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Open ballot: PM Imran Khan rejects opposition's cries

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Pak, China to celebrate 70 years of ties

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Briefs

COAS visits logistics unit

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) visited Logistics installations in Rawalpindi, on Wednesday. According to a ISPR statement, COAS was briefed regarding various facilities being developed and upgradation of existing infrastructure. COAS appreciated performance and commitment in provision of top class facilities and services. COAS appreciated indigenous development & maintenance program of diverse equipment and concept of one window operation for enhance operational efficiency.

Govt to address employees' problems

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Senator Shibli Faraz has assured to soon address the problems faced by the federal employees. Talking to the media persons in Islamabad on Wednesday, he said Prime Minister Imran Khan is particularly concerned about the problems of employees and has given directions to address them including those relating to their salaries. The Information Minister expressed the confidence that the employees will end their protest on Wednesday.

Maryam urges govt to stop violence

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President Maryam Nawaz has urged government to stop ruthless violence against employees demanding salary rise in Islamabad. In a statement released on Twitter against the violence against government employees, she said do not target oppressed govt employees with tear gas, shells and sticks. She asked to stop ruthless violence against government employees and said that government employees are not enemies but poor Pakistanis who are demanding their rights.

Open ballot: PM rejects PDM's cries

PM, while talking to media persons, said that rate of one seat of upper house of Parliament is between Rs500m to Rs700m

NAVEED MIRAJ

RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said that the opposition parties will cry foul if upcoming elections of the Senate are not held through open vote as government can secure more seats through secret voting. Prime Minister, while talking to media persons, said that rate of one seat of upper house of Parliament is between Rs500 million to Rs700 million and asked how is it possible that a person who spend this much money will not want a payback. The premier further said that timing of video is not important and clarified that he would have used the video as evidence in cases if he had it in his possession earlier. On the other hand, Prime Minister Imran Khan while addressing a ceremony in connection with the second phase of Ehsas Kafalat, said that the government will facilitate small businesses to help the deserving persons and told that work on Naya Pakistan Housing program has been started.

SC directs AG to complete arguments

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has directed the Attorney General of Pakistan Khalid Javed to complete his arguments regarding the procedure of Senate elections by tomorrow (Thursday). A five-member bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed hearing the presidential reference seeking the court's advice over open ballot in the upcoming Senate election. Top state lawyer while responding to a question of the court said that mostly people vote to the charisma of a leader but in principle they should vote to a party and its election manifesto. "What is charismatic with the PTI," the chief justice questioned.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan distributing cash among the poor people under the Ehsas program. - DNA

Palestine slams objections on ICC's jurisdiction ruling

Seeking justice for victims and accountability for international crimes must never be controversial

I.P. REPORT

RAMALLAH: State of Palestine has rejected objections over ICC ruling that Palestinian territories are under ICC jurisdiction. A statement from Palestinian foreign ministry read, "Israel's frantic and highly politicized reaction to the Pre-Trial Chamber's ruling on ICC jurisdiction in the State of Palestine was predictable. However, it is highly regrettable that States Parties to the Rome

Statute are encouraging Israel's intransigence with political statements that have no place in the discussion on the Court's independent proceedings, including Germany, Canada, Australia, Austria, Brazil, and others."

It further added that it is particularly dismaying to see States Parties, including members of the United Nations Security Council, taking positions that run counter to their obligations under the Rome Statute. Such politicized

attacks on the pursuit of accountability also undermine their role in encouraging a path forward towards peace in the region. Seeking justice for victims and accountability for international crimes must never be controversial.

Justice is a requisite of peace. Denying Palestinian victims the right to pursue peace is an inexcusable act of cruelty. Thankfully, these political positions are inconsequential to the proceedings at the ICC, the statement concluded.

