

HAAL AHWAL

Monthly News Reviews on Food and Agriculture

March, 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
ADP	Annual Development Programme
APFS	Audited Project Financial Statements
ASSIB	Adapting to Salinity in the Indus Basin
BBH	Benazir Bhutto Hospital
BISP	Benazir Income Support Programme
BTL	Bahria Town Ltd
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CCI	Council of Common Interests
CRISP	Crisis Resilient Social Protection
DEEP	Digital Economy Enhancement Project
DFIs	Development Finance Institutions
DHA	Defence Housing Authority
EAD	Economic Affairs Division
EAW	Economic Adviser Wing
EEA	European Environment Agency
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FBR	Federal Board of Revenue
FCA	Federal Committee on Agriculture
FEA	Foreign Economic Assistance
FFBL	Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim Limited
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council

GTC	Greater Thal Canal
HCCI	Hyderabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry
HDI	Human Development Index
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISRA	Indus River System Authority
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KGTL	Karachi Gateway Terminal Limited
KMA	Korean Medical Association
MEA	Ministry of Economic Affairs
MNCH	Maternal New-born and Child Health
NARC	National Agricultural Research Centre
NDRMF	National Disaster Risk Management Fund
NLC	National Logistics Corporation
OPD	Outdoor Patient Department
PAQI	Pakistan Air Quality Initiative
PARC	Pakistan Agricultural Research Council
PBS	Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
PCGA	Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association
PFF	Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum
PIA	Pakistan International Airlines
PSN	Pakistan Society of Nephrology
PSX	Pakistan Stock Exchange

PTA	Primary Teachers Association
REAP	Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan
RECHS	Revenue Employees Cooperative Housing Ltd
SAB	Sindh Abadgar Board
SAEP	Aircraft Engineers of Pakistan
SAI	Sindh Abadgar Ittehad
SAU	Sindh Agriculture University
SBA	Stand-By Arrangement
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SCA	Sindh Chamber of Agriculture
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SHT	Sindh Hari Tehreek
SIDA	Sindh Irrigation & Drainage Authority
SIFC	Special Investment Facilitation Council
SRM	Solar Radiation Modification
SWAWA	Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act
TEPA	Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement
TNBC	Especially Triple-Negative Breast Cancer
UAF	University of Agriculture, Faisalaba
UNEA	UN Environment Assembly
UNITARUN	Institute for Training and Research
UoB	University of Balochistan
WASA	Water and Sanitation Agency
WFP	World Food Programme
WPH	Wilmar Pakistan Holdings Pte Ltd
YDA	Young Doctors Association

Point to Ponder

Women's Rights or Corporate rights?

In the recent months the focus on women farmers remains a stream. A class analysis of rural women has put them in three categories: land owners, workers on family farms, and landless labor. The first category is no doubt the smallest category, but is representative of the powerful feudal base of the country, enjoying fruits of the land without any hand in labor. The other two categories of women face feudal and patriarchal exploitation, working on land without having any right to land ownership, but their toil resulting in rich harvest for land owners. Agriculture, generating the majority of country's earnings, as well a major livelihood contributor, remains part of the informal sector, which is a decisive factor for landless women farmers agriculture workers being the most exploited and oppressed at the hand of feudal, capitalist and patriarchal forces. As capitalist mode of agriculture intensifies and increases its grip on agricultural production, many actors are working to highlight the plight of women in the rural economy, raising issues of women's rights, including right to decent livelihood, safe working environment, right to nourishing food and the most important, right to land. There are also policy level initiatives underway. An example is of the Sindh Women Agricultural Workers Act, which was passed in 2019 but till present little has been done for its implementation. Though, these initiatives are much needed to ensure women can raise their voice in demanding rights, it is also important to remember that exploitative classes, especially capitalism has always used women's rights as an agenda that benefits its own coffers. Capitalism introduces new technologies much of which require more trained, skilled labor force. This is also being articulated as more and more agriculture universities around the country are stressing the need for trained manpower, a prerequisite for agricultural development. The most critical agenda of all, is to understand that the ultimate and most important of rights is the right to land and which will only be granted based on landless women and agriculture workers' engaging in this struggle as frontline activists, and not as passive receivers of education and sporadic campaigns.

Corporate Farming - who calls the shots?

With the formation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), there has been a sharp escalation in public land being given over for corporate farming. In addition, land is also being used for gentrification projects like

Zulfiqarabad city in Thatta, Bahria Town and DHA city in Karachi. Apart from such housing schemes, farmers' rights and nationalist groups have been agitating against about 1.3 million acres of land in Sindh being handed over for corporate farming. The Sindh Hari Tehreek organized a conference on the matter, with participants demanding land to be distributed among landless farmers, as well as called for an end to feudalism. Land grab is not only being seen in Sindh but also across the country including Punjab where a number of actors have been involved including the Revenue Employees Cooperative Housing Ltd (RECHS) as well the Bahria Town Ltd (BTL), and the Defense Housing Authority (DHA).

At the other end of the spectrum, the commercial enterprises have been praising the federal government's corporate farming policy. According to the President, Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders & Small Industry, Mr Shaikhani, there was a need for another green revolution, and furthering the corporate farming agenda, with emphasis on international agriculture technologies. Though he spoke in favor of the marginalized, pointing out that 24 percent of Pakistan's population (approximately 55 million people) lived below poverty, he did not outline the most critical policy recommendation of genuine land reforms with redistribution of land away from the elite to the peasants, who are in essence the foundation stone for the country's food security as well as economic growth.

The corporate farming agenda now also carries behind it the support of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government in Sindh, even though regional and nationalist parties had protested earlier in the year against the 50,000 acres being given to M/s Green Corporate Initiatives, (Private) Limited, an army-backed entity for corporate farming. Recently, as many as 27 Chinese containers carrying agricultural equipment for the `Green Pakistan` initiative have come through the Khunjerab Pass.

The Sindh government also wants to attract corporate investments in agriculture sector, while emphasizing that local growers would be given equal opportunity in such ventures. The PPP Sindh president, Mr. Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, has stated that the Sindh government has to ensure that irrigation water accessibility to the *khatedars*, meaning landholders based on revenue records. Given the political ambiguity of land ownership, the feudal and rich landlords controlling land and attached resources including water, what will this mean for the small farmers? It is well known that Pakistan suffers from water scarcity, and this year in the kharif season, there is a risk of 30-35 percent water shortage.

For Pakistan's policy makers, issues of national gravity are resolved not internally through democratic debate and resolution based on equitable distribution for all, but on discussions with known imperialist organizations such as the World Bank, for whom all answers emit from privatization of our resources. In a recent meeting with the Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, the World Bank Water Global Director, Saroj Kumar Jha advised that the Karachi Water Board needs to operate like a commercial organization. Needless to point out that the privatization of the energy sector is one of the critical most reasons for Pakistan's mounting debt.

Ventures like the Kisan Card program are being used to provide small farmers (owning 1-12 acres of land) subsidies and incentives to use 'best quality' agro-chemical inputs like pesticides and fertilizers, as well as seeds. Farmers have to register themselves, and open bank accounts at specified banks. These schemes promote digitalization, giving the corporate sector information and access to farmers, as well as ensure that it is their products that are being bought and used by small farmers, increasing their market sphere. It also opens space for Big data to gain insights into farmers' practices and develop strategic market decisions furthering market hold. It should be pointed out that the World Bank has approve \$78 million in financing for the Digital Economy Enhancement Project.

Agro-chemical farming continues to reap super profits from the sale of chemical fertilizers. According to a rich farmers' lobby, the Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB), the "urea dealers' mafia" had already minted over PKR 50 billion form farmers in Sindh. Urea prices in the past 12 months have escalated from PKR 2,900/bag to PKR 4,649/bag.

The corporate agriculture policy direction in agriculture development also shed light on the sudden interest in education and skill training programs for rural women as well. At the same time, with more mechanization and digitalization of the agriculture sector, will it mean that millions more landless will have no access to a livelihood?

In short, the only synchronization in agriculture policy is based on the demands of paying off the trillions of dollars of debt that the country's elite have piled up on the masses. How does corporate farming benefit the landless and how does it provide food security for the people? These are questions that are critical for the economic, social and political well-being of the country.

Climate Imperialism

According to a new report released by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), ‘The Unjust Climate,’ floods and high temperatures have globally widened the income gap between rural poor and non-poor households up by \$21 billion a year. Further, with every day of extreme heat, poor rural households lose 2.4% of their on-farm incomes, 1.1 percent of the value of the crops they produce, and 1.5 percent of their off-farm income relative to non-poor households. This certainly depicts the reality of Pakistan. The Global Climate Risk Index, ranks Pakistan as the fifth most climate-vulnerable country in the world. Pakistan also faces some of the highest disaster risk levels in the world, ranked as number 23 out of 194 countries.

Climate crisis facing Pakistan has many times resulted in the destruction of millions of dollars-worth crops, livestock, infrastructure and lives and livelihood of farmers, and rural people. At the same time, rising sea levels continue to destroy agricultural land. Though the advanced capitalist countries are historically responsible for the ongoing climate catastrophe, there is no recognition of the fact. The economic crunch along with the climate crisis are being used to further corporate-owned agriculture technology; collaborations on different projects are happening between different actors including Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Sindh Agriculture University (SAU), Tandojam, and Australian Research Council. In addition, the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) in collaboration with Chinese partners has introduced climate-resilient wheat varieties that would provide higher yield per acre, that would be useful in ensuring food security for the country.

Professional farmers, such as those from the SAB, also have been urging the use of genetically modified seeds, and private sector led research initiatives for provision of ‘quality seeds’ for climate change adaptation. In other words, paving the way for agrochemical monopoly corporations to take advantage of disaster, destruction and suffering of others for increasing their profits.

Production Woes

While grand plans are underway for modernizing agriculture in the country, there are still many hurdles faced by farmers. For instance, availability of urea remains a grave issue, with imported urea being provided to fertilizer corporations but farmers unable to procure the product. At the same time, though there was a much higher cotton production than the previous year, the

demand for cotton remained low, with at least 200,000 bales of cotton lying with ginners, due to the dire economic situation, high tariff rates on power and gas as well as steep taxes on the industrial sector.

For the current cotton sowing season, the government has decided on at least one million acres for cotton production. However, there have been complaints voiced that there was non-payment of the minimum support price of PKR 8,500 that had been promised at the start of the previous season.

For wheat procurement in the current season, Sindh government has approved a target of 900,000 tons of wheat to be bought at a support price of PKR 4,000/bag. The Chief Minister has directed procurement of 100,000 *bardana* (bags) for wheat collection from farmers. However, in spite of a bumper crop, there was news of wheat procurement from Ukraine. With delays in wheat procurement by the government, it was reported that wheat was being bought from farmers at a much lower price, with unjust deductions in payment based on excuses such as moisture content in wheat grains.

The Debt Trap Panacea – agricultural trade?

Pakistan's external debt rose by \$1.2 billion in six months to \$86.358 billion as of September 30, 2023, and stood at \$85.18 billion, while the public debt rose to PRK 42.62 trillion (approximately \$153 billion) in January 2024. According to the IMF, Pakistan is now seeking another medium-term bailout package that is based on longstanding structural reforms; if the IMF executive board approves the package, the staff-level agreement would be based on \$1.1 billion — 828 million special drawing rights (SDR) — by late April.

According to news reports, four areas remain central to the new IMF standby agreement. These include firstly, strengthening public finance which translates to broadening the tax base in particular sectors that are real estate, retail and wholesale trade and agriculture. Secondly, to restoring the energy sector's viability by accelerating cost-reducing reforms. Cost reducing reforms means budget cuts in production to reduce cost and increase profits, and is often hinged on cutting labor costs. Thirdly, there is emphasis on reducing inflation, which is based on the free-floating foreign exchange market. Fourthly, the emphasis on privatization continues, as well as further reforms of government owned corporations. In summary, all of these measures do not address price control of products but focus on letting Pakistani currency's value be based on foreign exchange markets, as well further shrinking of the labor market, all measures

that could ultimately result in further rise in market prices, joblessness, depreciation of the Pakistani rupee value, resulting in further economic hardship for the people.

The economic growth of the country remains unstable with the Large-Scale Manufacturing (LSM) growth at a negative -0.52 percent, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at only 1 percent in the second quarter of FY24. The decline in economic growth, along with the stiff conditionalities especially tariffs on electricity and gas continue to have a debilitating impact on the industrial growth as well as the working class, the urban poor and the peasantry. Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has come down from 28.3% in January to 23.06% depicting a slight decrease in the prices of food products. However, raw food products exports had risen by 35 percent in the previous month, up from \$518.87 million to \$702.46 million, raising food inflation to 20.2 percent.

The way out is of course increasing foreign exchange earnings, and there is a clear governmental effort to increase exports, as well as open the country to foreign direct investment. The government has invited United Arab Emirates to invest in real estate, energy, agriculture, information technology, sectors which have also been under perusal under the IMF agreements.

Malaysian government is interested in increasing import of rice from Pakistan, while welcoming free trade agreements between the two countries. Pakistan, with the help of National Logistics Corporation (NLC) has been exporting bananas, meat and seafood to Central Asian countries, as well as kinnows to Russia. Though in February, textile exports rose to \$1.4 billion from \$1.18bn during the same month last year, overall, in the first eight months of FY24, textile and clothing exports shrank 0.65 percent from \$11.21 billion to \$11.14 billion, based on the high production costs related to higher energy prices. It is also notable, that FDI from China, Pakistan's largest investor, saw a steep decline of 80 percent during this period.

Worth pointing out that in spite of such troublesome data, the corporate sector has been reaping rich profits. On the KSE-100 index, 83 corporations have shown a growth of 45 percent, with profits of \$5.94 billion up by 6.3 percent in 2023.

Pakistan Privatization Ltd

With poor credit ratings, the government is unable to get much credit. At the same time, the IMF conditionalities continue the push privatization policy as one of the key recourse for overcoming the crushing economic crisis facing the country. The Privatization Commission is supposed to be working out a three-phased privatization program for public entities in the next five-year plan (2024-29). According to the Federal Minister for Privatization and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan, 15 to 20 institutions must be privatized immediately. There are also ongoing discussions with IMF to introduce reforms within the FBR

The privatization of PIA is considered a priority, and British firm Ernst & Young had been appointed as financial advisor for this purpose. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), member of the World Bank Group, who had earlier last year been appointed by the government of Pakistan as transaction advisor under the Public Private Partnership Act 2017, has informed the Federal Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation Khawaja Muhammed Asif, about the outsourcing of three major airports including Islamabad International Airport, Jinnah International Airport Karachi, and Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore in the first phase.

Capitalism's unending disasters

While the thrust for privatization and more and more corporate sector encroachment is being encouraged, there seems to be a blind eye to the environmental disasters, and corrupt practices it brings in its wake. According to the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency, its survey of 270 industries across four industrial zones has shown that dozens of industries are non-compliant with environmental laws. Assessment measures on discharge of effluents has shown that many industries are responsible for polluting air spaces as well as ground water. Pakistan has been categorized as the second most polluted country in 2023. According to '2023 World Air Quality Report', published by IQAir, a Swiss air-monitoring organization, Lahore is the most polluted mega city globally, with pollution levels at 99.5 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), 20 times higher than WHO guidelines. Data from Pakistan Air Quality Initiative (PAQI) has shown that hazardous air quality is resulting in a life expectancy loss of 4.4 years.

While privatization is considered to provide the best option towards development, there is little to prove this assumption. The people of Pakistan continue to suffer from tuberculosis, diabetes and cancer, with women also facing potentially triple-negative breast cancer. It's reported that the country witnesses approximately 608,000 new TB cases and 15,000 drug-resistant TB cases, annually, while every fourth Pakistani suffers from diabetes. Private hospitals are in the meantime taking advantage of a government hospital, Services Hospital Lahore, by illegally obtaining postgraduate training and house jobs from the facility.

Climate crisis, which has been unleashed on the basis of climate imperialism continues to leash its havoc, not only in Pakistan but globally, with Vietnam suffering from huge loss of arable land due to rising sea levels. While the climate crisis leaves the most vulnerable suffering from loss of livelihood, the World Trade Organization continues to push for more free trade agreements that are entirely detrimental to small producers; a recent example is the passing of the WTO's fishing agreement which has decided that fisherfolk are responsible for 'illegal fishing.'

The many atrocities of capitalism also include the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Immune to the intense hunger faced by the people of Gaza, the Zionist Israel continues its food and humanitarian embargo in Gaza. According to UNICEF, said every third Gazan child is severely malnourished.

It is indeed tragic that the world's policy makers, including those in Pakistan are unable to see the downward social and economic disasters befalling the country. The voices raised by the people against stark injustice ushered through neoliberalism, or induced by climate imperialism fall on deaf ears of our state.

NEWS EXCEPTS

NATIONAL NEWS

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

- UAF Vice-Chancellor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan has said that trained manpower and tangible research work are prerequisites for agricultural developments. underscored the crucial role of agricultural scientists in addressing these challenges and stressed the need to develop strong links with farmers.
- Sindh Hari Tehreek, have strongly condemned handing over of around 1.3m acres of Sindh's land to foreign investors in name of corporate farming, and demanded shelving of all major projects like Bahria Town, Zulfi-karabad & DHA City.
- One of resolutions stressed that instead of giving them away to local and foreign investors, the farmlands should be allotted to landless peasants.
- It alleged that the SIFC had been set up to "loot the lands and resources of nations [Pakistan's major linguistic entities], especially Sindh".
- The Sindhi Hari Tehreek organised a conference against the auction of 1.3m acres of land of the province in the name of corporate agricultural farming.
- The participants demanded that the authorities distribute land among landless farmers, end feudalism and abolish what they said constitutional institutions like the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).
- The participants asked Parliament to pass an Act for abolition of the SIFC.
- Last year fertilizer companies earned a profit of Rs143 billion, and the sugar industry earned a profit of Rs22 billion.
- The Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders & Small Industry president Mohammad Farooq Shaikhani said that formulation of a National Seed Policy and enactment of Agriculture Development Authority Act were badly needed to facilitate the corporate farming.
- Mohammad Farooq Shaikhani said that 90pc of landholders had small pieces of land measuring from five to 12 acres and expressed concerns over absence of statistics and required mechanism for ascertaining eligibility of subsidy for bona fide recipients under the new agriculture policy.
- Stressed need for bringing a green revolution to drive agricultural development in Pakistan, advocating strategic crop selection based on land suitability.
- Pakistan's position as seventh largest agricultural nation globally,
- 29pc Pakistanis suffered from undernourishment, 40pc among them children. Pakistan's human development index stood at 0.544, ranking 161 out of 192 countries while its placement at 102 out of 126 countries in Global Hunger Index highlighted the need for policy reforms.

- Pakistan Peoples Party government in Sindh has also decided to extend initiative to attract local and foreign investors in province’s agriculture sector. Caretaker cabinet had approved a proposal for corporate farming on Dec 1, 2023.
- The chief minister directed the agriculture department to file proposals for the purpose so that projects pertaining to corporate farming could be launched.
- Provincial gov had sought from its agriculture department proposals to provide input facilities such as provision of fortified seeds, subsidised fertilisers & water for corporate agriculture farming on barren lands in province.
- However, terming the project an “onslaught” on the province, the nationalist parties in the province have raised serious reservations against it.
- PPP Sindh president Nisar Ahmed Khuhro has said federal and Sindh governments would have to make sure that water share of other khatedars is not cut for irrigating the land given under corporate farming in the province.
- Twenty-two fields in various union councils of Umerkot, Sanghar and Badin districts have been selected for an experiment to grow two crops, initially wheat and sugar cane, on a single field with the target of achieving higher yield at lower cost under a project undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organisation in collaboration with Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam.
- Female farmers are the strongest link in the agriculture sector, providing 70% of labour. Paradoxically, they are also weakest link because their contribution to sector is neither documented nor accounted for: they are treated more like informal & private help rather than formal labour in traditional and legal sense.
- Participants also voiced disappointment in the lack of implementation of the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act passed in 2019. This act is a pivotal step towards recognizing the work of women in the agriculture sector, promoting their participation in decision-making, and fostering empowerment.
- Despite more than 70% of women in rural Sindh being engaged in agriculture and related occupations, they and their families continue to endure poverty, malnutrition, and hunger.
- Despite the Sindh Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 2015; women and girls are still working as bonded laborers in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, subjected to hazardous conditions such as cotton harvesting, pesticide application, and exposure to dangerous machinery and environmental risks.
- 10 Suhaee Literacy centers for women have been set up in 10 villages in the Matiari district with the support of Feed the Minds UK.
- Sindh cabinet decided to issue within six months Kissan Cards to farmers benefiting from various government schemes like subsidies, loans & insurance.
- Regretting continued violations of labour rights in the province, speakers at a meeting held called upon the government to finalise rules of Sindh Women Agricultural Workers Act passed in 2019.

- SHRC chairperson Iqbal Detho explained that it's important to make and enforce provincial labour laws in the light of constitutional provisions and conventions of the International Labour Organisation.
- A one-day training programme for farmers was organised at crop production facility of the Sindh Agriculture University with the support of the Australian Research Council for technical training of saline-affected farmers in the Indus basin regions of Sindh under the Adapting to Salinity in Indus Basin project.
- The Revenue Employees Cooperative Housing Ltd (RECHS)
- Acquired over 2,830 kanals of (agricultural) land in 2005, but later transferred it to Bahria Town Ltd (BTL), which in turn, transferred the land to the Defence Housing Authority in 2007 for the development of Askari 14 Rawalpindi.
- World Bank's Global Director Saroj Kumar wondered whether a master plan for water usage was available in Sindh.
- Sida Managing Director Pritam Das told that Sindh did not have any such master plan. However a water policy was there as a guide to water usages & priorities.
- Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that Pakistan is facing severe water scarcity, and the situation is even worse in Sindh,
- According to the World Bank Water Global Director, the Karachi Water Board needs to operate like a commercial organisation.
- Water experts and social activists of Thatta and Sujawal districts have warned if required amount of water is not released downstream Kotri Barrage, the sea will invade areas as far up as Kotri and Hyderabad.
- Pakistan could face up to 30-35 per cent water shortages during the upcoming kharif cropping season starting April 1.

AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

- Significant gas price hike by the federal government has forced the manufacturers to adjustment in urea rates and Engro Fertilizers has also decided to increase the urea price.
- 27 Chinese containers carrying agricultural equipment for the `Green Pakistan` initiative crossed Khunjerab Pass.
- Over last 12 months alone, price increased from Rs2,900 per bag to Rs4,649.
- Rs60bn to 70b had been made by profiteers in the sale of urea to growers over the last six months alone.
- Pakistan should embark on use of biotechnology in seeds and encourage private sector to conduct research to help enhance availability of quality seeds that could resist climate change effects and drought as well as pest and disease.
- The controlled price of urea is Rs3,652 per bag but Rs6,500 was being charged from buyers, "urea dealers' mafia" had already minted over Rs50bn from growers in Sindh.

- To tackle climate change situation and harsh weather phenomena, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) in collaboration with Chinese partners has introduced climate-resilient wheat varieties that will not only increase per acre produce but will also ensure food security in the country.
- The Punjab government will provide loans worth Rs150 billion to 500,000 small farmers on easy terms under Kissan Card programme.
- “Farmers will be given an agricultural loan of Rs30,000 per acre for the purchase of the best quality seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides.

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

- At least 200,000 bales of cotton are lying with ginner despite a 32% less lint production than the target and a delay in the beginning of the new crop year.
- Punjab agriculture authorities have in principle decided to bring at least one million acres under early cotton cultivation.
- Food Minister Bilal Yasin says that there is surplus wheat available in the market and the administration should keep a close watch on the supply of good quality grain at fixed prices.
- The Sindh government has approved a wheat procurement target of 900,000 tons at the rate of Rs 4,000 per 40 kg
- Department after deliberations & discussions decided to fix a target of 900,000 of wheat to be procured for crop 2023-24 at a support price of Rs4000 per 40 kg.
- SAI president said that Sindh had a bumper wheat crop this year despite several issues and hence there was no need to import Ukrainian wheat.
- Delay in starting procurement drive was benefiting hoarders, who were buying wheat from growers at inadequate prices and making undue and unjust deductions from the wheat at the pretext of moisture in the grain.

SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

- The Sindh livestock authorities have vaccinated some 23.79 million cattle across the province this year to keep them away from different diseases.

TRADE

- Pakistan’s trade deficit narrowed down by 30.18% in the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year 2023-24 as it stood at \$ 14.872 billion compared to \$ 21.299 billion during the same period of last fiscal year.
- Trade deficit narrowed by 1.95% on a year-on-year basis & stood at \$ 1.712bn in February 2024 compared to \$ 1.746 billion during the same month of 2023.
- Merchandise exports maintained a bullish trend for the sixth consecutive month as shipments grew year-on-year by 17.54 per cent to \$2.57 billion in February, indicating a recovery of export-led industrial growth.

- Value of Pakistan's exports to Middle East rose 36.18% to \$1.769bn between July & January 2023-24 while imports dipped 31.69% to \$7.443bn, showing a massive contraction in trade deficit to \$5.674bn from \$9.668bn in same period LY.
- Pakistan's trade deficit with the nine regional countries slightly went up 0.5 per cent to \$4.539 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year.
- The value of Pakistan's exports to the nine regional countries rose 21.64pc to \$2.613bn between July and January 2023-24 from \$2.148bn over the corresponding months of last year.
- Pakistan's trade deficit with the nine regional countries widened by 10.98 per cent to \$5.415 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year.
- Around 10,000 Pakistani products were included in free trade agreement whereas Malaysia has 6000 products.
- Pakistani was importing \$1bn palm oil whereas Pakistani was exporting \$0.5bn goods to Malaysia.
- A convoy of 16 trucks entered Russia carrying Pakistani kinnows.
- Pakistan's textile and clothing exports rose 19.20% to \$1.407 billion in February from \$1.18bn during the same month last year.
- The export of raw food products recorded a growth of 35.38 per cent in February to \$702.46 million, up from \$518.87m over the corresponding month last year, forcing the local consumers to pay higher prices.
- Minister for Commerce, has proposed imposition of complete ban on export of livestock, sugar, wheat, onion, banana, & rice to stabilize their prices in country.
- Pakistan's exports to European countries dipped year-on-year by 6.89% in the first eight months of the current fiscal year.

CORPORATE SECTOR

- In calendar year 2023, 83 companies (88% of market capitalization) of KSE-100 index posted after tax profit of Rs1.66tr showing an amazing growth of 45% over 2022. In USD terms, profits of these companies were \$5.94bn up 6.3% in 2023.
- A consortium of Engro Fertilisers Ltd, Fatima Fertilisers and Fauji Fertilisers will invest over \$300m in Gas Pressure Enhancement Facilities project at Mari network to ensure availability of gas for domestic urea production & safeguard the food security. Pakistan has the fifth highest urea consumption in the world,

INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

- Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives has sought the approval of Rs9.990 billion as rupee cover for utilisation of foreign aid during the current fiscal year (2023-24) in order to enhance Pakistan's resilience to natural disasters
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) jumped 16% year-on-year to \$131.2 million in February. FDI inflows declined 25pc in fiscal 2023 compared to 2022.

- Pakistan authorities could materialise about \$6.68 billion in foreign economic assistance (FEA) in the first eight months of current fiscal year, almost 38pc of the annual budget target.
- Pakistan’s Ambassador to UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, has invited UAE investors to invest in Pakistan’s real estate, energy, agriculture, information technology and various other sectors which offer immense business opportunities. He said Pakistan deeply encourages business-to-business collaboration.
- Saudi Arabia has announced relief measures for calamity-hit Gwadar as hundreds of houses were damaged due to torrential rains in the port city. The ambassador announced 9,000 shelter camps and 9,000 ration bags for the calamity-hit people of Gwadar. As many as 3,100 houses in Gwadar, and 2,500 in Jiwani were damaged. Besides, 95.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

- ABD is to extend financing of \$250 million for two power sector transmission strengthening projects.
- Announcing the staff-level agreement on successful completion of the existing short-term facility, IMF confirmed Pakistan was seeking a 24th medium-term bailout package for a permanent push towards longstanding structural reforms.
- Government has requested further investments in and utilisation of the adaptive system through additional financing of \$ 250m, says World Bank.
- The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors is likely to approve \$ 150 million in financing for “Pakistan: Digital Economy Enhancement Project (DEEP) and Sindh Barrages Improvement Project
- The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors approved \$149.7 million in financing for Pakistan to support two projects. The Digital Economy Enhancement Project (\$78 million while the second Additional Financing for the Sindh Barrages Improvement Project (\$71.7 million)

POLICY

- Punjab government budget proposals seem to focus on agriculture sector, with plans to launch the Punjab Agriculture Transformation Programme costing Rs2bn, construct model agricultural malls for Rs2.5bn, and launch aquaculture shrimp farming for Rs1bn.
- Just before end of its tenure, caretaker government allowed a cost escalation of about 30pc to “ongoing contracts” of hundreds of development projects.
- Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the Ministry of Privatisation to present the schedule about the PIA’s privatisation in two days.
- Privatisation Commission is said to be chalking out a three-phased privatisation programme of State Owned Entities (SOEs)

- On March 7, 2024, Prime Minister directed that a compressive privatisation programme for next five years (2024-29) be chalked out in consultation with concerned Ministries/Divisions.
- Federal Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation said that privatisation of PIACL would be priority of government.
- In the present circumstances of the economy, 15 to 20 institutions must be privatised immediately.
- Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said that PIA is prioritised for privatisation with other institutions to follow suit.
- Highlighted the imperative role of private sector in economic development, noting ongoing discussions with IMF to introduce reforms within the FBR.
- Sindh High Court issued notices to ministries of law, aviation & finance as well as other respondents on a petition filed against proposed privatisation of PIA.
- An employees' union of PIA and the Society of Aircraft Engineers of Pakistan.
- Asked the court to declare all actions taken by the caretaker set-up for the privatisation of the PIA null and void and without lawful authority.
- The government, domestic banks and development finance institutions (DFIs) have successfully concluded PIA's commercial debt negotiations, removing the last hurdles in the way of privatization of the national flag carrier.

SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

- The federal government's total domestic and external debt stocks rose by 6 percent during the first seven (July-Jan) months of this fiscal year (FY24).
- The federal government's domestic debt rose to Rs 42.626 trillion in Jan 2024 up from Rs 38.810tr in June 2023, showing an increase of Rs 3.816 trillion.
- The upward trend was also seen in the federal government's external debt, which went up by 0.8 percent during the first seven months of this fiscal year.
- As of September 30, 2023 around 64% of total external public debt was obtained from multilateral and bilateral sources having concessional terms and longer maturity.
- Budgetary borrowing surged by 59% during first eight months of current FY, reflecting the higher government spending.
- The GDP growth stood at one percent in the second quarter of the ongoing fiscal year against the revised 2.50 percent in the first quarter despite improvement in the agriculture sector.
- Inflation is projected to hover around 24.5-25.5% in February, with expectations of further easing to 23.5-24.5% in March due to better crops and smooth supply of commodities.
- Pakistan's yearly Consumer Price Index (CPI) for January clocked in at 28.3%, the last monthly CPI data.

- Inflation, measured by CPI decelerated to 23.06 per cent year-on-year in February from 28.34pc in the preceding month due to a slight decrease in the prices of food products.
- Floods and heat stress have globally widened the income gap between rural poor and non-poor households by up to \$21 billion a year.
- With every day of extreme heat, poor rural households lose 2.4% of their on-farm incomes, 1.1pc of the value of the crops they produce, and 1.5pc of their off-farm income relative to non-poor households.
- A one-degree Celsius increase in average temperatures is associated with a 53pc increase in the farm incomes of poor households and a 33pc decrease in their off-farm incomes, relative to non-poor households.
- Female-headed households lose significantly more of their incomes than male-headed households when extreme weather events occur.

ENVIRONMENT

- Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency has surveyed 270 industries across four industrial zones and found that dozens of industries are non-compliant with environmental laws.
- Diabetes and cancer are two major public health problems occurring mainly in the Pakistan.
- Our health system is not equipped to deal with the epidemic of diabetes. It needs sustained and coordinated whole-of-government and societal efforts.
- Health experts at a seminar on diabetes have lamented that diabetes' prevalence is quite high in Pakistan with every fourth Pakistani suffering from the disease.
- The cases of drug-resistant TB in Pakistan are going to become a major challenge as "75pc of them are not identified".
- With Pak ranking fifth among high-burden countries globally, country witnesses approximately 608,000 new TB cases & 15,000 drug-resistant TB cases annually.
- Pakistan was the second most polluted country in 2023, Lahore was the world's fifth most polluted city, and most polluted mega city hazardous air quality is resulting in a life expectancy loss of 4.4 years.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- "According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is currently the fifth most climate-vulnerable country in the world.
- Pakistan also faces some of the highest disaster risk levels in the world, ranking [23rd] out of 194 countries."
- Climate and weather conditions in Sindh are making situation, especially Kotri barrage downstream, highly vulnerable and may lead to drought across the province.

CLIMATE DISASTERS

- The death toll from torrential rain and snowfall in different parts of KP reached 27, including 18 children. Besides, at least 38 people, including 20 children, were injured in several incidents related to rain and snowfall over past two days. Meanwhile, major roads remained closed in Gilgit-Baltistan, leaving thousands stranded in region. Power and water supply and communication services were also severely hit in many areas.
- On the other hand, Quetta and other parts of Balochistan remained in the grip of freezing weather, with sub-zero temperatures driving people indoors and thinning traffic on roads. In KP, rain and snowfall in most areas continued for the third consecutive day, destroying 33 houses and partially damaging 129 others. Similarly, 59 cattle heads have also perished in incidents.
- PDMA has said that recent rains in Balochistan claimed 5 lives besides damaging 237 houses across province. Walls of 25 houses collapsed, four highways and a bridge were damaged due to rain.

RESISTANCE

- Jeay Sindh Rahbar Committee has decided to hold protests across Sindh on March 10 against government move to sell away the province's fertile land for corporate farming under its green initiative and pointed out that Sindh's lands should have been distributed among landless peasants.
- Activists of Sindh Rehbar Committee held a demonstration & observed a token hunger strike in protest against what they said allotment & illegal occupation of land, construction of dams on Indus River, increasing crimes & rule of dacoits.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

- Vietnam faces nearly \$3bn a year in crop losses as more saltwater seeps into arable land.
- Saltwater levels are often higher in dry season but they are intensifying due to rising sea levels, droughts, tidal fluctuations, & a lack of upstream freshwater.
- Department of Water Resources warned saline intrusion could impact around 80,000 hectares of rice and fruit farms in Mekong Delta.

SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

- One-fifth of fish species in Mekong River face threat of extinction.
- The fisheries agreement, aimed at removing \$22 billion in harmful subsidies supporting illegal fishing, has seen significant support from member countries.

- The Mekong faces a multitude of threats including dam-building, sand mining, poorly managed fisheries, habitat loss and the introduction of non-native species. Report said 19 per cent of fish species in river are seriously threatened.

TRADE

- India & four-member European trade bloc, including Norway and Switzerland, signed a \$100-billion free trade agreement to promote investment and exports.
- In recent years, India has signed trade agreements with Australia and the UAE. A long-talked-about trade deal with Britain is also said to be in the final stages.
- In turn, India will lift, or partially remove, very high customs duties on 95.3% of industrial imports from Switzerland, excluding gold, either immediately or over time, the Swiss government said in a statement.
- India's basmati rice exports are likely to fall in 2024 after nearing a record high last year, as rival Pakistan is offering the grain at competitive prices amid a rebound in production.
- India's exports of basmati rice surged 11.5% from a year earlier to 4.9 million metric tons in 2023, just shy of the record high of 5 million tons hit in 2020, on lower supplies from Pakistan and stocking efforts by importing countries.
- Basmati rice shipments helped the world's biggest rice exporter to garner a record \$5.4 billion in 2023, up nearly 21% from the previous year, because of higher prices, government data showed.
- Islamabad's total rice exports could jump to 5 million tons in 2023/24 financial year, up from the last year's 3.7 million tons.
- Iran, biggest buyer of Indian basmati rice, slashed purchases by 36% in 2023, but higher shipments to Iraq, Oman, Qatar, & Saudi Arabia offset the shortfall.

CORPORATE SECTOR

- McDonald's outlets across Sri Lanka shut after the US fast-food giant launched a legal battle with its local franchise holder over allegations of poor hygiene.

INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

- The EU pledged to spend an initial 7.7bn euros (\$8.39 billion) on humanitarian aid in 2024, less than last year despite soaring needs in Gaza and elsewhere.
- The UN says a record 300 million people need aid, mostly due to conflicts and climate change, and estimates a funding gap of around \$50 billion.
- Catherine Russell, executive director of the UN children's agency UNICEF, said every third Gazan child was severely malnourished, with more resources needed for aid as well as political pressure to safeguard operations on ground.
- Saudi Arabia announced it will donate \$40 million to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

- The World Bank Group said it intends to provide more than \$6 billion of support over the coming three years to Egypt.
- The World Bank Group said \$3 billion will go towards government programs and \$3 billion to the private sector, all subject to the group's board approval.
- It also secured an expanded \$8 billion deal with IMF in March, with the European Union announcing a \$8.1 billion funding package to Egypt.
- Ukraine has received a \$1.5bn tranche of funding under a WB programme, In March, Kyiv managed to attract about \$9 billion in total external financing.
- “984 million dollars come from Japan and 516m dollars from UK. funds will cover budget spending for social and humanitarian needs and reconstruction,”
- Earlier in March, Ukraine received a 4.5 billion euro (\$4.9 billion) first tranche of aid under a European Union bridging finance programme.

SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

- Church of England pledged to boost efforts to compensate for historical ties to slavery after a new report called for funding to be increased tenfold to \$1.27bn.
- By end of 2023, India's richest citizens owned 40.1% of country's wealth, highest since 1961, & their share of total income was 22.6%, most since 1922.
- Global warming and heatwaves are expected to further increase food prices and overall inflation across the world in future.
- Impact will vary but be felt everywhere, especially in developing nations.
- More than \$1 trillion worth of food was binned by households and businesses at a time when nearly 800 million people were going hungry.
- It said that more than 1bn tonnes of food — almost one fifth of all the produce available on the market — was wasted in 2022, most of it by households.
- Half of Gazans are experiencing “catastrophic” hunger, with famine “People in Gaza are starving to death right now.
- Aid charity Oxfam accused Israel of continuing to “systematically and deliberately block and undermine” the delivery of aid into Gaza, in violation of international humanitarian law.
- One in three children are acutely malnourished, and at least two in every 10,000 people die every day of starvation or malnutrition.
- The UN said that Israel's severe restrictions on aid into Gaza coupled with its military offensive could amount to using starvation as a “weapon of war”, which would be a “war crime”.
- Famine is quite possibly present in parts of the northern Gaza Strip, a senior US State Department official said, adding that a scarcity of trucks was an obstacle to getting more aid into the Palestinian enclave under Israeli siege.

ENVIRONMENT

- Less than one quarter of the 62 million tonnes of e-waste produced in 2022 was recycled.
- It also poses health risks, particularly in poorer countries where a lot of e-waste is sent from wealthier parts of the globe. UN estimates value of metals in all these discarded gadgets at \$91bn.
- On average, every person on earth generates roughly 7.8kg of e-waste each year. But that varies considerably across the globe, with someone in Europe producing roughly seven times the e-waste of someone in Africa.
- More than one billion people around the world are now suffering from obesity.
- The humanitarian situation in Gaza is a “nightmare” for mothers and babies.
- Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies
- One in three children under age 2 in northern Gaza is now acutely malnourished and famine is looming.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Europe could suffer “catastrophic” consequences from climate change if it fails to take urgent and decisive action to adapt to risks.
- Methane remains in the atmosphere for only about 10 years, but has a much more powerful warming impact than CO₂. Its warming effect is 28 times greater than CO₂ over a 100-year timescale (and 80 times over 20 years).
- Majority of methane emissions — around 60pc — are linked to human activity.
- Agriculture is the biggest culprit, responsible for roughly a quarter of that pollution. Most is from livestock — cows and sheep release methane during digestion and in their manure — and rice cultivation.
- The energy sector — coal, oil and gas — is the second largest source of human caused methane.
- UK greenhouse gas emissions fell by 5.4 percent in 2023, largely due to a reduction in the amount of gas used in power stations.
- Global temperatures “smashed” heat records last year, as heatwaves stalked oceans and glaciers suffered record ice loss, UN said— warning 2024 was likely to be even hotter.

NATURAL DISASTERS

- Ukraine has seen its agriculture sector crippled by Russia’s invasion in 2022. Many of its major export routes through the Black Sea have been blocked and its farmland rendered unusable by warfare.

NATIONAL NEWS

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

Agricultural growth possible through trained manpower [1]

Farmers` body hits out at govt policy for corporate farming [1]

Sindhi Hari Tehreek rejects corporate farming in province [2]

Traders` body puts its weight behind corporate farming [3]

PPP govt moves ahead with plan to promote corporate farming [3]

Corporate farming not at cost of farmers` water share: Khuhro [4]

Project under way to extract two crops from single field [5]

1.1 # Farmer

Woes of female farmers [5]

SCF completes training programme for women cotton farmers [6]

Plight of women farmers in Sindh highlighted [6]

SCF sets up 10 `Literacy Centres` for women agriculture workers [7]

Cabinet okays Kissan Cards for farmers across Sindh [7]

Sindh govt urged to frame rules for Women Workers` Agricultural Act [7]

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SAU holds training for farmers to make saline land cultivable [8]

Commercialisation of farmland `shocks` Supreme Court [8]

Gun battle over land dispute leaves seven [9]

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Sindh CM, WB team discuss challenges facing irrigation system [9]

Experts warn of sea intrusion up till Hyderabad if water not released downstream Kotri

Rainwater harvesting project launched in Rawalpindi [10]

Sindh poised to move Centre, Council of Common Interests over Irsa's 'undue favours' to Punjab
Cut in power supply hours to agriculture feeders slammed [10]
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27 Chinese containers with farm equipment enter Pakistan [11]
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Bodies of last four boat tragedy victims also found [15]
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Miners stage protest against govt in Quetta [45]

NATIONAL NEWS

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

Agricultural growth possible through trained manpower

University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF), Vice-Chancellor Dr Iqrar Ahmad Khan has said that trained manpower and tangible research work are prerequisites for agricultural development. He made these remarks during a gathering of UAF alumni. Dr Khan said the agriculture sector was serious challenges, including low productivity, water scarcity, climate change, irrational use of inputs, and market problems. He underscored the crucial role of agricultural scientists in addressing these challenges and stressed the need to develop strong links with farmers. Dr Khan said that the UAF is conducting excellent research while equipping manpower with modern sciences. He expressed optimism that by developing agriculture on a scientific basis, Pakistan can not only meet its agricultural needs but also earn foreign exchange, ushering in a new era of agricultural development. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 8*)

Farmers` body hits out at govt policy for corporate farming

Leaders of the Sindh Hari Tehreek (SHT), a movement for the rights and welfare of farmers, peasants and tillers of the province, have strongly condemned handing over of around 1.3 million acres of Sindh's land to foreign investors in the name of corporate farming, and demanded shelving of all major projects like Bahria Town, Zulfi-karabad and DHA City. A number of resolutions were adopted at conference titled: 'Stop auctioning of Sindh lands in the name of corporate agricultural farming'. One of resolutions stressed that instead of giving them away to local and foreign investors, the farmlands should be allotted to landless peasants.

It alleged that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) had been set up to "loot the lands and resources of nations [Pakistan's major linguistic entities], especially Sindh". It felt that by handing over around 1.3 million acres of Sindh's land to the SIFC in the name of corporate agricultural farming, "an initial attempt has been made to take away the historic land from the Sindhi nations". The conference also demanded reversal of the decision to hand over Pakistan Steel mills' land worth trillions of rupees to the federal government.

Another resolution described the caretaker government's act of amending the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) Act as being in conflict of the Article 154 and 155 of the Constitution, and demanded its withdrawal. It said Irsa should be independent and autonomous institution and not a federally-controlled one. The conference said that any dams over the Indus and canals offtaking from it were a threat to the existence of the river and, as such, all these dams and canals must be dismantled immediately.

It deplored that growers had been subjected to ‘economic murder’ by denying adequate rates for their crops. It also stressed that the ‘mafia’ involved in the sale/supply of fake fertilisers, seeds and pesticides should be dealt with as per the relevant laws. The participants called for the establishment of villages on state-owned lands under the Gothabad Scheme and said these villages should have all basic facilities, including roads, electricity and clean drinking water, besides health and education facilities. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 15*)

Sindhi Hari Tehreek rejects corporate farming in province

The Sindhi Hari Tehreek organised a conference against the auction of 1.3 million acres of land of the province in the name of corporate agricultural farming. The conference was held in Shahpur Chakar in Sanghar district, in which resolutions were adopted that demanded putting an end to occupation of Sindh’s land, and construction of such dams and canals that had been making the province barren. The participants demanded that the authorities distribute land among landless farmers, end feudalism and abolish what they said constitutional institutions like the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). The slogan of ‘Jaga Jaga Kisan Jaga’ was raised during the conference that also stated that an amendment to the IRSA Act was unconstitutional and it should be repealed. The participants asked Parliament to pass an Act for abolition of the SIFC.

Meanwhile, the Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has slammed corporate farming and talks with the French delegation on environmental change, and also expressed concerns over not opening wheat procurement centres. The meeting of the SAI’s executive committee demanded putting an end to and banning the use of agricultural lands for housing and their commercialisation.

It was also considered in the meeting that in the areas where cultivation of rice has been banned, action should be taken against those who are planting there. Expressing concern over the sale of fake mixed seeds and agricultural poisons in Sindh, the meeting requested that the federal and provincial governments take action against such dealers by banning them, formulating strong laws against them and punishing them for at least a year. The agriculturist forum also expressed anger over the increasing prices of fertilizer, and demanded that the government give subsidy directly to the farmers instead of giving it to the mafia.

They also regretted the performance of agricultural extension and agricultural research, saying that the institutions that are a burden on the treasury and cannot give any new species to Sindh should be closed. Lamenting the Sindh Seed Corporation’s performance, they demanded its activation, and eliminating unnecessary expenses. The meeting was informed that last year fertilizer companies earned a profit of Rs143 billion, and the sugar industry earned a profit of Rs22 billion. They demanded that fertilizers be given to farmers at controlled prices and from warehouses. (*The News, March 10th, 2024, Page 15*)

Traders' body puts its weight behind corporate farming

The Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders & Small Industry president Mohammad Farooq Shaikhani has lauded federal government's initiative for crafting a corporate farming policy aimed at advancing Pakistan's agriculture sector. Mr Shaikhani said that formulation of a National Seed Policy and enactment of Agriculture Development Authority Act were badly needed to facilitate the corporate farming. He said that 90pc of landholders had small pieces of land measuring from five to 12 acres and expressed concerns over absence of statistics and required mechanism for ascertaining eligibility of subsidy for bona fide recipients under the new agriculture policy. He feared that without data collection the policy might inadvertently favour big landowners thus neglecting smaller cultivators and perpetuating disparities.

He said that Pakistan's significant agricultural potential with 40pc of cultivable land could address the nation's food needs and advocated adoption of international farming technologies, including researched seeds, high-quality pesticides, urea and modern machinery to substantially increase crop yields. He called for ensuring market prices for seeds, urea, pesticides and agricultural commodities, alongside providing subsidies to farmers and highlighted adverse impact of rising production costs and fluctuating crop prices on farmers' livelihoods and government's reputation, emphasising the need for immediate attention towards mitigating these challenges.

He stressed the need for bringing a green revolution to drive agricultural development in Pakistan, advocating strategic crop selection based on land suitability. With decline in international wheat prices, he said, a shift was needed for growing commodities that were imported like palm oil. Mr Shaikhani recommended a halt to sugar cane cultivation due to its being high delta crop, and redirecting resources towards cultivating other valuable food crops, including cotton. It was a proactive measure, he said.

