pay Rs4.92 per unit extra next month for electricity consumed in February.
- IMF maintained Pakistan’s economic growth prospects for current FY at 2%, which it had revised downward in January from its previous estimate of 2.5pc.
- Raw food exports continued to expand in March, with a 16.35 per cent increase to \$685.03 million, up from \$588.76m in the same month last year, forcing local consumers to pay higher prices across the country.
- Domestic sugar prices have risen by Rs10 to Rs150-150 per kg in different parts of the country amid reports that the government is under pressure from millers to allow the export of one million to 1.5m tonnes of the commodity
- Despite 79% of power generation coming from cheaper local fuels, the government has sought clearance from Nepra to extract about Rs23 billion additional in fuel cost adjustment (FCA) from consumers for electricity consumed in March.

ENVIRONMENT

- An alarming report from World Health Organisation (WHO) indicates that Pakistan had the highest number of viral hepatitis C infections in the world, around 8.8 million, and accounts for 44 per cent of all new hepatitis C infections attributed to unsafe medical injections.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Climate change caused by CO2 emissions already in atmosphere will shrink global GDP in 2050 by about \$38 trillion, or almost a fifth, no matter how aggressively humanity cuts carbon pollution.
- Economic fallout from climate change, could increase tens of trillions of dollars per year by 2100 if the planet were to warm significantly beyond two degrees Celsius above mid-19th century levels.
- “Countries least responsible for climate change are predicted to suffer income loss that is 60 percent greater than the higher-income countries and 40 percent greater than higher-emission countries,”
- Unavoidable damage would slash global economy’s GDP by 17% in 2050, compared to a scenario with no additional climate impacts after 2020.

CLIMATE DISASTERS

- ADB has warned that climate change is expected to increase the frequency and magnitude of floods and other extreme weather events in the future, and the

government of Pakistan needs to be prepared in advance to mitigate the damage.

- The report noted that Pakistan is ranked among the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change, especially to extreme weather events and natural hazards—the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 ranked Pakistan as the world’s 8th most vulnerable country.
- The PDNA report estimates the overall economic losses from the 2022 floods at \$14.9 billion.
- The report notes that the floods damaged 1.8 million hectares (ha) of cropland, which resulted in a loss of \$3.7 billion.
- As many as 63 people were killed while 78 were injured in rain related incidents in KP,
- Heavy rains, thunderstorms, and hailstones continued to lash various districts of Balochistan, including its capital pushing death toll to 22.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

TRADE

- The US trade deficit expanded in February by more than analysts expected trade gap grew to \$68.9 billion, up \$1.3 billion from a month earlier.
- Turkiye will restrict exports of a wide range of products to Israel, including steel and jet fuel, until a ceasefire is declared in Gaza.
- Ankara’s first significant measure against Israel after six months of aggression.
- Chinese exports plunged more than expected last month as the world’s second-largest economy struggles to sustain its post-pandemic recovery. Shipments sank 7.5% on-year, while imports shrank 1.9pc.

INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

- US House of Representatives with broad bipartisan support passed a \$95bn legislative package providing security assistance to Ukraine, Israel & Taiwan.
- Some hardline Republicans have voiced strong opposition to further Ukraine aid, with some arguing the US can ill afford it given its rising \$34 trillion national debt.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

- The World Bank’s forecasts call for a decline of 3pc in global commodity prices in 2024 and 4pc in 2025.
- The ongoing tensions in Middle East threaten to halt — or even reverse — some of the recent progress made in tackling global inflation.

SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

- In a world where millions go hungry every day, the staggering amount of food wasted by households and businesses worldwide not only perpetuates the brutal cycle of hunger but also represents glaring inefficiencies in global food systems, which are largely unsustainable and inequitable.
- An astonishing one billion meals were discarded every day in 2022, which in monetary terms amounts to an enormous 1 trillion dollars' worth of food. At a time when around 783 million people are going hungry worldwide.
- All of this combined has resulted in a situation where food waste generates eight to 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. To put this into perspective, if it were a country, food wastage would rank third after China and the US as a leading carbon emitter.
- World food prices rebounded in March from a three-year low, boosted by increases in vegetable oils, meat and dairy products.

ENVIRONMENT

- They didn't exist a century ago but today PFAS "forever chemicals" contaminate the environment from groundwater to Antarctic snow to turtle eggs, and concern over their possible toxicity is growing.
- A 2022 study in Australia established the transmission of PFAS from female turtles to their unborn offspring, while other research found traces in polar bear livers and birds, seals and other animals.
- Studies have since shown that exposure to some PFAS, there are at least 4,000 chemical compounds in the family, may be linked to serious health effects in humans and animals.
- During the last week of negotiations in Canada's capital, Ottawa, more than 60 countries demanded the treaty include production caps.
- More than 3,500 people die from hepatitis viruses every day and the global toll is rising.
- New data from 187 countries showed that the number of deaths from viral hepatitis rose to 1.3 million in 2022 from 1.1 million in 2019. The report said that there are 3,500 deaths per day worldwide from hepatitis infections

CLIMATE CHANGE

- A large majority of workers worldwide are facing a cocktail of health hazards linked to climate change, the United Nations said, warning that existing regulations offered inadequate protection.
- "Workers are among those most exposed to climate change hazards yet frequently have no choice but to continue working, even if conditions are dangerous,"

- It pointed out that in 2020 — the last year for which statistics are available — 2.4 billion workers, or more than 70 per cent of the global workforce, were estimated to be exposed to excessive heat at some point.
- Nearly 23 million occupational injuries attributed to excessive heat are reported each year, costing, on estimate, nearly 19,000 lives annually.
- ILO said 1.6 billion workers worldwide were estimated to be exposed to UV radiation each year, with more than 18,960 work-related deaths annually from non-melanoma skin cancer.
- More than 870 million agricultural workers are meanwhile likely to be exposed to pesticides, with more than 300,000 deaths attributed to pesticide poisoning each year.
- In 2022, more than 70 percent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries.

CLIMATE DISASTERS

- Global temperatures hit record highs last year, the impact of heatwaves in Asia was becoming more severe, with melting glaciers threatening the region's future water security.
- Asia was warming faster than the global average, with temperatures last year nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average.
- Last year, 79 disasters associated with water-related weather hazards were reported in Asia. Of those, more than 80 per cent were floods and storms, with more than 2,000 deaths and nine million people directly affected.
- Massive heatwaves across East Asia and the Pacific could place millions of children at risk.
- Global monitors have warned that 2024 is shaping up to be the hottest year on record, marked by climate extremes and rising greenhouse gas emissions.

NATIONAL NEWS

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS RESOURCES

Karandaaz Pakistan and BOP join forces to digitize agri lending

1.1 # Farmers / Peasants

‘Govt not interested in welfare of women peasants’ [1]

Sindh gov’t’s actions more favourable to landlords, say Hari unions [1]

Wheat farmers in south Punjab caught between rock and a hard place [1]

1.2 # Land

ETPB reclaims over 6,000 acres from encroachers [2]

1.3 # Water

Rehabilitation of Tunnel 5 gates of Tarbela Dam, WB asks Wapda to seek Rs80bn allocation in budget [2]

IRSA panel projects acute water shortage [2]

Sindh starts getting more water than its share [3]

CM for adoption of ‘new cropping pattern’ to offset water shortage effects [3]

Quality of Indus water improves [3]

Water crisis [3]

Jhuddo town faces acute shortage of water [4]

Govt depts disposing of waste into fresh water at 769 points, CS tells SHC [4]

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India has exclusive rights to the water of Ravi: govt [5]

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Rice scientists reject Indian claim of ‘seed technology piracy’ [5]

‘Modern warehousing can transform agriculture’ [5]

OICCI calls for imposing tax on agri income [6]

Saudi Arabia eyes cooperation in agriculture sector [6]

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Hard times for farmers after drop in rates of 3 crops [7]

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3.5pc agri growth target may be missed [8]

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Cotton crop outlook bleak for Punjab [9]

Punjab govt sets cotton production target of 6.5m bales [9]

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Cabinet approves Rs3,900 per 40kg wheat support price [10]

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Growers want Sindh govt to increase wheat support price [10]

Farmers threaten protests over wheat price stagnation [11]

High input costs adversely affecting agri output: PBF [11]

Wheat: farmers demand Rs5000/maund support price [11]

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Rain slightly delays wheat harvest with no impact on yield [11]

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Govt plans urea imports to ensure price stability [21]

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'Coordinated price fixation': CCP issues show-cause notices to urea producers [23]

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Govt borrows record Rs5.5tr from banks [30]

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Pakistan to grow at 2pc, face 25pc inflation: IMF [32]

Rising food exports fuel inflation [32]

Sugar prices surge amid reports of export ‘permission’ [32]

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Pakistan tops world in hep C infections [33]

Five children of Tando Allahyar village die of measles [33]

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12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

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Lightning, rains kill 24 in Punjab, Balochistan, KP [35]

Roads in Chitral washed away due to heavy rains [36]

Six killed in rain-related accidents as thunder claps frighten Karachiites [36]

Thundershowers, rain hit many Sindh districts [36]

Rain-related incidents in KP: Four killed, seven injured; 15 houses damaged: PDMA [36]

Urban flooding emergency declared in Balochistan [36]

15 killed in Chaman, AJK as rain continues to wreak havoc [36]

63 killed, 78 injured in rain-related incidents in KP: PDMA [36]

Death toll reaches 22 in Balochistan amid heavy rain [36]

Rain, hailstorm damage wheat crops [37]

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Anti-Israel protesters storm food outlet in Sukkur [40]

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Scores held for protesting govt's `unfair` wheat policy [44]

Medical students protest `rigid discipline` after fellow's death [44]

Protest against police [44]

Protest held against dacoity at hospital [44]

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS RESOURCES

Karandaaz Pakistan and BOP join forces to digitize agri lending

The Bank of Punjab (BOP) and Karandaaz Pakistan join forces in a strategic alliance aimed at revolutionizing Pakistan's Agriculture Sector under Karandaaz's inaugural Digital Financing for Agriculture (DFA) Challenge 2023. The landmark agreement signals the commencement of pioneering initiative geared towards enhancing digital agriculture loans and fostering financial inclusion nationwide. Zafar Masud, President & CEO of The Bank of Punjab, opined that collaboration aims to overcome farmers' financial hurdles. It not only aims to improve productivity but also addresses the challenge of loan securitization by offering collateral-free financing. By easing out the loan process and leveraging innovative solutions, such as real-time loan disbursement based on predictive AI assessments, the initiative is poised to empower farming community across the country, foster resilience and bring prosperity to the marginalized agriculturists. (*Business Recorder, April 2nd, 2024, Page 7*)

1.1 # Farmers / Peasants

'Govt not interested in welfare of women peasants'

Speakers at a seminar lamented that government is not interested in welfare of women peasants, hence there is no mechanism in farm sector to ensure Rs 32,000 minimum wage. HWA president Akram Khaskheli said that a significant number of rural women faced challenges in understanding medicines' expiry dates, lacked literacy skills to read and write, struggled to lodge complaints through online platforms and faced difficulties in reading signboards among other limitations. He said that one of the major reason for debt bondage was that peasants, including women, did not know how much loan they had taken from contractors, landlords or brick kiln owners whereas lenders continued to inflate the actual loan amount paid to them. (*Dawn, April 5th, 2024, Page 15*)

Sindh gov't actions more favourable to landlords, say Hari unions

Representatives of peasants and workers trade unions regret that Sindh government has not yet withdrawn its appeal filed in Supreme Court against Sindh High Court's landmark pro-peasant judgement passed in 2019. Hari Welfare Association's president Akram Ali Khaskheli said that PPP government appeared adamant to go against the pro-peasant rights judgement and lamented that it was despite the fact the party's voter base comprised peasants and rural workers who were not ill-treated in agriculture sector. He said that Sindh Tenancy Act, 1950, was not implemented for around 74 years and in 2013 and onward the PPP government even changed certain provisions in Act to favour landlords. He said that the Act governed relationship between landlords and tenants, including sharecroppers in rural areas of Sindh. However, practically, only landlords governed this relationship and enjoyed all rights under the law while peasants remained

poor and marginalised. The peasants never benefited from subsidies the government provided during floods and in the event of rise in inflation and equally suffered losses in production whereas only landlords were paid compensation. The gathering was told that the appeal was filed in January 2020 and then agriculture minister Ismail Rahu had confirmed government would not pursue appeal against the judgement in the apex court. But Sindh government continued to fight the case till April 2023. The HWA received a copy of government's plea which revealed the government had no concerns for the rights of peasants and rural workers and it was rather pursuing anti-peasant rights policies that aided repressive feudal system and structure. Sujag Women Hari Trade Union's president Habib Khatoon said that lack of enforcement of law deprived peasants and rural workers of protection and welfare, exacerbating difficulties in accessing land and getting fair treatment in their relationship with landowners. She shared some cases about landlords' ill-treatment of peasants her organisation had gathered in September 2023. She said that a landlord in Mirpurkhas attempted rape of a peasant girl and in Larkana a landlord allegedly murdered peasants. She said that a landlord dispossessed peasants in Mithi in August and police lodged fake case against peasants in Dadu and later occupied their lands at the behest of an influential landlord. In Benazirabad, a landlord was allegedly involved in attempted rape of a peasant girl. A landlord had allegedly killed a peasant in November in Mirpurkhas, a peasant's sons were abducted over repayment of debt in Badin district and a landlord had allegedly kidnapped three daughters and their mother in Naushahro Feroze. Scores of peasants were forcibly evicted by landlords in other districts. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

Wheat farmers in south Punjab caught between rock and a hard place

Despite wheat harvesting season nearing its end in south Punjab, millions of farmers in the region are in a predicament as the government has not yet started procurement despite fixing the support price at Rs3,900 per maund while the local market was offering even a lesser price for their produce. In such a situation, the farmers are stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea. The procurement target to two million metric tonnes set by the Punjab Food Department for the year 2024-25 is already less than half of the previous year as the government currently has a carryover wheat stock of 20 million metric tonnes. The government imported 3.2 million tonnes of Ukrainian wheat at the cost of Rs3,100 per maund and subsequently sold in market for Rs4,500. Meanwhile, the government has stockpiled four million tonnes of local wheat in its warehouses, exacerbating the crisis for local farmers. The imported wheat has been sold in the market while local wheat is being neglected. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 2*)

1.2 # Land

ETPB reclaims over 6,000 acres from encroachers

The ETPB, with the help of the Federal Investigation Agency, has retrieved over 6,096 acres of land worth Rs38.96 billion from encroachers and land grabbers in the nine months of the current fiscal year, starting from July. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 4*)

1.3 # Water

Rehabilitation of Tunnel 5 gates of Tarbela Dam, WB asks Wapda to seek Rs80bn allocation in budget

World Bank has asked Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) to approach ministries of Water Resources and Finance for allocation of Rs80 billion in the budget for the rehabilitation of Tunnel 5 gates of Tarbela Dam as it may incur huge penalties if payments to the contractors are delayed. (*Business Recorder, April 2nd, 2024, Page 12*)

IRSA panel projects acute water shortage

The IRSA advisory committee has projected 30 percent water shortage for early Kharif 2024 and seven percent in late Kharif 2024 as a total of 59.94 MAF water will be available during Kharif season. Pakistan Meteorological Department highlighted that during winter snowfall in catchments of Indus & Jhelum recorded at 34.8 inches against normal of 50.5 inches, ie, 31% less. (*Business Recorder, April 3rd, 2024, Page 12*)

Sindh starts getting more water than its share

Irsa accepted Sindh's request for release of water to province over and above its share from April 6. Irsa's decision is outcome of its Sindh member recent move to take up the issue of increasing values of TDS (total dissolved solids) in Indus water at Kotri Barrage. (*Dawn, April, 5th, 2024, Page 15*)

CM for adoption of 'new cropping pattern' to offset water shortage effects

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah expressing concern over the impact of climate change on water scarcity said that this could be addressed by introducing a new cropping pattern that includes low delta crops aimed at reducing water consumption and increasing efficiency in agriculture. He said that climate change impact was emerging in shape of water scarcity. He added that there were various methods for agricultural water conservation, including drip irrigation, sprinkle system, dry farming, conservation tillage and various others. "We have to study which method suits of weather, which method would be successful in which area, and how and when to start," all needed an appropriate study and research. (*Business Recorder, April 17th, 2024, Page 2*)

Quality of Indus water improves

The TDS (total dissolved solids) values of Indus water have started dropping following release of freshwater into river a few days back. This indicates desired improvement in quality of water meant for human consumption. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 15*)

Water crisis

Pakistan is starting its new summer cropping — kharif — season with a whopping 30pc water shortage caused by lower-than-normal snowfall last winter. However, water regulator Irsa is hopeful that the monsoon rains will plug the shortage in the latter part of the kharif season. This pattern is not unfamiliar to most of us as it repeats itself every year without exception. It is also worrisome for smallholder farmers living at the tail-

end of the canals. The water scarcity is predicted to worsen going forward, owing mainly to climate change unleashed by rapid global warming, which has already altered weather patterns significantly, as well as social and economic factors. Pakistan has been facing a severe water crisis that is putting millions of lives at risk. A UN report Global Water Security Assessment last year had placed Pakistan in the critically water-insecure category, indicating that country is facing a water emergency that requires immediate attention. It said that Pakistan is among the most water-stressed countries in the world, with rapidly declining per capita water availability, owing to an unbridled population and environmental factors. As the factors responsible for the shortage of water and its inefficient use are likely to get worse in the coming years, unless immediate action is initiated to ward off the apocalypse, poverty and food insecurity are forecast to surge.