GERMAN ENVOY ENJOYS TARKA DAAL



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Germany Bernhard Schlagheck enjoying Tarka Daal for the first time. The ambassador says he absolutely loved it - so rich and tangy in flavor. He says Pulses are not just packed with nutrients but their plants improve soil health and biodiversity. - DNA

Violations reported in vaccine administration

Asad says that NIMS was established to oversee the entire vaccine administration process and ensuring transparency and data accuracy

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: NCOC has taken a very comprehensive overview of vaccine administration progress to frontline health care workers and particularly various operational and administrative issues needing prompt action after start of vaccine on Feb 3rd. An elaborate and well defined procedure laid down by NCOC was shared with all stake holders. However the same was not strictly followed by some, resulted in violations. This was taken cognizance of and provinces asked to ensure compliance as per the agreed guidelines and procedures NCOC vaccine nerve centre NIMS identified various violations and irregularities

Registration of elderly citizens from next week

ANSAR MEHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Planning and Development Minister Asad Umar announced on Wednesday that the government will start registering elderly citizens for the next phase of Covid-19 vaccination next week. "Inshallah [we] will be opening up registration next week for covid vaccination for those 65 years and above," the minister, who also heads the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) on Covid-19, tweeted. "The vaccination of those who register in this category will start in march," he revealed. According to the NCOC, 27,228 frontline healthcare workers have thus far been vaccinated against the coronavirus in Pakistan, including 21,121 in Sindh, 4,458 in Punjab, 691 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 274 in Islamabad, 239 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 312 in Gilgit Baltistan and 133 in Balochistan. A countrywide Covid vaccination drive started last week. Half a million doses of a Sinopharm vaccine gifted by China are being used in the first phase. Sindh was provided 84,000 doses, Punjab 70,000, KP 65,000, and Balochistan 10,300 doses.

in vaccine administration. Mr Asad Umar said that NIMS was established to oversee the entire vaccine administration process and ensuring transparency and data accuracy. NCOC will ensure implementation of the vaccine strategy already shared with all stake holders. Only the front line healthcare workers (FLHCWs) who are saving precious lives and registered in resource management system by provincial health departments are authorized to be administered vaccine in this phase of vaccination. No one else is allowed to bypass the NIMS / RMS vaccine system. The complete vaccine administration record is maintained in the system for tracking and

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OGRA approves hike in gas prices

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: The OGRA on Wednesday approved hike up to 2 percent in gas prices for SNGPL consumers. The OGRA has proposed a hike in gas prices for the fiscal year 2020-21. The gas prices will be applied following notification of the government. According to OGRA, the gas price for the SNGPL consumers has been increased by Rs13.42 per MMBTU. SNGPL had requested OGRA to increase Rs123 per MMBTU.

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China reiterates principled stance on UNSC expansion - Page 06

EU was late to approve vaccines, von der Leyen admits - Page 07

Book 'From Landi Kotal to Wagah' launched - Page 08

Weather radar system granted by Japan govt inaugurated

ABID RAZA

ISLAMABAD: An inauguration ceremony for Japanese grant aid to "The Project for Establishment of Specialized Medium Range Weather Forecasting Center and Strengthening of Weather Forecasting System" was held with attendance of MATSUDA Kuninori, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, Mr. FURUTA Shigeki, Chief Representative, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Pakistan Office, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, Federal Minister for Aviation and Mr. Muhammad Riaz, Director General, Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). This project has updated the

degraded weather radar system in Islamabad and provided the wind profiler radar for upper-air observation, which monitor wind direction and speed in the Head Quarter of PMD in Islamabad and Multan Airport.



The weather forecasting and analysis system which enables medium-range (over 3 days up to 10 days) forecasting has been also provided to the Specialized Medium Range Weather Forecasting Center (SMRWC) located in

the Head Quarter of PMD in Islamabad. Technical trainings on the operation and maintenance of the weather radar, utilization of various meteorological products for weather forecasting, etc. were conducted as well. In addition, meteorological data communication systems have been installed in SMRWC and five PMD Regional Meteorological Centers, which enable exchange weather information such as various weather forecasting products, weather radar images, weather observation data, etc. between PMD Head Quarter and each PMD Regional Meteorological Office.