He said that Pakistan's position as the seventh largest agricultural nation globally, drawing attention to a planning and development ministry report which revealed that 24pc of Pakistan's population approximately accounted for 55m individuals who lived below poverty line. He said that 29pc Pakistanis suffered from undernourishment, 40pc among them children. Pakistan's human development index stood at 0.544, ranking 161 out of 192 countries while its placement at 102 out of 126 countries in Global Hunger Index highlighted the need for policy reforms. These statistics indicated disconnect between policy formulation and ground realities, showing systemic bias that favoured the elite. He proposed that policies including agriculture development policy be crafted and executed at state level. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 15*)

PPP govt moves ahead with plan to promote corporate farming

After the provincial caretaker government gave over 50,000 acres to an army-backed entity for corporate farming in January amid strong protest by nationalist and regional parties, the Pakistan Peoples Party government in Sindh has also decided to extend the

initiative to attract local and foreign investors in the province’s agriculture sector. A spokesperson for the Chief Minister House said a high-level meeting, chaired by CM Murad Ali Shah, was told that the caretaker cabinet had approved a proposal for corporate farming on Dec 1, 2023. The chief minister directed the agriculture department to file proposals for the purpose so that projects pertaining to corporate farming could be launched. He said that there was a dire need to improve crop yield with the help of technology, directing the agriculture department to strengthen its various wings, including research centres for the supreme interest of the peasants, growers, and economy.

Provincial government had sought from its agriculture department proposals to provide input facilities such as provision of fortified seeds, subsidised fertilisers and water for the corporate agriculture farming on the barren lands in the province. They said that the provincial government had decided to promote corporate agriculture farming on the barren lands of the province. Local growers would be given equal opportunities in corporate farming and they would be encouraged to adopt latest methods and techniques in the cultivation of land.

It may be noted that the caretaker provincial government had on Jan 19 through an agreement given M/s Green Corporate Initiative (Private) Limited 52,000 acres in six districts for corporate farming despite reservations from nationalist parties. According to the agreement between the caretaker government and the army-backed firm, the local administration in Sindh had identified approximately 52,713 acres of “barren” land — 28,000 acres in Khairpur, 10,000 acres in Tharparkar, 9,305 acres in Dadu, 1,000 acres in Thatta, 3,408 acres in Sujawal and 1,000 acres in Badin — to be handed over to the company for the next 20 years to execute its ‘Green Pakistan Initiative’, which is aimed at modernising agricultural practices by bringing the concept of corporate farming in the country. In July 2023, the then prime minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of the Army Staff General Asim Munir launched the first corporate farm.

However, terming the project an “onslaught” on the province, the nationalist parties in the province have raised serious reservations against it. The sources, nevertheless, said that the land would not be granted as a title but would be given just for cultivation purposes and no water rights of the local population shall be affected as the companies would have to arrange for water resources through alternative modes rather than relying solely on irrigation channels. (*Dawn, March 23rd, 2024, Page 13*)

Corporate farming not at cost of farmers’ water share: Khuhro

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Sindh president Nisar Ahmed Khuhro has said federal and Sindh governments would have to make sure that water share of other khatedars is not cut for irrigating the land given under corporate farming in the province. He said that water on the condition of availability might be used for the corporate sector farming, but where shortage was reported or rotation took place, people would have to be taken

into confidence there. He also emphasised the need that the local community should not be displaced in the wake of that initiative in Sindh. He said that though lands to be used for corporate farming would indeed lead to income generation, water availability was, however, a serious issue in present condition. He said new reservoirs would still take some time to be ready and operational. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 15*)

Project under way to extract two crops from single field

Twenty-two fields in various union councils of Umerkot, Sanghar and Badin districts have been selected for an experiment to grow two crops, initially wheat and sugar cane, on a single field with the target of achieving higher yield at lower cost under a project undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in collaboration with the Sindh Agriculture University (SAU), Tandojam. The collaboration has been initiated under a programme titled ‘Transforming Indus Basin with Climate Resilient Agriculture and Water Management. FAO is supporting farmers in selecting and using appropriate seed and fertiliser while SAU experts are providing technical assistance to them.

Addressing farmers, focal person of the project Dr Ghulam Murtaza Jamro said that farmers were facing serious challenges due to economic hardships and climate change. “Intercropping, which involves employing zero-tillage and raised bed, ridges sowing methods on the 22 demonstration plots, will result in higher yields at lower cost and get farmers benefit of two crops on a single field”. Prof Mohammad Mithal Jiskani said they were introducing modern agricultural practices to farmers and teaching them how to produce better and certified seeds from their own crops and how to protect them from uncertified and expensive seed. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2024, Page 15*)

1.1 # Farmer

Woes of female farmers

Female farmers are the strongest link in the agriculture sector, providing 70% of labour. Paradoxically, they are also the weakest link because their contribution to the sector is neither documented nor accounted for: they are treated more like informal and private help rather than formal labour in the traditional and legal sense. However, this missing measurement of their contribution is just a tiny part of problems that they face in field.

Researchers put female farmers in three broad categories: land owners, workers on family farms, and landless labourers. Those belonging to the first category are a tiny minority, inheritors of some ancestral land or widowers looking after land after their husband if their kids are too small to do it or studying in cities. The second group is the largest, including those working on their own small holdings and helping their sons or husbands in the fields. The third comprises around 40pc landless farmer families living in rural or city-suburban areas. When one talks about the problems of female farmers, they normally fall into one of the last two groups. The overwhelming majority (more than 90pc) of farming families belonging to this class engage their women in agricultural practices because their land holdings are too small to afford outside

employment. It is the last class, comprising roughly 40pc of landless families that provide most of the female workers. This class has been part of studies by researchers and non-governmental organisations due to their consistent complaints of exploitation of all sorts and yearning for legal cover for labour. Activists list overlapping problems between these two groups. They say that since the entire arrangement between farmers & female workers is informal, there are neither fixed working hours nor wages.

Labour is seasonal (based on crop and weather conditions), it neither comes regularly nor in same quantity. Nothing here is indentured; it is always open to exploitation after event, and it is done regularly and severely. “As far as livestock, which now accounts for 62pc of agriculture sector, women’s participation is well over 90pc. As they say, rural women spend more time caring for livestock than their own children. Livestock rearing and poultry are completely female fields. But still, their knowledge of both is indigenous & lacks modern dimensions. All this needs to be updated through training,” demands Bismillah Iram. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page Business and Finance 1*)

SCF completes training programme for women cotton farmers

Women’s participation in income generation is the key to economic empowerment and is pivotal in the nation’s development. At the certification ceremony, the development experts discussed the poverty reduction program for women cotton workers to uplift their economic status by providing them training for small home-based enterprises. Sindh Community Foundation held this training under the Asia Gender Equality Fund of the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network -AVPN.

SCF completed four three-day training programs for 120 women cotton workers on poultry rearing, vegetable and food preservation, and livestock management. SCF’s head, Javed Hussain, said that women cotton workers experience off-season poverty. The trainers emphasized that women often engaged in home-based food preservation and livestock and poultry-related works, the advanced skills will empower them to earn better livelihoods through home-based small businesses if they have right information on market linkages and an understanding of market demand and supply nexus. (*Business Recorder, March 11th, 2024. Page 4*)

Plight of women farmers in Sindh highlighted

Peasants and rural women and Civil society representative urged federal and provincial governments to invest funds for the empowerment of peasant and rural women in Sindh, these concerns were shared during the dialogue program among CSOs, commissions and Peasants women organized by Hari Welfare Association. The critical issue raised by women peasants pertains to the failure of government programs, such as Ehsaas and BISP, in enabling rural women to achieve self-sustainability. Participants also voiced disappointment in the lack of implementation of the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act (SWAWA) passed in 2019. This act is a pivotal step towards recognizing the work of women in the agriculture sector, promoting their participation in decision-making,

and fostering empowerment. Unfortunately, more than 4 years have passed, and no steps have been taken to enforce this law, which is vital for the rights of women involved in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and related sectors.

Akram Ali Khaskheli President HWA said that women in Tharparkar, Sanghar, Mirpurkhas, Dadu, Jacobabad, and Badin districts live in worst conditions, almost without access to health and education services and facilities. Despite the promises made in SWAWA of 2019, they are hardly given Rs5000 to Rs10000 per month for their extensive work in entire cultivation process, particularly in laborious activities like chili picking, cotton picking, dates processing, banana cultivation, & wheat cultivation.

Sakina Bibi, president of Harayani Sujag Mazdoor Union of Village Hakim Ali Khaskheli, added that despite more than 70% of women in rural Sindh being engaged in agriculture and related occupations, they and their families continue to endure poverty, malnutrition, and hunger. Despite the Sindh Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 2015; women and girls are still working as bonded laborers in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, subjected to hazardous conditions such as cotton harvesting, pesticide application, and exposure to dangerous machinery and environmental risks. (*Business Recorder, March 11th, 2024, Page 5*)

SCF sets up 10 'Literacy Centres' for women agriculture workers

Women's literacy plays a role in a healthy and prosperous society; this was discussed at the ceremony held by Sindh Community Foundation. SCF's head, Javed Hussain, said our commitment to equip the rural women agriculture workers with basic literacy, numeracy, and essential reading and writing skills has proved to have a better impact on the lives of women in the past; SCF in the second phase of its literacy program. He said that under this program, 10 Suhaee Literacy centers for women have been set up in 10 villages in the Matiari district with the support of Feed the Minds UK. (*Business Recorder, March 18th, 2024, Page 4*)

Cabinet okays Kissan Cards for farmers across Sindh

The Sindh cabinet decided to issue within six months Kissan Cards to farmers benefiting from various government schemes like subsidies, loans and insurance. The cabinet agreed that a farmer possessing up to 12 acres of land and cultivating it him/herself would qualify for Kissan Card for which a survey and registration work would be started within a week so that cards could be issued. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 15*)

Sindh govt urged to frame rules for Women Workers' Agricultural Act

Regretting continued violations of labour rights in the province, speakers at a meeting held called upon the government to finalise rules of Sindh Women Agricultural Workers Act passed in 2019. SHRC chairperson Iqbal Detho explained that it's important to make and enforce provincial labour laws in the light of constitutional provisions and conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Labour officer Reejo Mal shed light on the rules of business of the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act 2019, describing it as a historic legislative milestone in South Asia. To the concerns over the delay, he said the rules had been sent to the ILO for review and that the document would be sent to the law department for vetting once the feedback of the world labour body was received.

The act, he pointed out, had provisions to safeguard the rights and welfare of women agriculture workers. Under the act, women workers could opt for collective bargaining, social welfare, including child health, community development, economic profit and for accessing publicly supplied goods and services. Moreover, he said, initiatives such as the Sindh Maternity Benefits Act 2018 and the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act 2018 signified the province's commitment to address gender disparities and provide a conducive environment for all workers.

The consultation also witnessed discussions on amendments to existing labour laws and introduction of progressive measures such as provision of transport, separate facilities for female workers and establishment of district vigilance committees to enforce Sindh Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 2015. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2024, Page 14*)

1.2 # Land

SAU holds training for farmers to make saline land cultivable

A one-day training programme for farmers was organised at the crop production facility of the Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) with the support of the Australian Research Council for technical training of saline-affected farmers in the Indus basin regions of Sindh under the Adapting to Salinity in the Indus Basin (ASSIB) project.

SAU Pro Vice Chancellor Dr Jan Muhammad Marri stated that negative impacts on agricultural production were being observed in Sindh due to salinity in soil and groundwater. The ASSIB project aims at making agricultural lands getting saline cultivable through research and recommendations from agricultural and water experts, and enabling all the stakeholders to play role in rehabilitating severely saline lands. (*The News, March 10th, 2024, Page 15*)

Commercialisation of farmland `shocks` Supreme Court

The Supreme Court expressed shock over “flagrant violations” of the law committed in the acquisition of a huge chunk of agricultural land for a cooperative housing society in Rawalpindi, almost two decades ago. What irked the court the most was that the entire process of the merger of land acquired to develop residential facilities for members of the Revenue Employees Cooperative Housing Ltd (RECHS) was replete with flagrant violations of existing laws.

The RECHS acquired over 2,830 kanals of (agricultural) land in 2005, but later transferred it to Bahria Town Ltd (BTL), which in turn, transferred the land to the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) in 2007 for the development of Askari 14

Rawalpindi. To top it all, this was done despite a written statement by then-Punjab cooperatives minister Malik Mohammad Anwar, who opposed the transaction. But he was overruled by former chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi. The court wondered how agricultural land can be utilised for residential or commercial purposes. Court was informed that an agreement was entered into between Bahria Town and retired colonel Abdullah Siddiq, administrator of RECHS, on Feb 17, 2005, under which the society's land was transferred to Bahria Town. The BTL, in turn, transferred it to DHA through an agreement in 2007. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 14*)

Gun battle over land dispute leaves seven

A fierce gun battle between two rival groups belonging to the Dahiri clan of Qazi Ahmed taluka left seven people dead and 10 others wounded, two of them critically. The two groups had been at odds for long over the ownership of a piece of agricultural land in Wahid Bakhsh Dahiri village. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 15*)

1.3 # Water

WB official advises Sida to develop master plan for water sector

World Bank's Global Director Saroj Kumar Jha has said that WB is committed to bringing qualitative change in people's lives wherever it has funded projects. He was speaking at a meeting held at the Sindh Irrigation & Drainage Authority (Sida). He wondered whether a master plan for water usage was available in Sindh. He held that it would be difficult to take decisions regarding water sector in the absence of plan. Sida Managing Director Pritam Das told that Sindh did not have any such master plan. However a water policy was there as a guide to water usages and priorities. "Sindh government formulates water policy in the light of federal government's water policy," and informed WB official that national water policy document used to be signed by all CMs. He said that Sindh did not have a drainage system in left bank areas. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2024, Page 15*)

Sindh CM, WB team discuss challenges facing irrigation system

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that Pakistan is facing severe water scarcity, and the situation is even worse in Sindh, therefore, it is crucial to promote efficient use of water for both domestic and irrigation purposes to ensure sustainable water management. This emerged in the meeting of the CM with a World Bank delegation, discussing reforms in Karachi Water Board and the improvement of the irrigation system in the province. According to the World Bank Water Global Director, the Karachi Water Board needs to operate like a commercial organisation. (*Business Recorder, March 7th, 2024, Page 28*)

Experts warn of sea intrusion up till Hyderabad if water not released downstream Kotri

Water experts and social activists of Thatta and Sujawal districts have warned if required amount of water is not released downstream Kotri Barrage, the sea will invade

areas as far up as Kotri and Hyderabad. They demanded personhood rights for the Indus River and raised serious concerns over gradual destruction of the delta. The unique Indus delta with 17 creeks faced numerous threats, biggest among was intrusion, which had spread fear among inhabitants of coastal belt. (*Dawn, March 14th, 2021* Page 15)

Rainwater harvesting project launched in Rawalpindi

The Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa) with the cooperation of UN Habitat has launched a Rs150 million project for rainwater harvesting in 30 public buildings, the metro elevated road and public parks in the garrison city. A senior official of Wasa said under the project, water tanks will be constructed in government buildings and parks to cope with water shortage and reduce flooding. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 4*)

Sindh poised to move Centre, Council of Common Interests over Irsa's 'undue favours' to Punjab

Sindh government is likely to move federal government and the Council of Common Interests (CCI) to further outgoing caretaker government's objection on the issuance of water availability certificate by Indus River System Authority (Irsa) allowing creation of a new command area to irrigate desert lands of 'Smaller Cholistan' in south Punjab.

Earlier, Sindh caretaker government had informed then-PM Kakar that issuance of certificate by Irsa was done covertly and abruptly without sharing any such information with Sindh. Punjab's share, according to former caretaker CM's Jan 29 communication, is already allocated to the existing canal systems. The maximum water utilisation by Punjab during Kharif was 37.7MAF during 2007 against the allocation of 37.67 MAF under the 1991 Water Accord which means that existing canal capacity of Punjab is more than its allocations under the accord.

Former caretaker CM Justice Baqar had conveyed to then-PM that the Jan 17 certification grossly jeopardised Sindh's water rights, and urged him on behalf of the people of Sindh to defer any consideration of the matter until formation of an elected government. He asserted that it was a matter clearly beyond the mandate of caretaker government and was bound to create social and economic unrest among citizens [in Sindh]. Punjab is also executing the Greater Thal Canal (GTC) Phase-II under which three canals — Mankera, Dhengna and Chaubara — are to be built. Sindh had objected to this project as well and the province's then member in the Ecnec had urged ADB not to finance project. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 17*)

Cut in power supply hours to agriculture feeders slammed

The Zamindar Action Committee of Balochistan has expressed concern over a reduction in power supply hours to all agriculture feeders resulting in insufficient water supply for livestock and crops, and termed it an attempt to destroy agriculture sector. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2024, Page 5*)

Kharif crops likely to face 35pc water shortages

Pakistan could face up to 30-35 per cent water shortages during the upcoming kharif cropping season starting April 1. This could negatively affect some of the key cash crops like cotton and revive inter-provincial controversy over water allocations. A clear picture of water availability for the season is expected to emerge on April 2 provided the Advisory Committee of the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) is able to settle a couple of very tricky questions based on critical input from Wapda and snow deposit estimates from Pakistan Meteorological Department.

For a few years, Irsa has maintained that it cannot change water distribution practices among the provinces to absorb water shortages in the Kharif season. Under 1991 water accord, the apportionment of water was made under para 2 of the agreement that fixed provincial shares. However, because of the shortages, this para has not been in application for more than a decade as Irsa, with the involvement of federal and provincial governments, put in place in 2002 a cascading water distribution share mechanism among provinces in light of shortages. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2024, Page 9*)

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Higher gas prices push up urea rates

Significant gas price hike by the federal government has forced the manufacturers to adjust urea rates and Engro Fertilizers has also decided to increase the urea price by Rs 785 per bag (including FED), with effect from March 1, 2024. Earlier, Fauji Fertilizer Bin Qasim Limited (FFBL) had raised the urea price by Rs 1,350 per bag and now following the FFBL, the Engro fertilizer has increased the urea prices to adjust the gas price hike. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2024, Page 1*)

27 Chinese containers with farm equipment enter Pakistan

As many as 27 Chinese containers loaded with agricultural equipment have entered Pakistan after the Khunjerab Pass was temporarily opened as a trial run throughout the year for cross-border trade. However, the Khunjerab Pass was opened from Jan 2 to 16 for 14 days for the transportation of goods from China to Pakistan. A source said 27 Chinese containers carrying agricultural equipment for the 'Green Pakistan' initiative crossed Khunjerab Pass. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 5*)

Growers' board claims urea firms, dealers made up to Rs70bn profit over last six months

The Sindh Abadgar Board (SAB) has urged the incoming federal and Sindh governments to control prices of farm inputs and rationalise prices of agricultural commodities commensurate with cost of input. SAB members told the meeting that every other month urea price had been going up, pointing out that over the last 12 months alone, the price increased from Rs2,900 per bag to Rs4,649.

It noted that when companies increased prices overnight, inventory with companies and dealers would become huge and get them profits in billions. Still, it added, urea was sold at a price over and above the maximum retail price. According to SAB estimate, Rs60bn to 70b had been made by profiteers in the sale of urea to growers over the last six months alone. It also noted that biotechnology was being completely ignored. It urged that with a strong regulatory regime, Pakistan should embark on use of biotechnology in seeds and encourage private sector to conduct research to help enhance availability of quality seeds that could resist climate change effects and drought as well as pest and disease. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 15*)

Growers' body rejects draft amendment to Irsa Act

Sindh Chamber of Agriculture has rejected proposed amendment to Indus River System Authority Act through an ordinance and urged the president and newly-installed federal government to take notice of caretaker government's "overstepping of its authority in flagrant violation of relevant decision of the Council of Common Interests. The meeting termed ordinance regarding amendment to the Irsa Act 'unconstitutional and illegal' and criticised the caretakers' move as 'unethical'. It said that the caretaker government clearly overstepped its authority, and added that the SCA, therefore, rejected it.

Urea consignment stuck

Meeting discussed import of 200,000 tonnes of urea, and noted with concern that consignment had been lying stuck in warehouses. Around 52,000 tonnes of urea was to be distributed in Sindh as its share but release had not begun. It condemned provision of imported urea to different fertiliser companies and black-marketing of commodity. Controlled price of urea is Rs3,652 per bag but Rs6,500 was being charged from buyers, SCA deplored, and claimed that "urea dealers' mafia" had already minted over Rs50bn from growers in Sindh.

Certified seed for cotton

The meeting also pointed out that certified seed, besides urea, for cotton cultivation was not available yet although sowing season in Sindh had already begun. It noted that uncertified seed from Punjab was being sold across Sindh and no seed bag carried stamp of a government department. It demanded that the companies selling uncertified seed should be penalised. All companies should be bound down to sell seed that guarantees at least 70pc germination ratio.

Increasing farm input rates

The SCA also expressed its concern over increasing cost of farm input and inadequate prices offered to growers for their produce. It urged government to ensure that farmers get fair prices. It lamented that mustard crop was being procured for Rs5,500 per 40kg and wheat for Rs3,600 per 40kg in the open market. Sindh government should fix the wheat support price at Rs4,500 per 40kg and set up procurement centres from March 20 to procure wheat from farmers at official price with provision of gunny bags. The

meeting condemned imposition of a ban on export of onion and banana, and stressed that import of commodities should be banned. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2024, Page 15*)

Climate-resilient wheat varieties introduced

To tackle climate change situation and harsh weather phenomena, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) in collaboration with Chinese partners has introduced climate-resilient wheat varieties that will not only increase per acre produce but will also ensure food security in the country. PARC Chairman Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali said this while addressing an international seminar titled, “Sino-Pak Research Activities on Wheat Genomics”, held at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) as part of the Sino-Pak collaboration for wheat genomics. The PARC chairman said that his organisation pioneered climate-resilient wheat varieties which are critical to ensure food security in country. (*Business Recorder, March 14th. 2024, Page 4*)

Rs150bn Kissan Card programme launched

The Punjab government will provide loans worth Rs150 billion to 500,000 small farmers on easy terms under Kissan Card programme. CM Maryam Nawaz approved launch of the Kissan Card to provide subsidised farm inputs to farmers. At a meeting on agricultural reforms, the chief minister claimed the project was the biggest in the history of Pakistan. “Farmers will be given an agricultural loan of Rs30,000 per acre for the purchase of the best quality seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides. Various types of other subsidies will also be provided to the farmers through the Kissan Card,” she said.