Many insist that the country can, indeed, avoid this disaster and overcome increasing water insecurity through the efficient management of its water resources, and by improving its inadequate infrastructure. For example, the early adoption of modern environment-friendly irrigation technologies could save much of this resource from being wasted in agricultural fields, which consume nearly 97pc of freshwater, because of inefficient flood irrigation. Likewise, investments in infrastructure could minimise the massive loss of water — estimated to be around 40pc — available in the system to evaporation and pilferage. This requires the formulation of a long-term holistic water management policy in line with our national economic growth and development priorities. Unfortunately, political instability, economic uncertainty, and interprovincial discord on water apportionment continue to impede water sector reforms and perpetuate water insecurity for millions of people. (*Dawn, Editorial, April 8th, 2024, Page 6*)

Jhuddo town faces acute shortage of water

About 300,000 population in Jhuddo town had been grappling with acute shortage of water for past few weeks and attributed problem to unabated theft of water being committed by big landlords in connivance with corrupt irrigation officials, who were supplying already scarce commodity to farmlands. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 15*)

Govt depts disposing of waste into fresh water at 769 points, CS tells SHC

Sindh Chief Secretary Syed Asif Hyder Shah has conceded before the Sindh High Court that the timelines for implementation of Supreme Court-appointed water commission could not be met. He also conceded that were still 769 points from where different departments had been releasing waste into freshwater bodies. The one-man commission headed by retired Justice Amir Hani Muslim had inspected most freshwater bodies and sewerage installations in Sindh in 2018 before recommending a series of measures to ensure provision of clean drinking water to citizens and improving sanitation across the province. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 15*)

IRSA decides to distribute additional water

IRSA has decided to distribute nearly 250,000 cusecs of additional flows amongst provinces, coming from catchments areas due to recent rains. Storage has increased from 0.8MAF because of rainfall. (*Business Recorder, April 24th, 2024, Page 12*)

India has exclusive rights to the water of Ravi: govt

Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar said that India has the right to River Ravi water under Indus Waters Treaty and Pakistan is legally bound not to move International Court of Justice (ICJ) against neighbouring country's "water aggression". "There is a water treaty between Pakistan and India and it is an international obligation. The right to water on the River Ravi belongs to India, and we cannot interfere with it. Pakistan has right on the water of the rivers Chanab, Jhelum, and Indus". Under 1960 Indus Waters Treaty signed, India claims waters of Rivers Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas. India wants exit from 1960 Indus Waters Treaty but it could not do it due to disagreement from Pakistan's side. (*Business Recorder, April 24th, 2024, Page 12*)

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Rice scientists reject Indian claim of 'seed technology piracy'

Pakistan's rice scientists have rejected an Indian claim that 'two high-yielding basmati varieties being sown in the country are stolen from India', with the industry urging the government to initiate concrete action to foil fresh Indian propaganda to undermine the nation's rice exports. India's agricultural scientists have recently accused the Pakistani rice growers and exporters of 'seed technology piracy', claiming that Pakistan has "renamed basmati rice varieties developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, PUSA 2011 and 1509. IARI director was alleging that "Pakistani rice export companies are selling them in the international market" as Kainat 2011 and Kissan Basmati. He also went on to initiate a legal action against Pakistani seed firms involved in piracy in order to protect the interests of Indian rice farmers and exporters. DNA of two Pakistani varieties was entirely different from Indian seeds. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 2*)

'Modern warehousing can transform agriculture'

Finance Minister has said that Pakistan's current economic outlook can help private and financial sectors transform agri in country. "We want to facilitate farm machinery service providers, & we need a major scale-up of modern agri warehousing under EWRs financing that allows agri commodities to be traded nationally and internationally". Associate Professor at LUMS, country's overly regulated seed system is unsuitable for agriculture's growth. "Cumbersome procedures have made our seed system depend on government, making Pakistan stay in lowest ranks in this domain according to WB." GM Agri-Business, Fatima Group, said that an additional \$18bn can be generated by enhancing wheat yields per acre by freeing up 5m acres of cotton land. Pakistan could earn \$1.6bn by planting canola/raja on 5m acres saved from wheat area, as Pakistan imports 4m tonnes of edible oil worth \$4bn annually. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 9*)

OICCI calls for imposing tax on agri income

The Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) has urged the government to focus on broadening the tax base, which the authorities have been unable to expand due to lack of firm commitment, capacity and resource allocation constraints. The chamber also recommended exploring the imposition of taxation on agricultural income despite this being a provincial subject, collecting advance tax on vehicle transfers, and promoting digital payments while discouraging cash transactions by demonetising the Rs5,000 note. (*Dawn, April 28th, 2024, Page 11*)

Saudi Arabia eyes cooperation in agriculture sector

Riyadh told Islamabad that Saudi agriculture companies were looking at Pakistan with great interest and expressed the hope that both countries would benefit from joint ventures for improving the value chain of agriculture economy. During his meeting with the ministers of economy and agriculture, the PM highlighted the potential of Pakistani agriculture sector and underscored that Pakistan could become a bread basket for the kingdom and could play a critical role in ensuring food security not only for the two countries but for the entire region. The Saudi minister for agriculture briefed the premier on fruitful discussions that he and his delegation held in Islamabad on April 15-16. The kingdom valued Pakistan's strategic & competitive advantages in field of agriculture and considers Pakistani agricultural sector as a significant area of cooperation. PM said his government would promote agriculture through modern technology and by providing best seeds and fertilisers to farmers. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 1*)

3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

Natural, administrative constraints mar kharif outlook

With an anticipated higher-than-normal temperature and an almost 31% lower-than-usual snow bank, major crops in kharif (April-October) face a challenging outlook. In addition, the unusual operational constraint at both major water reservoirs — Tarbela and Mangla dams — and administrative weaknesses at the irrigation network are presenting a daunting task for water regulations. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 9*)

CM orders cultivation of saffron in suitable areas

KP CM Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has ordered necessary steps for cultivation of saffron in suitable lands in upcoming season. He ordered the officials concerned to collect data of agricultural lands across the province, adding saffron crops being grown in neighboring countries should also be evaluated in order to have better production. CM said that drip irrigation system could also be introduced in merged districts, agricultural activities should be carried out keeping in view specific climatic conditions and other related aspects of different regions of the province. (*Dawn, April 8th, 2024, Page 9*)

Harvest worries hit farmer as rains loom

Farmers in Lalamusa are both excited and worried as they prepare to harvest their crops during the Baisakhi festival. There's a happy celebration but also concern about the

crops as reaping season is set to start. With Baisakhi, farmers have prepared for the culmination of their labour for harvesting the wheat crop. The harvest season officially begins today, with fields full of golden wheat ready to be cut, but there's a nervous feeling mixed in with the excitement. Cloudy skies coupled with forecasts of imminent rainfall are a cause of concern for the farming community. Fearing the wrath of nature, farmers dread the prospect of their labor being washed away. The situation is further compounded by the economic chaos being faced by the farmers. For many, agriculture is not just a vocation but a lifeline, providing sustenance for their families and livelihoods for the future. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 9*)

Major crops at risk: Significant challenges may hit agri growth target

The country may face significant challenges in meeting the agriculture growth target of 3.5% set for 2023-24, as ongoing rains have negatively impacted on major crops including wheat. The wheat production target of 32.2m tons set for the current season is at high risk, owing to ongoing rainfall, which has delayed the harvest as well as damaged standing crops. Official said that rains would also negatively impact other Rabi crops including oil seeds like mustard & canola as well as gram already negatively affected by prolonged dry spells in the country. However, wet spell will help increase the production of sugarcane crop. (*Business Recorder, April 16th, 2024, Page 16*)

Hard times for farmers after drop in rates of 3 crops

The agriculture is again facing hard times as farming community is experiencing a double jeopardy; on one hand, cost of production has doubled since 2023 and, on other, commodity prices of major crops (wheat, cotton and maize) have slid by 25% on an average basis. Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, president of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI), said, issuing SOS (save our souls) calls for the sector. Cumulatively, both these factors have rendered farming business totally unviable. During 2023 farmers paid a huge amount of Rs300 billion (over and above to the MRPs, prescribed by the fertiliser industry) to the market exploiters on account of black marketing of urea. Despite continuous hue and cry by the farmers, the government failed to implement its writ and ensure availability of urea on prescribed rates.

Keeping in view all these 'adversaries', farmers were expecting relief from the government through an increase in support price of wheat – minimum of Rs4,000 per 40kg. However, instead of addressing the farmers' agony, the government took a surprising step of importing huge quantities of wheat just ahead of the harvest, which caused a crash in wheat price in market from Rs3,900 to Rs3,000 per 40kg. Secondly, the government delivered another unprecedented blow to the farmers by increasing gas prices, causing an increase of urea price by around Rs1,000 per bag. This step shows policymakers have used the black-marketing tool as an opportunity by assuming that growers may absorb this hike in urea price. Cotton contributes more than 60pc to the total national exports and is under serious threat as farmers are not able to invest to cultivate cotton in the current cropping season. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 2*)

FCA sets targets for major crops for kharif season

The FCA, the high-powered body mandated to oversee strategic measures for ensuring food security in country, has set the production targets of major crops for the kharif season 2024-25. FCA decided to set production targets for cotton at 10.8 million bales, 8.7m tonnes for rice, 9.3m tonnes for maize, and 76.7m tonnes for sugarcane. Targets for other crops such as mung, mash, and chilies were also fixed. Water availability in canals will remain at 63.61 million acre-feet (MAF), compared to last year's 61.85 MAF. Currently, all provinces are receiving satisfactory supplies in the system. An official from the State Bank of Pakistan informed that allocations of institutional credit for agriculture had substantially increased to Rs2,250bn for 2023-24. Disbursements up to February 2023 reached Rs1,073.5bn, which is 59% of overall annual target of Rs1,819bn and 28.5pc higher than disbursement of Rs835.3bn made during the previous year. While reviewing the performance of outgoing rabi season crops for 2023-24, the committee observed that wheat production is estimated at 29.69m tonnes from an area of 9.6m hectares, a 5.4pc increase over the last year. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 9*)

3.5pc agri growth target may be missed

The country is likely to miss agriculture growth target of 3.5 percent set for 2023-24, as ongoing rains will negatively impact Kharif crops owing to delayed sowing of some of the major Kharif crops and a decline in fruit production. Pakistan produced 29.69 million tons of wheat against the set target of 32.2 million almost eight percent reduction for the Rabi Season 2023-2024. For the Kharif crops the government has fixed cotton production target at 10.8mn bales, rice production target at 8.7 million tons, sugarcane production target at 76.7 million tons, and maize production target at 9.3 million tons. So far ongoing rains are not posing a serious threat to major Kharif crops including cotton, maize, rice, and sugarcane. (*Business Recorder, April 30th, 2024, Page 16*)

3.1 # Cash Crop

DCs involved in cultivation of paddy in 'banned' areas: growers

The Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) accused deputy commissioners concerned of all areas, where cultivation of paddy was banned under the law, of allowing rice cultivation on a massive scale. SAI body urged Sindh government to fix support price of Rs12,000 per 40kg for cotton, otherwise the crop's production would decline. SAI demanded audit in agricultural engineering department for corruption and political intervention and rejected corporate farming. The meeting condemned Sindh government's decision to purchase wheat from traders instead of farmers and said there was no transparency in ongoing distribution of gunny bags, which should be provided to farmers to procure wheat at support price of Rs4,000 per 40kg.

SAI supported protest by Punjab growers for raise in wheat support price and expressed anger over corruption in Rs4bn subsidy by agriculture extension department. It recalled department had stomached in 2022 Rs4bn out of which Rs5,000 per acre subsidy was

to be provided to flood-hit farmers for wheat cultivation as well as subsidy for agricultural machinery, which too had fallen prey to corruption. SAI called for high-profile inquiry into massive misappropriation of public funds and rejected price of fertiliser being charged by companies over & above actual market price. It expressed concern over ‘artificial’ raise in price of tractors. (*Dawn, April 16th, 2024, Page 15*)

Sindh govt demands federal govt increase cotton support price up to Rs 11,000/maund

Sindh government demanded of federal government to increase support price for cotton up to Rs 11,000 per maund to incentivize farmers to cultivate more cotton. Last year, PM Shehbaz Sharif had fixed the cotton support price at Rs8,500 per 40-kg aimed at encouraging farmers to cultivate more cotton. Current target for cotton cultivation in Sindh, stands at 640,000 hectares. Sowing of cotton in Sindh has declined by 20% due to increased costs of fertilizers, seeds, petroleum products, and agri-medicines, which have escalated expenses for farmers. (*Business Recorder, April 16th, 2024, Page 4*)

Cotton crop outlook bleak for Punjab

The outlook for the upcoming cotton crop season appears bleak due to unfavourable weather conditions, insufficient irrigation water, and the government’s tepid response to resolve the growers’ issues. Sindh benefited from early cotton sowing last season (2023-24) as the crop matured before the heat stress of May and June; the first picking had also been done in many areas. Province tried to repeat experience this year, too, but heavy rains spoiled sown lands, and in many cotton areas, the crop is being re-cultivated. Observing over 100 per cent higher production in Sindh due to early sowing last year, Punjab agriculture authorities decided to adopt a similar strategy this season. They claimed over one million acres had been brought under early cotton cultivation. However, they have reduced the overall lint acreage from 5.2m acres last year to 4m this year. Growers will face a new challenge of around 30pc irrigation water shortages for kharif crops. Furthermore, Federal Committee on Agriculture has yet to convene to set acreage and production targets for kharif crops. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 9*)

Punjab govt sets cotton production target of 6.5m bales

The Punjab government has set cotton production target this season at 6.5 million bales besides fixing the sowing the crop over 04 million acres of land. While giving a briefing to the Secretary of Agriculture, it was said that due to the rains and weather conditions, the harvesting of wheat crop and the cultivation of cotton are slightly delayed. Agriculture Department is taking practical steps to convert South Punjab back into a cotton Valley. (*Business Recorder, April 28th, 2024, Page 3*)

3.2 # Food Crop

Windstorm damages wheat crop in Swabi

Heavy rain accompanied by strong winds damaged standing wheat crop across Swabi, causing a considerable financial loss to farmers. The growers told that the wheat crop

was at a very critical stage and was expected to be harvested at the end of the current month. They said they were expecting a bumper yield this year, but the windstorm shattered their dream. (*Dawn, April 2nd, 2024, Page 8*)

Delay in setting up wheat procurement centres condemned

An inordinate delay in setting up wheat procurement centres at many places in Sindh has caused huge losses to growers, say Tail-end Abadgars Association's Nara canal circle office-bearers, who condemned provincial government's lethargy in this regard. They said growers were compelled to sell away their crop at a rate of around 3,500 a maund, far less than the official price of Rs4,000 a maund, to middlemen and hoarders. They urged the government to take notice of the issue and immediately take remedial measures. (*Dawn, April 2nd, 2024, Page 15*)

Cabinet approves Rs3,900 per 40kg wheat support price

The Punjab cabinet has fixed wheat support price at Rs3,900 per 40kg. The minimum support price of wheat for the year 2023-2024 was fixed by cabinet. It also approved wheat procurement policy 2024-25. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 2*)

Wheat imports bring down flour prices

Huge wheat imports by private sector have continued to bring down the prices of various flour varieties, but many retailers are not passing on the relief to consumers. Millers have lowered the rate. Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA), Sindh Zone, Chairman Aamir Abdullah claimed that the private sector had imported around 3.2 million tonnes of wheat from Russia and Ukraine since September 2023. He said the government suspended imports from April 1 after the arrival of new crops. He said that allowing the private sector to import wheat last year was the best decision of the federal government and shielded the millers from the Sindh government's blackmailing practices, which have been in vogue for the last three years. Mr Aamir said efforts were also being made to end the quota system for getting wheat, which would help the flour millers to operate in an open environment. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 9*)

Growers want Sindh govt to increase wheat support price

SindhAbdgarBoard has rejected wheat support price declared by provincial government and demanded it revise price to between Rs4,500 and Rs5,000 per 40 kilogram otherwise growers will be compelled to launch province-wide protest after Eid. They said prices of agriculture inputs like urea, DAP, petrol and diesel had multiplied while the growers had invested huge money in addition to bank loans to have a good crop. "We have achieved bumper crop but low procurement price and traders' monopoly have discouraged us as we cannot afford to sell wheat at Rs4,000 per 40 kg to government". They said that instead of transferring benefits to growers the government had imported 3.2 million tonnes of poor quality wheat at the rate of Rs7,000 per 40 kg. It was quite unfortunate that growers with bumper crop in hand were looking to the government to provide them gunny bags to sell their yield through procurement centres. They said that

in absence of satisfactory measures the traders were buying wheat in open markets at as low price as Rs3,200 to Rs3,300 per 40 kg from growers. Traders would later sell wheat at higher rate in connivance with food department. (*Dawn, April, 5th, 2024, Page15*)

Farmers threaten protests over wheat price stagnation

Farmers across Punjab have voiced their disappointment following CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif's decision to retain the previous year's wheat support price and threatened legal action and protests if the government failed to address the issue. She has decided to maintain the last year's minimum support price of Rs3,900 per 40kg of wheat, while the Sindh province has enhanced it to Rs4,600 per 40kg. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 3*)

High input costs adversely affecting agri output: PBF

Pakistan likely to produce 29m tons of wheat this season against a target of 32m tons due to high input costs wheat; however, the wheat consumption is 33m tones excluding requirement to feed Afghanistan. Vice President of Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) said prices of inputs stay at higher levels and in the current season the crop remained three million tons less than the target of 32 million tons. Farmers have been forced to buy urea at double the actual price as they paid over Rs5,000 per bag due to alleged cartelization. "PBF VP also stated wheat cultivation is already beginning in Sindh, in this regard he urged the government agencies to make a strict check on smuggling this time as last year 592 hoarders were involved in wheat smuggling while 26 smugglers are involved in wheat smuggling". (*Business Recorder, April 6th, 2024, Page 11*)

Wheat: farmers demand Rs5000/maund support price

Farmers criticized (Punjab) provincial government decision of maintaining the wheat support price at previous year of Rs 3900 per maund and asked for an upward revision and fix it at Rs 5000 per maund in line with hike in agricultural inputs, electricity and other utility charges. Policies of the present government would only benefit a few while economy of the farmers would eclipse. (*Business Recorder, April 6th, 2024, Page 11*)

Wheat set for a good harvest

Pakistan is preparing for a record-breaking wheat harvest of around 15m metric tons of biofortified, zinc-enriched wheat for 2024 season. This surge in production is attributed to farmers predominantly choosing to cultivate biofortified wheat variety Akbar 2019. Approximately 42% of Pakistan's wheat cropping area was dedicated to "Akbar 2019" during 2023-24 season, covering about 3.78m hectares & expecting a yield of nearly 15m metric tons. This success is credited to a decade-long partnership with HarvestPlus, as highlighted by Javed Ahmad. (*Business Recorder, April 14th, 2024, Page 1*)

Rain slightly delays wheat harvest with no impact on yield

Punjab agriculture department claims, recent rains have insignificantly affected wheat crop. Agriculture Secretary Iftikhar Ali Sahoo was briefed that no adverse effects were observed on wheat crop due to the recent rains. However, the rain spells have slightly delayed the grain harvesting process. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 2*)

Punjab govt urged to maintain wheat procurement target

Wheat growers have voiced significant concerns over the falling market prices of their crop and urged the Punjab government to maintain this season's procurement target at 4 million tons, consistent with last year's figure, to prevent substantial financial losses to farming community. Khalid Mahmood Khokhar, President of Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) criticised the current policy of allocating only 36 gunny bags to each grower, stating that this amount is insufficient even to cover the cost of transporting wheat to procurement centers. He recommended that farmers be allocated between 200 to 500 bags each, aligning with practices from previous years.