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Briefs

Government employees agree to negotiate

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The government employees protesting in Islamabad have agreed to negotiate with the federal government after the latter has decided to give a 40 percent pay rise to them. Islamabad's district administration announced that it was halting an operation against the protesting government employees for two hours.

It emerged that some of the arrested leaders of the Islamabad protestors would also be released ahead of the talks with the government. An increase of 25 percent to 40 percent is also expected in the salaries of the protesting employees.

It is pertinent to mention here that police on Wednesday fired tear gas at government employees protesting for pay raise, pensions and other allowances at Islamabad's D-Chowk.

Hundreds of the Pakistan Secretariat employees gathered at D-Chowk to protest for higher salaries.

Swinging into action, the police fired tear gas at the protesters in a bid to disperse them. As a result, the protesters got furious and started pelting the policemen, many in anti-riot gear, with stones, turning the area into a virtual battlefield.

Amin Aslam inaugurates water filtration plants

DNA

ATTOCK: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Wednesday said the government was making all out efforts for provision of maximum facilities to the people. While inaugurating newly installed water filtration plants in village Shinka and Behboodi, he said about 45 water filtration plants were being installed in different areas which would ensure provision of clean and hygienic drinking water to thousand of people. It would also help in controlling water borne diseases in the respective areas, he added.

He said Prime Minister Imran Khan was giving special preference and allocating funds for the uplift of less developed districts and its ample proof is allocation of Rs 4 billions for Attock district for provision of gas facility to its different villages. While giving details of this mega project, Malik Amin said the work order for provision of gas facility to additional abadis of Attock, Hazro and Hasanabad have been issued which will cost Rs 500 million, adding that case for provision of gas facility to 35 villages of Jand, Pindigheb and Fatehjang has been finalised and sent to ECC (Economic Cooperation Council) for release of Rs 1.8 billion to materialise it.

'5G service to be launched in Pakistan in 2022'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications, Syed Aminul Haque announced on Wednesday that the 5G technology would be launched in Pakistan next year in December. He said this while addressing the contract signing ceremony of broadband projects in Upper Dir, Chitral and Lower Dir districts. The contract was signed between Universal Service Fund (USF) and Telenor for high-speed mobile broadband projects in Upper Dir, Chitral and Lower Dir districts. The ceremony was witnessed by Federal Minister for IT and Telecom Syed Amin Ul Haque and SAPM Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari. The IT minister further said that the broadband project in Upper Dir, Chitral and Lower Dir districts would be completed at a cost of Rs1.3 billion, adding that the government is also taking measures to resolve internet issues in North Waziristan. "IT ministry taking necessary measures to ensure availability of broadband services at all tourist spots across the country," he added. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Tear gas, smoke emerge as police push protesting government employees from entering into Red zone area of capital. - DNA

AJK enriches with huge potential: AJK President

"Besides, the foundation has provided 20 ambulances and more than 400,000 patients have used this service so far, and now we want to repeat the same exercise in Azad Kashmir also as the people of remote mountainous areas have no access to hospitals"

DNA

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan Wednesday appreciated the Akhuwat Foundation's welfare projects that aim at to alleviate poverty and improve health and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the country. He said this at a briefing given in a meeting given to him by a senior member of the Board of Directors of Akhuwat Foundation Pakistan, Mohammad Salim Ahmed Ranjha in the federal capital, AJK President office said. The president said that AJK would fully cooperate with the Akhuwat Foundation

in its endeavor to combat hunger, alleviate poverty and improve the health and education sector.

With the highest literacy rate and the spirit of cooperation among ambitious educated youth, AJK could be transformed into a Silicon valley and IT hub of Pakistan if the youth of the area were provided guidance and required training, he added.

Speaking on the occasion Ranjha told that Akhuwat Foundation was providing interest-free loans to the underprivileged youth of all the four provinces and Azad Jammu and Kashmir and response of Azad Kashmir in repayment of the loans is a way better than all other provinces of the country.