Model agriculture centres will be established across Punjab in collaboration with the private sector. These centres will have modern agricultural machinery, training, pesticide seeds, and demonstration plots. She said in first phase, one model centre would be set up in each district. Farmers would get rid of fake fertilisers and medicines. She directed agriculture department to compile data on production and demand of each crop. She approved the state-of-the-art centre of excellence for research and development on cotton, wheat, and rice crops. She also directed to build a research and development centre at a cost of Rs2bn in Agriculture University Faisalabad with cooperation of China. She directed authorities to present amendments to Agriculture Pesticides Act and Fertilisers Control Act to prevent sale of spurious agricultural drugs and fertilisers. She reviewed restructuring of Punjab Seed Corporation and Punjab Agricultural Research Board. A proposal to introduce a law to prevent use of agricultural land for residential purposes was also considered in meeting. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2024, Page 2*)

3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

3.1 # Cash Crop

Cotton stocks pile up at ginning mills despite lower production

At least 200,000 bales of cotton are lying with the ginners despite a 32 percent less lint production than the target and a delay in the beginning of the new crop year. As per data

released by the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA), a total of 8.393m bales of cotton were received by the ginning factories across the country till Feb 29, which is 72pc more than previous year but a record 32pc less than official target. Cotton Ginners Forum chairman Ihsanul Haq recalling that SIFC had approved reduction in power rates from 14 cents to nine cents for export textile sector. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 2*)

Punjab plans early cotton sowing on 1m acres

Though Federal Committee on Agriculture is yet to meet to fix targets for various Kharif crops for provinces, Punjab agriculture authorities have in principle decided to bring at least one million acres under early cotton cultivation. A meeting said that issue of non-payment of the intervention price of Rs8,500 per maund to the cotton growers despite promises by government during the outgoing cotton crop season (2023-24) did come up for discussion during the huddle. Food Minister Bilal Yasin says that there is surplus wheat available in the market and the administration should keep a close watch on the supply of good quality grain at fixed prices. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 9*)

Concerns mount as govt delays cotton sector decisions

The delay in Federal Committee on Agriculture meeting for setting cotton sowing and production targets for crop year 2024-25 and absence of an announcement regarding intervention cotton prices by government have sparked concerns within cotton sector. FCA typically convenes well before the commencement of the Rabi and Kharif seasons to establish output targets for various major and minor crops. Also, government usually announces intervention or support prices for wheat, sugarcane, and cotton to incentivize farmers to cultivate these major crops. However, FCA has yet to convene, despite Punjab Agriculture Department's initiatives to promote early cotton sowing. Concerns loom that any further delay in meeting & determination of minimum support prices may dishearten growers, particularly since government failed to ensure payment of promised Rs8,500 per maund price throughout previous season. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 2*)

3.2 # Food Crop

Wheat procurement target of 900,000 tons at the rate of Rs4,000/40kgs approved

The Sindh government has approved a wheat procurement target of 900,000 tons at the rate of Rs 4,000 per 40 kg. Meeting of new Sindh cabinet approved wheat procurement target. Food Minister Jam Khan Shoro told the meeting a stock of 400,000 tons of wheat is available with the department. The department after deliberations and discussions decided to fix a target of 900,000 of wheat to be procured for the crop 2023-24 at a support price of Rs4000 per 40 kg. The CM directed the food department to procure 100,000 bags/ bardana and mobilise food department teams to start procurement of wheat. (*Business Recorder, March 14th. 2024, Page 2*)

Delay in procurement of wheat worries growers

The Sindh Abadgar Ittehad (SAI) has expressed serious concern over delay in the procurement of wheat crop by Sindh food department. SAI president said that Sindh

had a bumper wheat crop this year despite several issues and hence there was no need to import Ukrainian wheat. He said that the delay in starting procurement drive was benefiting hoarders, who were buying wheat from growers at inadequate prices and making undue and unjust deductions from the wheat at the pretext of moisture in the grain. It said that cotton cultivation was seriously affected due to flawed policies, which would affect export as well. The appointment of Irsa chairman by prime minister was illegal and in violation of Irsa Act 1992. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2024, Page 17*)

3.3 # Fruits

Italy for enhancing olive oil production in Pakistan

Italy reaffirmed its commitment to fostering a comprehensive approach towards enhancing the value chain of olive oil cultivation and production in Pakistan. (*Business Recorder, March 15th, 2024, Page 10*)

4 # SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

4.1 # Fisheries

Hopes fade for 14 fishermen missing after boat capsizes near Thatta

PFF said that 14 fishermen, who were part of a 45-member crew that departed for a fishing expedition on their boat that capsized near Thatta, are still missing and feared dead. PFF official Yasmeen Shah said that local divers were busy searching missing fishermen but they were facing difficulties in rescue operation due to tidal waves & gusty winds. She criticised gov officials for showing indifferent attitude towards issue as they had announced without verifying facts that all fishermen had been rescued. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 15*)

Death toll in boat tragedy rises to 10 as navy finds six more bodies

Bodies of six more fishermen, who were among 14 drowned in sea were recovered. PFF-Karachi president Majeed Motani said that it was fourth boat that capsized in the same Hajmbro Creek near Keti Bunder. He said that all affected fishermen were rescued in first two incidents. However, one fisherman drowned in the third incident. He said that because of climate change, high tidal waves or storms tended to take place in that particular creek, resulting in tragedies. (*Dawn, March 12, 2024, Page 13*)

Bodies of last four boat tragedy victims also found

Remaining bodies of four missing fishermen were recovered in a joint search operation conducted by Pakistan Navy in coordination with the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2024, Page 13*)

Sailor martyred in operation against Indian fishermen in Pakistani waters

A Pakistan Maritime Security Agency sailor was martyred and two Indian fishermen went missing at sea when an Indian fishing boat carrying eight fishermen tried to escape and capsized after they were caught fishing in Pakistani waters in the Arabian Sea, PMSA statement. (*Dawn, March 22nd, 2024 Page 13*)

Fishermen net fortune in a rare Suwa fish catch

A few fishermen from Keti Bandar in Thatta hit the jackpot when they caught a huge haul of rare and priceless Golden Suwa fish in their nets in Kajar Creek the other day. The fish is extremely expensive because of the layer of fat fibres around its gut, which must be obtained from a live Suwa or a very fresh piece to make sutures or surgical thread. According to Kamal Shah, who heads Coastal Media Centre in Ibrahim Hyderi, “The Golden Suwa is the male fish, which weighs around 50 to 60kg. And each fish sells for Rs1.25 million for its stomach fat. And here our fishermen caught some 5,000 fish”. “The Suwa fish is found in our waters around this time of the year to feed on little fish and also breed and lay eggs near the shore”. (*Dawn, March 23rd, 2024, Page 13*)

4.2 # Livestock

Livestock dept vaccinated over 23 million cattle across Sindh, meeting told

The Sindh livestock authorities have vaccinated some 23.79 million cattle across the province this year to keep them away from different diseases as local production of vaccines has on one hand enhanced the department’s prevention capacity and on the other opened new doors of revenue generation through supplies to other provinces. The meeting was told that there were five farms across Sindh which were managed and run by the livestock department where various breeds of cattle were farmed and used for meat and dairy consumption. Similarly, the department was also successfully running 12 poultry hatcheries in the province which had increased its production multiple times over the years. (*Dawn, March 22nd, 2024 Page 14*)

5 # TRADE

Jul-Feb trade deficit falls 30.2pc to \$14.87bn YoY

Pakistan’s trade deficit narrowed down by 30.18 percent in the first eight months (July-February) of the current fiscal year 2023-24 as it stood at \$ 14.872 billion compared to \$ 21.299 billion during the same period of last fiscal year, says the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). The monthly data released by the Bureau noted that the country’s exports increased by nine percent (\$1.681 billion) to \$ 20.351 billion during July-February 2023-24 compared to \$ 18.670 billion in the corresponding period of the last fiscal year. Imports declined by 11.87 percent to \$ 35.223 billion during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as compared with \$ 39.969 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year. On a month-on-month basis, the trade deficit narrowed down by 13.49 percent to \$ 1.712 billion in February 2024, as compared to \$ 1.979 billion in January 2024. Exports recorded a 7.84 percent decline to \$ 2.573 billion in February 2024 when compared with \$ 2.792 billion in January 2024. Import increased by 10.19 percent to \$ 4.285 billion in February 2024 when compared with \$ 4.771 billion in January 2024.

The trade deficit narrowed by 1.95 percent on a year-on-year basis and stood at \$ 1.712 billion in February 2024 compared to \$ 1.746 billion during the same month of 2023.

The imports increased by 8.89 percent on a YoY basis and remained \$ 4.285 billion in February 2024 compared to \$ 3.935 billion in February 2023. The exports increased by 17.54 percent on a YoY basis and remained \$ 2.573 billion in February 2024 compared to \$ 2.189 billion in February 2023. (*Business Recorder, March 2nd, 2024, Page 1*)

Merchandise exports grow for sixth month

Merchandise exports maintained a bullish trend for the sixth consecutive month as shipments grew year-on-year by 17.54 per cent to \$2.57 billion in February, indicating a recovery of export-led industrial growth. Exports increased by 9pc to \$20.35bn in the first eight months of FY24 from \$18.67bn in the same period last year. The trade deficit narrowed year-on-year by 1.95pc to \$1.71bn in February. The overall trade deficit in eight months decreased by 30.18pc to \$14.87bn as compared to \$21.29 in the previous year. The IMF's first review of the \$3bn Stand-by Arrangement projects Pakistan's export proceeds over the next five years to be much less than the commerce ministry's ambitious \$100bn goal by the end of FY28. At the same time, imports also rose by 8.89pc to \$4.28bn in February from \$3.93bn in the same month last year. The import bill fell 11.87pc to \$35.22bn in July-February FY24 from \$39.96bn over the corresponding months last year. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2024, Page 9*)

Trade deficit with Gulf nations narrows

Pakistan's trade deficit with the Middle East narrowed 41.31 per cent to \$5.674 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year mainly due to low imports of petroleum products from the region. In absolute terms, the value of Pakistan's exports to the Middle East rose 36.18pc to \$1.769bn between July and January 2023-24 while imports dipped 31.69pc to \$7.443bn, showing a massive contraction in trade deficit to \$5.674bn from \$9.668bn in the same period last year, according to data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The exports stood at \$1.229bn while imports totalled \$10.897bn in January-July FY23. The government has recently signed a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states which was aimed to minimise the trade balance with the region. A surge in demand for Pakistani products was observed from countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Pakistan witnessed a 7.24pc decline in imports totalling \$17.488bn in FY23, down from \$18.853bn in the preceding year. In FY23, exports to the Middle East shrank 12.62pc to \$2.332bn from \$2.669bn in the preceding year. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 9*)

Trade deficit with nine regional states widens

Pakistan's trade deficit with the nine regional countries slightly went up 0.5 per cent to \$4.539 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal year from \$4.516bn over the corresponding period of last year, mainly due to an increase in imports from China and India. Exports to regional countries, particularly China and Sri Lanka increased significantly over the review period but exports to other regional countries remained negative, according to data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). In absolute terms, the value of Pakistan's exports to the nine regional countries — Afghanistan,

China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives — rose 21.64pc to \$2.613bn between July and January 2023-24 from \$2.148bn over the corresponding months of last year. Contrary to this, imports saw an increase of 7.32pc to \$7.152bn in 7MFY24 from \$6.664bn over the corresponding months of last year. This shows a slight increase in trade deficit with all these countries in FY24. In FY23, exports to regional countries dipped year-on-year by 21.1pc to \$3.331bn. Pakistan's bulk of the regional exports, which accounts for over 60pc, go to China while the rest to the remaining eight countries. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 9*)

Trade gap with nine regional states widens

Pakistan's trade deficit with the nine regional countries widened by 10.98 per cent to \$5.415 billion in the first eight months of the current fiscal year from \$4.879bn over the corresponding period of last year. The trade deficit is mainly driven by an increase in imports from China and India during the period under review. Exports to regional countries, particularly China increased over the review period but exports to other regional countries remained negative, according to data compiled by the State Bank.

In absolute terms, the value of Pakistan's exports to the nine regional countries — Afghanistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives — rose 20.58pc to \$2.911bn between July and February 2023-24 from \$2.414bn over the corresponding months of last year. Contrary to this, imports saw an increase of 14.16pc to \$8.326bn in 8MFY24 from \$7.293bn over the corresponding period of last year. This shows a slight increase in trade deficit with maximum countries in FY24. Pakistan's bulk of the regional exports, which accounts for over 60pc, go to China while the rest to the remaining eight countries. Exports to China increased 42pc to \$1.895bn in July-February FY24 from \$1.334bn over the corresponding period last year. In FY23, the exports to China declined 27.3pc to \$2.02bn from \$2.78bn in FY22. It was the first decrease in the post-Covid period. The imports from China also increased by 14.72pc to \$8.105bn in 8MFY24 from \$7.065bn over the corresponding months of last year. The bulk of imports in the region is also sourced from China followed by India. Pakistan's imports from India increased by 10.47pc to \$138.72 million in 8MFY24 compared to \$125.57m in same period last year. Exports to India stood at \$0.23m pc this year compared to \$0.161m during the same period LY. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 9*)

5.1 # Exports

Malaysia CG vows to help increase Pak rice exports

Consul General of Malaysia in Karachi, Herman Hardynata Bain Ahmad has said that around 10,000 Pakistani products were included in free trade agreement whereas Malaysia has 6000 products. He was addressing members of Hyderabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI). He said that he would talk to Malaysian government for increasing import of Pakistani rice. He further said that Pakistani exporters could use Malaysian ports for trade purposes for other countries as transit facility. HCCI

President Adeel Siddiqui said that Pakistani was importing \$1bn palm oil whereas Pakistani was exporting \$0.5bn goods to Malaysia. He said both the countries need to review free trade agreements so that a balance could be ensured in the bilateral trade volume. President HCCI said veggies, fruits, pulses and cotton were being exported to Malaysia. The guest was informed by chamber's members that Malaysia was importing rice worth 700,000 metric tons which is inclusive of Pakistani quota of 250,000 tones. (*Business Recorder, March 3rd, 2024, Page 2*)

Ban on export of banana, onion slapped

The government has reportedly slapped a ban on the export of bananas and onions till April 15, 2024, apparently, to control their prices during the month of Ramazan. The government has issued directions to the concerned departments not to issue a certificate allowing the export of bananas and onions. The prices of onions and bananas have increased by 34 per cent and seven per cent respectively within last one week. (*Business Recorder, March 9th, 2024, Page 8*)

16 truckloads of Pakistani kinnows reach Russia

A convoy of 16 trucks entered Russia carrying Pakistani kinnows. The convoy, comprising refrigerated trucks of National Logistics Corporation (NLC) laden with kinnows, arrived in Russian cities of Derbent and Grozny, covering almost 6,000 km distance as Russian authorities applauded the NLC efforts for the promotion of bilateral trade between the two countries. Earlier, NLC also provided logistic support to export of bananas, meat and seafood to Central Asian Republics and China. Pakistan had placed its first order for discounted Russian crude oil under a new deal struck between Islamabad and Moscow in April last year. Currently, Pakistan's exports to Russia stand at \$150m, while imports hover around \$300million. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 2*)

Export of onion, banana formally banned till April 15

The Ministry of Commerce (MoC) has formally banned export of onions and bananas till April 15, 2024 aimed at arresting skyrocketing prices of both items in the month of Ramazan. (*Business Recorder, March 13th, 2024, Page 4*)

Textile exports rise to \$1.4bn

Pakistan's textile and clothing exports increased by double digits for third consecutive month in February, indicating a recovery in orders from international buyers, according to PBS. The sector's exports rose 19.20% to \$1.407 billion in February from \$1.18bn during the same month last year. However, in the first eight months of FY24, textile and clothing exports shrank 0.65pc to \$11.14bn from \$11.21bn in the corresponding months last year. The decline was attributed to escalating production costs due to higher energy prices and a liquidity crunch. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2024, Page 9*)

Food exports surge 35pc in February

The export of raw food products recorded a growth of 35.38 per cent in February to \$702.46 million, up from \$518.87m over the corresponding month last year, forcing the

local consumers to pay higher prices. With this growth, raw food exports increased for the seventh consecutive month during the current fiscal year despite the highest food inflation in the country's history, according to data compiled by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. These unchecked exports drove food inflation to a stunning 20.2pc in February as prices rose, limiting cash-starved people's access to key goods such as wheat flour, rice, onions, sugar, meat and vegetables. The new fiscal year began with a negative growth of 7.56pc in export of raw food products, but it improved to positive growth of 4.07pc in August, while export proceeds grew further by 60.89pc in September, 59.90pc in October, 60.65pc in November, 111.63pc in December and 105.29pc in January. Food exports grew 54.05pc in the first eight months of FY24 to \$4.96bn from \$3.22bn in the corresponding months last year.

The PBS data showed the country's rice exports rose 85.83pc in July-February FY24 led by basmati rice, which had been falling since last year. India's recent decision to impose a ban on rice exports to protect the interest of domestic consumers has emerged as a key driver behind the surge in basmati rice exports from Pakistan. The export of basmati rice experienced a notable surge of 39.43pc, reaching \$539.42m in July-February FY24 from \$386.88m in the corresponding period last year. The export of non-basmati rice rose 104.37pc to \$1.97bn in July-February 2023-24 from \$967.87m in the same period last year. Due to a sustained surge in export figures over the past two years, the average price of basmati rice has surged to Rs390 per kg from Rs150, restricting buying from domestic consumers.

Pakistan exported \$333.85m worth of meat in 8MFY24 from \$256.28m over the same period last year, showing a growth of 30.16pc. Export of all other food products saw an increase of 23.27pc to \$792.14m in 8MFY24 from \$642.62m in the corresponding months last year. Export of vegetables reached \$277.06m in eight months this year against \$198.94m over corresponding months last year. Fruits' exports saw a growth of 13.89pc to \$246.46m in 8MFY24 against \$216.41m over corresponding months LY.

On the other hand, Pakistan imported 778,112 tonnes of wheat in February, up 194pc from 264,430 tonnes over the corresponding month LY. Country began importing wheat in September 2023 despite the government's claims of having a bumper wheat crop. Import of sugar also saw an increase of 28.07pc as it stood at 315 tonnes in February FY24 from 246 tonnes over corresponding month LY. Average sugar price in country is around Rs160 per kg. In eight months, the import bill of tea reached \$43667m this year, up 10.13pc from \$396.49m over same period LY. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2024, Page 9*)

Non-textile exports fall over 3pc in February

Exports of non-textile value-added products registered a year-on-year growth of 0.47% in first eight months of current FY, a healthy sign of getting more orders from the international market. The non-textile products exports did not include the export value of food products during the period under review. In absolute terms, the value of non-

textile products reached \$4.24 billion in July to February FY24 against \$4.22bn in the corresponding months of last year, according to PBS. In February, the export of these commodities posted a negative growth of 3.26pc to \$473.37m this year against \$489.33m over the same month last year. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 9*)

Ban on export proposed by Jam

Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal has proposed imposition of complete ban on export of livestock, sugar, wheat, onion, banana, and rice to stabilize their prices in the country. He floated this proposal during a meeting of Price Control Coordination Committee on March 19, 2024. (*Business Recorder, March 23rd, 2024, Page 1*)

Exports to EU states fall despite GSP+ status

Pakistan's exports to European countries have begun to dip in current fiscal year despite a GSP+ status that allows duty-free entrance into European markets for the majority of its products. Pakistan's exports to European countries dipped year-on-year by 6.89% in the first eight months of the current fiscal year to \$5.411 billion from \$5.812bn in the corresponding period last year. In FY23, exports to the EU dropped 4.41pc to \$8.188bn from \$8.566bn in the preceding fiscal year. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2024, Page 11*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

2023: corporate profits boom despite economic slowdown

Profits of key companies listed on PSX have remained fabulous despite the economic issues faced by Pakistan. In the calendar year 2023, 83 companies (88 percent of market capitalization) of KSE-100 index posted after tax profit of Rs1.66trillion showing an amazing growth of 45 percent over 2022. In USD terms, the profits of these companies were \$5.94billion up 6.3 percent in 2023. Banks contributed 34 percent in total profits in 2023. Excluding banks, total earnings was up 31 percent (minus 3.8 percent in US\$ term). (*Business Recorder, March 3rd, 2024, Page 8*)

Karachi Gateway Terminal to invest \$75m in first two years

Karachi Gateway Terminal Limited (KGTL) aims to invest USD 75 million in the first two years, including upfront fees, prepayments and investments in superstructure and equipment. Experts told that Karachi Port and Port Qasim handle the majority of nation's maritime trade. (*Business Recorder, March 16th, 2024, Page 3*)

6.1 # Corporate Lobby

HCCI vows to keep supporting small traders

Hyderabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI) President Adeel Siddiqui has said that HCCI is committed to serving small traders considering the fact that he himself is a small trader and will keep supporting them. He stressed that pushcart vendors should also be provided spaces to do their business in an organised manner although shop owners had nothing to do with them. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 15*)

6.2 # Fertilizer Company

Urea makers plan \$300m investment to ensure gas

A consortium of Engro Fertilisers Ltd, Fatima Fertilisers and Fauji Fertilisers will invest over \$300m in Gas Pressure Enhancement Facilities project at Mari network to ensure the availability of gas for domestic urea production and safeguard the food security. Engro Fertilisers Chief Financial Officer Ali Rathore pointed out that even though Pakistan has the fifth highest urea consumption in the world, it is not investing in capacity growth despite a rapid surge in population. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 9*)

6.3 # Food Company

Wilmar's Pakistan unit to acquire 277m shares of Unity Foods

Wilmar Pakistan Holdings Pte Ltd, a wholly owned direct subsidiary of Wilmar International Ltd, Unity Wilmar Agro Ltd, a subsidiary of WPH & certain shareholders of Unity Foods Ltd announced their intentions to acquire 277,070,908 shares of UFL. UFL informed Pakistan Stock Exchange that offer was made through Arif Habib Ltd, manager of public offer, at a price that complies with pricing formula & other applicable Pakistan laws and regulations including the Securities Act 2015 and Listed Companies (Substantial Acquisition of Voting Shares and Takeovers) Regulations 2017. UFL is principally involved in manufacturing and processing of edible oils, industrial fats, flour and various feed ingredients for Pakistan's poultry and livestock sectors.

WIL, founded in 1991 and headquartered in Singapore, is Asia's leading agribusiness group. Business activities of WIL and its group companies include oil palm cultivation, oilseed crushing, edible oils refining, flour and rice milling, sugar milling and refining, manufacturing of consumer products, ready-to-eat meals, central kitchen products, specialty fats, oleochemicals, biodiesel and fertilizers as well as food park operations. Supported by a multinational workforce of about 100,000 people, Wilmar Group embraces sustainability in its global operations, supply chain and communities. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 9*)

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

Rupee cover of Rs9.99bn sought for utilising foreign aid

Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives has sought the approval of Rs9.990 billion as rupee cover for utilisation of foreign aid during the current fiscal year (2023-24) in order to enhance Pakistan's resilience to natural disasters. ECC of Cabinet has given approval of the summary of Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives for technical supplementary grant for budgetary allocation/ rupee cover for utilisation of foreign aid for FY 2023-24.

The meeting was informed that the government has established National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) as a not-for-profit public-owned company under Section 42 of the Companies Act, 2017. The company is non-banking financial intermediary fully-owned by Government of Pakistan. To achieve its given objectives, government

of Pakistan received loan, as well as, grant financing from International development partners namely, ADB, WB, Government of Switzerland, Australia, and Norway. Planning Ministry added that Finance Division has allocated Rs1 billion for fiscal year 2023-24 for NDRMF. The meeting was further told that the NDRMF Board of Directors has approved NDRMF budget of Rs10.978 billion for disbursement against loans and grants for fiscal year 2023-2024. Therefore, the NDRMF has requested for the allocation of its Rs9.91 billion for rupee cover budgetary allocation during fiscal year 2023-24. (*Business Recorder, March 10th, 2024, Page 1*)

FDI returns to positive territory in February

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) jumped 16% year-on-year to \$131.2 million in February, the State Bank reported. The increase in February inflows was also a welcome change from January's dire situation, which saw a net outflow of \$173m. However, the overall trend for the fiscal year remains troubling, with FDI falling by 17pc to \$821m during the first eight months (July to February). More worryingly, inflows from China, traditionally Pakistan's largest investor, saw a steep decline of 80pc during this period.

However, total inflows from Arab countries during July-February were \$39.4m out of global total of \$820m FDI received by Pakistan. Inflows of \$23m came from UAE, \$12.2m from Kuwait, \$2.2m from Saudi Arabia, and \$1.9m from Qatar. FDI inflows declined 25pc in fiscal 2023 compared to 2022. The current trend suggests that reaching even the \$1.5bn mark received in 2023 might be ambitious under present conditions. The dramatic drop of 83pc in Chinese investment, from \$472.4m last year to just \$80.4m. The highest investment during July-February was noted from Hong Kong, with inflows surging to \$234.6m from \$150.5m a year ago. Inflows from the United States and the UK were \$79.6m and \$163.7m, respectively, almost unchanged compared to the previous year. Inflows from the Netherlands stood at \$58.7m.