Khalid Bath, President of another farming group, Kissan Ittehad, echoed same concerns. He highlighted that divisions like Multan and Bahawalpur have produced 7 million tons of wheat, but due to market manipulation, the grain is being purchased at merely Rs 2200-2800 per maund, inflicting severe financial distress on farmers. He suggested that a portion of Saudi investment in Pakistan should be allocated to bolster the agricultural sector. (*Business Recorder, April 16th, 2024, Page 4*)

Govt eyes bumper wheat crop, enhanced procurement targets

Anticipating a bumper wheat crop, the federal cabinet decided to write a letter to all provinces to enhance their wheat procurement targets and set a good price for the commodity to facilitate farmers and ensure the availability of the staple in the market. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 1*)

Balochistan sets same wheat price as Sindh to curb smuggling

The Balochistan cabinet has decided to fix the wheat support price equal to that in Sindh to curb smuggling, also approved the procurement of 500,000 tonnes of wheat this year. It was also decided that the provincial government will not provide bardana (bags) to the growers starting next year. Instead, the food department will pay farmers to buy them from the market. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 11*)

All set for purchase of 0.4m metric tonne wheat

The wheat procurement campaign is going to be launched at the 72 procurement centres to benefit particularly small land holders with effect from April 22 (today) in Bahawalpur division. Dawn learnt that the focus of the Punjab government this time was the small wheat growers with a land holding of up to only six acres, keeping the procurement open till the purchase of the last grain. (*Dawn, April 22nd, 2024, Page 8*)

Growers face plethora of issues in selling wheat at official price

Wheat growers in the district are finding it hard to sell their wheat crop at the official support price announced by the Punjab government and have serious reservations with regard to the procurement policy and the 'Bradana App' meant for supplying them gunny bags. According to farmers, despite increasing wheat cultivation target for district (Rahimyar Khan), the government has drastically cut the procurement target, which will force them to sell their yield in the open market at lower rates. They argue

that according to PAD, total wheat cultivation in the district was on 685,000 acres last year, while this year wheat had been cultivated on 714,000 acres. Similarly, Punjab government had announced that farmers could apply for empty bags (bardana) from April 13 to April 17, through their android cell phones using the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB's) 'Bardana App'. It had said the bags would be released to farmers on April 19, while the procurement will start from April 22. However, most of the farmers in the district can't use android mobiles to benefit from the PITB app. Many farmers from adjoining areas gathered at District Food Controller (DFC) office, complaining that the 'Bardana App' was "not active". They were told by the officials to go to the wheat procurement centres with written applications for gunny bags and relevant land record documents. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 2*)

Farmer's anxiety

Wheat prices in Punjab have plummeted far below the minimum support price owing to a bumper harvest, reckless imports, large carryover stocks being held by the food department, and a collapsing international grain market. While a record wheat crop is a matter of comfort for the province's new political leadership, the crashing prices must worry farmers. Various farmer organisations have already demanded immediate government intervention to stabilise the market. The rates being offered by flour mill owners and stockists for the new crop have already dropped to Rs2,800 per 40kg compared to the official support price of Rs3,900 in south Punjab due to the food department's absence from the market. The conditions demand that the government ditch this year's truncated wheat purchase target of 2m tonnes and ensure its continuous presence in the market to use it as a lever to stabilise prices.

The decades-old policy of heavy government intervention in the wheat market — from setting the minimum support price to purchasing a major portion of tradable surplus from farmers — has indeed helped increase domestic production to meet national needs. However, this policy has its drawbacks, which far outweigh the benefits. Besides spending billions on wheat procurement and storage every year, the province is compelled to maintain a heavily staffed food department at the cost of other essential expenditure.

This policy discourages farmers from diversifying into value-added crops, forces urban consumers to frequently pay a premium on the commodity's international price, and has led to the establishment of a surplus flour-milling capacity that makes big bucks from 'subsidised wheat quotas' from government stocks. The government must completely deregulate the wheat economy by linking the country with the global grain market. It should support farmers by reducing production costs and improving yields, and via increased BISP cash transfers. It may be difficult initially but will ensure that the long-term food security objective is met without creating a financial burden on government budgets. (*Dawn, Editorial, April 24th, 2024, Page 6*)

Treasury, opposition urge govt to stop wheat price crash

In a rare show of unity, both treasury and opposition benches in the Punjab Assembly joined their voices to draw government's attention towards the plight of wheat growers. When the issue of extremely low prices of the new wheat crop in the market was raised, most of the MPAs from across the aisle came on the same page. Agriculture minister Ashiq Kirmani held the caretaker government responsible for the situation, claiming the caretakers had imported wheat unnecessarily when the province had enough grain in its stock. He said that a solution was being worked out in consultation with the food department. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 2*)

KP okays wheat procurement at rates fixed by centre, Punjab

KP cabinet has approved procurement of wheat at rates fixed by federal, Punjab, and Balochistan governments. Under plans okayed by cabinet, 600,000 metric tons of wheat will be procured at rate of Rs3,900 for 40kg. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 8*)

Country misses wheat production target

The country has missed the wheat production target as the estimated production of the commodity is 29.69m tons against set target of 32.2m for Rabi Season 2023-2024 from an area of 9.6m hectares of land. According to provincial government estimates, out of 29.6m tons of estimated production wheat, Punjab will produce 22.6m tons of wheat, Sindh 4.4m tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 1.4m tons, and Balochistan 1.3m tons. Country missed the fixed wheat production target, but production of wheat showed an increase of 5.4 per cent over the last year. (*Business Recorder, April 25th, 2024, Page 1*)

Minister backs call for probe into wheat import by caretakers

Punjab Food Minister Bilal Yasin has supported the call for setting up a committee to investigate import of wheat by the caretaker government as the house unanimously rejected the current wheat procurement policy. Concluding the discussion on wheat procurement policy in the Punjab Assembly, he negated the impression that the government does not want to buy wheat. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 2*)

Farmers' Outcry compels PM to hike wheat target

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered an increase in the wheat procurement target from 1.4 million tonnes to 1.8 million tonnes after protests by farmers over delays in the grain's buying process. PM Shehbaz has also directed the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation Limited (Passco) — the national grain procurement and storage agency — to ensure swift buying to help growers. However, farmers complained that Passco was not purchasing wheat and flour mills were “exploiting them” by offering rates lower than the government-mandated support price for their crops. The Sindh and Balochistan governments have set the support price at Rs4,000 per 40kg, while the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab governments Rs3,900 per 40kg. The growers have staged protests in several areas and demanded the government increase the support price. (*Dawn, April 28th, 2024, Page 1*)

3.4 # Fruits

Current rain spell likely to damage mango orchards in South Punjab

Fruit fly is an invasive polyphagous pest of wild and cultivated soft-skinned fruits, which can cause widespread economic damage in fruit orchards. The temperature and humidity brings extensive effects on fruit fly population dynamics. Fruit flies do not carry infectious agents on the inside of their bodies. They are not disease vectors. However, they can carry bacteria on the outside of their bodies and transmit them by contacting with fruits or vegetables, which can cause disease when consumed. The fruit damaged by fruit flies are not safe to eat. If food was touched by fruit flies, there may be bacteria that causes disease.

The appropriate strategy is to remove the damaged area of the food or to dispose of it. However, there is no scientific evidence of diseases caused by eating a fruit fly. There is no scientific evidence that eating the fruit fly's eggs can cause disease. The current rain spell in South Punjab is feared to bring an extremely negative impact on fruit orchards. The rain spell not only grows weeds, but it also encourages the growth of the most harmful fruit fly, which survives and develops inside fruits like mango and cannot be visible outside fruits. European countries, the United States and Middle Eastern countries have restricted import of fruits carrying fruit flies. "Growers need to take measures according to recommendations of the South Punjab Agriculture Department." The scientists said that the fruit flies were attracted to moist environments and food waste, especially fermenting fruits and vegetables. They also liked drains, garbage disposals, trash bags, empty cans and bottles, cleaning rags, and mops. A moist film of fermenting material is all that is needed for development. Fruit flies prefer to grow in the current temperate climates where they can access plenty of water. The optimum conditions for fruit flies are minimum and maximum temperatures of 22.77C to 27.77C.

The fruit flies target all types of fruits. However, in South Punjab mango is one of the country's largest crops and is passing through maturity phase, facing a major threat from fruit flies. The fruit flies also take shelter in weeds to damage the mango fruits and the growers should ensure prevention of fruit flies from weeds also. The rest of host plants of the fruit fly, include guava, loquat, jamon and value-added fruits. The fruit fly reproduces by staying inside the fruit and grows up and enters the ground from the fruit and remains in the ground in the form of a pupa. There are four types of fruit flies in Punjab province, including oriental fruit fly, peach fly, melon fly and plum fly.

The agriculture officials informed that the damaged fruit fallen in the orchards should be buried in the ground by digging a hole and after picking the fruit, it should be kept in a 5pc salt solution for 60 minutes, which will kill the eggs of the fruit fly. The growers should be sure to apply it to other host plants, vegetables and herbs for fruit fly control. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 9*)

PHDEC to address issue of green potato black-heart disease

Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) recently brought together stakeholders and experts to address the issue of green potato black-heart disease which has caused over 68 per cent decline in potato exports to Russia during the eight months of financial year 2023-24. Pakistan is among the top 15 largest producers of potato in the world with annual production of 8 MMT and ranks 8th in the export with annual export of \$216 million (FY 2022-2023). The supply of Pakistani potatoes to Russia in financial year 2022-2023 amounted to 10.3 thousand tons worth US\$ 3.04 million. Deliveries of Pakistani potatoes to Russia during 8 months of 2023-2024 reached 1.43 thousand tons worth US\$ 0.4 million. In terms of quantity, the supply decreased by 68.61%, whereas in value terms the supply dropped by 75.22% as compared to 2022-2023. (*Business Recorder, April 28th, 2024, Page 3*)

4 # SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

Poultry traders fleece buyers with phony rates

Wholesale poultry traders in the metropolis are selling chicken to retailers at exorbitant price while circulating fake official rate list. Various poultry sellers have complained that they were forced to buy costly live chicken by wholesale traders. On other hand, poultry association termed increase in poultry prices as a result of factors involving supply and demand. Many people involved in the chicken business, especially small farmers and traders, have been affected by the current crisis and many poultry farms have been shut down. Imported poultry feed ingredients are very expensive, including soybean. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 2*)

Fisheries, aquaculture sectors: experts underscore need for expansion, intensification

Experts on fisheries and aquaculture sectors agree that rising demand of fish for human consumption cannot be met without major expansion and sustained intensification of aquaculture. They said that for this purpose the existing technologies have to be improved and private sector mobilized to invest in aquaculture value chains for fish businesses at local level as well for export earnings. Talking to this scribe, Omar Hayat Khan, an expert on fisheries said that aquaculture is highly diverse in Pakistan, coastal area provides ample opportunities to produce marine fish and brackish water for production of high demand shrimp for export. Similarly, inland fisheries in Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provide ample opportunities to produce fresh water fish from aquaculture for human consumption. However, the private sector has to be provided enabling environment for expansion and intensification of fish production from existing fish farm and in establishment of new ventures of aquaculture in Pakistan. The other high value crop of fish is trout which can be produced in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (*Business Recorder, April 15th, 2024, Page 11*)

5 # TRADE

Trade deficit widens 56pc to \$2.17bn in March

Pakistan's merchandise export growth in March slowed to 7.99% after posting double-digit increases in preceding three months. In absolute terms, the export reached \$2.55 billion in March, up 7.99pc from \$2.36bn over the corresponding month of last year, according to PBS. The trade deficit widened year-on-year by 56.30pc to \$2.17bn in March. However, overall trade gap in first nine months of the current FY narrowed by 24.94pc to \$17.03bn compared to \$22.68bn in the corresponding period last year. At the same time, imports rose by 25.86pc to \$4.73bn from \$3.75bn in March 2023. The import bill has rapidly increased in recent months following government's relaxation of restrictions. These rapidly increasing imports would drive up trade imbalance in final quarter of current FY. However, import bill squeezed 8.65pc to \$39.94bn in July-March FY24 from \$43.73bn in the corresponding months LY. (*Dawn, April 2nd, 2024, Page 9*)

Businessmen reject 'Tajir Dost' scheme

Businessmen rejected government's 'trader-friendly tax scheme' labelling it as detrimental to economy. "The government's economic policies are incomprehensible," Mehmood Hamid, President of All Pakistan Organization of Small Traders and Cottage Industries Karachi said. (*Business Recorder, April 2nd, 2024, Page 2*)

Exports to ME up 36pc

Pakistan's trade deficit with the Middle East narrowed 22.62% to \$8.525bn in first eight months of the current FY from \$11.017bn in corresponding period of LY mainly due to reduced imports of petroleum products from the region. In absolute terms, Pakistan's exports to the Middle East rose 35.75% to \$2.024bn between July and February 2023-24, compared to \$1.491bn in corresponding period LY. At same time, imports dipped 15.66% to \$10.549bn in 8MFY24 against \$12.508bn in same period LY, according to SBP. Pakistan has recently signed a free trade agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council states to minimise its trade imbalance with region. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 9*)

Pakistan, Iran eye lofty \$10bn trade target

Pakistan and Iran committed to increasing their annual trade volume to \$10bn over next five years, as part of an understanding to deepen relations across all sectors. This was agreed during a meeting between PM Shehbaz Sharif and Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi. President Raisi, in his media statement, described current level of bilateral trade as "unacceptable" & "as a first step" decided to raise this to \$10bn. New target set by two leaders looks highly ambitious given that trade between two countries last year stood at about \$2.3bn despite a significant boost in trade after two countries signed MoUs for facilitating bilateral trade in Jan 2023. Later in August, two sides chalked out a five-year trade plan for realising 2021 goal of increasing trade to \$5bn. Since 2005, the two countries have been operating under a preferential trade agreement and have been negotiating a free trade agreement, which many anticipated would be

concluded during the Iranian president's visit. Several factors have impeded trade growth between Iran and Pakistan, including international sanctions on Iran, security issues in border regions, and inadequate border infrastructure as well as economic misalignment. Moreover, banking and payment issues due to the lack of direct banking channels and the necessity to comply with international financial regulations hinder smooth economic interactions. Fluctuating political and diplomatic relations influenced by external geopolitical pressures also affect the execution of bilateral trade agreements. The two sides, which share nearly 900km of border, are specifically eyeing the development of border markets to increase trade. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 1*)

Pakistan, Iran agree to boost trade, economic cooperation

Pakistan and Iran declared their intention to enhance bilateral trade and collaborate more closely in energy sector, despite US warning Islamabad against engaging with Iranian businesses. Two countries are aiming to achieve this ambitious target through “setting up of joint border markets, economic free zones, and new border openings”, finalisation of Free Trade Agreement, and operationalising barter trade, according to the communique that also underscored importance of energy sector cooperation through electricity trade, installation of power transmission lines and implementation of Iran-Pakistan pipeline project. However, the US Department of State had issued a warning to the Pakistani government about entering into business deals with Iran. The US threats of sanctions are strategically designed to deter Pakistan from enhancing its economic ties with Iran. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 1*)

US, Pakistan renew trade framework

Following Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's extensive visit to Washington, United States and Pakistan renewed a key framework to promote bilateral trade. The Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, signed in 2003, is a vital platform for addressing bilateral trade issues. US and Pakistan concluded the 9th TIFA meeting in February 2023. The last intersessional talks were held in Islamabad in May 2019. When asked for comments on proposed deals between Pakistan and Iran, US State Department spokesperson, Vedant Patel, said: “We advise anyone considering business deals with Iran to be aware of potential risk of sanctions.” US has repeatedly warned Islamabad against joining the pipeline project with Tehran, citing sweeping sanctions on Iran's energy sector over its nuclear programme. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 9*)

PBC floats 5-year 'exports charter and imports substitution plan'

PBC has proposed a five-year exports charter and import substitution plan to Commerce Ministry. The plan includes moratorium on signing of new trade agreements. Pakistan's current exports are limited to a few commodities (textiles, rice, leather) and a few markets (US, EU & the UK). Pakistan needs to reindustrialize if it is going to increase its exports. Without a strong outward looking manufacturing base, Pakistan will continue to be stuck in manufacture and export of low end, non-sophisticated products. (*Business Recorder, April 26th, 2024, Page 1*)

Trade gap with nine states widens 18pc

The country's merchandise trade deficit with the nine regional countries widened by 17.92% to \$6.193 billion in the first nine months of the current fiscal year compared to \$5.252bn in the same period last year. An increase in imports from China and India during the period under review drove the trade deficit. According to SBP, exports to regional countries, particularly China, increased over the review period, but exports to other regional countries remained negative. In absolute terms, the value of Pakistan's exports to nine regional countries — Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives — rose 20.74pc to \$3.313bn between July and March 2023-24 from \$2.744bn over the corresponding months of last year. Contrary to this, imports increased 18.88pc to \$9.506bn in 9MFY24 from \$7.996bn over the corresponding period of last year. This shows a slight increase in trade deficit with maximum countries in FY24. Pakistan's bulk of regional exports, over 60pc, go to China, while the rest goes to remaining 8 countries. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 9*)

5.1 # Exports

Millers begin lobbying for 1m tonnes sugar export

With sugar prices already up 42% over last year, the influential sugar industry has started lobbying for major exports – at least one million tonnes – to “ensure payments to farmers”. Sugar millers had already activated their political channels in the new government to secure permission for sugar exports and some procurements by the government for strategic reserves to ensure higher profitability notwithstanding the inflationary pressures in the country. In a formal letter, Pakistan Sugar Mills Association (PSMA) also asked Commerce Minister Jam Kamal to start the approval process for exporting at least one million tonnes in two equal instalments as crop output was almost 1.5 million tonnes higher than the domestic needs. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 9*)

PSMA urges govt to create 'permanent' window of sugar export

PSMA (Punjab Zone) has urged the government to create a permanent window of exporting one million tons of sugar annually as the sugarcane and the production of sugar is increasing every year. (*Business Recorder, April 3rd, 2024, Page 2*)

Exports to US decline 10pc to \$3.63bn

Pakistan's merchandise exports to US fell 10.14% to \$3.63bn in first eight months of the current fiscal year from \$4.04bn over the corresponding period last year. Pakistan's exports to China increased by 42pc to \$1.895bn in July-February FY24 from \$1.334bn over the corresponding period last year. It is estimated that during FY24, Pakistan's exports to China will reach \$3bn by the end of June this year. Meanwhile, export figures to UK, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and UAE remained relatively stable compared to previous year. Imports from US also dropped 17.36pc to \$1.19bn during July-February from \$1.44bn a year ago. In FY23, imports from US also dipped 45.64pc to \$2.18bn compared to \$4.02bn in same months last year. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 9*)

Exports to central Asian states jump 21pc in 8 months

Pakistan's exports to five central Asian countries witnessed a growth of 21.17% during first eight months of the current FY over corresponding period LY. Despite the existing prospects, country's exports to region have yet to attain their full potential. Similarly, imports from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and other countries to Pakistan have not increased significantly, despite regular high-profile visits. In absolute terms, value of Pakistan's exports to the five central Asian countries —Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — rose by 21.17pc to \$158.07m in July-February 2024 from \$130.45m during same period LY. Imports from the region fell by 18.56pc to \$17.46m in 8MFY24 from \$21.44m during the same period LY. The majority of these imports came from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. (*Dawn, April 10th, 2024, Page 9*)

Exports of textiles post meagre rise in March

Country's textile and clothing exports suffered a slowdown last month, reversing the trend of double-digit growth observed over the previous three consecutive months and indicating a decline in orders from international buyers. Sector's exports showed a paltry growth of 3.29% to \$1.299bn in March over \$1.257bn recorded in same month LY, according to data released by PBS. In 9MFY24, however, textile and clothing exports shrank 0.25% to \$12.444bn from \$12.476bn in same period LY. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 9*)