Highlighting the details of the Foundation's AJK specific projects, Ranjha said that Akhuwat Foundation was considering expanding its interest-free loan scheme to the remote areas of Azad Kashmir to alleviate poverty besides providing medical facilities to the people in remote rural areas through telemedicine.

He said besides the microfinance scheme, the Akhuwat Foundation was considering to introduce Kashmiri handicrafts at home and abroad, and establishing an educational institution in Muzaffarabad on the pattern of NJV School Karachi.

He maintained that the Akhuwat Foundation under the Islamic concept of Quarz-e-Hasna had provided

more than 130 billion rupees through its 831 branches in the length and cranny of the country, while the Foundation had established 200 rest houses for the poor segments of society and 301 schools to provide quality education to more than 47,000 poor students. The Foundation, he added, had provided 2.16 billion rupees to 60,000 families in Azad Kashmir, and the state government has extended full cooperation to the Foundation in that regard.

He stated that the Foundation had established 23 telemedicine centres affiliated with the best hospitals in the country.

"Besides, the foundation has provided 20 ambulances and more than 400,000 patients have

used this service so far, and now we want to repeat the same exercise in Azad Kashmir also as the people of remote mountainous areas have no access to hospitals in urban areas."

Salim Ranjha further stated that in collaboration with the Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVETA), we intended to come up with a comprehensive plan to impart vocational education to the youth, while we had planned to set up a business incubation centre to connect the students of five public sector universities of the liberated territory with the job market so that the students and researchers had an interest in devising business plans get basic infrastructure.



ISLAMABAD: Group photo of the Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi with probationary officers of 40th Specialized Diplomatic Course at Foreign Service Academy. - DNA

Govt well aware of problems of masses

DNA

ATTOCK: Punjab Minister for revenue Col (ret) Mohammad Anwar Khan on Wednesday said that the economic growth was slowed down mainly due to COVID-19 which created problems for masses.

He was addressing a function arranged on the eve of inauguration of rehabilitation of Kunnt road in Pindigheb on Wednesday. The project of rehabilitation

of one kilometer long road would be completed with the allocation of Rs 10.09 million rupees during the current fiscal year.

He said that the PTI government has given top priority to infrastructure development and provision of better civic facilities to the masses living in the rural areas to further uplift their living standards. "The present government is pursuing a comprehensive strategy for effective execution and completion of public development projects," he said.

He informed that a network of development projects will be laid in the province. The far-reaching results of public interest decisions and new projects will come out soon. He said that Pakistan will move towards development under the supervision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. He expressed hope that, due to its prudent policies, the government will overcome inflation and unemployment during the current year.

SHC grants post-arrest bail to PIA officer

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Wednesday granted post-arrest bail to a PIA officer in a case pertaining to the fake degree scandal. The SHC bench ordered that PIA engineer Muhammad Sher Iqbal be released on bail. The appellant's lawyer stated before the court that his client was sacked from service by the national flag carrier and arrested on charges of having obtained the job on a bogus degree. - APP

'Govt has strong association with Masjid, Mardassah'

ISLAMABAD: Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Wednesday said the formation of new Examination Board for Religious Seminaries manifested the government's strong association with Masjid and Madrasah. He said mainstreaming of the religious education in the country would eventually ensure optimum opportunities and conducive environment for the seminarian students. Addressing a news conference, Ashrafi dismissed the apprehension of changing the syllabus of religious seminaries. Over 70 percent seminaries were already imparting both the religious and contemporary education and their students were playing a pivotal role in the country's progress and prosperity. He said effective measures have been taken to check fanning hatred among various segments of society. Interfaith harmony centers have already been set up in four provinces to promote harmony among different segments of society. A complaint cell has already been set up in his office to resolve the issues of minorities. Multiple issues of minorities had already been resolved in last two to three months. - DNA