On a sectoral basis, the highest investment was attracted by hydel power, which received \$301.9m compared to \$232.9m a year ago. Thermal power attracted \$28.9m. The coal sector noted a net outflow of \$82m, which was completely against the inflows of \$316m last year. Overall, the power sector received \$249m in FDI, a sharp decline from \$600m in the year-ago period. The oil and gas power exploration attracted \$151m compared to \$78m last year, while the financial businesses (mainly banks) attracted \$125m against \$185m previously. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 11*)

Pakistan receives \$9.53bn in foreign loans

Pakistan authorities could materialise about \$6.68 billion in foreign economic assistance (FEA) in the first eight months of current fiscal year, almost 38pc of the annual budget target. The borrowing avenues remained limited 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 (SBA) and \$1bn by UAE that is separately accounted for by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Thus, total foreign inflows including IMF and UAE amounted to \$9.53bn in the July-February period. This generally works out to be almost 54pc of the full-year targeted inflows. Thus its target is now tentatively revised to around \$11bn instead of the \$17.62bn set in the 2023-24 budget for FEA. They are now predicting the current account deficit to be around \$2bn instead of about \$6bn budget estimate. In its monthly report on Foreign Economic Assistance, Economic Affairs Division said country received \$6.68bn in first eight months of FY24 against its annual target of \$17.62bn including \$235m in grants. This meant foreign inflows were almost 10pc lower when compared to \$7.4bn of the same period last fiscal year which was otherwise a very tough period given challenging relationship with the IMF. (*Dawn, March 22, 2024 Page 9*)

7.1 # Countries

US says supports Pakistan to break free from vicious cycle of debts

The United States has said that Washington supports Pakistan's efforts to break free from the vicious cycle of debts, urging incoming government in Islamabad to continue working with IMF and other related institutions to ensure macroeconomic reforms in the country. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2024, Page 22*)

UAE urged to invest in real estate, energy

Pakistan's Ambassador to UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, has invited UAE investors to invest in Pakistan's real estate, energy, agriculture, information technology and various other sectors which offer immense business opportunities. He said Pakistan deeply encourages business-to-business collaboration. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2024, Page 9*)

Saudi Arabia announces relief for calamity-hit Gwadar

Saudi Arabia has announced relief measures for calamity-hit Gwadar as hundreds of houses were damaged due to torrential rains in the port city. The ambassador announced 9,000 shelter camps and 9,000 ration bags for the calamity-hit people of Gwadar. As many as 3,100 houses in Gwadar, and 2,500 in Jiwani were damaged. Besides, 95 houses were completely destroyed and more than 200 cattle were killed. (*Business Recorder, March 11th, 2024, Page 11*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

8.1 # Asian Development Bank (ADB)

ADB warns govt of loan suspension

ADB has cautioned government that if Audited Project Financial Statements (APFS) in default for one year from the due date, it may lead to suspension of the loan. A Financial Management (FM) country consultation Mission from ADB was held from 27th October to 8th November, 2023. Pakistan is significant ADB development partner and the largest borrower in Central and West Asia region, with an active portfolio of over \$9billion. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2024, Page 1*)

Asian Development Bank, Unicef join hands for ‘resilient’ municipal services

ADB and the Unicef have signed a letter of understanding to collaborate on water, sanitation and hygiene (Wash) and solid waste management interventions under an ADB-funded project in Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2024, Page 5*)

ADB approves \$250m for two power transmission projects

ADB is to extend financing of \$250 million for two power sector transmission strengthening projects. One loan will be of \$ 235 million. The borrower will pay to ADB interest on the principal amount of the loan withdrawn and outstanding from time to time. Repayment period will be 25 years including a grace period of five years. Repayment shall be made in 40 variable semi-annual installments commencing on May 15, 2029 and ending on November 15, 2048. Second loan will be of \$ 15 million. The borrower will pay to ADB an interest charge at the rate of 2% per annum during the grace period and thereafter on the amount of the loan withdrawn from the loan account outstanding from time to time. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2024, Page 1*)

8.2 # International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Islamabad seeking 24th bailout, IMF confirms

Announcing the staff-level agreement on successful completion of the existing short-term facility, IMF confirmed Pakistan was seeking a 24th medium-term bailout package for a permanent push towards longstanding structural reforms. In its end-of-mission statement, the IMF said that subject to the approval of its executive board, the staff-level agreement would enable Pakistan to access about \$1.1 billion — 828 million special drawing rights (SDR) — by late April. It said Pakistan “expressed interest in a successor medium-term Fund-supported programme with aim of permanently resolving Pakistan’s fiscal and external sustainability weaknesses, strengthening its economic recovery, and laying the foundations for strong, sustainable, and inclusive growth”.

It said the IMF team reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities on the second and final review of Pakistan’s stabilisation programme supported by the IMF’s \$3 billion standby arrangement approved in July last year. While doing so, the Fund also laid bare the broader, though well-known, conditionalities of next programme on which “discussions are expected to start in the coming months”. As in the past programmes, four central areas would remain under focus for reforms. The top objective of the next medium-term programme — Extended Fund Facility of about 36 to 39 months — would be strengthening public finances, including through gradual fiscal consolidation and broadening the tax base, especially in under-taxed sectors (read real estate, retail and wholesale trade and agriculture) and improving tax administration to improve debt sustainability and create space for higher priority development and social assistance spending to protect the vulnerable. The second objective of the next programme would be restoring the energy sector’s viability by accelerating cost-reducing reforms, including through improving electricity transmission and

distribution, moving captive power demand to the electricity grid, strengthening distribution company governance and management, and undertaking effective anti-theft efforts. The third key objective is returning inflation to the target, with a deeper and more transparent flexible foreign exchange market supporting external rebalancing and rebuilding foreign exchange reserves. The fourth and last critical aim would be promoting private-led activity through above-mentioned actions as well as removal of distortionary protection, advancement of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) reforms to improve the sector's performance, and scaling up investment in human capital to make economic growth more resilient and inclusive and enable Pakistan to reach its economic potential. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 1*)

8.3 # World Bank

World Bank to help improve Dhabeji pumping station, says KW&SC

World Bank experts visited Dhabeji pumping station and assured the KW&SC of cooperation in improving performance of pumping station. Pumping station is facing multiple problems related to maintenance and technical issues for past one decade that often leads to suspension of water supply to Karachi. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2024, Page 15*)

Govt seeks further investments through \$250m additional financing: WB

Due to the success of the Crisis Resilient Social Protection (CRISP) programme and the improved delivery capabilities of BISP, government has requested further investments in and utilisation of the adaptive system through additional financing of \$ 250 million, says World Bank. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2024, Page 12*)

WB may approve \$150m for two projects today

World Bank's Board of Executive Directors is likely to approve \$ 150m in financing for "Pakistan: Digital Economy Enhancement Project and Sindh Barrages Improvement Project". Sources revealed that World Bank's Board of Executive Directors is likely to approve additional financing covers of around \$72m to bridge financing gap in "Sindh Barrages Improvement Project." The project development objectives are improving the reliability and safety of the Guddu Barrage and strengthening the Sindh Irrigation Department's capacity to operate and manage barrage. "Sindh Barrages Improvement Project" worth \$ 326.6m is facing a financing gap of about \$ 72m and will require either government of Sindh counterpart funding or additional IDA funding to meet contractual obligations in medium term. (*Business Recorder, March 22, 2024 Page 26*)

DEEP, SBIP projects, WB approves \$149.7m financing

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved \$149.7m in financing for Pakistan to support two projects. Digital Economy Enhancement Project (\$78m) will support expansion of digitally enabled public services delivery for citizens and firms, while the second Additional Financing for the Sindh Barrages Improvement Project (\$71.7m) will support better resilience to floods and improvements in reliability, safety, & management of three Sindh barrages. (*Business Recorder, March 24th, 2024, Page 1*)

9 # POLICY

Punjab's three-month budget focuses on health, IT, agriculture

Punjab government tabled its first budget for a precise period of three months (April to June) for the fiscal year 2023-24. It also ratified the nine-month budget (July 2023 to March 2024) of the total annual budget for FY24, approved and utilised by the outgoing caretaker provincial government. Budget consists of Rs280 billion annual development programme (ADP), reflecting CM's priorities in health, social, and IT sectors. ADP includes Rs55bn allocated for launch of various initiatives, Rs16bn for other development projects, Rs158bn for ongoing development schemes, and Rs51bn for foreign-funded schemes. The budget proposals seem to focus on agriculture sector, with plans to launch the Punjab Agriculture Transformation Programme costing Rs2bn, construct model agricultural malls for Rs2.5bn, and launch aquaculture shrimp farming for Rs1bn. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 3*)

9.1 # Developmental Policy

CDWP approves Rs7.87bn development projects for Balochistan, KP

CDWP approved two development projects of energy and water supply in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, respectively, with a total estimated cost of Rs7.87 billion. Under the current financial rules, the CDWP is empowered to itself approve projects costing up to Rs7.5bn while the projects of higher estimated costs are approved by Ecneec on CDWP recommendations after clearance on technical grounds. The CDWP also approved another project relating to Physical Planning and Housing sector namely "Gravity Based Safe Drinking Water Supply System in Havelian, Abbottabad, KP" at a cost of Rs3.336bn. The sponsoring agency of project is KP government, which would provide Rs1.296bn, while remaining funds would be provided by Korea International Cooperation Agency through a \$12m grant in aid. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2024, Page 3*)

Caretakers hiked project costs by 30pc before exit

Just before end of its tenure, the caretaker government allowed a cost escalation of about 30pc to "ongoing contracts" of hundreds of development projects, financed under PSDP of federal government. According to IMF estimates for fiscal year 2022-23, federal PSDP portfolio of Rs10.32 trillion alone contained about 1,153 development projects. This includes 909 ongoing projects worth Rs7.96tr, coupled with addition of 244 new projects with total cost estimate of Rs2.26tr. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 1*)

9.2 # Neo – Liberal Policy

PM seeks timeline for PIA privatisation

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sought a final implementation schedule for privatisation of PIA. Chairing a high-level meeting on the airline's privatisation and restructuring of Federal Board of Revenue, the PM directed the Ministry of Privatisation to present the schedule about the PIA's privatisation in two days. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 5*)

SOEs: three-phased privatisation programme being chalked out

Privatisation Commission is said to be chalking out a three-phased privatisation programme of State Owned Entities (SOEs) excluding entities with some national or strategic interest. On March 7, 2024, Prime Minister directed that a compressive privatisation programme for next five years (2024-29) be chalked out in consultation with concerned Ministries/Divisions. (*Business Recorder, March 15th, 2024, Page 1*)

PIACL sell-off plan termed 'priority'

Federal Minister for Defence, Defence Production and Aviation Khawaja Muhammed Asif said that privatisation of PIACL would be priority of government. International Finance Corporation (IFC) apprised minister about latest development of outsourcing of three major airports including Islamabad International Airport, Jinnah International Airport Karachi, and Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore in the first phase. (*Business Recorder, March 15th, 2024, Page 1*)

15 to 20 institutions, Govt seeks swift privatisation

Federal Minister for Privatisation and Board of Investment Abdul Aleem Khan has said that in the present circumstances of the economy, 15 to 20 institutions must be privatised immediately. He added that loss-making institutions were like termites for the economy as it was the national capital and exchequer which was being wasted every year for which there was no solution or cure. Federal Minister Khan indicated that the deficit of the PIA for the last five years was 500 billion rupees which had no justification. Khan said that the privatisation of loss-making institutions was not a matter of convincing anyone, "but it is a question of the survival of our country's economy and a decision must be made including Steel Mill." (*Business Recorder, March 15th, 2024, Page 1*)

PIA first in line for privatisation, says Aurangzeb

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said that PIA is prioritised for privatisation with other institutions to follow suit. "Our agenda solely revolves around implementation and enforcement," he asserted. He highlighted the imperative role of private sector in economic development, noting ongoing discussions with IMF to introduce reforms within the FBR. (*The News, March 17th, 2023, Page 3*)

SHC issues notices on plea against privatisation of PIA

The Sindh High Court issued notices to ministries of law, aviation and finance as well as other respondents on a petition filed against proposed privatisation of PIA. An employees' union of the PIA and the Society of Aircraft Engineers of Pakistan (SAEP) have jointly moved the SHC and submitted that the federal government was taking steps to privatise/sale the PIA and the Privatisation Commission had also appointed a British firm as financial adviser for this purpose. Referring to some rulings of the apex court, the petitioners contended that only an elected government could take major policy decisions. They asked the court to declare all actions taken by the caretaker set-up for the privatisation of the PIA null and void and without lawful authority.

They also impugned the amendments in the PIAC (Conversion) Act, 2016 authorising the federal government to issue fresh shares or cancel any shares as it may deem fit. They argued that such an amendment was made in violation of the company law and the authority in this regard was not vested with the government; whereas the impugned amendment had also been carried out to facilitate privatisation of national flag carrier. After a preliminary hearing, a two-judge bench issued pre-admission notices to respondents for April 3. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 13*)

Last hurdles to PIA privatisation removed

The government, domestic banks and development finance institutions (DFIs) have successfully concluded PIA's commercial debt negotiations, removing the last hurdles in the way of privatization of the national flag carrier. Under the arrangement, Pakistan International Airlines Company Ltd's (PIACL) commercial domestic debt will be moved to PIA Holding Company Ltd, established by the federal government as part of the former's legal restructuring. The federal cabinet approved the segregation plan on Feb 6 this year. This arrangement will help make a viable business case for private sector's investment in the national flag carrier. (*Dawn, March 30th, 2024, Page 03*)

10 # SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

Jul-Jan debt rises 6pc

The federal government's total domestic and external debt stocks rose by 6 percent during the first seven (July-Jan) months of this fiscal year (FY24), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). Cumulatively, the central government's total domestic and external debt stocks reached Rs 64.842 trillion at the end of Jan 2024 compared to Rs 60.841 trillion in June 2023, depicting an increase of Rs 4trillion. The detailed analysis revealed that major increase was witnessed in the domestic debt, which rose by 10 percent. The federal government's domestic debt rose to Rs 42.626 trillion in Jan 2024 up from Rs 38.810 trillion in June 2023, showing an increase of Rs 3.816 trillion. Similarly, the upward trend was also seen in the federal government's external debt, which went up by 0.8 percent during the first seven months of this fiscal year. With the current surge, government's external debt stocks reached Rs 22.216 trillion at the end of Jan 2024 as against Rs 22.031 trillion in June 2023. (*Business Recorder, March 6th, 2024, Page 1*)

External debt rises \$1.2bn in six months

Pakistan's external public debt rose by \$1.2bn in six months to \$86.358bn as of September 30, 2023, Ministry of Economic Affairs. In its first quarterly report on FEA, Pakistan had received total foreign inflows of \$3.5bn in July-September 2023 against loan repayments of \$1.5bn, resulting in a net inflow of \$1.97bn. Around 64% of total external public debt was obtained from multilateral & bilateral sources having concessional terms and longer maturity. "As of September 30, 2023, total external public debt of government was \$86.358bn". External public debt as of March 31, 2023 amounted to \$85.18bn. In comparison, country had received \$2.2bn in loans & repaid \$2.06bn during same period LFY (July-September 2022), leading to net addition of \$142m. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 11*)

Budgetary borrowing surges 59pc in July-Feb

Budgetary borrowing surged by 59% during first eight months of current FY, reflecting the higher government spending. State Bank's latest data shows that government borrowed Rs3.395trillion during July-Feb FY24 compared to Rs2.136tr in same period last year, an increase of 59pc or Rs1.259tr. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2024, Page 9*)

Q2 GDP stands at 1pc despite improvement in agri sector

The GDP growth stood at one percent in the second quarter of the ongoing fiscal year against the revised 2.50 percent in the first quarter despite improvement in the agriculture sector. This has been acknowledged by the Economic Adviser Wing (EAW) of the Finance Ministry in its monthly economic update and outlook for March 2024. The decline in LSM of negative -0.52 percent may have been the reason for a decrease in the GDP growth. The decline in LSM may have been due to a massive slash in the credit to the private sector. The credit to the private sector during July-January 2024 plummeted 41.1 percent to Rs180.7 billion from Rs393.6 billion for the same period a year before. (*Business Recorder, March 30th, 2024, Page 1*)

10.1 # Food

Punjab, Balochistan lead in costly food

Punjab and Balochistan are the two most expensive provinces in terms of the gap between actual and prices fixed by district administration of essential food items, PBS. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2024, Page 11*)

Snow-bound Chitralis fear food shortage

The closure of roads of more than a dozen of valleys in both Upper and Lower Chitral districts to vehicular traffic for the last three weeks has been creating myriad issues for people with food insecurity topping the list. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 8*)

Export of flour made from imported wheat allowed

Ministry of Commerce (MoC) has allowed export of wheat flour manufactured from the grinding of imported wheat solely for export under the Export Facilitation Scheme, 2021. (*Business Recorder, March 29th, 2024, Page 1*)

10.2 # Inflation

Monthly inflation rate slows in February

Inflation is projected to hover around 24.5-25.5% in February, with expectations of further easing to 23.5-24.5% in March due to better crops and smooth supply of commodities, the finance ministry said in its monthly economic report. The report comes a day before the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) will release February 2024 inflation data, and while Pakistan undertakes reforms linked to a \$3 billion Standby Arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Pakistan's yearly Consumer Price Index (CPI) for January clocked in at 28.3%, the last monthly CPI data before general elections held on Feb. 8. The governor of the State Bank of Pakistan said the decision was warranted due to "elevated" inflation - which was 29.7% in December. He said a rise in the bank's average inflation forecast for the fiscal year ending in June to 23-25%, from a previous projection of 20-22%, was due to rising gas and electricity prices. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2024, Page 22*)

CPI inflation decelerates to 23.1pc in February

Inflation, measured by CPI decelerated to 23.06 per cent year-on-year in February from 28.34pc in the preceding month due to a slight decrease in the prices of food products. It is the lowest reading in 20 months, down from a peak of 37.97pc in May 2023. The first eight months' average inflation for FY24 was recorded at 27.96pc compared to 26.19pc during the corresponding period last year. This exceeds the 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 31.5pc in February 2023. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2024, Page 9*)

10.3 # Poverty

Ramazan package: Rs6.48bn allocated

Federal government has allocated Rs6.484 billion for providing Atta (Flour), ghee, and sugar at subsidized prices through the Utility Stores Corporation during the month of Ramzan. Rs3.474 billion subsidy will be provided for atta, followed by Rs1.610 billion for sugar, and Rs1.4 billion for ghee. (*Business Recorder, March 2nd, 2024, Page 1*)

BISP successful in mitigating poverty: WB

A new World Bank report said the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has been successful in mitigating negative impact of poverty on households as well as protecting them against shocks, but the benefit level must at least be 15% of the average household consumption for BISP to have any impact on poverty. The report, 'Evolution of Benazir Income Support Programme's Delivery System' said BISP has had significant positive impacts on consumption expenditure, food consumption, child nutrition security, asset retention, the mobility of women investments in health and education. Prior to the 2008 global financial crisis, social safety net initiatives in Pakistan were ineffective because of their non-objective targeting and limited coverage, the World Bank report added.

To date, BISP has provided \$1 billion in regular and reliable support. Between 2011 and 2019, the percentage of BISP beneficiaries below the poverty line fell from 90pc to 72pc, however, its impact on poverty diminished by 2019, primarily because of eroding value of benefit level, the report said. It added that investments in building systems over the years were realized when the government was able to rapidly expand BISP, both vertically and horizontally, to respond first to Covid-19 pandemic and then to devastation caused by floods in 2022. It is essential to continue investing in such programmes "to reduce poverty and inequality". (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2024, Page 5*)

Rural areas: One-quarter of population still below poverty line: WB

While poverty has decreased significantly over the past two decades, one-quarter of the population still lives below the poverty line, and these people are disproportionately located in rural areas, says the World Bank. The bank in its report, “The evolution of Benazir Income Support Programme’s delivery systems, Leveraging Digital Technology for Adaptive Social Protection in Pakistan” stated that the BISP benefit level has been increased to improve its adequacy, but it still accounts for only 10 per cent of average household consumption.

The report noted that the Covid-19 pandemic worsened the situation for poor and vulnerable households, and the floods in 2022 further pushed millions of people below the poverty line. Human capital accumulation is sluggish in Pakistan, with the country’s low education and health indicators leading to low labour productivity. Stark inequalities in human capital accumulation between wealth quintiles and gender disparities exacerbate poverty and low human development indicators. Pakistan is also among the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change-related disasters which pose a continuous threat to lives and livelihoods. Pakistan, the world’s fifth-most populous country, is a lower-middle-income state with a per capita GDP of \$1,505.

The bank stated that BISP has had significant positive impacts on consumption expenditure, food consumption, child nutrition security, asset retention, the mobility of women, investments in health and education, and savings. To date, BISP has provided USD 1 billion in regular and reliable support. Between 2011 and 2019, the percentage of BISP beneficiaries below the poverty line fell from 90 per cent to 72 per cent; however, its impact on poverty diminished by 2019, primarily because of the eroding value of the benefit level. Investments in building systems over the years were realized when the government was able to rapidly expand BISP, both vertically and horizontally, to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and the floods in 2022. It is essential to continue investing in such programmes to reduce poverty and inequality in the country.

Despite making progress in outreach & communication, BISP has faced capacity challenges that have hindered development of an effective communication strategy. Effective communication is critical for social protection systems & could be used at every stage of delivery. Several draft strategies produced by BISP have recognized communication as institution’s weakest link. (*Business Recorder, March 3rd, 2024, Page 8*)

PM launches Rs7.5 billion Ramazan relief package

Following an approval by Prime Minister, a Rs7.5 billion Ramazan package for needy people has been launched, allowing them to acquire essential items at subsidised rates from all 4,775 utility stores across the country. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 1*)

Punjab cabinet okays Ramazan relief package

Punjab cabinet has approved the Ramazan Negahban Relief Package 2024 to provide essential food items to needy people. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 5*)

Rs22.5bn Ramazan package announced

Sindh CM has announced a Ramazan package worth Rs22.5 billion aimed at supporting 60% of population, particularly those who earn a minimum wage of between Rs32,000 and Rs35,000 per month. The targeted families will receive Rs5,000 cash each through banks. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 13*)

Floods, heat stress expand rural income gap by \$21bn: FAO

Floods and heat stress have globally widened the income gap between rural poor and non-poor households by up to \$21bn a year, a new report published by FAO. These estimates, according to FAO report, 'Unjust Climate', highlight the massive challenge that extreme weather events pose for global efforts to reduce poverty & inequality. This challenge will only become more acute as frequency & intensity of these events increase because of climate change. Report says extreme weather events disproportionately affect poor rural households, leading to significant reductions in their incomes and widening income inequality. With every day of extreme heat, poor rural households lose 2.4% of their on-farm incomes, 1.1pc of the value of the crops they produce, and 1.5pc of their off-farm income relative to non-poor households.