Russia warns of rice import ban over safety concerns

Russia has warned Pakistan that it will ban rice imports again if their phytosanitary concerns are not addressed in future consignments. The Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (FSVPS) of the Russian Federation issued a notification regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements over a shipment of rice imported from Pakistan. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 11*)

No report of ban on Pakistani rice by Russia: REAP

REAP said trade with Russia is normal and there is no report of ban on Pakistani rice from Russian authorities. (*Business Recorder, April 24th, 2024, Page 12*)

Dairy exports to China on the cards

Pakistan will soon start exporting dairy products to China through a state-of-the-art farm developed in Sheikhpura, says Punjab Livestock Secretary Masaud Anwar. Speaking at the Pakistan Agricultural Coalition's Agri-Connections 2024 Expo, he said a team from China Customs recently visited the farm and unofficially approved dairy imports from Pakistan. Agriculture Secretary Iftikhar Sahoo said incumbent government would invest Rs100 billion in the agriculture sector in two years, while Rs80 billion was additionally earmarked to modernise watercourses in 3years. Faisalabad Agriculture University VC Dr. Iqrar Ahmad urged the private sector to invest in high-efficiency irrigation. International Finance Corporation's Principal Country Officer Naz Khan cautioned that by 2050, Pakistan's population would be 400 million, so the agriculture sector was very important for meeting food needs. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 9*)

5.2 # Imports

Seven wheat vessels berthed at Karachi Port

The Karachi Gateway Terminal Multipurpose Limited (KGTML) has informed the Ministry of Ports and Shipping that it has successfully achieved the berthing of seven wheat bulk-carrier vessels across berths 11-17 on the East Wharf of Karachi Port. In a letter to the ministry, KGTML has stated that this achievement has been made possible through the introduction of efficient operational design, technological integration, and best practices leveraging Abu Dhabi Ports Group's global experience. It said that historically, cargo trucks had a waiting time of two-three days for ship to unload and cargo to be relayed to the right truck, increasing costs and time. However, KGTML has reduced this cost element to just one day. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 9*)

Wheat import bill hits \$1bn mark

Pakistan spent some one billion dollars on the import of wheat during this fiscal year (FY24) to meet domestic demand and avoid shortage of the commodity in the domestic market. The federal government in July last year decided to import wheat as domestic crop was insufficient to fulfill the domestic demand. On the recommendation of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet allowed the private sector to import wheat from the international market without involving any subsidy. The ECC of the Cabinet in July 2023 asked SBP for opening of LC for wheat import. According to statistics, the country produced some 27 million metric tons of wheat during 2023 as against consumption of 31m metric tons. As per government estimates after calculating the carry-forward stocks of 2022, there was a wheat shortage of about 2.5m metric tons, while according to the market, country was facing a shortage of about 3 million metric tons of wheat during the last year. The crop shortfall forced the government to allow the wheat to fill the demand and supply gap and keep commodity prices stable in domestic market. The private sector-initiated wheat imports in August LY and first shipment arrived in September 2023. According to official statistics, Pakistan imported wheat amounted to \$ 1bn during July-March of FY24 compared to \$997m in the same period of last fiscal year. In terms of quality, wheat import rose by 36% during period under review. Cumulatively, country imported wheat 3.4m metric tons during first nine months of this FY as against 2.5m metric tons in corresponding period of LFY. (*Business Recorder, April 20th, 2024, Page 1*)

Govt plans urea imports to ensure price stability

Amid continuously rising domestic prices, the government decided to import at least 200,000 tonnes of urea to meet ongoing kharif requirements. Subject to the proverbial endorsement by ECC of Cabinet, a decision to import urea was taken at a meeting of the Fertiliser Review Committee (FRC). In recent days, the local producers have increased the urea prices, one after the other, by Rs500 to Rs700 per 50kg bag during the current month alone without any noticeable movement in input costs amid estimates that urea consumption could be 18-20pc higher this season. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 9*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

\$22m invested in beverage sector by Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola has invested \$22 million in the beverage sector, specifically in technology upgrade, capacity enhancement of its export potential, and employment for over half a million local professionals along its chain. This new investment is in addition to the \$1 billion invested in the country by the Coca-Cola System since 2008. To discuss future investments in Special Economic Zones, Iain McLaughlin, President Global Commercial Product Supply, The Coca-Cola Company, met with Secretary Punjab Board of Investment, Ehsan Bhutta. (*Business Recorder, April 27th, 2024, Page 3*)

'Seed to Table' project has 'saved' \$2m

The revolutionary "Seed To Table" project, launched by National Foods Limited, has saved some \$2 million providing import substitute of the imported agricultural products. "Seed to Table" project was launched in August 2023 with a vision to reduce country's dependency on imported raw materials, particularly the annual import of tomato paste amounting to \$10 million. Through the dedicated efforts of all stakeholders in the project including farmers, tomato seeds were cultivated in September 2023 over 500 acres in different parts of Sindh. The harvests started in February this year, yielding around 8,000 tons of premium-quality tomatoes so far. The project aims to empower local farmers ensuring their continued growth and prosperity through formal partnerships with progressive farm-managing companies including Syngenta, Ibtida Ventures, Vital Green, Indus Acres, Kevlaar, Al-Rahim Agri Processing, Farmdar, Farmevo, and Salaam Takaful. Abrar Hasan, Global CEO of National Foods Limited (NFL) informed that the revolutionary "Seed To Table" project has already saved \$2 million and it presents an opportunity to export the goods in a \$10 billion global market. (*Business Recorder, April 26th, 2024, Page 14*)

6.1 # Fertilizer Company

CCP issues notices to urea makers

The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has issued show-cause notices to the Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC) and six leading fertiliser companies for allegedly fixing urea prices, a prima facie violation of Section 4 of the Competition Act 2010. Urea prices play a crucial role in determining the prices of essential food commodities. Any arbitrary increase in urea prices by fertiliser companies can lead to higher costs for farmers, ultimately resulting in more expensive food prices for consumers. CCP's inquiry found that FMPAC and its six-member firms, including Engro Fertilisers Ltd, Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd, Fatima Fertiliser Company Ltd, Fauji Fertiliser Bin Qasim Ltd, Agritech Ltd and Fatima Fertiliser Ltd of prima facie violating the competition law. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 9*)

‘Coordinated price fixation’: CCP issues show-cause notices to urea producers

An inquiry conducted by the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has shed light on the profitability, cost structures, subsidies, and their impact on urea prices for farmers. The investigation has raised key questions regarding the pricing strategies employed by urea manufacturers. Despite these differences in costs, urea producers have maintained identical prices, prompting CCP to question the pricing mechanisms in place. (*Business Recorder, April 7th, 2024, Page 8*)

Fertiliser sector didn’t pass on benefits of Rs152bn subsidy to consumers: CCP

An inquiry conducted by Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) revealed that the fertiliser sector secured a whopping subsidy on gas to the tune of Rs152 billion but never passed the benefits on to the consumers. The profits of fertiliser sector giants run into billions of rupees, which clearly indicates that it has gone up at the cost of voiceless consumers. This was also reflected in the major companies’ profits in 2021 as compared to the previous year. The FFC profit before tax in 2021 was Rs30 billion, Engro Rs29.8 billion, and Fatima Fertiliser Company Limited Rs28.4 billion. Only Agritech posted a loss of Rs4 million in 2021. The enquiry report states that the CCP has shed light on the profitability, cost structures, subsidies and their impact on urea prices for farmers. The investigation has raised key questions regarding the pricing strategies employed by urea manufacturers. In 2021, Fauji Fertiliser Company (FFC) reported a gross profit margin of 35.78 percent, net profit margin of 20.15 percent, and a return on equity (ROE) of 46.08 percent. Similarly, Engro Fertilisers recorded a gross profit margin of 33.3 percent, net profit margin of 15.9 percent, and an ROE of 44.97 percent. These ROE figures are notably higher compared to the Indian urea industry, where the ROE is capped at 20 percent. (*The News, April 7th, 2024, Page 12*)

Fauji, Fatima raise urea prices

The increase in rates of urea compost products by a couple of companies running their plants on subsidised gas has raised many eyebrows. Fatima Fertiliser Company Ltd (FFCL) raised the price of its brand Sarsabz urea by Rs551 per bag, taking the maximum retail price to Rs4,400. On April 9, Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd (FFC) increased its urea prices by Rs633 per bag to Rs4,400. This increase of around 17% has been made even though gas input cost has remained unchanged. An official of affected stakeholders says that this is a missed opportunity for the government, leading to a revenue loss of up to Rs100 billion due to delayed gas reforms that would have standardised gas pricing for all fertiliser manufacturers. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 9*)

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

FDI jumps 51pc

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) jumped by 51.7 per cent to \$258 million in March compared to \$170m in the same month last year. During July-March FY24, the country received \$1.099bn against an inflow of \$1.217bn in the same period of last year,

showing a fall of 9.7pc or a loss of \$118m. Pakistan has the lowest FDI preference in the region and receives close to \$2bn in FDI per annum. China has been the biggest investor in Pakistan but the scenario has changed. The inflow from China was \$262m in 9MFY24 compared to \$556.6m in the same period last year. Inflows from the UAE dropped drastically. The nine-month inflow from UAE was \$27.7m compared to \$88.7m in the same period last fiscal year. The government expects to attract billions of dollars from the UAE under the SIFC. The nine-month inflows from Hong Kong were \$264m, from the UK \$196.3m, from the USA \$100.7m, and from Japan \$5.2m against \$140m in the same period last year. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 9*)

Aurangzeb makes a pitch for investments

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Aurangzeb has held meeting with foreign investors including Chairman of Ayana Holding, Abdulla Bin Lahej and Chairman Nad Al Shiba Holding, Mohammed Hilal Bin Tarraf Al Mansoori, in Dubai. Minister explored ways to enhance investment activity between UAE and Pakistan by supporting existing economic partnerships and exploring further diversification to include areas of information technology, renewable energy, transport and logistics, infrastructure and real estate development. Competitive advantages that make Pakistan an ideal destination for investors seeking high returns and sustainable growth. The minister also highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in assisting investors at every stage of their journey, comprehensive support services including market research, regulatory guidance, investment facilitation, and post-investment support, ensuring a smooth experience. (*Business Recorder, April 23rd, 2024, Page 1*)

Foreign loan target missed amid major slippages

Pakistan received only about \$9.8bn in foreign loans and grants in the first nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year, far behind the annual target of \$17.4bn, amid major slippages in raising international financial support. Disbursements appeared to be slowing down as country received less than \$204m in foreign loans in March compared to \$318m in February. The Ministry of Economic Affairs said the government could materialise about \$6.899bn in foreign economic assistance in the first nine months of the current fiscal year, almost 39pc of the annual budget target, amid limited borrowing avenues in the wake of poor credit rating and adverse conditions in the global financial markets despite the support of IMF. This FEA is in addition to \$1.9bn released by IMF out of the \$3bn Stand-By Arrangement and \$1bn by UAE that is separately accounted for by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). Thus, total foreign inflows, including from the IMF and the UAE, amounted to \$9.799bn in nine months. This generally works out to be almost 55.6pc of full-year targeted inflows. Authorities now claim that better debt and trade management have reduced the current year's foreign assistance requirements. Therefore, its target is now tentatively revised to around \$11bn instead of the \$17.62bn set in 2023-24 budget for FEA. They are now predicting current account deficit to be around \$2bn instead of about \$6bn budget estimate. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 1*)

Jul-Mar borrowing stands at \$6.899bn

The country borrowed \$6.899bn from multiple financing sources during the first nine months (July-March) of the current fiscal year 2023-24 compared to \$7.764bn borrowed during the same period of 2022-23, revealed EAD data. The data further shows that the country received \$218.53m in March 2024 compared to \$358.71m in March 2023. The government has budgeted \$ 2.4bn from the IMF for the current fiscal year 2023-24 and received \$ 1.9bn of the \$ 3bn Stand-By Arrangement; however, the EAD data does not reflect it. Further, there is no mention of \$1bn disbursed by the UAE. If the IMF and the UAE inflows are added, total inflows would reach \$9.799bn during first nine months of current fiscal year. The \$6.899bn included \$2bn received from Saudi Arabia under head of time deposit during July 2023. (*Business Recorder, April 24th, 2024, Page 1*)

\$1bn investment plans proposed for ports uplift

A prospective investment blueprint delineating a proposed infusion of \$1 billion into various plans for port development in Pakistan was unveiled by Hutchison Ports, one of the world's leading ports network, already operating in the country. The plan was unveiled by a delegation of the Hong Kong-based ports network during a meeting with Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh. The delegation discussed the prospective expansion plans for investment in Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and other strategic ports across Pakistan. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 9*)

President seeks greater Chinese, Australian investment

President Asif Ali Zardari called on Chinese and Australian investors to capitalise on opportunities across various sectors in Pakistan, including agriculture, trade, economy, and infrastructure. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 5*)

7.1 # Countries

PM Shehbaz invites French companies to invest in Pakistan

PM Shehbaz Sharif stressed need for working together to enhance cooperation between Pakistan and France in areas of trade and investment and invited French companies to invest in Pakistan. PM Shehbaz invited the French companies to invest in Pakistan and welcomed the initiative of the French side to bring corporate leaders from top French companies to Pakistan soon on a visit. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 3*)

Japan to give additional grants for 2 projects

The government of Japan has decided to provide additional grants of around \$9.8 million for two projects, titled, "Installation of Weather Surveillance Radar in Sukkur City" and "The Extension of Maternal and Child Health Care Facilities in Sindh". (*Business Recorder, April 5th, 2024, Page 7*)

Riyadh to expedite \$5bn initial investment in Pakistan

Saudi Arabia has committed to fast-tracking the initial tranche of \$5 billion investment in Pakistan, while Islamabad has promised to facilitate the expedited process aimed at

enhancing economic cooperation between two countries. This agreement was reached at a meeting between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Makkah. Last year Saudi Arabia had promised to invest \$25bn within next five years under SIFC that is seeking investments in energy, IT, minerals, defence, and agriculture sectors from the Arab countries. It is expected that the \$5bn investment would be made in the minerals sector especially Reko Diq gold and copper mines as KSA has already been studying the prospects of tapping into this sector, also has interest in petroleum, agriculture as well as IT sectors. (*Dawn, April 9th, 2024, Page 1*)

Saudi FM commends Pakistan's investment strategy

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud praised Pakistan's proactive, business-oriented approach to seeking investments and expressed high expectations for "significant benefits" for both countries from the expanded investments. A central aspect of the understanding reached at that meeting was to fast-track an initial \$5 billion investment tranche under a broader Saudi commitment to invest \$25bn in Pakistan over the next five years. The two foreign ministers co-chaired the investment conference. During the conference, the Pakistani side highlighted legal and administrative reforms, including establishing the SIFC to streamline investments. Mr Dar spotlighted opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, IT, and mining and invited Saudi investors to invest in them. Investments in state-owned enterprises, which are being put up for privatisation, were also solicited. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 1*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

8.1 # Asian Development Bank (ADB)

SOE transformation: ADB sending mission to develop \$400m project scope

The ADB is dispatching a reconnaissance mission from 6-24 May 2024 to develop the scope, coverage, and design of the proposed \$400m Accelerating SOE Transformation Programme, a Results-Based Loan. (*Business Recorder, April 21st, 2024, Page 1*)

ADB asks Pakistan to use spatial mapping to mitigate damages

A case study by ADB has presented real-time crop assessments of the 2022 massive floods in Pakistan and strongly recommended developing spatial analysis capacity within government agencies to ensure better preparedness for mitigating damages of future water-related disasters. The case study of the 'Pakistan 2022 Floods', released this week, observed that spatial mapping could also be used to assess the impact of crop disease, pest infestations, drought, and others and to inform policymakers and decision-makers about situations pertinent to the national food supply, export earnings, and crop insurance. (*Dawn, April 28th, 20224, Page 11*)

8.2 # INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF)

IMF okays release of final \$1.1bn SBA tranche

The Executive Board of IMF approved the immediate disbursement of approximately \$1.1 billion to Pakistan. The board met in Washington and completed the second review under SBA for Pakistan, allowing for bringing total disbursements under the arrangement to about \$3 billion. All board members favoured releasing the last installment except India, which abstained. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 1*)

8.3 # WORLD BANK (WB)

WB calls for bold reforms to sustain recovery

Projecting Pakistan's economy growing by 1.8pc in the ongoing fiscal year, the World Bank warned that the nascent recovery was neither sustainable nor sufficient to address growing poverty (currently at 40pc) unless bold, steadfast and broad-based reforms were implemented on an urgent and sustainable basis. In its biannual report, Pakistan Development Update (PDU): Fiscal Impact of Federal State-Owned Enterprises, the bank said the SOEs were getting budget support of around 2pc of GDP and responsible for about 18pc of the country's fiscal deficit and yet the government was practically doing little except a lot of legislative and regulatory work. The World Bank also raised questions over the creation of the \$8bn sovereign wealth fund of eight leading profitable SOEs in oil and gas and financial sectors, saying these had moved out of the ambit of the SOE Policy and related transparency. The transfer of these four SOEs, OGDCL, PPL, Government Holdings, and NBP — “may significantly change outlook of the SOE portfolio”, it said, adding that these four state-owned firms accounted for 42pc of total profits & 12pc of total assets in portfolio in 2022. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 1*)

WB identifies hurdles to foreign investment

Tax policies in Pakistan discourage investment in the tradable sector, and investment laws discriminate against foreign investors, says the World Bank. The bank in its report, “South Asia Development Update Jobs for Resilience”, stated that sales and value-added tax systems can have limited revenue potential unless properly designed. These narrow base, multiple exemptions, and concessional rates in Pakistan's current sales tax are estimated to cost the country 15 per cent of the tax's potential revenue. The report further noted that growth is expected to pick up further to 2.3% in FY2024-25. Inflation is expected to remain high, however, as reforms to lower energy subsidies drive up domestic energy prices and transportation costs. The projected recovery assumes that IMF supported reform program and planned fiscal consolidation remain on track, boosting investor confidence and ensuring capital inflows are sufficient to finance fiscal and current account deficits. (*Business Recorder, April 3rd, 2024, Page 1*)

Crisis-Resilient Social Protection programme: WB to approve \$270m additional financing next month

The World Bank will provide additional financing of \$ 270 million for Crisis-Resilient Social Protection programme to support the development of an adaptive and crisis-resilient social protection system. (*Business Recorder, April 22nd, 2024, Page 1*)

9 # POLICY

Murad approves Rs14.7bn for K-IV project

CM Syed Murad Ali Shah approved Rs14.7bn as 20% share from the Sindh government for the Rs74bn Augmentation Project of the much-awaited Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Scheme, commonly known as K-IV, and directed the planning and development department to start the process of hiring consultants for the project. The Augmentation Project is one of the components of the K-IV to be carried out by the Sindh government and funded by 40pc each from the World Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and 20pc by provincial government. However, it has been pending final approval from the federal government since March 2022. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 13*)

9.1 # Neo – Liberal Policy

‘Liberalising economy can unlock trillions’