CDA to improve security of park enclave

ISLAMABAD: The administration of Capital Development Authority (CDA) hired the services of a local security agency to improve the security system of Park Enclave. Work on installation of security cameras is also underway. According to detail, the developmental work on a unique housing project Park Enclave is underway. The services of a security agency have been hired to improve the security and to ensure the protection. Security guards will give duty in three shifts. They will also do patrolling. These guards will also keep the record of those who will enter or exit the main gate of the society. They will not allow the irrelevant people to enter the society. The said security guards will also perform their duties at already constructed check posts in the schemes. The boundary wall of the scheme has been completed already. - DNA

CTD meeting reviews terror financing, smuggling

DNA

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General of Police (IGP) Dr. Sanaulah Abbasi Wednesday presided over a video link conference held here at Central Police Office (CPO) Peshawar on Wednesday.

In the conference, heads of the Counter Terrorism Departments (CTD) from the country and members of the FATF action plan participated through video link. Addl: HQRs, DIG CTD, DIG Operations and Director Research police attended the conference. In the country wide CTD meeting, the overall status of terror financing cases i.e cash smuggling, narcotics and extortion cases so far registered were debated upon and thoroughly reviewed.

The meeting also thread-barely discussed the registered terror finance cases, challaned cases, arrest made in and convicted cases. All heads of CTD presented a detailed briefing about the action taken as per FATF action plan against the terrorists, narcotics money and extortion money to prescribed organizations.

Court extends interim bail to Sindh minister

DNA

KARACHI: An accountability court was informed on Wednesday that an accountability probe against provincial minister Sohail Anwar Sial and others has been changed into an investigation. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) informed the court about progress in the inquiry against Sial and others. The court extended interim bail of Sohail Anwar Sial, Zafar Sial and Jameel Soomro till March 31.

"Ghulam Asghar and Bakht Sial have also been included in the probe," NAB prosecutor informed the court and sought more time from the court for completion of the investigation against the accused. The court clubbed petitions of all accused in the case and adjourned the hearing till March 31. The judge directed the NAB to produce its progress report of the probe in the next hearing of the case. Sohail Anwar Sial, Jameel Soomro and other accused were present in the court during the hearing.

4 new virus positive cases reported in Attock

DNA

ATTOCK: As many as four new coronavirus patients were tested positive in Attock district while number of total confirmed patients surged to 1241 on Wednesday. Chief Executive, District Health Authority, Dr Jawad Ellahi while giving the details said that among them two belongs to Attock city while one each belongs to Hazro and Pindigheb. He informed that the number of active patients in the district was 63 in which 60 were home isolated and all were asymptomatic while three others were under treatment in district. He said that the number of suspected cases in the district was 25,073 while screening of as many as 28,325 persons has also been carried out so far.

Chairman NHA visits Hakla-D.I.Khan project



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman National Highway Au-

thority Capt @ Sikander Qayyum today visited all packages of Hakla (M-1) - D.I Khan Motorway Project a Section of CPEC

Western Route Corridor. The senior officers of NHA also accompanied him. The project authorities briefed him regarding the progress of works and the hindrances faced and being resolved during the execution of works. Chairman National Highway Authority Capt @ Sikander Qayyum expressed his satisfaction over the pace and quality of the ongoing construction activities. Moreover the Chairman NHA very kindly directed all the concerned authorities to ensure the completion of the project within scheduled time period so as the said project can be put for facilitation of general public.

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Briefs**RDA conducts operation at Wallayat Complex**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on Wednesday conducted a grand operation against illegally constructed buildings and occupation land mafia and demolished two illegal constructed restaurants and two Marquees and commercial buildings on plot numbers 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 37 and 38 at Wallayat Complex Rawalpindi.

In compliance with the vision of Prime Minister and Chief Minister of Punjab, the Director General (DG) RDA Chaudhry Maqbool Ahmed directed RDA Land Use and Building Control (LU&BC) Wing to actively conduct operations against illegal and unauthorized commercial cum residential construction activities including plazas, shops, schools and other illegal land use encroachments within the controlled area of RDA in Rawalpindi.