Every day of extreme precipitation causes poor households to lose 0.8pc of their incomes relative to non-poor households, mostly driven by losses in off-farm incomes. Extreme weather events push poor rural households to adopt maladaptive coping strategies, including reducing income sources, liquidating livestock, and redirecting expenditures away from their farms. Poor households tend to reduce the diversity of their income sources when exposed to heat stresses, relative to better-off households. A one-degree Celsius increase in average temperatures is associated with a 53pc increase in the farm incomes of poor households and a 33pc decrease in their off-farm incomes, relative to non-poor households. Female-headed households lose significantly more of their incomes than male-headed households when extreme weather events occur. A day of extreme temperature or extreme precipitation is associated with a 1.3pc and 0.5pc reduction, respectively, in the total incomes of female-headed households, relative to that of male-headed households. Across low- and middle-income countries, heat stresses widen the income gap between rural female-headed households and male-headed households by \$37bn annually, and floods by \$16bn. An additional day of drought or extreme temperatures reduces the farm incomes of female-headed households by 0.4 and 1.1pc, respectively, relative to male-headed households. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 3*)

PM enhances Ramazan package to Rs12.5 billion

Days after announcing a Ramazan package that would allow needy people to buy essential items at subsidised rates from all Utility Stores across country, PM enhanced its quantum from Rs7.5bn to Rs12.5bn. Premier also ordered enhancing outreach of package, & that along with Utility Stores & BISP, mobile units would provide edible items at subsidised rates across country. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 3*)

Jobless father of seven kills himself

A 35-year-old father of seven children died by suicide after hanging himself with a rope from a tree in Shehzad Hote village near Jhuddo town. The victim's relatives said the deceased had been jobless for a long time and had no money to feed his children or fulfill their innocent desires. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 15*)

11 # ENVIRONMENT

Environmental pollutants major risk factor for kidney disease, experts say

While discussing critical issues concerning kidney health in developing countries, senior nephrologists at an international conference at SIUT shared their concern over environmental deterioration that was having an 'alarming impact' on kidney health. They were speaking on second day of 14th Biennial Conference of Pakistan Society of Nephrology (PSN). According to experts, while people are generally aware of serious threat posed by diabetes to their kidney health, little awareness exists on environmental risk factors. Environmental pollutants were believed to have been playing a significant role in growing prevalence of chronic kidney disease. In this respect, they referred to some recent Pakistani data showing that a significant number of patients suffered from end-stage kidney disease from "unknown causes" followed by kidney stones. The kidney health challenges in Pakistan might aggravate if preventive strategies were not developed to tackle the increasing numbers of diabetics as well as environmental degradation. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 14*)

Survey finds dozens of industries violating environmental laws

To protect all the water channels in Islamabad from industrial discharge, the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency has surveyed 270 industries across four industrial zones and found that dozens of industries are non-compliant with environmental laws. A monthly schedule with weekly monitoring was established to track and assess the discharge of effluents. This monitoring process safeguards the maintenance of environmental quality. According to a senior official in the Ministry of Climate Change, many industries continued to wreak havoc with the air people breathed and polluted groundwater without any checks, and it was about time that such facilities were brought under the ambit of environmental laws. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 4*)

11.1 # Health

Experts explain how diabetes increases risks of triple-negative breast cancer

Diabetes is a serious metabolic disorder characterized by sustained hyperglycemia, hyperinsulinemia, and hyperlipidemia due to insulin resistance, which potentially enhances risk of cancer, especially triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), the deadliest form of breast cancer. Diabetes and cancer are two major public health problems occurring mainly in the Pakistan, the causative link is yet to be proven, but the relative risks imparted by diabetes are said to be greatest (about two-fold or higher) for cancers of the liver, pancreas and endometrium, and less (about 1.2–1.5 fold) for cancers of the

colon, rectum, breast and bladder. Our health system is not equipped to deal with the epidemic of diabetes. It needs sustained and coordinated whole-of-government and societal efforts. (*The News, March 3rd, 2024, Page 16*)

Mega scam unearthed at Services Hundreds of private institutes` doctors get PG training at public hospital illegally

Hundreds of doctors from private hospitals/institutes have completed their illegal / unauthorised postgraduate training and house job at the Services Hospital Lahore, blasting the Central Induction Policy and the rules under the nose of the senior medical teachers of the state-run medical institute. Of them, 366 doctors of the private hospitals completed the unauthorised training and managed to get experience certifications while 107 others did house job at Services Hospital. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 8*)

Every fourth Pakistani suffers from diabetes, moot told

Health experts at a seminar on diabetes have lamented that diabetes' prevalence is quite high in Pakistan with every fourth Pakistani suffering from the disease, according to statistics compiled by the International Diabetes Federation, globally, one in six children were born with diabetes. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 15*)

Women worst hit by underfunded healthcare: WHO

A new report published by WHO has outlined how under-investment in health systems results in a vicious cycle of unpaid health and care work, lowering women's participation in paid labour markets and hampering gender equality. The report titled 'Fair share for health and care: gender and the undervaluation of health and care work' suggested investment in public health systems to reduce the burden of unpaid care work and improve the quality of healthcare services. It stated women comprise 67% of the paid global health and care workforce. However, in addition to this paid work, it has been estimated that women perform an estimated 76pc of all unpaid care activities. Report highlighted low pay and demanding working conditions are common in the health and care sector. Devaluing care giving, which is work performed primarily by women, negatively impacts wages, working conditions, productivity and economic footprint of sector. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 5*)

Gastroenteritis on the rise after flu outbreak in Karachi

Cases of gastroenteritis and flu are on the rise in the city with several patients being referred to the tertiary care hospitals for admissions by general physicians. Flu has staged a comeback in recent weeks after seeing a decline over a month back. (*Dawn, March 22, 2024 Page 13*)

75pc tuberculosis cases in country are 'not identified': global health body

While World Tuberculosis (TB) Day will be observed today with the theme 'Yes We Can End TB', the cases of drug-resistant TB in Pakistan are going to become a major challenge as "75pc of them are not identified". With Pakistan ranking fifth among high-burden countries globally, the country witnesses approximately 608,000 new TB cases

and 15,000 drug-resistant TB cases annually. Notably, the country transitioned to WHO-recommended short, all-oral patient-friendly TB treatment regimens for drug-resistant TB (DRTB), significantly improving treatment outcomes and patient experience. However, international non-government organisation Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has claimed that over 75 per cent of drug resistant tuberculosis cases were not identified in Pakistan. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2024, Page 4*)

Hospitals in Karachi register influx of patients with measles' complications

While there has been a slight decrease in measles' cases with the weather conditions getting warmer in a couple of days, the highly contagious infection remains a serious public health concern in Karachi as complicated cases continue to be reported at the city's tertiary care hospitals. The majority of children being brought to hospitals are unvaccinated and malnourished. "This month, 80 children have been admitted to the hospital with measles' complications. Two of them have died. Only today, a three-year-old child has been brought to us from Thatta with post-measles pneumonia," shared Dr Samreen Zaidi, SIDHRC. The data showed that measles had seen a drastic increase in incidence over the past four years; a total of 1,873 suspected cases were reported in 2020; 6,293 (suspected) cases were reported in 2021; 4,990 were reported in 2022 and 8,051 reported last year. The total number of confirmed cases jumped from 675 in 2020 to more than 4,000 in 2023. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2024, Page 13*)

11.2 # Pollution

Pakistan `second most polluted country` in 2023

Pakistan was the second most polluted country in 2023, with its neighbours Bangladesh and India also topping the list of nations with extremely hazardous air quality. Lahore was the world's fifth most polluted city, and most polluted mega city with pollution levels at 99.5 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), 20 times higher than WHO guidelines, according to '2023 World Air Quality Report', published by IQAir, a Swiss air-monitoring organisation. Based on this data, a calculation by Pakistan Air Quality Initiative (PAQI) showed that hazardous air quality is resulting in a life expectancy loss of 4.4 years. Other major Pakistani cities with the worst pollution were: Faisalabad (88.2), Peshawar (76.5), Rawalpindi (59.5), Karachi (56.4) and Islamabad (42.4). Islamabad has gone up from 17th place to 9th in the list of most polluted capitals in the world. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 12*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

SC seeks report on actions to tackle climate change

Supreme Court has asked federal government to come up with a report highlighting what initiatives it took to cope with climate change challenges faced by country. Law Association of Pakistan, which highlighted existential threat of climate change. Pilap's petition, moved through Advocate Syed Faisal Hussain Naqvi, pleaded that Pakistan Climate Change Act, 2017 was promulgated on March 31, 2017, to provide adaptation

and mitigation policies, plans, programmes, and other measures required to address effects of climate change. Act called for establishment of Pakistan Climate Change Authority, which had yet to be formed, thus rendering act ineffective, Petition argued. “According to Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is currently fifth most climate-vulnerable country in world. Pakistan also faces some of highest disaster risk levels in world, ranking [23rd] out of 194 countries.” Risk is driven by nation’s exposure to flooding, earthquakes, tropical cyclones & their associated hazards. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 3*)

Changing climatic conditions may lead to drought in Sindh, warn experts

Climate and weather conditions in Sindh are making situation, especially Kotri barrage downstream, highly vulnerable and may lead to drought across province. They said at moot titled “Climate impact assessment on biodiversity of Indus River Kotri downstream to delta region” organised by Zoology department, University of Sindh, that necessary steps should be taken to safeguard natural biodiversity of Kotri downstream and Indus delta. They said that if conditions persisted for some years, Sindh would become a deserted land and fauna, aquatic and terrestrial life would suffer great harm. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 15*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTERS

Gwadar declared calamity-hit; forecast puts Sindh govt on edge

The fourth-time PPP government in Sindh, haunted by its past poor performance during rains, faces its first challenge today, with Met Office predicting two days of moderate to heavy downpours in many parts of the province. Meanwhile, Balochistan government declared Gwadar a calamity-hit area after heavy rains battered the district, suspending normal life and traffic. Heavy rains with hailstorms continued to lash the district. Hundreds of people affected by rains have protested in Gwadar against the provincial administration, alleging that it was not doing enough to shift citizens to safe areas. The heavy downpour has practically left many people homeless in the affected areas, as their houses either collapsed or inundated. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2024, Page 1*)

Rains, landslides paralyse GB, KP and Balochistan areas

Heavy snowfall and rain have brought life to a standstill in Gilgit-Baltistan, many parts of Balochistan & Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with Karakoram Highway and other thoroughfares rendered impassable due to landslides and flashfloods. Adverse weather has led to the cancellation of PIA flights between Islamabad and cities of Gilgit and Skardu. Heavy rains and snowfall continue to lash large swathes of KP for a second day, resulting in deaths of at least 22 people and injuries to 25 others. According to GB Disaster Management Authority, heavy rain and snowfall in upper areas of the region. Landslides triggered by rains have blocked the Karakoram Highway at several points, including at the Kohistan, Gilgit-Diamer, Gilgit-Hunza and Nagar sections. (*Dawn, March 3rd, 2024, Page 3*)

Inclement weather takes its toll across the country

The death toll from torrential rain and snowfall in different parts of KP reached 27, including 18 children. Besides, at least 38 people, including 20 children, were injured

in several incidents related to rain and snowfall over past two days. Meanwhile, major roads remained closed in Gilgit-Baltistan, leaving thousands stranded in region. Power and water supply and communication services were also severely hit in many areas.

On other hand, Quetta & other parts of Balochistan remained in grip of freezing weather, with sub-zero temperatures driving people indoors and thinning traffic on roads. In KP, rain & snowfall in most areas continued for third consecutive day, destroying 33 houses and partially damaging 129 others. Similarly, 59 cattle heads have also perished in incidents. In Gilgit-Baltistan, Karakoram Highway, Baltistan Road & other major roads remained blocked at multiple locations, rendering thousands of tourists stranded at various points. Landslides triggered by rains have blocked Karakoram Highway at several points, including Kohistan, Gilgit-Diamer, Gilgit-Hunza, & Nagar sections. Heavy snowfall has brought daily life to a standstill in Quetta and other northern parts of Balochistan, with critical highways & inter-provincial roads being blocked, cutting off many areas from district headquarters. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 1*)

Balochistan rains: Five killed, 237 houses damaged: PDMA

PDMA has said that recent rains in Balochistan claimed 5 lives besides damaging 237 houses across province. Walls of 25 houses collapsed, four highways and a bridge were damaged due to rain. (*Business Recorder, March 4th, 2024, Page 5*)

Death toll from rain, snowfall surges to 36

Death toll from the recent devastating rains and snowfall across KP surged to 36, PDMA said. It added that 43 people were injured in disaster. The PDMA said 46 houses were destroyed and 346 partially damaged. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2024, Page 8*)

Five miners die after heavy downpour in Duki

Five miners were killed due to a roof collapse in heavy rainfall in the Duki coal mines area, while a new spell of torrential rains in many areas of the province, including Quetta, also suspended traffic on highways. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2024, Page 5*)

Seven killed as rain, hailstorms batter KP

Seven people were killed and nine others injured as heavy rain and hailstorms battered large parts of KP for second consecutive day. The provincial capital also received heavy rainfall and hailstorm, which inundated several roads and disrupted power supply in many areas. Damage to wheat and tobacco crops has also been reported in Charsadda district. (*Dawn, March 31st, 2024, Page 1*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTERS

Unabated deforestation induces natural disasters, moot told

Speakers at a program on impact of climate change have pointed out that environmental crisis in the form of natural disasters is caused by unabated deforestation and cessation of water and said tree plantation can be instrumental in redeeming the damage left in wake of calamities like floods and heavy rainfall. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2024, Page 17*)

14.1 # Earthquake

5.3 magnitude quake jolts Islamabad, parts of KP

An earthquake of moderate intensity jolted Islamabad and some districts of adjoining KP as there were no immediate reports of casualties or damages. Intensity of earthquake was recorded at 5.3 on Richter scale and it was reported from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, and some other adjoining areas of these cities. The earthquake's epicentre was at Afghan-Tajikistan border area with the depth of 86 kilometers. Residents of Kohat, Lower Dir and Chitral districts also experienced tremors. Similar seismic activity was reported in Shangla, Buner, Malakand and Swat districts as well. Drawn in comparison with the 2005 earthquake that wrecked havoc in Islamabad and adjoining cities, which was roughly 10km deep, quakes occurring as deep as 100 kilometers to 150 kilometers beneath surface of the earth were also less dangerous. The region was prone to earthquakes due to shifts in tectonic plates. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2024, Page 4*)

14.2 # Landslide

Landslide disrupts traffic on Neelum Valley Road

The main Neelum Valley Road got blocked for all kinds of traffic near the town of Kel due to a huge landslide. The landslide has brought huge boulders apart from mounds of earth at Sheikh Bela village due to which for the time being even a motorcycle cannot pass through it. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 4*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Rising crimes spark protest in Kandhkot

Workers of nationalist parties and social organisations observed a sit-in in Kandhkot town to protest against rising unrest among citizens due to growing lawlessness and simmering tribal feuds, forcing people to leave the crime-infested district and migrate to relatively peaceful other areas. The protesters led by Sindh-Taraqqi-pasand Party held a four-hour sit-in in front of SSP office said that unabated robberies, thefts and kidnappings, which had become order of the day in the district, had spread fear and unrest among citizens across Kandhkot-Kashmore district.

They claimed that police picked up innocent citizens, kept them hidden somewhere for several days and then declared them criminals only to target them in staged encounters. They demanded higher authorities establish law and order in the district and bring criminals to justice, otherwise, they would continue their protest. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2024, Page 15*)

Teachers protest colleagues' murder

A large number of primary schoolteachers staged demonstrations in several towns in upper Sindh in protest against murder of their fellow teachers in Naseerabad, Thull and Madeji towns. In Sukkur, teachers took out a procession under the banner of Primary Teachers Association. In Jacobabad, protesting teachers, who took out a procession,

demanded immediate arrest of killers of Zafar Lako, Murad Bhangwar and Hidayatullah Lohar. They warned if killers were not arrested immediately they would expand protest. A similar protest was held in Ghotki district. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2024, Page 15*)

Muzaffarabad rocked by massive protests

AJK capital (Muzaffarabad) saw three massive protest demonstrations by the serving and former ad-hoc, contractual and contingent paid employees who were either shown door or feared termination by present coalition government. The demonstrators included around 900 contingent-paid baildars of the forest department who had been serving since 2011 but were relieved on December 31, 2023 reportedly for want of funds.

Separately, hundreds of employees of previously federal government funded Maternal New-born and Child Health (MNCH) programme, who included a sizable number of females, also staged protest demonstration on a green belt in Chattar neighbourhood, calling upon the government to fulfil its commitment to regularize their service and bring them on normal budget.

The third demonstration was held outside the deputy commissioner's office by serving and recently relieved ad-hoc employees calling for restoration and continuation of their services. A female member of cabinet first met and assured them that a meeting between their five representatives and the prime minister would be arranged in the afternoon. Meanwhile, in a fourth demonstration, a large number of serving non-gazetted employees of the civil secretariat continued their protest on the premises of the civil secretariat on the sixth consecutive day for acceptance of their demands, which included an increase in their allowances. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2024, Page 4*)

Sindh-wide protest planned for tomorrow against corporate farming

Jeay Sindh Rahbar Committee has decided to hold protests across Sindh on March 10 against government move to sell away the province's fertile land for corporate farming under its green initiative. The committee decided to observe death anniversary of G.M. Syed on April 25 and pointed out that Sindh's lands should have been distributed among landless peasants. They said that Sindh had more resources in country than any other province still it was hit by poverty and hunger. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2024, Page 15*)

Patients suffer as protesting young doctors shut OPD at Benazir Bhutto Hospital in Rawalpindi

Young Doctors Association (YDA) closed the outdoor patient department (OPD) of Benazir Bhutto Hospital (BBH) in protest against the Punjab government for not releasing salaries to the house officers and postgraduate trainees on time. Hundreds of patients visiting hospital particularly its OPD suffered because of the strike by junior doctors. However, doctors were available at the emergency department and checking patients. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 4*)

Protest held against police failure to arrest teachers` killers

A large number of teachers took part in a procession to protest against police failure to arrest the culprits involved in the murder of teachers, Zafar Lakho, Hidayatullah Lohar and Murad Ali Bhangwar. The procession organised by district chapter of the Primary Teachers Association (PTA) in response to a call for agitation issued by Sindh PTA began its march from Shah Abdul Lateef primary school and culminated at local press club. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 15*)

Wahdat Colony residents protest against week-long power cut

Residents of Hyderabad's old Wahdat Colony started a protest against Hesco at Guddu Chowk in protest against the power supply suspension that began a week ago. The officers reached the Guddu Chowk and directed the protesters to present the copies of the electricity bills submitted and assured them of the restoration of the power supply if the bills were submitted. (*The News, March 10th, 2024, Page 14*)

Nigehban Ramazan package Fishermen protest non-provision of relief package

About 500 families of fishermen who live in boats on river Indus held a protest at Head Taunsa Barrage against district administration for non-provision of Nigehban Ramazan package and chanted slogans against the administration. The protesting fishermen said they went to DC's office multiple times and asked about the Ramazan relief package announced by CM but they were pushed away by the Kot Addu assistant commissioner. They said their complaint was not heard by the administration though they had not received any relief package. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 8*)

JI rally expresses solidarity with Palestinians

The city chapter of the Jamaat-i-Islami staged a rally to express solidarity with the people of Palestine. A number of JI workers and supporters gathered on Numaish traffic intersection and marched on M.A. Jinnah Road. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 13*)

SRC protests 'anti-Sindh' projects

Activists of the Sindh Rehbar Committee (SRC) held a demonstration and observed a token hunger strike in protest against what they said allotment and illegal occupation of land, construction of dams on Indus River, increasing crimes and the rule of dacoits. They alleged that the land of Sindh was being allotted and occupied in the name of new projects, which was not acceptable at all. The tail-enders were suffering as their lands were barren due to non-availability of water, but there was nothing to be done. They said the rulers were considering construction of new dams on the Sindh's river, which would not be tolerated at any cost. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 15*)

GB residents protest 22-hour power outages, internet disruptions

Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have been protesting the prolonged unavailability of electricity, mobile services, and internet connectivity, enduring around 22 hours of disruptions each day for months. This situation has significantly affected the social and economic conditions in GB, prompting widespread concern and dissatisfaction among

the local population. Those involved in online businesses, students, and professionals have become jobless due to the complete blackout. (*Dawn, March 12, 2024, Page 5*)

BU teachers, staff protest non-payment of salaries

Hundreds of Balochistan University employees, including senior professors, lecturers and other female staff members, protested in front of the university against the non-payment of their salaries for the past three months. Protesters chanted slogans against management of university & provincial authorities. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2024, Page 3*)

Protest held against girl's murder

A large number of people staged a procession in response to a call for protest given by Child Rights Committee, a social organisation working for children's rights, demanding arrest of killers of a seven-year-old girl, who was brutally murdered after sexual assault in Rahimo Khoso village five days ago. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2024, Page 15*)

Torkham labourers protest torture of colleague by Afghan guards

Labourers at Torkham protested alleged torture of a worker by Afghan border guards. Protesters chanted slogans and demanded of their high-ups to take action against those involved in torturing their colleague. (*Dawn, March 14th, 20214 Page 8*)

Protesters block Indus Highway over delay in autopsy

Relatives of a woman, who had died in an accident, blocked Jamshoro-Sehwan section of the Indus Highway in protest against lack of facilities for post mortem at Manjhnd taluka hospital where the victim was taken for medico-legal formalities. They placed the body of the victim on the highway during the protest, causing traffic to come to a halt on both sides of the highway. (*Dawn, March 16th, 2024, Page 15*)

Gwadar cut off amid `missing persons` protests

The road link of Gwadar and other parts of Makran division with Karachi and other areas has been cut off for over 48 hours due to protests against the alleged enforced disappearance of two youth. The closure of roads has severed the land communication between Gwadar, Karachi, Pasni, Ormara and Iran. The protesters, including women and children from all over Gwadar and other areas, are sitting in the camp carrying placards and banners. The relatives have claimed that the two men were forcefully taken away by security forces three months ago, and their whereabouts were still unknown. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 1*)

Torkham highway blocked against slow customs clearance

Customs clearing agents and transporters blocked the Torkham highway in protest against slow process of customs clearance and traffic congestion on the important artery. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

Truckers to protest ban on entry to Abbottabad city

The Hazara Truck Dumper Owners Association has announced to go on strike against a plan by the traffic police to ban their entry to the city during the daytime. They said that they wouldn't tolerate the injustice of the traffic police, accusing the cops of depriving them of their sources of livelihood. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

Protest held in Nawabshah over `police excesses` against slain JSQM man's family

Activists of the Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM) held a protest demonstration outside the local press club against "arrest and manhandling" of their slain party colleague's family members by police. They deplored that the family had been subjected to harassment by police ever since Hidayat Luhar, a teacher by profession, had been killed. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

JSM plans Sindh-wide protest against crimes

Jeay Sindh Mahaz (JSM) has called for a province-wide protest on March 24 against deteriorating law and order situation and increasing cases of kidnapping in Sindh. He said Afghans or Somalians were not behind poor law and order, it was due to dacoits who were present all over Sindh, especially in the upper Sindh areas of Kandhkot, Kashmore, Larkana and Khairpur. Hindus of Sindh were being abducted under a conspiracy due to which thousands of them had already migrated and others were planning to shift. What was purpose of spending billions of rupees on police and Rangers in Sindh if the people were not safe? (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

Multi-party demo held in Kandhkot over unabated kidnappings

A large number of civil society activists, workers and supporters of various nationalist parties and people from different walks of life held a demonstration outside the Kandhkot Press Club on a joint call given by their organisations against failure of the district police in controlling kidnapping for ransom and recovering hostages from the clutches of dacoit gangs. The call was given after several fresh incidents of kidnapping for ransom and increased activities of dacoit gangs having their hideouts in the riverine areas of upper Sindh. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

Inaction against influential chilli trader causes unrest

Angry residents of took to streets and blocked the Kunri Mirurkhas road after local police declined to take action against an influential trader who got three huge piles of red chillies placed close to their residences for auction causing unbearable smell and respiratory problem in entire locality. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 15*)

Teachers hold protest against non-payment of salaries

Teachers and other employees of Balochistan University took out a protest procession against the university administration over non-payment of salaries for three months. All faculty members, academic staff and other employees gathered on call of university's joint action committee and took out the protest rally. The participants of the procession carried placards and banners inscribed with their demands, and marched on Sariab

Road, Zahghoon Road and other roads and chanted slogans against the government and the Higher Education Commission. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 5*)

Protest sit-in against rising robberies in Dera Allahyar

Business community of Dera Allahyar staged sit-in against increasing incidents of theft and robbery in district and blocked National Highway, suspending traffic for several hours. They said armed robbers entered a petrol pump the other day in Allahyar town and snatched Rs8.8 million from its owner, Fahad Khosa, and injured his brother when he resisted the robbery. (*Dawn, March 22, 2024, Page 5*)