The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (Pide), a state-owned think tank, has asked the government to shift gear from bureaucratic permissions to rule-based market liberalisation, exploit over Rs300 billion annual revenue potential from real estate through transparency, generate gains in agriculture sector worth Rs1.7 trillion and open up public land in Islamabad worth Rs2.2tr for private investment — all through immediate and widespread reforms led through firms specialising in digitisation. In its ambitious reform advice, “ISLAAH: Immediate Reform Agenda — IMF and Beyond“, to government, said proposed plan would respond to Pakistan’s urgent need for external financing exceeding \$120bn over next 5years. (*Dawn, April 3rd, 2024, Page 9*)

Health ministry starts work on outsourcing diagnostic services at Pims

While citizens are already hit hard by rising inflation and their medical treatment under the health card are being denied, the health ministry has started working on outsourcing diagnostic services at Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims), rural health centres and basic health units. Employees of hospital have announced to resist decision saying it was another move for privatisation of the hospital. (*Dawn, April 8th, 2024, Page 4*)

Govt eyes deregulation of fuel prices

Amid increasing fuel prices and the oil industry’s complaints over the rising influx of smuggled oil products, government has expedited the process of deregulating petroleum product prices to shift the brunt of public criticism to oil marketing companies. In a directive, petroleum division has asked Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority “to share a presentation on analysis and implications of deregulation of petroleum products” within

three days. This should particularly cover “in-country freight equalisation margins and other related aspects”. The oil industry has also been criticising the government for doing little to stop the massive smuggling of low-quality and cheaper products, particularly from Iran. This smuggling affects the regulated oil industry’s market share and profitability, and causes the government annual revenue loss of over Rs230 billion. An official told *Dawn* that while the final deregulation framework would come out with the approval of the federal cabinet and SIFC, the deregulation of petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD) pricing would mean an end of uniform pricing across the country and the oil companies would be free to set their own prices for different cities and towns. Legally speaking petroleum prices were already deregulated and the government notified only kerosene prices for the retail stage. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 1*)

Ogra, oil industry propose phased deregulation of fuel prices

Amid warnings about supply chain challenges and retail prices increasing by up to Rs27 per litre in Gilgit-Baltistan, the major oil sector stakeholders the regulator and the industry have proposed gradual deregulation of petroleum prices over a period of two years to avoid the political pressure associated with pricing. The government has also been advised to end its engagements with petroleum dealers and cartage contractors over their commissions and leave them to the oil industry to set their margins on a “competitive basis”. The government has also been warned that the deregulation of inland freight equalisation margin pooling mechanism for uniform rates throughout country — was announced in 2010, which quickly “escalated into a political challenge and the policy was reversed”. (*Dawn, April 20th, 2024, Page 9*)

Privatising PIA

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb’s reaffirmation that process of disinvestment of the loss-making national carrier will be concluded by the end of June or early July reinforces confidence in the government’s commitment to privatisation. Reiterating the old refrain “the government has no business being in business”, Mr Aurangzeb declared that the country’s three main airports in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi are next on the list of privatisation. “We expect the bids for PIA to come in the next two to three weeks, and by the end of June or early July, we can move it to the investors,” he told a news briefing at the end of his weeklong visit to Washington to discuss a new and larger medium-term package with the IMF. It is encouraging to see the minister consistently underscoring the need for privatising state-owned enterprises, which are incurring massive annual losses of Rs500bn, and have become a source of systemic risk for the national budget as well as our creditors. Yet, he, like other government officials, has never elaborated if the authorities have a clear privatisation roadmap beyond the sale of PIA and the outsourcing of airports. The current initiative on the privatisation of the national carrier and airports is understood to have been taken under the military-backed SIFC to hand over these assets to investors from friendly Gulf countries, probably in government-to-government deals. This has generated an impression that the civil and

military authorities are in a hurry to disinvest these assets for raising a few billion dollars to ease pressure on the current account and budget. While taxpayers can no longer afford to finance the state-owned resource guzzlers, the hasty pursuit of privatisation, especially PIA, might cast serious doubts over process even if these transactions are not challenged in courts. Multilateral lenders like World Bank have also cautioned against the perils of a chaotic privatisation process, advising authorities to pursue disinvestment of these assets in a planned and structured manner through a revamped privatisation commission staffed with “able professionals who can prepare a financial model for each entity to be privatised”. Transparency and full disclosure in such transactions is crucial for inspiring public confidence in process and avoiding complications or legal challenges for investors. (*Dawn, Editorial, April 23rd, 2024, Page 6*)

10 # SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

Government borrows record Rs4.7tr from banks

The government’s borrowing from banks reached Rs4.7 trillion, with an addition of Rs700 billion within last two months. SBP latest data showed that the government borrowed Rs4.69tr during July-March, marking record borrowings during the current financial year. The huge borrowing has already sidelined the private sector, as the sector’s borrowing fell by 70%, making it a hard time for economic growth. Despite significant revenue collections, the record borrowing indicates excessive spending by the government without consideration for the cost of borrowing. The government is borrowing at record-high rates. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

LSM sector grows for third month in Feb

The quantum of large-scale manufacturing (LSM) rose 0.06% in February, its third increase in a row, according to PBS. The annual change in the LSM index has been mostly positive since August 2023, when it rose 0.26pc. Before that, the index was down for 13 consecutive months. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 9*)

Fiscal gap to widen to 7.4pc of GDP

Projecting stagnant tax-to-GDP ratios over the next five years, IMF estimated Pakistan’s fiscal deficit, gap between total resources and expenditures, for current FY at 7.4% of GDP, almost 1pc higher than 6.5pc target set by federal government. Centre had estimated the overall fiscal deficit at Rs6.9tr for current FY24 (6.53pc of GDP) on anticipation that provinces would offer Rs600bn surplus to scale down federal deficit otherwise estimated at Rs7.5tr or 7.1pc of GDP. IMF and the WB currently in progress in Washington, fund forecast fiscal deficit declining 7.3pc of GDP in FY25 significantly higher than its 6.9pc forecast made in October LY. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

Govt borrows record Rs5.5tr from banks

Within a week, the government borrowed over Rs650 billion from banks to meet its rising expenditure, reflecting the consequence of high inflation. SBP data showed that the government’s borrowing from commercial banks reached a record Rs5.5 trillion

from July 1 to April 5, 2023-24. This is against Rs2.95bn in the same period last fiscal year. Analysts estimate that the current borrowing from banks could touch Rs7tr by the end of June 2024. The government has been increasing energy prices but has not generated enough revenue to meet its expenditures. (*Dawn, April 20th, 2024, Page 9*)

Bad loans surge by Rs70bn in 2023

The non-performing loans (NPLs) of the banking sector increased by 7.6%, or Rs70 billion, during 2023, according to SBP. The rise in defaults, influenced by high interest rates and sluggish economic growth, reflects ongoing financial struggles within almost all segments of the economy. Throughout 2023, political instability and economic uncertainties stymied growth across all sectors. The data, covering December 2022 to December 2023, identified the textile industry as the largest defaulter, contributing significantly to the total NPLs, which escalated from Rs924.04bn in 2022 to Rs994.82bn by the end of 2023. This increase marks a 7.6 per cent rise in bad loans, highlighting a troubling year for the economy. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 9*)

10.1 # Food

Five food employees suspended for ‘mixing sand in wheat’

Punjab food secretary suspended the staff of Fatehpur food centre, including its in charge and two assistant food controllers (AFCs), for allegedly mixing sand in wheat. (*Dawn, April 1st, 2024, Page 8*)

10.2 # Inflation

Inflation slows to 20.7pc

Inflation decelerated for third month in a row to 20.7% year-on-year in March, down from 23.06pc the previous month owing to a high base effect and favourable domestic and global conditions. This is mostly owing to the ongoing execution of tough conditions as part of IMF bailout plan. The first nine months’ average inflation for FY24 was recorded at 27.06pc compared to 27.26pc during the corresponding period last year. This exceeds government’s projection of 21pc. The IMF has also forecast the average inflation for FY24 at 25.9pc, a significant easing from the previous year’s 29.6pc. The inflation was recorded at 35.4pc in March 2023. Food inflation for March stood at 16.6pc in urban areas and 17.1pc in rural areas. Core inflation slightly declined to 12.8pc in urban areas compared to 15.5pc last month. In rural areas, core inflation was recorded at 20pc, down from 21.9pc. (*Dawn, April 2nd, 2024, Page 9*)

Rs4.92 per unit extra for electricity used in Feb

Consumers will pay Rs4.92 per unit extra next month for electricity consumed in February, after the power regulator approved the hike as additional fuel cost adjustment (FCA). (*Dawn, April 9th, 2024, Page 1*)

Pakistan to grow at 2pc, face 25pc inflation: IMF

Notwithstanding a relatively better global outlook, IMF maintained Pakistan's economic growth prospects for current FY at 2%, which it had revised downward in January from its previous estimate of 2.5pc. In its flagship World Economic Outlook (WEO 2024), the IMF kept the country's growth rate at 3.5pc for the next fiscal year. In January, the Fund had lowered the current year's growth rate by 0.5pc from 2.5pc and by 0.1pc from 3.6pc for FY25, which it anticipated in October 2023.

The IMF estimated that Pakistan's average inflation will decelerate to 24.8pc this year from 29.2pc last year and further slow to 12.7pc in FY25. Also, the Fund projected the current account deficit increasing to 1.1pc of GDP this year from 0.7pc last year and rising further to 1.2pc next year. On the other hand, the IMF estimated that the unemployment rate would gradually decline from 8.5pc in FY23 to 8pc this year and 7.5pc next fiscal year. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 9*)

Rising food exports fuel inflation

Raw food exports continued to expand in March, with a 16.35 per cent increase to \$685.03 million, up from \$588.76m in the same month last year, forcing local consumers to pay higher prices across the country. With this upward trend, raw food exports have climbed for the eighth consecutive month this fiscal year, despite the country's highest food inflation in history, according to data compiled by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. These unchecked exports drove food inflation to a stunning 16.6pc in March as prices rose, limiting cash-starved people's access to key goods such as wheat flour, rice, onions, sugar, meat, and vegetables. Analysts say the surge in food exports can be attributed to the unprecedented rupee depreciation. In addition, persistent disruptions in the supply chain and higher prices in the international market have led to soaring demand for food products. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 11*)

Sugar prices surge amid reports of export `permission`

Domestic sugar prices have risen by Rs10 to Rs150-150 per kg in different parts of the country amid reports that the government is under pressure from millers to allow the export of one million to 1.5 million tonnes of the commodity. Karachi Wholesalers Grocers Association (KWGA) Chairman said the wholesale price jumped Rs7-8 per kg in the last 10 days to Rs138-139 per kg on reports about likely permission for sugar exports. He warned the government not to yield to millers' pressure; otherwise, sugar exports would result in a sharp spike in local prices. (*Dawn, April 25th, 2024, Page 9*)

10.3 # Poverty

Power firms seek to extract Rs23bn more for March

Despite 79% of power generation coming from cheaper local fuels, government has sought clearance from Nepra to extract about Rs23bn additional in fuel cost adjustment from consumers for electricity consumed in March. Central Power Purchasing Agency has demanded Rs2.94 per unit additional fuel cost to recover from consumers through

May bills. Proposed additional FCA is almost 46pc higher than pre-fixed fuel cost of Rs6.44 per unit already charged to consumers in March. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

11 # ENVIRONMENT

11.1 # Health

Diseases spread in Karachi as gas crisis forces people to use unboiled water

Expressing concern over the persistently high number of gastroenteritis cases in the city, experts said that one key reason behind this situation was use of contaminated water for drinking purposes as a paucity of gas and its soaring prices had forced many people to use water without boiling it. Water supplies to the city, they pointed out, had been found to be highly contaminated on multiple occasions and needed to be properly boiled or filtered to make it safe for drinking. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 13*)

Pakistan tops world in hep C infections

An alarming report from WHO indicates that Pakistan had the highest number of viral hepatitis C infections in world, around 8.8m, and accounts for 44% of all new hepatitis C infections attributed to unsafe medical injections. In previous years, Egypt reported the largest number of hepatitis C and B cases, followed by Pakistan. The data from 187 countries shows the estimated number of deaths from viral hepatitis increased from 1.1m in 2019 to 1.3m in 2022. Of these, 83pc were caused by hepatitis B & 17pc by hepatitis C, according to report. If number of hepatitis B & hepatitis C cases are combined, then Pakistan ranks fifth in world, only trailing behind China, India, Indonesia and Nigeria, with around 12.6m cases reported in 2022. The WHO's Global Hepatitis Report 2024 notes that ten countries account for nearly two thirds of the global burden of viral hepatitis B and C, with Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Philippines and the Russian Federation rounding off the top ten. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 3*)

Five children of Tando Allahyar village die of measles

Five children in Tando Allahyar taluka died after developing measles related complications over the past 24 hours. (*Dawn, April 28th, 2024, Page 17*)

Measles continues to take its toll on children of Tando Allahyar village

Three more children died from measles complications in Tando Allahyar, prompting departmental inquiry and action against officials concerned. A team of officials of Expanded Programme on Immunisation has arrived in Tando Allahyar from Karachi to conduct the inquiries, which led to action against three vaccinators and focal person. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 15*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate impacts set to cut 2050 global GDP by nearly a fifth

Climate change caused by CO2 emissions already in atmosphere will shrink global GDP in 2050 by about \$38 trillion, or almost a fifth, no matter how aggressively humanity

cuts carbon pollution. But slashing greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible remains crucial to avoid even more devastating economic impacts after mid-century, they reported in journal *Nature*. Economic fallout from climate change, could increase tens of trillions of dollars per year by 2100 if the planet were to warm significantly beyond two degrees Celsius above mid-19th century levels. Earth's average surface temperature has already climbed 1.2C above that benchmark, enough to amplify heatwaves, droughts, flooding and tropical storms made more destructive by rising seas.

Annual investment needed to cap global warming below 2C is a small fraction of the damages that would be avoided. Staying under the 2C threshold “could limit average regional income loss to 20% compared to 60%” in a high-emissions scenario, lead author Max Kotz, an expert in complexity science at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK). Economists disagree on how much should be spent to avoid climate damages. Some call for massive investment now, while others argue it would be more cost-effective to wait until societies are richer and technology more advanced.

The new research sidesteps this debate, but its eye-watering estimate of economic impacts helps make the case for ambitious near-term action, the authors and other experts said. “Our calculations are super relevant” to such cost-benefit analyses, said co-author Leonie Wenz, also a researcher at PIK. Mostly tropical nations, many with economies already shrinking due to climate damages, will be hit hardest, study found.

“Countries least responsible for climate change are predicted to suffer income loss that is 60 percent greater than the higher-income countries and 40 percent greater than higher-emission countries,” said senior PIK scientist Anders Levermann. “They are also the ones with the least resources to adapt to its impacts.” Rich countries will not be spared either: Germany and the United States are forecast to see income shrivel by 11 percent by 2050, and France by 13 percent. Projections are based on four decades of economic and climate data from 1,600 regions rather than country-level statistics, making it possible to include damages earlier studies ignored, such as extreme rainfall. The researchers also looked at temperature fluctuations within each year rather than just averages, as well as the economic impact of extreme weather events beyond the year in which they occurred. “By accounting for these additional climate variables, the damages are about 50% larger than if we were to only include changes in annual average temperatures,” basis of most prior estimates, Wenz. Wenz and her colleagues found that unavoidable damage would slash global economy's GDP by 17% in 2050, compared to a scenario with no additional climate impacts after 2020. Even so, the new calculations may be conservative. (*Business Recorder, Editorial, April 22nd, 2024, Page 9*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTERS

‘Case study of 2022 floods’: ADB warns of big climate disasters

ADB has warned that climate change is expected to increase the frequency and magnitude of floods and other extreme weather events in the future, and the government

of Pakistan needs to be prepared in advance to mitigate the damage. The bank in its latest report, “Applying Spatial Analysis to Assess Crop Damage a Case Study of the Pakistan 2022 Floods”, stated that Pakistan is highly flood-prone and faces a growing risk of water-related disasters due to predicted impacts of climate change. It is important to plan how to use real-time crop damage assessments such as spatial analysis to plan for immediate disaster assistance and recovery efforts.

The report noted that Pakistan is ranked among the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change, especially to extreme weather events and natural hazards—the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 ranked Pakistan as the world’s 8th most vulnerable country. The observed spatial and temporal variability in monsoon rainfall has further exacerbated the uncertainty in water availability and implications on food insecurity. More than half of the country’s population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for its livelihood, and agriculture production is highly exposed to and dependent on climate and weather events. Climate warming will intensify the existing high water demand to 60 per cent by 2047 compared to current levels, leading to a substantial decrease in crop and livestock productivity. The PDNA report estimates the overall economic losses from the 2022 floods at \$14.9 billion. The report highlights the significant impact of the floods on the country’s agriculture sector, which is a major contributor to Pakistan’s economy. The report notes that the floods damaged 1.8 million hectares (ha) of cropland, which resulted in a loss of \$3.7 billion. The data in the PDNA report are provided by the provincial crop reporting services (CRSs) using field surveys. Authenticating the data on crop damage was important and was accomplished by comparing the data derived from remote sensing with data gathered on the ground in accessible areas. The ADB’s remote sensing team estimated crop damage by monitoring the health of crops over a period of time. (*Business Recorder, April 26th, 2024, Page 1*)

13.1 # Rainfall

Three killed by lightning as rain lashes Balochistan

Three people were killed by lightning strikes and two others were injured during heavy torrential rain and thunderstorms, which lashed Quetta and 20 districts of Balochistan, prompting the provincial government to issue a high alert. The new spell of heavy rain affecting 20 of the 35 districts of Balochistan. (*Dawn, April 13th, 2024, Page 3*)

Lightning, rains kill 24 in Punjab, Balochistan, KP

Lightning strikes and rain-related incidents left 24 people dead and injured several others in Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as downpour continued to lash 3 provinces for 2nd day. Heavy rains damaged highways, roads and houses, disrupting traffic and forcing people to move to safe places. (*Dawn, April 14th, 2024, Page 1*)

Roads in Chitral washed away due to heavy rains

Heavy rain hit hard resulting roads swept away by closing all traffic between Chitral and Peshawar wherein a house was affected in Chitral city and a girl child was injured and was shifted to the hospital. (*Business Recorder, April 14th, 2024, Page 3*)

Six killed in rain-related accidents as thunder claps frighten Karachiites

Six people were killed in two rain-related traffic accidents as Karachi and its outskirts received light to moderate showers. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 13*)

Thundershowers, rain hit many Sindh districts

Thunder showers hit Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, Badin, Dadu, Shaheed Benazirabad and some other districts causing slush and slime in the low-lying areas and crippling normal life to some extent. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 15*)

Rain-related incidents in KP: Four killed, seven injured; 15 houses damaged:

PDMA

At least four people were killed while seven other were injured in rain-related incidents in different areas of KP during the last 24 hours, according to PDMA, and a child were injured in these incidents whereas nearly 15 houses were damaged. (*Business Recorder, April 15th, 2024, Page 4*)

Urban flooding emergency declared in Balochistan

While the Balochistan government declared a rain and flood emergency in 25 districts, 18 more people were killed and several others injured in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the downpour continued to lash several parts of the province for the third consecutive day. Lightning strikes and heavy rains have killed over 55 persons in KP, Balochistan and Punjab since Friday. (*Dawn, April 16th, 2024, Page 1*)