Protests held against abduction, forced marriage of underage girl

Protest demonstrations were held in Hunza and Islamabad against alleged abduction and forced marriage of an underage girl belonging to Gilgit. The 13-year-old went missing from Sultanabad village in Gilgit four days ago. In Hunza, the protest was held at Karakoram Highway in Aliabad. A large number of activists from various political parties participated in the demonstration. The protesters were holding placards inscribed with demands for the recovery of the girl without her being forced into marriage. Awami Workers Party called the protest against the alleged abduction and forced marriage of the student. A video posted on social media by the alleged abductors of the girl claimed that she was married to a 17-year-old boy. This age is also not legal for marriage under Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act 1929. Furthermore, in the video the suspects showed the girl older than her actual age contrary to her original Nadra issued birth registration certificate. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 2*)

BU teachers, staff continue protest for salaries

Leaders of the joint action committee said that despite 24 days passing in March, the professors and employees of the University of Balochistan (UoB) have not received salaries and pensions for the last three months. Additionally, the announced 35 per cent payment in the annual budget for research centres' professors, officers, and employees, as well as house rent allowance, has not been disbursed yet. They said that professors and employees have set up camps in front of the main gate of the UoB to demand salaries and pensions throughout Ramazan. They have been organising daily protest rallies and sit-ins on Sariab Road. Moreover, they have conducted protest rallies from the UoB to the Quetta Press Club and protested in front of the secretariat, Quetta commissioner office and Manan Chowk. However, neither the provincial nor the federal government has taken notice, and the Higher Education Commission, Islamabad has also shown indifference. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 5*)

Demos against `dacoit culture`

Protest demonstrations were held in many towns of Sindh in response to a call given by Jeay Sindh Mahaz over growing incidents of gangs' activities and failure of police and provincial government to find a clue to a girl, 'PK', who had allegedly been abducted some four years ago from a locality in Sukkur. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 15*)

Islamabad police book over 350 for Gaza demo

The capital police booked a former senator and 350 others on several charges, including pelting the law enforcers with stones and threatening them with dire consequences, after they organised a protest at Express Chowk in connection with Palestine. Police also attempted to detain former Jamaat-i-Islami senator Mushtaq Ahmad near a metro station on Jinnah Avenue, but returned empty-handed. A police official told a contingent intercepted the senator when he was “moving in a car along with some female members” of his family. The police led by a senior officer threatened the senator, allegedly used expletives against him and his family, and made efforts to arrest him. However, some passersby assembled there and started making videos of the incident, prompting the police to leave the spot without making the arrest. Since the protest was organised without prior permission, a case was registered at the Kohsar police station under sections 148, 149, 353, 341, 427, 186, 188, and 506ii of the PPC along with Sections 2 and 3 of Amplifier Act in response to the complaint lodged by SHO Kohsar Shafqat Faiz. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2024, Page 4*)

SUP holds protest against police

Activists of Sindh United Party staged a rally outside press club in Jamshoro town in protest against SHO of Jamshoro police station and chairman of town committee. The party’s local leaders accused the SHO of being involved in corruption and demanded his transfer. They said that SHO was filing fabricated cases against the party workers and conducting raids on their houses at the behest of political figures. They demanded IGP, DIG of Hyderabad and SSP of Jamshoro immediately place SHO under suspension and launch an inquiry against him. They demanded the detained SUP workers should be freed and the false cases should be quashed. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2024, Page 15*)

Miners stage protest against govt in Quetta

While security forces have launched a search operation in Duki and nearby areas, the whereabouts of the coal miners kidnapped by armed men in the Duki coalfield area could not be traced despite the passage of four days. Members of the Pakistan Central Mines Labour Federation along with a large number of coal miners took out a rally from the Quetta Metropolitan Corporation to the press club. The protesters held the labour department and mines directorate responsible for failing to fulfill their responsibilities for the implementation of labour laws. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2024, Page 5*)

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

1 # AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION RESOURCES

Water crisis leaves farmers clinging to Sidr trees in Iraq

Faced with a failing date palm business due to scarce resources, Iraqi farmer Ismail Ibrahim has planted “sidr”, or jujube, trees which require far less water during an irrigation crisis. Iraq is part of the “Fertile Crescent”, arable land sweeping from the Mediterranean to the Gulf which has been farmed for thousands of years. Today, the landscape has been devastated by upstream damming of the main two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, lower rainfall trends and decades of armed conflict, leaving farmers such as Ibrahim facing the loss of their livelihoods. (*Dawn, March 29th, 2024, Page 10*)

2 # AGRICULTURAL INPUTS

Not any preferable news to be included in this month

3 # AGRICULTURAL OUTPUTS

Vietnam faces \$3bn annual crop losses from rising saltwater levels

Vietnam faces nearly \$3 billion a year in crop losses as more saltwater seeps into arable land, state media reported. The damage would likely centre on the Mekong Delta region, known as “Vietnam’s rice bowl” because it provides food and livelihoods for tens of millions of people. Saltwater levels are often higher in the dry season but they are intensifying due to rising sea levels, droughts, tidal fluctuations, and a lack of upstream freshwater. The resulting crop losses could amount to \$2.94 billion, citing new research from Water Resources Science Institute. Department of Water Resources warned saline intrusion could impact around 80,000 hectares of rice and fruit farms in Mekong Delta. (*Business Recorder, March 18th, 2024, Page 9*)

4 # SUB – AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIONS

One-fifth of Mekong River fish species face extinction

One-fifth of fish species in Mekong river face threat of extinction, according to a new report from a coalition of regional and international environmental groups. The Mekong — among the world’s most biodiverse rivers, surpassed only by the Amazon and the Congo — is home to some 1,148 recognised species of fish, with millions of people relying on its waters for their incomes. But it faces a multitude of threats including dam-building, sand mining, poorly managed fisheries, habitat loss and the introduction of non-native species. The report said 19 per cent of fish species in the river are seriously threatened by changes, highlighting how depleted fish populations will affect millions whose livelihoods rely on the river. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 10*)

WTO chief sees fisheries subsidies deal ratified before year’s end

The World Trade Organization’s director-general said she was hopeful a fisheries subsidies agreement would be ratified this year by required number of members, despite

disappointment of not finalising the deal at a recently concluded ministerial conference. Environmentalists say knocking out billions of dollars in subsidies that promote unsustainable fishing is the single most important thing countries can do to help reverse declining stocks. The fisheries agreement, aimed at removing \$22 billion in harmful subsidies supporting illegal fishing, has seen significant support from member countries. So far, 71 WTO members have formally accepted agreement and 39 more formal acceptances are needed to reach two-thirds of membership threshold for it to come into effect. (*Business Recorder, March 21st, 2024, Page 36*)

5 # TRADE

India, European bloc sign \$100bn free trade deal

India and four-member European trade bloc EFTA, including Norway and Switzerland, signed a \$100-billion free trade agreement to promote investment and exports. The deal will see European Free Trade Association — made up of non-EU nations, including Iceland and Liechtenstein — invest \$100bn over 15 years in India, world’s fifth largest economy, “The India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement marks a historic milestone in our growing partnership,” Goyal said after the signing in New Delhi. The deal was signed after several rounds of negotiations spanning 16 years. Indian PM Narendra Modi said trade agreement “symbolises our shared commitment to open, fair and equitable trade”, according to a statement. Swiss Economy Minister Guy Parmelin said the deal “will allow us to make better use of our economic potential and create additional opportunities for both India and the EFTA states”. “EFTA countries gain market access to a major growth market... India, in return, will attract more foreign investment from EFTA, which will ultimately translate into an increase in good jobs”. EFTA was established in 1960 to promote free trade and economic integration between its members. In 2021, it was the 10th largest trader in the world in terms of merchandise, and the eighth largest in services. In recent years, India has signed trade agreements with Australia and UAE. A long-talked-about trade deal with Britain is also said to be in the final stages. In turn, India will lift, or partially remove, very high customs duties on 95.3% of industrial imports from Switzerland, excluding gold, either immediately or over time, Swiss government said in a statement. India has committed to cut its bound tariff rate’ on gold to 39pc from 40pc, but does not anticipate much impact on imports of the metal from Switzerland, which were estimated at \$16 billion last fiscal year, an Indian government official said. The Indian market offers immense opportunities for trade and investment, said Swiss economic official Guy Parmelin, adding that the pact was the result of 21 rounds of talks. (*Dawn, March 11th, 2024, Page 10*)

5.1 # Export

Basmati rice exports likely to surge

India’s basmati rice exports are likely to fall in 2024 after nearing a record high last year, as rival Pakistan is offering the grain at competitive prices amid a rebound in production, industry officials said. India and Pakistan are the leading exporters of the

premium long-grain variety of rice, famous for its aroma, to countries such as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. India's exports of basmati rice surged 11.5% from a year earlier to 4.9 million metric tons in 2023, just shy of the record high of 5 million tons hit in 2020, on lower supplies from Pakistan and stocking efforts by importing countries, industry officials said. Basmati rice shipments helped the world's biggest rice exporter to garner a record \$5.4 billion in 2023, up nearly 21% from the previous year, because of higher prices, government data showed.

Islamabad's total rice exports could jump to 5 million tons in 2023/24 financial year, up from the last year's 3.7 million tons, Chela Ram Kewlani, chairman of Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP) said last month. The depreciation of the Pakistani rupee has made Pakistan's exports more competitive, according to Akshay Gupta, head of bulk exports at KRBL Ltd. Lower export demand amid an estimated 10% rise in India's basmati rice production has started pulling down basmati prices in that country. Iran, the biggest buyer of Indian basmati rice, slashed purchases by 36% in 2023, but higher shipments to Iraq, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia offset the shortfall, according to India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Indian exports had lost momentum in September and October as government imposed minimum export price on basmati rice, but they quickly recovered, said a New-Delhi-based exporter. In August, India imposed the MEP on basmati rice shipments at \$1,200 per ton, exceeding prevailing market rates, before lowering it to \$950 in October. (*Business Recorder, March 1st, 2024, Page 1*)

India's rice exports at risk

Indian exporters have received notices from customs department demanding payment of duty differentials on rice exported in the last 18 months, four exporters told, a rare tax demand that could cripple rice shipments from India. The world's biggest rice exporter imposed a 20% export duty on white rice in September 2022, followed by a similar duty on parboiled rice in August 2023 to control domestic rice prices. Exporters were paying a 20% duty based on the Free on Board (FOB) value of rice. However, the customs department now requires them to consider the transaction value and pay any resulting duty difference. (*Business Recorder, March 27th, 2024, Page 1*)

5.2 # Import

EU envoys strike new deal on Ukraine food imports

Ambassadors from European Union countries reached a revised deal to extend tariff-free food imports from Ukraine - with restrictions - after some states complained the original agreement risked destabilising the bloc's agricultural markets. The agreement now goes to European Parliament, where diplomats expect a push to add more restrictions, as the EU wrangles over how to continue with exemptions granted in 2022 to help Ukraine's economy following Russia's invasion. Some EU farming groups and countries such as France and Poland had argued measures needed to be tightened to avoid making EU agricultural products uncompetitive. Ukraine and others argue the

imports have little effect on EU markets. An EU diplomat said new deal - which would run until June 2025 - was similar to a provisional agreement struck last week but changed reference period used to determine when tariffs on some products would be applied. The original deal stipulated that tariffs would kick in on poultry, eggs, sugar, oats, maize, groats and honey if imports exceeded the average levels of 2022 and 2023. The compromise expands the reference period to include the second half of 2021, the diplomat said. It is estimated to cost Ukraine about 330 million euros (\$357 million) in annual revenue - although the continued overall suspension of tariffs is worth much more to Kyiv. Earlier this week, both France and Hungary said wheat should be subject to tariffs if imports rose above average levels. The issue of food imports has sparked tensions between Ukraine and Poland, an otherwise staunch supporter of Kyiv. Polish farmers say that much of the Ukrainian grain that is supposed to transit through Poland to other countries ends up in the domestic market instead. Ukraine says farmers' protests, which have included blockades of the border and the spilling of Ukrainian grain across rail tracks, are harming its war effort against Russia and its economy. (*Business Recorder, March 30th, 2024, Page 32*)

6 # CORPORATE SECTOR

McDonald's outlets shut in Sri Lanka over poor hygiene case

McDonald's outlets across Sri Lanka shut after the US fast-food giant launched a legal battle with its local franchise holder over allegations of poor hygiene, court officials said. The Commercial High Court of Colombo ordered the closures until April 4, after the parent company accused the local franchise holder of failing to meet international hygiene standards. (*Dawn, March 25th, 2024, Page 10*)

7 # INTERNATIONAL AID / LOAN / INVESTMENT

EU pledges 7.7bn euros for world needs in 2024 including Gaza

The EU pledged to spend an initial 7.7bn euros (\$8.39bn) on humanitarian aid in 2024, less than last year despite soaring needs in Gaza and elsewhere. Last year, bloc pledged 8.4bn euros. No reason was given for decrease. The UN says a record 300m people need aid, mostly due to conflicts and climate change, and estimates a funding gap of around \$50bn. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the situation in Gaza was especially dire. "We are no longer on brink of famine, we are in a state of famine". Catherine Russell, executive director of UN children's agency UNICEF, said every third Gazan child was severely malnourished, with more resources needed for aid as well as political pressure to safeguard operations on the ground. Head of ICRC said in reaction to the funding pledge that some donors were struggling with economic restraints at a time of rising conflicts. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2024, Page 11*)

S. Arabia donates \$40 million to UNRWA

Saudi Arabia announced it will donate \$40 million to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which has faced massive funding cuts and calls for its abolition

spearheaded by Israel. The funding will provide food for more than 250,000 people and tents for 20,000 families. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 13*)

8 # INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

World Bank group to provide Egypt with \$6bn over three years

The World Bank Group said it intends to provide more than \$6 billion of support over the coming three years to Egypt, which has been struggling with a foreign currency crunch that slowed economic activity and led to shortages of imported goods. The World Bank Group said \$3 billion will go towards government programs and \$3 billion to the private sector, all subject to the group's board approval. The support package comes after Egypt devalued its currency earlier in March, to curb record high inflation, following a \$35 billion deal with Emirati sovereign wealth fund ADQ in late February.

It also secured an expanded \$8 billion deal with IMF in March, with the European Union announcing a \$8.1 billion funding package to Egypt. Egypt is selling assets to boost the private sector and raise scarce hard currency, setting a target in 2022 to raise \$10 billion annually over four years through private investment in state assets. World Bank Group said its current operational portfolio in Egypt is more than \$8 billion, comprising \$6 billion from International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, \$1.9 billion from International Finance Corporation, and \$0.5 billion from Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2024, Page 11*)

Ukraine gets \$1.5bn funding tranche under World Bank programme

Ukraine has received a \$1.5 billion tranche of funding under a World Bank programme, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said, helping it pay for its budget and social spending as it defends itself against the Russian invasion. Ukraine is reliant on financial aid from its Western partners but foreign financing dwindled in the first two months of this year, and a US aid package has been blocked by Republicans in Congress for months. In March, Kyiv managed to attract about \$9 billion in total external financing. EU, Canada, Japan, IMF and Britain were among the donors. The new block of World Bank aid was funded by Britain and Japan, Shmyhal said. "984 million dollars come from Japan and 516 million dollars from the UK. The funds will cover budget spending for social and humanitarian needs and reconstruction," he wrote on X. Earlier in March, Ukraine received a 4.5 billion euro (\$4.9bn) first tranche of aid under a EU bridging finance programme. Kyiv spends most of its own revenues to finance its defence efforts, leaving Kyiv heavily reliant on funding from Western partners to cover its social spending. "In 2024, external financing reached \$10.2bn, and since beginning of full-scale war – \$83.8bn. International assistance is directed to finance priority social expenditures of state budget of Ukraine," (*Business Recorder, March 30th, 2024, Page 80*)

9 # POLICY

EU states agree farm policy review as tractors throng Brussels

EU member states agreed to unpick more ecofriendly requirements under the bloc's common agricultural policy in a new bid to pacify months-long protests by farmers who rolled hundreds of tractors into Brussels to vent their grievances. A special committee endorsed review to be debated by agriculture ministers meeting in Brussels as farmers thronged city's European quarter for third time in two months, setting fire to tyres and bales of hay, and throwing eggs at riot police. (*Dawn, March 27th, 2024, Page 10*)

10 # SOCIO – ECONOMICAL CONDITION

Church of England urged to give more than \$1bn to pay for slavery ties

Church of England pledged to boost efforts to compensate for historical ties to slavery after a new report called for funding to be increased tenfold to \$1.27 billion. In January 2023, the funding body of the mother church of global Anglicanism pledged to support communities affected by slavery with a £100 million (\$127 million) investment over nine years. That followed an admission by Church Commissioners that it was originally funded with investments in an 18th-century company involved in the African slave trade. (*Business Recorder, March 5th, 2024, Page 12*)

India's richest 1pc has highest concentration of wealth in decades, study shows

The wealth concentrated in the richest 1 percent of India's population is at its highest in six decades and the percentage share of income exceeds that of countries including Brazil and the United States, research group the World Inequality Lab found. Since India, which won its independence in 1947 from Britain, opened its markets to foreign investment in 1992, its number of billionaires has surged. "The 'Billionaire Raj' headed by India's modern bourgeoisie is now more unequal than the British Raj headed by the colonialist forces," the authors said. By the end of 2023, India's richest citizens owned 40.1% of the country's wealth, the highest since 1961, and their share of total income was 22.6%, the most since 1922, the study, whose four authors included Nitin Kumar Bharti and Thomas Piketty, found. (*Business Recorder, March 21st, 2024, Page 38*)

Global warming to raise food prices, inflation: study

Global warming and heatwaves are expected to further increase food prices and overall inflation across the world in future, according to new research from scientists and the European Central Bank. The impact will vary but be felt everywhere, especially in developing nations, said the paper published in the journal *Communications Earth and Environment*. Extreme weather — including heatwaves, droughts and floods — is becoming increasingly frequent as the climate heats up, taking a toll on key sectors of the economy, including farming and food production. For this new study, researchers from Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and European Central Bank drew on historical price and weather data from 121 countries between 1996 and 2021.

They found that rising temperatures due to climate change were predicted to drive up cost of food worldwide between 1.49 and 1.79% points every year by 2035. Effect of future warming & heat extremes on overall inflation would be between 0.76 and 0.91% points under a best and worst case scenario. (*Business Recorder, March 23rd, 2024, Page 1*)

10.1 # Food

World food price index falls in February: UN agency

UN food agency's world price index fell in February for a seventh consecutive month as lower prices for all major cereals more than offset the rising price of sugar and meat. FAO's price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 117.3 points in February, down from a revised 118.2 points previous month. February reading was lowest since February 2021. (*Business Recorder, March 9th, 2024, Page 1*)

UN says households waste one billion meals a day

Households around the world threw away one billion meals every single day in 2022 in what the United Nations called a "global tragedy" of food waste. More than \$1 trillion worth of food was binned by households and businesses at a time when nearly 800 million people were going hungry, the UN's latest Food Waste Index Report says.

It said that more than 1 billion tonnes of food — almost one fifth of all the produce available on the market — was wasted in 2022, most of it by households. Such wastage was not just a moral but "environmental failure", report said. Food waste produces five times planet-heating emissions of aviation sector, and requires huge tracts of land be converted for growing crops that are never eaten. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 10*)

10.2 # Food Scarcity

Gaza famine 'almost inevitable': UN

Famine in the Gaza Strip is almost inevitable unless the Israel-Hamas war changes, UN said. UN and other humanitarian actors have not yet declared a state of famine in Gaza, despite worsening conditions in Palestinian territory since war started. Humanitarian agencies say conditions for 2.2 million people in Gaza are now dire. In Somalia in 2011, when famine was officially declared, half of the total number of victims of the disaster had already died of starvation. (*Business Recorder, February 2nd, 2024, Page 1*)

Gaza faces famine, unprecedented crisis, warns UN

Half of Gazans are experiencing "catastrophic" hunger, with famine projected to hit the north of territory by May without urgent intervention, a UN-backed food security assessment warned. "People in Gaza are starving to death right now. Speed at which this man-made hunger and malnutrition crisis has ripped through Gaza is terrifying," head of UN's World Food Programme Cindy McCain said. "To have 50% of an entire population in catastrophic, near-famine levels, is unprecedented," Beth Bechdol. This amounts to around 1.1 million people "struggling with catastrophic hunger and starvation", according to the WFP. It added: "This is the highest number of people ever

recorded as facing catastrophic hunger” under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership, which published its latest report. The situation is particularly dire in the north of the besieged Palestinian territory, where there are about 300,000 people, the UN says — and where aid agencies have reported huge difficulty distributing food and other aid.

Aid charity Oxfam accused Israel of continuing to “systematically and deliberately block and undermine” the delivery of aid into Gaza, in violation of international humanitarian law. The IPC system, conducted by UN and aid agencies, is used by UN or governments in deciding whether or not to officially declare a famine. “Famine is imminent in northern governorates and projected to occur anytime between mid-March and May 2024,” IPC report. “All evidence points towards a major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition.

‘Wasted’ children

A famine is declared when 20% of households face an extreme food shortage — which is the case in Gaza, the UN says — one in three children are acutely malnourished, and at least two in every 10,000 people die every day of starvation or malnutrition. Children in Gaza face “extremely critical health conditions... exposing them to high-risk nutritional deterioration”, the IPC report said. According to the WFP, “one in three children below the age of two is now acutely malnourished, or ‘wasted’. “This means they are dangerously thin for their height, which puts them at risk of death.” Arif Husain, WFP’s chief economist, warned the final criteria for declaring a famine — the mortality rate — would “happen any time from now until the end of May”.