15 killed in Chaman, AJK as rain continues to wreak havoc

Seven more people have been killed in accidents in Balochistan as heavy rains continue to inflict damages across the province. So far, 17 people have died and 15 injured due to roof collapses, lightning strikes and other mishaps since heavy rain and thunderstorms started last week. Separately, eight people were killed in two accidents as rainfall continued in several areas of Azad Kashmir. Seven new deaths in Balochistan were reported from border town of Chaman. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 1*)

63 killed, 78 injured in rain-related incidents in KP: PDMA

As many as 63 people were killed while 78 were injured in rain related incidents in KP, according to PDMA. (*Business Recorder, April 22nd, 2024, Page 3*)

Death toll reaches 22 in Balochistan amid heavy rain

Heavy rains, thunderstorms, and hailstones continued to lash various districts of Balochistan, including its capital pushing death toll to 22. The Quetta valley received

heavy rain, thunderstorms, and hailstones throughout the day with short intervals, resulting in flooding of the main roads and streets. (*Dawn, April 28th, 20224, Page 5*)

Rain, hailstorm damage wheat crops

Farmers in the surrounding areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad have said the latest spell of rain accompanied by winds and hailstorms spoiled their wheat crops. The rain and hailstorm played havoc with the ready-to-harvest wheat crops in Gujar Khan, Sohawa, Jhelum and Rawat. Wheat harvesting had started two weeks ago but the process was disrupted by intermittent rains with farmers trying to cut, thrash and bring yields to their granaries. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 4*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTERS

Landslide buries four houses, mosque in Chitral

A landslide buried four houses and a mosque and shook the foundations of 18 other houses in Drosh town, rendering families homeless. Meanwhile, in Shangla, the district administration evacuated the inmates of 19 houses in Karora area of Chakesar tehsil to safer places for fear of landslides. Downpour caused death of two people, three injuries and damaged 25 houses in Shangla. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 8*)

Landslide hits 20 houses in Chitral

A huge landslide in Mroi Bala village of Lower Chitral hit 20 houses. Lower Chitral deputy commissioner told that no loss of life was reported in incident as occupants of houses had already left for safer places when land started drifting in the afternoon. (*Dawn, April 22nd, 2024, Page 9*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Protesters seek recovery of Hindu girl

Hindu community and traders in Dera Murad Jamali protested against recent kidnapping of a girl, Priya Kumari, and demanded her immediate recovery. The protesters criticised the inefficiency of the Sindh government in recovering Ms Kumari, who had been abducted from Sukkur a few days ago. Holding placards, the protesters raised slogans against what they said routine abduction of innocent children in Sindh and deteriorating security situation for the religious minorities. (*Dawn, April 1st, 2024, Page 5*)

JI rally expresses solidarity with people of Gaza

Thousands of workers and supporters of the Jamaat-i-Islami gathered on Shahrah-i-Quaideen to join the Gaza Solidarity Night to show their support for Palestinians against Israeli atrocities and crimes against humanity. (*Dawn, April 1st, 2024, Page 13*)

Protesting teachers in Quetta seek salaries

Hundreds of teachers, along with members of staff of the Balochistan University, staged a sit-in, in front of Balochistan Assembly. After the sit-in, they marched on the main

roads of provincial capital against the non-payment of their salaries for last 4 months, which they said had caused great financial difficulties. (*Dawn, April 2nd, 2024, Page 5*)

Farmers block highway in protest against loadshedding

Hundreds of landowners and farmers blocked the Quetta-Karachi National Highway at Khuzdar in protest against prolonged power loadshedding which they said was destroying standing crops in Khuzdar and adjacent areas. Speaking at the rally, protest leaders said that 18 to 20 hours of daily power load-shedding is destroying wheat and other crops. They demanded government to end the “economic massacre” of landowners and farmers and ensure uninterrupted power supply to all agricultural feeders so that crops could be watered. Later, the Khuzdar additional deputy commissioner held successful talks with leaders of the protest and assured them of resolving their problem. After getting assurance from administration, the farmers ended their protest and the highway was opened for traffic. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 5*)

Hesco employees protest

A large number of employees of Hyderabad Electric Supply Company observed a sit-in outside a bank on Masjid Road in protest against non-payment of salaries. They said that the staff of the Habib Bank Limited’s branch on Masjid Road in collusion with Hesco officials had embezzled salaries of more than 650 employees. The Federal Investigation Agency had unearthed the Rs540 million scam through forgery and fraud in salaries account of Hesco. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 15*)

Paramedics protest against govt hospitals` `privatisation`

Grand Health Alliance Balochistan staged a rally against a plan to privatise government hospitals in the provincial capital. A large number of government hospital employees, including paramedics and nurses, gathered in Civil Hospital and marched on the main roads and streets of Quetta. The alliance leaders addressed the protesters. They said that instead of ensuring the provision of facilities in hospitals, the government is planning to privatise them. Protesters chanted slogans against the government and criticised plan.

The protesters demanded the removal of Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti and declared him “incompetent”. They said instead of giving hospitals into private ownership, their conditions should be improved so that free healthcare can be made available to people. They vowed to resist the privatisation and demanded the government to reconsider its decision. They also claimed that they met with the provincial health secretary to discuss issue and informed the authorities of their stance and reservations. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 3*)

Strike ends as labourers allowed work at Torkham

Protesting labourers and daily wagers ended their 3-week-long protest sit-in after Pakistani and Afghan officials agreed to provide them access up to Torkham border’s zero point and resume small-time cross-border trade. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 8*)

Protest held over ‘extrajudicial killing’ by police in Thatta

Activists of political parties, nationalist groups and sympathisers of an alleged victim of ‘staged’ encounter held a demonstration outside local press club to register protest against what they described as extrajudicial murder of Rafique Khaskheli by Thatta police earlier this week. The protesters deplored that police were victimising local citizens through ‘staged’ encounters and claimed that Khaskheli was shot dead at the behest of an influential person. He was first promoted as a dangerous criminal and then targeted in a fake encounter, they said. They demanded a transparent and impartial probe into the episode. (*Dawn, April 8th, 2024, Page 15*)

Govt following IMF dictates, claims CPP

The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) described present federal dispensation as a ‘caretaker’ government which, it said, was managing the country’s affairs on dictates of IMF. In the present government too, important portfolios had been doled out to persons who were in fact “pawns of the establishment and IMF”. Kazi said that it was highly deplorable that Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf had voted for such ‘pawns’ to get themselves elected to Senate. He said that elections in the country were just a farce considering the fact that they facilitated the rise to power of such people who were not genuine representatives of masses but of IMF and the establishment.

He foresaw that now national enterprises would be auctioned off in the name of privatisation and prices of petrol, gas, electricity and essential commodities would rise with each passing day. As per official statistics, 40pc of population was living below poverty line and according to World Bank figures another 10 million would slide down the poverty line in the country. He apprehended that opposition would remain silent on the aggravating situation. The government and opposition would keep playing ‘cat and mouse’ while masses would continuously be looted. He said that people had been trapped in the vicious circle of tribal clashes, kidnapping for ransom and hoodlums’ tyranny to deprive them of their voice.

The Sindh government had surpassed all limits of bad governance, inefficiency, corruption and nepotism. Kazi said that in order to defeat people’s struggle against corporate farming, incidents of kidnapping for ransom, thefts and brigandry had been increased. All tribal chiefs and waderas, who were part of the government, were involved with criminals. He called for police operation under the leadership of some honest officers to eliminate dacoit gangs and their patrons, and said there was no need of a military operation for the purpose. Federal law enforcement agencies had been present in the province since 1992 and receiving billions of rupees from Sindh government yet peace continued to elude the region. He said that CPP believed in the struggle for peoples’ rights. The party’s provincial committee adopted a resolution at the meeting demanding the government to implement notification for fixation of a fair support price for wheat and said the present price was inadequate given hike in the cost

of production. Wheat procurement centres should be established as soon as possible. (*Dawn, April 8th, 2024, Page 15*)

Farmers to stage sit-in for hike in wheat support price

The Pakistan Kissan Ittehad has announced a sit-in in front of the Punjab Chief Minister House for an increase in support price of wheat in the province. The chairman of the farmers' body said that the Rs3,900 per 40kg wheat support price announced by the Punjab government was not acceptable to growers. (*Dawn, April 14th, 2024, Page 2*)

Enraged mob storms fast-food outlet in Mirpurkhas

An enraged mob attacked local outlet of an international fast food chain on Military Road during a protest against Israeli brutalities in Gaza and massacre of innocent Palestinians in a one-sided war. Eyewitnesses said that a large number of people gathered outside the outlet and raised charged slogans against Israeli bombardment of innocent men, women and children in Gaza. Police officials said that they had arrested a number of miscreants and started interrogating them. They would track down the rest of the attackers with the help of CCTV footage. Police had already started conducting raids in different areas to detain the miscreants. (*Dawn, April 14th, 2024, Page 15*)

Anti-Israel protesters storm food outlet in Sukkur

A fast food outlet was attacked by anti-Israel protesters in Sukkur, police said. They added that 11 attackers have been arrested and an FIR has been registered against 50-60 suspects. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 8*)

Rally denounces killings of Gazans, welcomes Iran's retaliatory strikes on Israel

Amid rain, scores of people gathered in front of Karachi Press Club and staged a protest demonstration against Israeli atrocities in Palestine. The demonstration, organised by Palestine Foundation Pakistan (PLF), also welcomed Iran's retaliatory strikes on Israel over an attack on its embassy in Damascus. The protesters carried portraits of three slain sons of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and displayed banners and placards inscribed with demands like "Stop killing children in Gaza", "Stop Genocide" and "The United States bears responsibility for genocide in Palestine", etc. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 14*)

AT holds rally against low wheat price, proposed amendment to Irsa Act

Awami Tehreek staged a rally, as part of its series of protests, in Khairpur Nathan Shah against low support price of wheat fixed by the Sindh government and the proposed amendment to Indus River System Authority (Irsa) Act. They demanded fixing of wheat support price at Rs5,000 per 40kg. The protesters also demanded raising of wheat procurement target set at 900,000 tonnes. They noted that it was far lower than previous year's target of 1.4mn tonnes. They insisted that target should be at least 1.7mn tonnes.

They also accused the Sindh government of facilitating wheat smuggling by fixing low target and depriving growers of gunny bags, thus forcing abadgars to sell their produce at lower prices. They said: "The amendment to the Irsa Act is viewed as a symbol of

martial law and reminiscent of the ‘One Unit’ rule. This ordinance is deemed unconstitutional and perceived as an assault on the principles outlined in the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Consequently, it is imperative to halt the implementation of this ordinance”. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 15*)

Death of a woman in crossfire: Police baton charge protesters, including women, in Shahdara

The police allegedly trashed and baton charged protesters, including women, who were staging a demo by placing the dead body of a young woman on a road, after she was killed during crossfire between two rival groups in Shahdara area. The protesters, chanting slogans against police, said the deceased woman, Ayesha Nazir (24), died after being hit by a bullet during crossfire between two rival groups who had been resorting to firing in the area since long. They alleged that despite repeated complaints by locals against the rival armed groups, the local police turned a deaf ear, resulting in the killing of the young woman. Eyewitnesses say that a large number of police personnel led by the DSP concerned reached the spot and held negotiations with protesters to convince them to clear the road for traffic. However, the protesters refused to budge. After failure of the dialogue, the police baton charged the protesters, including women, to disperse them. Later, the police high-ups engaged the elders of the area and managed to disperse the protesters, assuring them of action against those responsible for the woman’s death. Police shifted woman’s body to city morgue for an autopsy and dispatched teams for the arrests of the armed men who resorted to firing. (*Dawn, April 16th, 2024, Page 2*)

Protesters block road in Mirpurkhas

Frustrated residents of Old Mirpur and its adjoining localities and villages blocked main Sindhri-Mirpurkhas road in protest against suspension of power supply to their areas for six days. The protesters placed hurdles on the road to cause traffic flow to come to a halt. They complained to media persons that Hyderabad Electric Supply Company’s (Hesco) officials had disconnected power supply to their areas six days ago without giving any reason, multiplying difficulties for thousands of people in Old Mirpur and its adjacent areas. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

Naanbais observe `partial strike` amid more arrests

The district administration arrested 16 naanbais for not complying with new rates of Roti and Naan as tandoors across the garrison city observed a partial strike against the government’s move to reduce the prices of Roti. The strike was observed on the call of the All Pakistan Naan-bai Association and is likely to continue today as well. District administration warned they would seal the shops if the tandoors remained closed and the new price list was not followed. Punjab government reduced the price of Roti from Rs20 to Rs16 while the price of Naan was reduced from Rs25 to Rs20 in the province. The refusal of the tandoor owners to follow the government prices was met with high-handedness. The president of the naan-bai association was detained under MPO and

many naan-bais were arrested for violating the notification. Imposed fines to tune of Rs243,500 on 59 tandoors and arrested 16 violators. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 4*)

KU research facility staff protests over non-payment of salaries

The staff of Centre of Excellence in Marine Biology (CEMB) at Karachi University (KU) held another protest on campus for the third consecutive day over non-payment of their salaries for the past three months. CEMB, directly funded by Higher Education Commission (HEC), had been facing a serious financial crisis following significant deduction in its grant and that too was released on a quarterly basis after prolonged delay. The worst affected were the pensioners as some of them were deprived of their dues pending for years. (*Dawn, April 20th, 2024, Page 14*)

Family protests trespass into home, torture on inmates

A number of women staged demonstrations outside Khairpur SSP's office and Khairpur Press Club in protest against a lawyer who allegedly barged into their house in Gambat along with police, subjected the family to torture, ransacked the property and took away three men. The protesters raised slogans against police and demanded immediate release of their men. They were buying a piece of agricultural land and lawyer forced them to cancel their deal. They alleged that when they refused the lawyer and his brothers along with Gambat police forced into their house, tortured the family members, including women and young children, and forcibly took away Liaquat Ali, Bahadur and Ali Mohammad Jiskani. They said that they were being threatened with dire consequences, implication in fake cases and threats to their lives. (*Dawn, April 20th, 2024, Page 15*)

Jl activists stage protests over surge in street crime

The Jamaat-i-Islami took to the streets to stage multiple protests across the metropolis against increasing incidents of street crime and the failure of police in curbing the menace. Scores of party workers gathered outside the offices of SSPs of Karachi's seven districts to demand local policing and accountability of "black sheep" within the force. The protesters carried party flags and placards and chanted slogan against lawlessness in the city and poor performance of the law enforcement agency. The Karachi police was comprised of over 37,000 policemen but unfortunately majority of them were deputed for VIP security and protocol duties. They said that 62 Karachiites had been killed in the last three months and more than 21,000 street crimes reported in city during the same period. They said that no one was safe in Karachi as these crime statistics were enough to tell what's happening in metropolis. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 15*)

Torkham highway blocked as relatives protest man's death in 'custody'

The Peshawar-Torkham highway remained closed for eight hours as the agitated relatives of a man demonstrated in Jamrud after his alleged death inside Jamrud sub-jail. Noorul Amin was arrested by the police on suspicion of his involvement in drug smuggling. Jail authorities insisted Amin had a heart attack and was immediately shifted to Hayatabad Medical Complex in Peshawar, but could not survive. Jail authorities also

insisted neither they nor relatives of the deceased, in his early 50s, could find any torture signs on his body. The prolonged road closure suspended vehicular traffic to Torkham border with a large number of loaded vehicles stranded on both sides of the artery. The protesters agreed to end the protest only after MNA Iqbal Afridi's assurance about an impartial inquiry into the death of Amin and suspension of Jamrud SHO Adnan Afridi. (*Dawn, April 22nd, 2024, Page 9*)

Protesters block road in Nawabshah

Two large groups of protesters blocked the press club road, demanding arrest of a teenage boy's killers and recovery of a huge amount of cash looted from a Hindu trader that day in the city. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 15*)

Balochistan varsity staff rally for pay

The teaching and non-teaching staff of Balochistan University marched on different roads of the provincial capital and staged a sit-in to protest against non-payment of their salaries for four months. The protesting faculty and other staffers questioned why funds were not being released when funds for all other departments were always made available. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 5*)

Protest held against drug peddlers

A large number of students and teachers of Government Serenwari Higher Secondary School near Khipro took out a rally and staged a demonstration in protest against sale of drugs to students by drug peddlers in connivance with local police. The protesters led by the school's headmaster Urs Rajar marched to Khipro town where they staged a sit-in on main road and blocked traffic. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 15*)

Multi-party rally calls for probe into supply of Nato weapons to dacoit gangs

Activists of many nationalist and progressive parties brought out a 'peace rally' over deteriorating law and order situation and increasing incidents of kidnapping for ransom in Sindh, as well as failure of security agencies in tracing out Priya Kumari and taking to task killers of journalist Jan Mohammad Mahar and other respectable citizens. The rally started from Old Campus locality and culminated outside local press club. (*Dawn, April 28th, 2024, Page 17*)

KU in crisis as non-teaching staff on pen-down strike from today

Amid a week-long teachers' boycott of evening classes, the University of Karachi is heading towards a complete closure as the non-teaching staff on the campus are set to go on a pen-down strike for an indefinite period from Monday till acceptance of their demands by the varsity administration. Academic activities on the campus have partially been suspended since April 22 due to the teachers' boycott of KU evening classes. Their demands include payment of leave encashment, reimbursement of medical bills and remuneration of evening classes pending for more than a year.

A couple of days ago, the Employees' Welfare Association of the KU (EWAKU) and all representative groups held their general body meeting at the Chinese Teachers Memorial Auditorium and announced that they would go on a pen-down strike from Monday. The employees unanimously decided to stop performing their academic, administrative and examination duties till acceptance of their demands. Meanwhile, staff members of the CEMB continued their strike over non-payment of their salaries and pension for three months. (*Dawn, April 29th, 2024, Page 13*)

Scores held for protesting govt's `unfair` wheat policy

As farmers from across the province thronged The Mall to record their protest against what they believe to be an unfair wheat procurement policy, a heavy contingent of Punjab police in anti-riot gear rounded up scores of their number. The farmers had taken to streets against an inordinate delay in the purchase of grain and the decision to reduce provincial procurement quota from over 4m tonnes to 2.3m tonnes. Protesters, led by Kissan Ittehad Pakistan, managed to assemble at GPO Chowk on Mall and attempted to march towards Punjab Assembly, where a heavy contingent of police intercepted them. Police not only blocked road by placing containers, but also arrested several protesters. There were reports that arrests were also made in Rahim Yar Khan, Khanewal, Vehari, Kasur, Multan, Sadiqabad, Pakpattan, Muzaffargarh, and Sahiwal districts. Police sources claimed 46 protesters were taken into custody. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 1*)

Medical students protest `rigid discipline` after fellow's death

Dozens of students of a private medical college located in the Defence Housing Authority (Lahore) staged a demonstration against what they said death of a female peer under mysterious circumstances and accused the college owner and some teachers of creating 'rigorous discipline' on the campus. The death of the student and the subsequent protest by her peers compelled the administration to accept the 'charge-sheet' and issue a notification to mollify protesters. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 2*)

Protest against police

Residents of Mian Shoro village near Sakrand staged a demonstration in protest against police for picking up their loved one and holding him incommunicado. The protesters said that Pir Abdul Ghafar, 25, was kidnapped by a uniformed policeman along with others in civvies when was going in his car to attend hearing of a case lodged by forests department in Qazi Ahmed four days ago. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 15*)

Protest held against dacoity at hospital

Doctors and paramedics at Moro taluka hospital observed a token hunger strike and staged a demonstration at the hospital's gate in protest against worsening law and order conditions in the district. The protesters said that law and order conditions in the district were far from satisfactory. A few days back, a gang of dacoits held Halani government hospital's staff hostage at gunpoint and robbed them of gold, cash and other valuable belongings. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 15*)

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Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

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Unexpected strawberry crop spins Burkina`s `red gold` [45]

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

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3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

Chicago wheat futures extend gains

Chicago wheat extended gains to a new two-month peak as a sharp decline in US winter wheat conditions kept attention on weather risks to northern hemisphere crops. (*Business Recorder, April 16th, 2024, Page 9*)

Unexpected strawberry crop spins Burkina`s `red gold`

In the suburbs of Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou, lucrative strawberry farming is supplanting traditional crops like cabbage and lettuce and has become a top export to neighbouring countries. Prized as "red gold" in the Sahel, strawberry crops brought in some two billion CFA francs (\$3.3 million) from 2019 to 2020, according to agricultural support programme PAPEA. Cultivating strawberries, which thrive on ample sunlight and water, might come as a surprise in this semi-arid West African country. But Burkina Faso leads the region's strawberry production, growing about 2,000 tonnes a year. Despite being prized by local customers, more than half is exported to neighbouring countries. In season, strawberries tend to be sold at a higher price than other fruit and vegetables, fetching 3,000 CFA francs (\$5) per kg. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 9*)

4 # SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

5 # TRADE

US trade gap grows in February to highest level since April 2023

The US trade deficit expanded in February by more than analysts expected to reach its highest level since April 2023, as imports once again exceeded exports. The overall trade gap grew to \$68.9 billion, up \$1.3 billion from a month earlier, the Commerce Department said. The February increase reflected a \$7.1 billion rise in imports from a month earlier, which was counteracted by export growth of just \$5.8 billion, meaning the overall trade gap rose. (*Business Recorder, April 5th, 2024, Page 9*)southern

Turkiye imposes export restrictions on Israel until Gaza ceasefire

Turkiye will restrict exports of a wide range of products to Israel, including steel and jet fuel, until a ceasefire is declared in Gaza, the Turkish Trade Ministry said, in Ankara's first significant measure against Israel after six months of aggression. Turkiye

has denounced Israel for its aggression on Gaza. Ankara has called for an immediate ceasefire, supported steps to try Israel for genocide, and sent thousands of tons of aid for Gazans. However, Ankara also maintained commercial ties with Israel despite its strong rhetoric, prompting a domestic backlash.

In a statement following Ankara's announcement that it would be taking measures after Israel rejected its request to take part in an aid air-drop. It said the measures would apply to the export of products from 54 different categories. "This decision will remain in place until Israel, under its obligations emanating from international law, urgently declares a ceasefire in Gaza and allows the unhindered flow of sufficient humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip," it said. Shortly after the war started, Turkiye and Israel pulled back their ambassadors. According to Turkish Exporters Assembly, while trade with Israel has fallen since Oct. 7, exports to Israel have increased each month in 2024 so far, and were worth \$423.2m in March. Total exports in first quarter of year amounted to \$1.1 billion, down 21.6% year-on-year. (*Business Recorder, April 10th, 2024 Page 1*)

Chinese exports fall more than feared in March

Chinese exports plunged more than expected last month as the world's second-largest economy struggles to sustain its post-pandemic recovery. Shipments sank 7.5% on-year, while imports shrank 1.9pc. A Bloomberg survey of economists had forecast exports to fall just 1.9pc and imports to rise 1pc. Meanwhile, US has topped long-time leader China as Taiwan's main export market for four consecutive months due to a surge in demand for microchip products and AI technology, Taipei's Finance Ministry said. Taiwan exported \$8.49bn in products to US, compared with \$8.28bn to mainland China. The trend continued through March, when US exports increased by 65pc to \$9.11bn, a 6pc jump, while mainland China received \$7.99bn. (*Dawn, April 13th, 2024, Page 9*)

India set to sign trade deal with Oman

India and Oman will sign a trade deal in the coming months, two Indian government officials said, as New Delhi seeks to expand its ties in the Middle East, where rising tensions are putting major shipping routes at risk. India and Oman have annual trade of less than \$13 billion, but the relationship is important for New Delhi as the Gulf nation is a gateway to the narrow Strait of Hormuz between Oman and Iran, a major transit point for global oil shipments. (*Dawn, April 28th, 20224, Page 13*)

Russian wheat export prices rise on weather risks to new crop

Russian wheat export prices continued to rise last week as volatile weather conditions made crop forecasts difficult. Combined with dry weather in south of the country, May frosts in central regions, the Volga region and in some southern regions could have a negative impact on crop. Price of 12.5% protein Russian wheat scheduled for free-on-board (FOB) delivery in June was \$216 a metric ton, up from \$212 a ton previous week. The Sovecon agriculture consultancy pegged the same class of wheat at \$215-219 a ton, up from \$213 to \$216 a ton FOB. (*Business Recorder, April 28th, 2024, Page 7*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

US House okays aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan

The US House of Representatives with broad bipartisan support passed a \$95 billion legislative package providing security assistance to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, over bitter objections from Republican hardliners. The measure includes some \$60.84bn for Ukraine as it struggles to fight off Russian invasion. The unusual four-bill package also includes funds for Israel, security assistance for Taiwan. Some hardline Republicans have voiced strong opposition to further Ukraine aid, with some arguing the US can ill afford it given its rising \$34 trillion national debt. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 14*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

Shocks in G20 emerging economies hit rich-world growth: IMF

Domestic shocks in emerging economies in G20 are increasingly impacting growth in rich world, according to a report published by IMF. Those countries — ranging from China, the world’s second-largest economy, to default-prone Argentina — have become so embedded in the global economy, particularly via trade and commodity value chains, that they are “no longer simply on the receiving end of global shocks.”

“Since 2000, spillovers from domestic shocks in G20 emerging markets — particularly China — have increased and are now comparable in size to those from shocks in advanced economies,” IMF wrote in a chapter of its World Economic Outlook report, released ahead of next week’s IMF World Bank Group Spring Meetings in Washington, DC. Domestic shocks in China can explain as much as 10% of output variation in other emerging markets after three years, and 5% in advanced economies, while shocks from other the G20 emerging markets account for as much as 4% of variation in other emerging and advanced economies.

The intertwined nature of economies underscores the risks to the rich world of shocks in faraway nations but also the boost they could get if the economies strengthen again. The ten emerging economies in the G20 - Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey - have more than doubled their combined share of global GDP since 2000. Overall, spillovers have increased almost threefold since the early 2000s, led by China, while spillover risks from Brazil, India and Mexico have also grown moderately. Across G20 emerging markets, IMF warned that average growth of 6% per year over the past 20 years would slow and lowered the medium-term growth outlook to 3.7%. (*Business Recorder, April 10th, 2024 Page 1*)

8.1 # World Bank

WB sees fall in commodity prices

The World Bank's forecasts call for a decline of 3pc in global commodity prices in 2024 and 4pc in 2025. That pace will do little to subdue inflation that remains above central bank targets in most countries. It will keep commodity prices about 38pc higher than they were on average in five years before Covid-19. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 9*)

ME tensions threaten progress on inflation: WB

The ongoing tensions in Middle East threaten to halt — or even reverse — some of the recent progress made in tackling global inflation, the World Bank said. Israel's ongoing military campaign in Gaza has caused tensions to rise across the region and pushed up oil prices. "Heightened tensions in the Middle East have been exerting upward pressure on prices for key commodities, notably oil and gold," the World Bank announced in its outlook for global commodity markets. "Disinflationary tailwinds from moderating commodity prices appear essentially over". A worst-case scenario shock to oil prices meanwhile could raise global inflation. (*Business Recorder, April 26th, 2024, Page 1*)

9 # POLICY

Not any preferable news to be included in this month.

10 # SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

The global challenge of food waste

In a world where millions go hungry every day, the staggering amount of food wasted by households and businesses worldwide not only perpetuates the brutal cycle of hunger but also represents glaring inefficiencies in global food systems, which are largely unsustainable and inequitable. This was underscored in some detail in the UN's Food Waste Index Report published on March 27, which has thrown up some confounding revelations. According to report, an astonishing one billion meals were discarded every day in 2022, which in monetary terms amounts to an enormous 1 trillion dollars' worth of food. At a time when around 783 million people are going hungry worldwide and the hunger epidemic has already been compounded by the impacts of climate change, economic shocks, the Covid pandemic, and wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the level of food waste is nothing short of a global tragedy. It has hugely exacerbated dire circumstances faced by the most vulnerable populations, deepening human suffering on a global scale.

Given the catastrophic consequences for millions of people, food wastage, therefore, amounts to nothing short of a moral failure, requiring urgent efforts to implement policies that incentivize food recovery and redistribution, and investment in programmes that raise public awareness about the costs of food waste. When it comes to the issue of food loss, investments in infrastructure that improve food storage and transportation, especially in poorer countries like ours, and the adoption of sustainable practices throughout the supply chain that prioritise energy-efficient production

methods, are a must. Food waste also has grave implications for the environment. A leading cause of habitat loss is the use of natural ecosystems for agricultural purposes. Given this, the fact that food waste takes up the equivalent of nearly 30 percent of the world's farming land only exacerbates the environmental toll. In addition, when food ends up in landfills, it decomposes anaerobically, releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Moreover, the production of wasted food entails the use of valuable resources such as water, fertilisers and energy, all of which generate carbon emissions.

All of this combined has resulted in a situation where food waste generates eight to 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. To put this into perspective, if it were a country, food wastage would rank third after China and the US as a leading carbon emitter. Food waste is clearly a complex issue with far-reaching consequences for economies, food security and the environment. There is a need to recognise the interconnected nature of the challenge and take decisive action to reduce food waste so that global food systems become more resilient and sustainable, benefiting both people and the planet. (*Business Recorder, Editorial, April 4th, 2024, Page 6*)

World food prices rebound from 3-year low, says UN agency

World food prices rebounded in March from a three-year low, boosted by increases in vegetable oils, meat and dairy products, according to FAO latest price index. FAO index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 118.3 points in March, up from a revised 117.0 points the previous month. The February reading was the lowest for the index since February 2021 and marked a seventh consecutive monthly decline. International food prices have fallen sharply from a record peak in March 2022 at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of fellow crop exporter Ukraine. The FAO's latest monthly reading was 7.7% below the year-earlier level. The dairy index gained 2.9% for a sixth straight monthly rise, driven by cheese and butter prices. Gains outweighed declines, for sugar fell 5.4%. (*Business Recorder, April 6th, 2024, Page 1*)

11 # ENVIRONMENT

From polar bears to groundwater, nature is riddled with 'forever chemicals'

They didn't exist a century ago but today PFAS "forever chemicals" contaminate the environment from groundwater to Antarctic snow to turtle eggs, and concern over their possible toxicity is growing. Lawsuits and regulations targeting per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are multiplying, with France becoming the latest jurisdiction to consider tough new curbs on these long-life substances. A French legislator will introduce a bill to address what he calls the health "emergency" posed by exposure to PFAS in the environment. Widely used in everyday items, highly durable, and very slow to break down, PFAS have been detected in water, air, fish and soil in remotest corners of the globe. A 2022 study in Australia established the transmission of PFAS from female turtles to their unborn offspring, while other research found traces in polar bear livers and birds, seals and other animals. A wealth of scientific research

has demonstrated the pervasive reach of PFAS in nature, but possible harms to people and planet have been harder to definitively establish. More than 20 years ago, a study in US concluded that once inside body PFAS may be able to reach brain of vertebrates and affect nervous system. Studies have since shown that exposure to some PFAS, there are at least 4,000 chemical compounds in the family, may be linked to serious health effects in humans and animals.

It is a subject of growing concern, with French ecologist and MP Nicolas Thierry asking lawmakers to ban PFAS from 2025 if alternatives exist. European Union is considering a blanket Europe-wide ban on PFAS from as early as 2026 while New Zealand will outlaw their use in cosmetic products by 2027. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 10*)

Plastic treaty talks deadlocked over production limits

With world still divided over how ambitious its first plastics treaty should be, countries are considering launching a series of smaller meetings before a hoped-for agreement in December. Countries still need to decide on whether the treaty should call for reducing the amount of plastics produced. During the last week of negotiations in Canada's capital, Ottawa, more than 60 countries demanded the treaty include production caps. European Union, along with Rwanda, Peru, Norway, Ghana, and other governments calling themselves the High-Ambition Coalition, said negotiators should spend the next few months studying whether some types of plastics can be reduced.

On the last day of talks in Ottawa, countries split into working groups to focus on resolving details of the hoped-for treaty, including how the work should be financed. In announcing the plan for working groups to continue negotiating in coming months, the chair of the talks, Luis Vayas Valdivieso of Ecuador, did not say whether production limits would continue to be in discussion. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 10*)

11.1 # Health

Hepatitis viruses kill 3,500 people a day

More than 3,500 people die from hepatitis viruses every day and the global toll is rising, the World Health Organisation warned, calling for swift action to fight the second-largest infectious killer. New data from 187 countries showed that the number of deaths from viral hepatitis rose to 1.3 million in 2022 from 1.1 million in 2019, according to a WHO report released to coincide with World Hepatitis Summit in Portugal. The report said that there are 3,500 deaths per day worldwide from hepatitis infections — 83 per cent from hepatitis B, 17 percent from hepatitis C. There are effective and cheap generic drugs which can treat these viruses. (*Dawn, April 10th, 2024, Page 10*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

`Staggering` number of workers facing climate change-induced health hazards: UN
A large majority of workers worldwide are facing a cocktail of health hazards linked to climate change, the United Nations said, warning that existing regulations offered

inadequate protection. “A staggering number of workers are already being exposed to climate change-related hazards in the workplace and these figures are only likely to get worse,” the UN’ ILO said. Farm workers and others who carry out heavy labour in hot climates especially “may be exposed to a cocktail of hazards”. These hazards include excessive heat, UV radiation, air pollution, vector-borne diseases and agrochemicals. Those working in hot indoor environments or poorly ventilated spaces are also at risk. “Workers are among those most exposed to climate change hazards yet frequently have no choice but to continue working, even if conditions are dangerous,” report said.

It pointed out that in 2020 — the last year for which statistics are available — 2.4 billion workers, or more than 70 per cent of the global workforce, were estimated to be exposed to excessive heat at some point. That marks “a clear increase”, Manal Azzi, the ILO’s senior specialist on occupational safety and health, told reporters in Geneva. The number of exposed workers had ballooned by 35 per cent over two decades, and even adjusting for the growing global population, the percentage of the labour force affected had swelled by 8.8pc since year 2000. Nearly 23 million occupational injuries attributed to excessive heat are reported each year, costing, on estimate, nearly 19,000 lives annually. And those numbers do not include the more than 26 million people who live with chronic kidney disease linked to workplace heat stress, the ILO said. Furthermore, the impact of global warming on workers goes well beyond heat exposure.

Report noted that numerous dangerous health conditions in workers had been linked to climate change, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory illnesses, kidney disfunction and mental health conditions. ILO said 1.6 billion workers worldwide were estimated to be exposed to UV radiation each year, with more than 18,960 work-related deaths annually from non-melanoma skin cancer. Another 1.6 billion people were likely to be exposed to workplace pollution, resulting in up to 860,000 deaths among outdoor workers annually. More than 870 million agricultural workers are meanwhile likely to be exposed to pesticides, with more than 300,000 deaths attributed to pesticide poisoning each year. And 15,000 work-related deaths each year are attributed to exposure to parasitic and vector-borne diseases. (*Dawn, April 23rd, 2024, Page 10*)

UN launches fund to shield displaced people from climate shocks

The United Nations said it was launching a new Climate Resilience Fund aimed at boosting protections for “refugees and displaced communities” threatened by climate change. The UN refugee agency said it aimed to raise \$100 million for the new fund by the end of next year to support refugees, their host communities and countries of origin hardest hit by climate emergencies. The agency highlighted in a statement that climate risks were “strongly correlated with conflict and poverty”, experienced by many refugees. In 2022, more than 70 percent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries. UNHCR works to protect more than 114 million people forced to flee their homes globally. (*Business Recorder, April 25th, 2024, Page 5*)

12 1 # Climate Crisis

Northern Spain's Galicia breaks April heat records

Parts of the region of Galicia in northern Spain and the Canary Islands on Friday (April 12) experienced record breaking heat for April as swathes of warm air from Africa upped temperatures, triggering summer warmth that is expected to last through the weekend, Spain's weather agency AEMET said. In some parts of northern Spain and Canary Islands, the temperature was up to 15 degrees Celsius (59 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than the normal April temperature. The first trimester of 2024 has been the hottest on record in Spain since records began in 1961. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 11*)

'Exceptional' late snowfall surprises Finland

Finland experienced exceptionally snowy weather for late April that caused chaos in commuter traffic, halted tramlines and delayed airport departures. Snowfall in late April or even in May is not unprecedented in the Nordic country. There is even a Finnish word, "takatalvi", to describe instances of sudden cold spells making a return in spring. However, the last time similar heavy amounts of daily snowfall were recorded in Helsinki on April 23 dates back to 1972 more than 50 years ago, Ville Siiskonen from the Finnish Meteorological Institute said. "Having this much snowfall in the south this late in spring is unusual, even exceptional", he noted. A wide area of cold precipitation moved over Finland from east, bringing freezing rain that quickly turned to ice as it hit the cold ground followed by heavy snowfall. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 10*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTERS

Asia hit hardest by climate, weather disasters in 2023: UN

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the UN's weather and climate agency said Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace. The World Meteorological Organisation said the impact of heatwaves in Asia was becoming more severe, with melting glaciers threatening the region's future water security. The WMO said Asia was warming faster than the global average, with temperatures last year nearly two degrees Celsius above the 1961 to 1990 average. Many countries in the region experienced their hottest year on record in 2023, along with a barrage of extreme conditions, from droughts and heatwaves to floods and storms. The State of the Climate in Asia 2023 report highlighted the accelerating rate of key climate change indicators such as surface temperature, glacier retreat and sea level rise, saying they would have serious repercussions for societies, economies and ecosystems in the region. "Asia remained the world's most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023," the WMO said. The annual mean near-surface temperature over Asia in 2023 was the second highest on record, at 0.91°C above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.87°C above the 1961-1990 average. Particularly high average temperatures were recorded from western Siberia to central Asia, and from eastern China to Japan, the report said, with Japan having its hottest summer on record. As for precipitation, it was below normal in the Himalayas and in the Hindu Kush mountain range in Pakistan and

Afghanistan. Meanwhile, southwest China suffered from a drought, with below-normal precipitation levels in nearly every month of the year. The High-Mountain Asia region, centred on the Tibetan Plateau, contains the largest volume of ice outside of the polar regions. Over the last several decades, most of these glaciers have been retreating, and at an accelerating rate, the WMO said, with 20 out of 22 monitored glaciers in the region showing continued mass loss last year. The report said 2023 sea-surface temperatures in northwest Pacific Ocean were the highest on record.