‘300 aid trucks needed each day’

WFP said meeting basic food needs would require at least 300 trucks to enter Gaza every day and distribute food, especially in north. The agency has only managed to get nine convoys into the north since the start of the year, it said. The latest of these involved 18 truckloads of food supplies delivered to Gaza City. “The convoy, the second to use a coordinated route into Gaza City and the north, delivered some 274 tonnes of wheat flour, food parcels and ready-to-eat rations. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 12*)

Israel may be using starvation as ‘weapon of war’: UN

UN said that Israel’s severe restrictions on aid into Gaza coupled with its military offensive could amount to using starvation as a “weapon of war”, which would be a “war crime”. Without a surge of aid, famine would hit the 300,000 people in Gaza’s war-battered north by May. Finding comes just over five months into the Gaza crisis. Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, pointed to difficulty of clearly determining if strict criteria have been met to declare a famine. “Famine thresholds may already be case in northern Gaza,” report, highlighting that for weeks people had already been reduced to eating bird seed, animal fodder, wild grass and weeds. “There is literally nothing left,” he said. Looking ahead, he warned that without more aid, Gaza could soon be looking at “more than 200 people dying from starvation per day”. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 11*)

Famine ‘quite possibly’ in some areas of northern Gaza, US official says

Famine is quite possibly present in parts of the northern Gaza Strip, a senior US State Department official said, adding that a scarcity of trucks was an obstacle to getting more aid into the Palestinian enclave under Israeli siege. “While we can say with confidence that famine is a significant risk in south and center but not present, in north, it is both a risk and quite possibly is present in at least some areas,” official told on the condition of anonymity. UN has warned that Gaza faces famine and has complained of “overwhelming obstacles” in getting in aid and distributing it around the enclave. US officials have acknowledged Gaza is facing a humanitarian catastrophe but few have offered an assessment on risk of famine. Earlier a global authority on food security warned that famine was imminent and likely to occur by May in northern Gaza and could spread across enclave by July. (*Business Recorder, March 30th, 2024, Page 88*)

10.3 # Poverty

More than 100 Palestinians killed in aid distribution massacre

Desperate for food amid the looming famine, hundreds of Palestinians flocked to an aid distribution point early, only to be met with live fire by Israeli troops. At least 104 people are said to have been killed in what has been described as a massacre, while the health ministry said around 760 people were wounded in the grisly incident. The incident caused the largest loss of civilian lives in weeks and was condemned by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as an “ugly massacre conducted by the Israeli occupation army on people who waited for aid trucks at the Nabulsi roundabout”. Just hours earlier, the death toll from the nearly five-month-old war had topped 30,000. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2024, Page 12*)

Global development rebounds post-Covid, leaving poor countries behind, says UN

Humanity has returned to pre-pandemic levels of development, UN said, but it warned that global recovery masks a widening gap between rich and poor countries. Rebound follows two years of decline, when, in 2021 and 2022, the global Human Development Index (HDI) dipped twice in a row for the first time since its creation nearly 35 years ago, thanks in part to the Covid-19 crisis, rolling back five years of progress. UNDP has forecast a record high in index for 2023. 2023 report shows Switzerland, Norway and Iceland still at top of the HDI list, and scores of every OECD country returning to at least 2019 levels. Somalia, South Sudan and Central African Republic find themselves at the bottom of 2023 HDI list. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2024, Page 5*)

11 # ENVIRONMENT

Hanoi tops list of most polluted cities

Vietnam’s capital city Hanoi were enveloped in thick smog which dramatically reduced visibility due to air pollution. Levels of hazardous small particles in air were highest among a list of most polluted international cities. (*Dawn, March 5th, 2024, Page 10*)

UN sees rising scourge of e-waste as a catastrophe for environment

The world threw away a record amount of smartphones, televisions and other electrical devices in 2022, the UN said, warning this avalanche of dumped gadgets was polluting planet. Less than one quarter of the 62 million tonnes of e-waste produced in 2022 was recycled, resulting in heavy metals, plastics and toxic chemicals leaking from junked devices. It also poses health risks, particularly in poorer countries where a lot of e-waste is sent from wealthier parts of the globe. Far from worthless junk, UN estimates value of metals in all these discarded gadgets at \$91bn. But less than one-third is recovered, with rest lost when e-waste is burned, thrown in landfills or improperly recycled. The scourge is only going to worsen as demand for new technologies, including solar panels and electric vehicles, outpaces the ability to recycle. Roughly twice as much e-waste was produced in 2022 compared to 2010 a weight equivalent to 107,000 of the world's largest and heaviest passenger jets. On average, every person on earth generates roughly 7.8 kilograms of e-waste each year, report from UN Institute for Training and Research & International Telecommunication Union, another UN agency. But that varies considerably across globe, with someone in Europe producing roughly seven times e-waste of someone in Africa. Around 18m tonnes of e-waste is processed in developing world. Every year, unmanaged e-waste leads to 45,000 tonnes of harmful plastics and 58 tonnes of mercury entering environment. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 12*)

11.1 # Health

More than one billion now afflicted by obesity, experts say

More than 1 billion people around world are now suffering from obesity, with number having more than quadrupled since 1990, according to a study released by Lancet medical journal. "epidemic" is particularly hitting poorer countries and rate is growing among children and adolescents faster than adults, according to study carried out with WHO. Released ahead of World Obesity Day on March 4, estimated that there were about 226m obese in world in 1990. Figure had risen to 1,038m in 2022. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2024, Page 10*)

No more `normal-sized babies` in Gaza, says UN

The Humanitarian situation in Gaza is a "nightmare" for mothers and babies, with doctors reporting small and sickly newborns, stillbirths and women forced to undergo C-sections without adequate anesthesia, a UN official said. Doctors are reporting that they no longer see normal-sized babies. Israeli authorities had refused to allow in some UNFPA supply shipments, such as kits for midwives, or had removed supplies like flashlights and solar panels. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2024, Page 11*)

One in three children under 2 in Gaza acutely malnourished: UNRWA

One in three children under age 2 in northern Gaza is now acutely malnourished and famine is looming, U.N. agency said. For the IPC to declare famine, at least 20% of the population must be suffering extreme food shortages, with one in three children acutely malnourished and two people out of every 10,000 dying daily from starvation or malnutrition and disease. (*The News, March 17th, 2023, Page 10*)

11.2 # Natural Resources

Resource extraction could surge 60pc by 2060, UN warns

Extraction of Earth's natural resources could surge 60% by 2060, imperilling climate goals and economic prosperity, UN said, calling for dramatic changes in energy, food, transport and housing. Enormous expansion of infrastructure, energy demand and consumer consumption over the last half century, particularly in wealthier countries, has driven a tripling of the world's use of materials, according to the Global Resource Outlook by the UN Environment Programme's International Resource Panel. And the hunger for natural resources — everything from food to fossil fuels — keeps growing by an average of more than 2.3% per year. People in wealthy countries drive most of that demand, using six times more materials and responsible for ten times more climate impact than those in low-income countries, according to the analysis.

Extraction and processing of the huge amount of resources accounts for over 60% of planet-warming emissions as well as devastating ecosystems and harming human health. The report follows an agreement by countries at UN climate negotiations last year in Dubai, to triple global renewable energy capacity this decade and “transition away” from polluting fossil fuels. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2024, Page 10*)

12 # CLIMATE CHANGE

Proposal to cool earth by blocking sun withdrawn

UN delegates withdrew a motion calling for more research into technologies that aim to fight climate change by reflecting the sun's rays back into space, amid concerns about health and environmental risks. Some who opposed the draft resolution at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) were also worried that the use of solar radiation modification (SRM) might let big polluters off the hook.

Switzerland and Monaco first tabled the resolution on examining the geoengineering technology in December and it was discussed during this week's assembly in Nairobi. One of the best known proposals for using it involves blasting sulphur dioxide — a coolant — into the higher reaches of the atmosphere. (*Dawn, March 1st, 2024, Page 10*)

Europe must do more against 'catastrophic' climate risks: EU

Europe could suffer “catastrophic” consequences from climate change if it fails to take urgent and decisive action to adapt to risks. Areas in southern Europe are most at risk, the European Environment Agency (EEA) said in its first report on the risks the continent faces from climate change, driven by human burning of fossil fuels. The dangers include fires, water shortages and their effects on agricultural production, while low-lying coastal regions face threats of flooding, erosion and saltwater intrusion. “Many of these risks have already reached critical levels and could become catastrophic without urgent and decisive action,” That doesn't mean northern Europe is spared the negative impact, as floods in Germany and forest fires in Sweden have demonstrated in

recent years. “Extreme heat, drought, wildfires, and flooding, as experienced in recent years, will worsen in Europe even under optimistic global warming scenarios and affect living conditions throughout the continent,” the EEA warned. The report lists 36 risks related to climate in Europe, 21 of which demand more immediate action and eight were “particularly urgent.” At the top of the list were risks to ecosystems, mainly relating to coastal and marine ones. (*Business Recorder, March 12, 2024, Page 5*)

UN climate chief writes letter to 200 nations

Countries have a year to produce ambitious new emissions-cutting pledges to ensure the “safety and prosperity” of people around the world, the UN’s climate chief said, calling plans most important so far this century. Simon Stiell, who leads the United Nations climate change organisation, said the new round of commitments, as well as upgrades to existing pledges for this decade, were essential to keep the world from blowing past the 1.5C warming limit. Together these pledges “will determine how protected your peoples, economies and national budgets will be from rapidly worsening climate impacts,” Stiell said in an open letter to the nearly 200 nations in the UN climate negotiations. The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at “well below” 2C above pre-industrial times — with a safer limit of 1.5C if possible. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 11*)

12.1 # Carbon Emission

Methane: a powerful gas heating the planet

Climate talks often revolve around reducing the most dangerous greenhouse gas CO₂. But other powerful heat-trapping emissions — of methane — will be in the crosshairs at a global forum in Geneva this week. Methane — which is potent but relatively short-lived — is a key target for countries wanting to slash emissions quickly and slow climate change. That is particularly because large amounts of methane are simply leaking into atmosphere from oil and gas projects. Methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry have risen for 3 consecutive years, according to IEA, hitting near record highs in 2023. Atmospheric methane (CH₄) occurs abundantly in nature and is the primary component of gas fuel. It is the second largest contributor to climate change, accounting for roughly 30% of global warming since pre-industrial levels, according to UN climate experts. Methane remains in the atmosphere for only about 10 years, but has a much more powerful warming impact than CO₂. Its warming effect is 28 times greater than CO₂ over a 100-year timescale (and 80 times over 20 years).

The majority of methane emissions — around 60pc — are linked to human activity, and the rest from natural sources, mainly wetlands. Agriculture is the biggest culprit, responsible for roughly a quarter of that pollution. Most is from livestock — cows and sheep release methane during digestion and in their manure — and rice cultivation, where flooded fields create ideal conditions for methane-emitting bacteria. The energy sector — coal, oil and gas — is the second largest source of human caused methane,

which leaks from gas pipelines and other energy infrastructure, or is deliberately released during maintenance procedures. A study published in the journal *Nature* in March found that oil and gas projects in six major producing regions of the US were emitting three times as much methane as estimated by the government — losses worth \$1 billion. Discarded household waste also creates large amounts of methane when it decomposes if left to rot in landfills. The IEA estimates that rapid cuts in methane emissions linked to the fossil fuel sector could prevent up to 0.1 degrees Celsius of warming by mid-century. That might sound modest, but such a reduction would have an impact greater than “immediately taking all cars and trucks in the world off the road”, the agency said. IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol called it “one of the best and most affordable” options for reducing global warming. (*Dawn, March 19th, 2024, Page 10*)

UK greenhouse gas emissions fell 5.4pc in 2023: data

UK greenhouse gas emissions fell by 5.4 percent in 2023, largely due to a reduction in the amount of gas used in power stations. Net emissions of all greenhouse gases were estimated to have been 384.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2023, compared to 406.2 million tonnes in 2022. UK said country was halfway to reaching net-zero emissions. Germany in January reported a 9.8 percent fall in carbon dioxide emissions in 2023. France last week said its domestic greenhouse gas emissions had fallen by 4.8% over same period. (*Business Recorder, March 30th, 2024, Page 20*)

12.2 # Climate Crisis

Greece records warmest winter on record

Greece has recorded its warmest winter, a leading weather scientist said. Kostas Lagouvardos, research director at the Athens national observatory, said that winter temperatures in 2023-2024 on average stood at 11.8 degrees Celsius. “This is the highest average temperature in December, January and February” since records began in 1960. Last year was the worst in terms of forest fires with nearly (432,000 acres) ravaged and over 20 people killed, according to the observatory. (*Dawn, March 6th, 2024, Page 10*)

La Nina return could reduce extreme heat risks for 2024, say scientists

The rapid return of the La Nina weather phenomenon “may actually decrease” the risk that 2024 smashes last year’s record heat, Europe’s climate monitor said, amid enduring historic global temperatures. (*Dawn, March 8th, 2024, Page 10*)

UN sounds `red alert` with new heat records likely in 2024

Global temperatures “smashed” heat records last year, as heatwaves stalked oceans and glaciers suffered record ice loss, UN said— warning 2024 was likely to be even hotter. The annual State of the Climate report by the UN weather and climate agency confirmed preliminary data showing 2023 was by far hottest year ever recorded. And last year capped off “the warmest 10-year period on record”, World Meteorological Organisation said, with even hotter temperatures expected. (*Dawn, March 20th, 2024, Page 12*)

Climate change messing with how we measure time

Struggle to wrap your head around daylight savings? Spare a thought for the world's timekeepers, who are trying to work out how climate change is affecting Earth's rotation — and in turn, how we keep track of time. In a strange twist, global warming could even help out timekeepers by delaying the need for history's first "negative leap second" by three years, a study suggested. Experts fear that introducing a negative leap second — a minute with only 59 seconds — into standard time could cause havoc on computer systems across the world.

For most of history, time was measured by Earth's rotation. However in 1967, the world's timekeepers embraced atomic clocks — which use the frequency of atoms as their tick-tock — ushering in a more precise era of timekeeping. But sailors, who still relied on the Sun and stars for navigation, and others wanted to retain the connection between Earth's rotation and time. There was a problem. Our planet is an unreliable clock, and had long been rotating slightly slower than atomic time, meaning the two measurements were out of sync.

So a compromise was struck. Whenever the difference between the two measurements approached 0.9 of a second, a "leap second" was added to Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), the internationally agreed standard by which the world sets its clocks. Though most people likely have not noticed, 27 leap seconds have been added to UTC since 1972, the last coming in 2016. But in recent years a new problem has emerged that few saw coming: Earth's rotation has been speeding up, overtaking atomic time. This means that to bring the two measurements in sync, timekeepers may have to introduce the first-ever negative leap second. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 12*)

12.3 # Climate Financing

Presidents of Brazil, France unveil green investment plan on Amazon visit

French President Emmanuel Macron kicked off a visit to Brazil with the launch of a billion-euro Amazonian green investment plan alongside his counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The former president had clashed with Macron's government over environmental destruction and even lobbed insults directed at French first lady Brigitte Macron. (*Dawn, March 28th, 2024, Page 10*)

13 # CLIMATE DISASTER

Artificial glaciers help stave off drought in Kyrgyzstan

In the Tian-Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan, villagers have made an artificial glacier to provide water for their drought-hit farms. A 2023 study in the journal *Science* predicted that acceleration in melting of glaciers would peak only between 2035 and 2055. The lack of snow, also due to higher temperatures, does not allow them to regenerate. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 10*)

Floods, landslide claim 18 lives in Indonesia

At least 18 people were killed and five others missing after flash floods and a landslide on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Torrential rains triggered floods and landslide, forcing around 46,000 people to evacuate to temporary shelters. At least 14 houses were buried in the landslide, more than 20,000 houses were flooded and eight bridges had collapsed. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 12*)

At least 60 Afghans killed by weeks of intense snow, rain

At least 60 people have been killed by heavy rain and snow in Afghanistan over the past three weeks. About 1,645 houses have been totally or partially ruined and nearly 178,000 livestock killed. (*Business Recorder, March 14th, 2024, Page 5*)

Record heat index of 62.3C scorches Rio de Janeiro

A heat wave stifling Brazil set new records, with Rio de Janeiro's heat index hitting 62.3C, highest in a decade. (*Business Recorder, March 19th, 2024, Page 18*)

Powerful storm leaves nine dead in Brazil

A powerful storm has claimed at least nine lives in southeastern Brazil, particularly in the mountainous part of Rio de Janeiro state, where authorities deployed rescue teams to deal with a "critical" situation. (*Dawn, March 24th, 2024, Page 13*)

14 # NATURAL DISASTERS

Volcano erupts again on Iceland peninsula

Icelandic police declared a state of emergency as lava spewed from a new volcanic fissure on the Reykjanes peninsula, the fourth eruption to hit the area since December. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 10*)

Five killed, 1,000 homes destroyed in PNG earthquake

At least five people were killed and an estimated 1,000 homes destroyed when a magnitude 6.9 earthquake rocked Papua New Guinea. Flooding, landslides and torrential rains earlier this month killed at least 23 people in Papua New Guinea's interior Highlands region. The Sepik River twists for hundreds of kilometres through Papua New Guinea's East Sepik province, flowing down from the jungle highlands and out towards the tropical coast. (*Dawn, March 26th, 2024, Page 10*)

15 # RESISTANCE

Farmers block traffic near Macron's office

French police said they had arrested 66 people at a farmers' protest on the Champs-Élysées that blocked traffic during the morning rush hour. Using tractors and bales of hay, farmers briefly brought traffic to a halt on the famed avenue near the Arc de Triomphe monument, only a short distance from President Emmanuel Macron's office, the Élysée. The protesters, who held up banners on the avenue, said their action was aimed "at saving French agriculture". Farmers across Europe have been protesting for

weeks over what they say are excessively restrictive environmental rules, competition from cheap imports from outside the European Union and low incomes. Farmer Axel Masson said about 100 of his peers had gathered at the arterial roundabout “in a peaceful and law-abiding manner”. (*Dawn, March 2nd, 2024, Page 10*)

Indian farmers plan new march on Delhi

Indian farmers plan to march to the capital New Delhi as they push their demands for higher crop prices, a protest leader said, after several rounds of failed talks. Farm union leaders are seeking guarantees of state support or a minimum purchase price for farmers’ produce. “On March 6, farmers will come to Delhi from all over the country by train, bus and air,” protest leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal told reporters. He said farmers would also block railway lines across the country on March 10. The protests began in early February with hundreds of farmers in East Punjab aiming to take their campaign to Delhi. They were blocked by police and paramilitary troops at Shambhu, at the border with neighbouring Haryana state, about 200 km from the capital. The government announces support prices for more than 20 crops each year, but state agencies buy only rice and wheat at the support level, which benefits only about 6 per cent of farmers who raise those two crops. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 10*)

Canadian, Italian PMs` soiree scrapped amid pro-Palestinian protest

A soiree to be attended by prime ministers of Canada and Italy in Toronto was cancelled over “security concerns”, as pro-Palestinian protesters picketed the venue. Hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators had gathered in front of Art Gallery of Ontario, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was due to host his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni. Meloni, whose country holds rotating presidency of G7 nations, is visiting Canada ahead of a leaders’ summit in Italy in June. (*Dawn, March 4th, 2024, Page 11*)

South Korean doctors hold a mass rally against medical policy

Thousands of South Korean doctors held a mass rally against government plans to increase medical school admissions, defying official calls for trainee physicians who had also walked off the job in protest to return to work. Up to 40,000 doctors joined the rally, demanding the government scrap the plan, according to the Korean Medical Association (KMA), which represents private practitioners and had organised protest. Police put the number of demonstrators at about 12,000. The government has publicly issued a back-to-work order for 13 doctors, including vocal critics of the plan, and raided some KMA officials. (*Business Recorder, March 4th, 2024, Page 9*)

Angry Polish farmers protest EU rules

Throwing smoke bombs and lighting fires, thousands of angry farmers demonstrated in Warsaw against EU regulation and cheap Ukraine imports, with police reporting that two officers had been injured and a dozen protesters detained. Some demonstrators tried to force their way past security railings onto parliament grounds, according to police. Farmers also organised tractor blockades on roads across the country. Polish farmers

have been blocking border crossings with Ukraine since last month to protest at what they say is unfair competition from goods entering from Ukraine. Ukraine has seen its agriculture sector crippled by Russia's invasion in 2022. Many of its major export routes through the Black Sea have been blocked and its farmland rendered unusable by warfare. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 12*)

German rail, air workers on strike

Passengers in Germany faced new travel disruption amid walkouts across the rail network and airports to back demands for higher wages. Germany has been troubled by strikes for months as workers and management wrestle over terms amid high inflation and weak business activity. Industrial action has hit the transport sector, supermarkets and the civil service. Rail employees have been staging strikes for months to demand a pay rise to help members manage the higher cost of living in light of inflation. A walkout by train drivers in January caused travel disruption for thousands of passengers over several days. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 12*)

Indian farmers say detentions foil Delhi protest

Dozens of protesting Indian farmers were detained en route to New Delhi, forcing them to call off their plan to converge on the capital in their demand for higher crop prices. Thousands of farmers, mostly from northern state of Punjab, launched a "Delhi Chalo" march last month demanding higher guaranteed prices for their produce but were stopped by police about 200km north of capital. Protest leaders had planned to resume the protest, urging farmers across India to head for the capital by bus and train since their tractors had been blocked and tear gas and water cannon used to disperse them.

Farmers from other central and northern states are expected to arrive in Delhi on Thursday, said another protest leader, Ramandeep Singh Mann. Farmer groups from southern and western India also said they were preparing to join the protests. A similar but larger protest two years ago, which saw farmers from more groups camped at Delhi's borders for months, forced Modi to repeal some farm reform laws in his biggest political defeat. (*Dawn, March 7th, 2024, Page 13*)

Tear gas battle as Greek students protest private university bill

Greek students clashed with police in Athens as thousands protested a controversial bill on private universities, which they say will favour the rich. Riot police fired tear gas and used batons to keep students away from parliament ahead of a vote on the bill. Some protesters hurled stones and Molotov cocktails and setting bins on fire. Media reported that at least 8 people had been injured and nine arrested. Proposed measure will make degrees from approved private institutions equivalent to public university diplomas.

The bill will also allow foreign universities to open in Greece using a nonprofit status despite charging tuition fees. Police said around 17,000 people marched to parliament in central Syntagma Square for the latest in weeks of student protests against the reform. Organisers put the turnout at 30,000. "No to education for the few and chosen, free

education for all,” many chanted. The government says the new bill will enable Greek public universities to enter into partnerships with foreign academic institutions, improving their international appeal. (*Dawn, March 9th, 2024, Page 10*)

Thousands protest in Madrid over amnesty bill

Thousands of people protested in Madrid against an amnesty bill Spanish government reached this week with Catalan independence parties, demanding the resignation of Socialist PM Pedro Sanchez. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 10*)

Thousands march in London pro-Palestinian rally

Thousands of protesters marched in central London to call for a ceasefire in Gaza amid ongoing bombardments by Israel. Regular marches protesting Israel’s aggression have seen dozens arrested. The march, from Hyde Park Corner to the US Embassy, was fifth major demonstration of the year so far in capital. (*Dawn, March 10th, 2024, Page 11*)

S. Korea to suspend licences of 4,900 striking doctors

South Korea said it had started procedures to suspend medical licences of 4,900 junior doctors who have resigned and stopped working to protest government medical training reforms, causing healthcare chaos. Nearly 12,000 junior doctors, 93% of the trainee workforce, were not in their hospitals at last count, despite government back-to-work orders and threats of legal action, forcing Seoul to mobilise military medics and millions of dollars in state reserves to ease the situation. (*Dawn, March 12th, 2024, Page 10*)

Protests erupt in India over contentious citizenship law

Sporadic protests have erupted in India against a controversial citizenship law that has been criticised for discriminating against Muslims, after PM Narendra Modi’s government implemented legislation just days before a general election is announced. Protests broke out in eastern state of Assam and the southern state of Tamil Nadu after implementation was announced. Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government framed rules to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), making it easy only for non-Muslim refugees from three Muslim-majority South Asian nations to get Indian citizenship. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which rules southern state of Kerala, had called for state-wide protests. (*Dawn, March 13th, 2024, Page 12*)

Thousands of farmers gather in Delhi to demand higher crop prices

Thousands of farmers rode buses and trains from across India to gather at a rally in the capital, pressing a demand for higher guaranteed prices for their crops, as they faced down police barricades and tough security. The rally, days before general elections are expected to be called in an exercise that will see PM Narendra Modi seek a rare third term, comes a month after police wielding tear gas and water cannons halted a farmers’ march outside New Delhi. (*Dawn, March 15th, 2024, Page 12*)

Climate protesters under fire in Europe, says UN

Environmental activists are increasingly facing hostility across Europe, a UN expert said, warning that the very right to protest was “at risk” in countries usually considered beacons of democracy. (*Dawn, March 17th, 2024, Page 10*)

Spanish farmers stage fresh protests in Madrid

Hundreds of farmers paraded through Spanish capital on foot and by tractor in the latest protest over the crisis facing the agricultural sector. The farmers marched from the Ministry of Ecological Transition to the Ministry of Agriculture after the European Union proposed legislative changes to drastically ease the environmental rules of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Rallied by their trade union, farmers carried banners proclaiming ‘We are not delinquents’ to the sound of horns and whistles. (*Dawn, March 18th, 2024, Page 10*)

Polish farmers block roads in new protest against Ukraine imports

Polish farmers blocked roads nationwide in a new protest against farm imports from outside European Union, in particular Ukraine, and environmental regulations that they say increases costs. Farmers have been blocking border crossings with Ukraine since last month to protest lower cost produce that has been allowed into EU since Russia’s invasion of neighbouring country. A demonstration in Warsaw this month by thousands of farmers degenerated into clashes with police. Polish police said that more than 580 protests involving 70,000 people were planned. (*Dawn, March 21st, 2024, Page 12*)

Thousands attend pro-Palestine rally in London

Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters rallied in London, in the latest demonstration in British capital demanding a ceasefire in Gaza and more aid for the besieged territory. The event, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, began at Russell Square in the city centre before attendees marched to Trafalgar Square for a mid-afternoon rally. A smaller number of demonstrators also turned out for a counter-protest in support of Israel, with lines of police separating the two gatherings.

London has seen numerous large-scale pro-Palestinian protests since Israel mounted its military response to Hamas’ unprecedented raid on October 7, as well as smaller pro-Israel counter-demonstrations. Police have made dozens of arrests for anti-Semitic chanting and banners, promoting a proscribed organisation and assaulting emergency workers. But organisers insist they are exercising their democratic rights. (*Dawn, March 31st, 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.

Roots for Equity

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