Last year, 79 disasters associated with water-related weather hazards were reported in Asia. Of those, more than 80 per cent were floods and storms, with more than 2,000 deaths and nine million people directly affected. “Floods were the leading cause of death in reported events in 2023 by a substantial margin”, noting the continuing high level of vulnerability of Asia to natural hazard events. Hong Kong recorded 158.1mm of rainfall in one hour on September 7 — the highest since records began in 1884, as a result of a typhoon. The WMO said there was an urgent need for national weather services across the region to improve tailored information to officials working on reducing disaster risks. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the evolving climate is not merely an option, but a fundamental necessity. (*Dawn, April 24th, 2024, Page 12*)

13.1 # Flood

Kazakhstan and Russia battle huge floods

Water levels in overflowing rivers were still rising in swathes of Russia and Kazakhstan that have been hit by massive floods, with Russia’s city of Orenburg and western Siberia bracing for a new peak. Both Astana and Moscow have called the floods the worst in decades, introducing a state of emergency as water covered entire cities and villages. More than 100,000 people have been evacuated from the rising water — mostly in Kazakhstan. (*Dawn, April 10th, 2024, Page 10*)

Thousands evacuated from flood-hit Russian city

Thousands of people were evacuated from the Orenburg region in the south of the Urals as floodwater continued to rise, Russian emergency services said. In the city of Orenburg, one of the worst-hit areas in Russia, the Ural River breached its banks, submerging streets and residential areas and water levels continued to rise. The Ural River flows through the centre of Orenburg. Fast-rising temperatures have melted snow and ice, and along with heavy rain have caused a number of major rivers that cross Russia and Kazakhstan to overflow this month. (*Dawn, April 14th, 2024, Page 12*)

Heavy rain, flash floods kill 33 in Afghanistan

At least 33 people have been killed over three days of heavy rains and flash flooding in Afghanistan. Most casualties were from roof collapses while some 600 houses were damaged or destroyed, nearly 600kms of road demolished, and around 2,000 acres of farmland “flooded away”. Some 20 of the nation’s 34 provinces were lashed by the heavy rains, which have followed an unusually dry winter season that has parched

terrain and forced farmers to delay planting. At least 25 people were killed in a landslide after massive snowfall in eastern Afghanistan in February, whilst around 60 were killed in a 3-week spate of precipitation ending in March. (*Dawn, April 15th, 2024, Page 12*)

Heavy floods hit UAE, other Gulf States; 18 die in Oman

Dubai's major international airport began diverting all incoming flights as heavy rains lashed the city, causing widespread flooding. World's busiest air hub, which had been expecting more than 100 flights, earlier briefly halted its operations in the chaos caused by the storm. Dubai has been paralysed by the torrential rain that caused floods around UAE and Bahrain, and left 18 dead in Oman. (*Dawn, April 17th, 2024, Page 10*)

70 die as heavy rains lash Afghanistan

Around 70 people have been killed by heavy rains lashing Afghanistan over the past five days, fifty-six others have been injured, while more than 2,600 houses have been damaged or destroyed and 95,000 acres of farmland wiped away. At least 25 people were killed in a landslide after massive snowfall in eastern Afghanistan in February, while around 60 were killed in a three-week spate of precipitation ending in March. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 10*)

'Once a century' floods to hit southern China

Severe floods "seen around once a century" are expected to hit parts of southern China, state media said, as heavy rains prompted authorities to step up disaster precautions. Major rivers, waterways and reservoirs in Guangdong province are threatening to unleash dangerous floods, forcing the government to enact emergency response plans to protect more than 127 million people. (*Dawn, April 22nd, 2024, Page 12*)

46 killed as dam bursts in flood-hit Kenya

46 people died when a makeshift dam burst its banks in Kenya, as torrential rains and floods battered the country. Scores of people have been killed over March-May wet season in Kenya as heavier than usual rainfall pounds East Africa, compounded by the El Nino weather pattern. The Kenyan government spokesman said that 103 people had lost their lives in floods since March, in a statement that did not mention the dam disaster. More than 28,000 households have been displaced and over 185,000 people affected. The weather has also wreaked havoc in neighbouring Tanzania, where 155 people have been killed in flooding and landslides. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 10*)

13.2 # Heatwave

In-person classes in Philippine schools suspended due to heat

Thousands of schools in Philippines suspended in-person classes, education department said, as parts of tropical country endured dangerously high temperatures. The months of March, April and May are typically the hottest and driest in the archipelago nation, but conditions this year have been exacerbated by the El Nino weather phenomenon. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 12*)

Heatwaves put millions of children in Asia at risk: UN

Massive heatwaves across East Asia and the Pacific could place millions of children at risk, the UN warned, calling for action to protect vulnerable people from the soaring temperatures. Global monitors have warned that 2024 is shaping up to be the hottest year on record, marked by climate extremes and rising greenhouse gas emissions. The UNICEF data showed over 243 million children across the Pacific and East Asia were estimated to be affected by heatwaves, putting them at risk of heat-related illnesses and death. Several countries in the region are currently smouldering in the summer heat, with temperatures nearing record levels as they regularly hit over 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). The UN projected that over two billion children are expected to be exposed to heatwaves by 2050. (*Business Recorder, April 15th, 2024, Page 9*)

Most of Asia swelters in extreme heatwave

South and Southeast Asia braced for more extreme heat, as authorities across the region issued health warnings and residents fled to parks and air-conditioned malls for relief. A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted the region over the past week, sending the mercury as high as 45 degrees Celsius and forcing thousands of schools to tell students to stay home. The Philippines announced the suspension of in-person classes at all public schools for two days after a record-shattering day of heat in the capital Manila. In Thailand, where at least 30 people have died of heatstroke so far this year, the meteorological department warned of “severe conditions” after temperatures in a northern province exceeded 44.1C. And in Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, India and Bangladesh, forecasters warned that temperatures could exceed 40C in the coming days as people endured searing heat and stifling humidity. (*Dawn, April 29th, 2024, Page 10*)

BD court orders closure of schools due to heat wave

A Bangladeshi court ordered a nationwide shutdown of schools due to an ongoing heat wave, one day after government sent millions of children back to class despite searing temperatures. Extensive scientific research has found climate change is causing heat waves to become longer, more frequent and more intense. Average temperatures in Dhaka over the past week have been 4-5 degrees Celsius higher than the 30-year average for the same period. The government said seven people had died as a result of the extreme heat since the start of this month. (*Dawn, April 30th, 2024, Page 10*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTERS

14.1 # Earthquake

Hundreds hurt, many trapped after Taiwan’s strongest quake in 25 years

At least nine people were killed and more than 1,000 injured by a powerful earthquake in Taiwan that damaged dozens of buildings and prompted tsunami warnings that extended to Japan and the Philippines before being lifted. Dozens of people were believed safe but unreachable in areas cut off by massive landslides triggered by the quake — many in tunnels that cut through the mountains that bisect the island from

north to south. Quake was strongest to shake the island in decades, and warned of more tremors in the days ahead. Magnitude-7.4 quake putting the epicentre 18 kilometres south of Taiwan's Hualien City, at a depth of 34.8km. (*Dawn, April 4th, 2024, Page 1*)

Magnitude-6.0 quake shakes northeast Japan

A magnitude-6.0 earthquake struck off northeastern Japan's Fukushima region, but no tsunami warning was issued. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries after the earthquake, whose epicentre had a depth of 40 kilometres (25 miles) and which was also felt in Tokyo. (*Dawn, April, 5th, 2024, Page 10*)

4.8-magnitude quake hits New York, New Jersey

4.8-magnitude earthquake struck near New York City. No major damage was reported. (*Dawn, April 6th, 2024, Page 12*)

14.2 # Volcanic Eruption

Hundreds evacuated after volcano erupts in Indonesia

At least 800 people in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province have been evacuated after multiple eruptions of area's Ruang volcano, which for days has spewed lava and ash clouds into the sky, volcanology agency said. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 10*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Thousands rally against Netanyahu govt in Jerusalem

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Jerusalem against Benjamin Netanyahu's government and against exemptions granted to ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from military service, in scenes reminiscent of mass street protests last year. Protest groups, including some that led mass demonstrations that rocked Israel in 2023, organised the rally outside parliament, the Knesset, calling for a new election to replace government. The protesters also want a more equal share in the burden of army service that binds most Israelis. Around 600 soldiers have been killed so far since Oct 7 and the ensuing war in Gaza, military's highest casualty toll in years. (*Dawn, April 1st, 2024, Page 10*)

Greta Thunberg held twice after Dutch protest

Greta Thunberg was detained twice by Dutch police after she and a group of marchers blocked a main road in The Hague to protest against fossil fuel subsidies. Earlier, Thunberg joined hundreds of protesters on a walk from The Hague's city centre to the nearby A12 arterial highway that connects the seat of the Dutch government with other cities including Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 10*)

Thousands join protest against Hungarian PM

Tens of thousands rallied in Budapest in support of a former government insider turned critic of premier Viktor Orban, as he outlined his plans to try to challenge the nationalist leader. About 100,000 people gathered. (*Dawn, April 7th, 2024, Page 10*)

Protesters demand Netanyahu's resignation, early polls

Protesters once again took to the streets of Tel Aviv, Caesarea and Haifa, demanding the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and early elections. Demonstrators also called for the release of all Israeli hostages held in Gaza ahead of six-month mark of hostilities. (*The News, April 7th, 2024, Page 11*)

Thousands rally in Niger to push for withdrawal of US troops

Thousands took to the streets of Niger's capital to demand the departure of US troops, after the ruling junta further shifted its strategy by ending a military accord with the United States and welcoming Russian military instructors. Marching arm in arm through central Niamey, the crowd waved Nigerien flags in a demonstration that recalled anti-French protests that spurred the withdrawal of France's forces from Niger last year after the army seized power in a coup. One hand-written sign in English read "USA rush out of Niger," in a show of support for the junta and its decision in mid-March to revoke an accord that had allowed around 1,000 US military personnel to operate on its territory out of two bases. (*Dawn, April 14th, 2024, Page 10*)

Israelis rally against government amid deadlock on Gaza hostages

Thousands of Israelis rallied against their government, with some demanding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu call off the half-year-old war in Gaza amid a deadlock in diplomatic efforts to retrieve hostages held there by Hamas. As concern mounts in Israel for the wellbeing of the 129 remaining hostages, who cannot be contacted, their families and friends have organised increasingly vocal demonstrations against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rightist government. (*The News, April 14th, 2024, Page 11*)

Pro-Palestinian protest in San Francisco

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators blocked San Francisco's Gold Gate Bridge, with aerial footage showing entire span packed with traffic in one direction while lanes in the other direction were empty. Demonstrators who were blocking traffic held a banner reading "Stop the world for Gaza." Protest group A15 Action said it was coordinating a "multi-city blockade... in solidarity with Palestine." "In each city, we will identify and blockade major choke points in economy, focusing on points of production and circulation with aim of causing the most economic impact," (*Dawn, April 16th, 2024, Page 11*)

News Maker: WASHINGTON:

Protesters dressed as G7 leaders call upon the G7 to fund debt relief and climate finance through International Development Association, outside World Bank headquarters during the IMF-World Bank spring meetings. (*Dawn, April 18th, 2024, Page 10*)

Google fires 28 workers protesting contract with Israel

Google said it had terminated 28 employees after some staff participated in protests against the company's cloud contract with the Israeli government. The Alphabet unit said a small number of protesting employees entered and disrupted work at a few unspecified office locations. (*Dawn, April 19th, 2024, Page 11*)

Mass protests in Canary Islands decry overtourism

Tens of thousands of demonstrators hit streets across Spain's Canary Islands to demand changes to model of mass tourism they say is overwhelming the Atlantic archipelago. Rallying under the slogan "The Canary Islands have a limit", demonstrators began rallying at midday, flag-waving crowds packing the streets of the main towns across all of the archipelago's seven islands. (*Dawn, April 21st, 2024, Page 12*)

Hundreds in Niger tell US troops to go home

Hundreds protested against the US troop presence in military-ruled Niger where a delegation from Washington is expected within days to arrange an orderly withdrawal. The United States had agreed to withdraw its more than 1,000 soldiers from the African nation where Washington built a \$100 million base to fly a fleet of drones. The demonstration in the northern desert town of Agadez, home to a US air base, was called by a group of 24 civil society associations that have backed the regime since last year's coup. (*Business Recorder, April 22nd, 2024, Page 9*)

Climate protesters wrap Swedish parliament in giant red scarf

Several hundred women surrounded Sweden's parliament with a giant knitted red scarf to protest political inaction over global warming. Responding to a call from the Mothers Rebellion movement, the women marched around the Riksdag with the scarf made of 3,000 smaller scarves, urging politicians to honour a commitment to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The women unfurled their scarves and marched for several hundred metres, singing and holding placards calling to "save the climate for the children's future". (*Dawn, April 22nd, 2024, Page 11*)

Columbia extends protest deadline after students agree to dismantle some tents

Columbia University students agreed to take down "a significant number" of the dozens of tents set up on the school's main campus as part of a protest against Israel's incursion into Gaza, the New York school said. The concession by protesters was part of a deal under which Columbia agreed to extend by 48 hours a midnight deadline for the entire encampment to come down, it said, pointing to "significant progress" in talks.

The university threatened to invite law enforcement to dismantle the encampment if students had not done so by midnight. New York police arrested more than 100 protesters at the encampment at the behest of administrators. The protesters had vowed to keep the protest going until the university agreed to disclose and divest any financial holdings that might support the war in Gaza and granted amnesty to students suspended from school during the demonstrations. The university said student leaders had agreed to make sure that anyone unaffiliated with Columbia leaves the campus that any activity complies with fire safety rules and that protesters refrain from any discriminatory or harassing language. (*Business Recorder, April 25th, 2024, Page 5*)

Pro-Palestinian US campus protests grow as police start crackdown

Pro-Palestinian protests spread to more college campuses in the United States as authorities appeared to be running out of patience and police carried out large-scale arrests. Students at some of the country's most prestigious universities have staged occupations over the growing human toll of Israel's aggression in Gaza. Sit-ins and boisterous demonstrations, including a new one that sprung up at the University of California, Los Angeles, are calling for colleges to sever ties with Israel and with companies they say profit from the conflict. "For 201 days, the world has watched in silence as Israel has murdered over 30,000 Palestinians," said a message posted online by organisers of the UCLA protest. (*Dawn, April 26th, 2024, Page 11*)

Thousands rally in Australian cities to demand gender violence justice

Violence against women is an "epidemic" in Australia, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said, as thousands attended rallies in Sydney and other major Australian cities urging tougher laws on gendered violence. The rallies were spurred by a wave of violence against women that the government says has seen a woman killed every four days this year. The rallies also followed a mass stabbing in Sydney this month that killed six people, including five women. (*The News, April 28th, 2024, Page 10*)

Columbia, Texas varsities leadership rebuked for police crackdown on protesters

Columbia University's embattled president came under renewed pressure as a campus oversight panel sharply criticized her administration for clamping down on a pro-Palestinian protest at the Ivy League school. President Nemat Minouche Shafik has faced an outcry from many students, faculty and outside observers for summoning New York police to dismantle a tent encampment set up on campus by protesters against Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. After a two-hour meeting, the Columbia University Senate approved a resolution that Shafik's administration had undermined academic freedom and disregarded the privacy and due process rights of students and faculty members by calling in the police and shutting down the protest. At least 40 protesters were arrested in Denver at the Auraria Campus. Like-minded protests against Israel's actions have spread overseas. At the prestigious Sciences Po University in Paris, pro-Israeli protesters came to challenge pro-Palestinian students occupying the building. Police kept the two sides apart. A few blocks from the White House, about 200 protesters at George Washington University remained gathered for a second day. The school said students did not follow directions to leave, and several were suspended and temporarily barred from campus. The White House has defended free speech on campus, but Democratic President Joe Biden denounced "antisemitic protests" this week and stressed that campuses must be safe. Some Republicans in Congress have accused Shafik and other university administrators of being too soft on protesters and allowing Jewish students to be harassed on their campuses. The president of the University of Texas at Austin, Jay Hartzell, faced a similar backlash from faculty, two days after he joined with Republican Governor Greg Abbott in calling in police to break

up a pro-Palestinian protest. Dozens of protesters were taken into custody, but charges were dropped because authorities lacked probable cause - or reasonable grounds - for making the arrests. Nearly 200 university faculty members signed a letter expressing no confidence in Hartzell because he “needlessly put students, staff and faculty in danger” when police in riot gear and on horseback moved against the protesters. Hartzell said he made the decision because protest organizers aimed to “severely disrupt” the campus for a long period. The clash in Texas was one of many this week between demonstrators and police summoned by university leaders, who say the protests jeopardize the safety of students and at times, subject Jewish students to antisemitism and harassment. Civil rights groups have condemned the arrests and urged authorities to respect free speech rights. (*The News*, April 28th, 2024, Page 12)

US university demonstrators stand strong in face of police action

Over the past few weeks, similar protests have been held in universities around the US, resulting in heated discussion over the right to free speech and the political discourse on university campuses. In some universities, the administration called in police and security forces to dislodge protesting students. Around 275 people were arrested on four campuses, at times by police in riot gear using chemical irritants and tasers. The wave of demonstrations started with students setting up their camp at Columbia University in New York last week. University’s president, Nemat Minouche Shafik, called New York Police Department to disperse the protesters. In the action that followed, 108 students were arrested, according to the student who talked to *Dawn* on the condition of anonymity. She said this was first time that police was called on students since 1968, when anti-war protests broke out amidst the war in *Vietnam*. This acted as a catalyst for the protests to spread across US universities. Students turned up at Columbia to protests in droves the very next day. A similar police action was also witnessed at the University of Michigan’s campus in Ann Arbor. One of the students explained to *Dawn* that the use of undue and illegitimate force against protesters was jaw-dropping. She claimed that one of the female protesters was “body slammed” while another had her “hijab ripped off”. Pro-Palestine protests are often met with counter-demonstrations, which students believed weren’t dealt with same ferocity. University of Michigan students claimed that their camps were targeted by counter-protestors who “harass and intimidate” students. Protesting students have a mechanism to deal with this retaliation & have devised “comprehensive safety protocols” to prevent any altercations and ensure movement’s growth. (*Dawn*, April 29th, 2024, Page 12)

Columbia varsity warns students of suspension over Gaza protests

Columbia University’s president said that talks with pro-Palestinian protesters over the dismantling of an encampment on the Ivy League campus had failed and urged them to voluntarily disperse or face suspension from school. President said days of talks between student organisers and academic leaders had failed to break a stalemate over encampment set up to protest Israeli attacks on Gaza. (*Dawn*, April 30th, 2024, Page 11)

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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