The RDA LU&BC Wing's staff including Director LU&BC, Deputy Director LU&BC, Building Inspectors and others with support of Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Revenue Sadar, Assistant Commissioner (AC), Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation (MCR) staff RPO, CPO and Police from the concerned Police Station carried out operation against above mentioned four illegal commercial buildings at Wallayat Complex Rawalpindi.

PR requests NTC to host PR E-services

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Recognizing the quick response of NTC to restore its collapsed system, Pakistan Railways (PR) has formally requested the Ministry of Information Technology (IT) to grant permission to National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) for hosting PR E-Services. "Pakistan Railways intends to extend collaboration by migrating all of its E-services to the National Data Center being managed by NTC," according to the copy of a letter written to the Ministry of IT by Pakistan Railways.

The Public Sector Entity - Pakistan Railways has asked the Ministry of IT to allow NTC for hosting of PR E-Services on National Data Center by signing an MoU with Pakistan Railways (PR). National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) is the official IT & Telecom service Provider organization for the government of Pakistan. Pakistan Railways (PR), in its letter, mentioned that it had requested National Telecommunication Corporation for its online booking applications on January, 25 2021. NTC provided requested Data Center services "on war footing basis to Pakistan Railways". Pakistan Railways advance reservation and E-ticketing application is currently being run through the National Data Center.

IESCO issues power schedule

DNA

ISLAMABAD: According to Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO)'s spokesman, System Maintenance is in process. Therefore power supply of below mentioned feeders/areas will be temporary suspended as per given schedule: On 11th February from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, G-6/3, Polyclinic, Pandorian, G-8/1, Khanna East, Tramri, Alipur, F-8, G-9/3, I-8/3, I-10/4, G-14/4, MPCHS, NIH, Pindi Point, Berot, Nambal, Blawara, Pir Sohawa, Ghousia Colony, Gulshanabad, Gwalmandi, Dhok Hassu, Ali Market, Tench Bhatta, Askari XI, Capt. Amir Shaheed, Bajniyal, Lakho Road, Tipu Road, Industrial II-Feeders and surrounding areas will be remain without power.

'Govt to notify increase in salaries of grade 1-16'

Sheikh Rashid said that political parties were vindicating the protest for their personal gains which should not be exploited

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed Wednesday said the government after negotiations with the protesting employees was ready to notify an increase in the wages of grade 1-16 employees.

Addressing a joint press conference flanked by Minister for Defence Pervez Khattak and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad Khan, he said the protesting employees were primarily demanding increase in the salaries from grade 1 to 16 where 25 percent increase

to their basic salaries was possible at the moment and would be notified by the cabinet on Tuesday after the protesters' agreement. Sheikh said that political parties were vindicating the protest for their personal gains which should not be exploited. "Service rules are applicable on government employees and not political leaders. Therefore, the public servants should raise voice for their own rights instead of becoming tools at the hands of political parties." He added that negotiations by the government's team were underway. The minister also thanked PIMS protesters for calling off their protest on his request.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister for Defence Pervez Khattak said the protesters yesterday had made a new demand for raising salaries till grade 22 employees of the federal government which was not possible at the moment keeping in view the country's economic condition. He said: "We have requested the protesters to wait for the Pay and Pension Commission's Report as the government itself wants to give this increment to them." Khattak mentioned that the second issue appeared was the provincial governments' employees were also participating in the protests. "They are requested that after 18th amendment its provin-

cial government's mandate to accommodate them and they are responsible to resolve their issues," he added. Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad Khan said protesters were responsible people, employees of the state and our brothers and the government engaged them for resolution of their issues. The government was concerned about the issues of employees, he said adding when for the first time the employees held a protest, he and Deputy Speaker National Assembly Qasim Khan Suri met them and brought the issue to the notice of the Prime Minister. "The Prime Minister formed a

high powered committee comprising me, Pervaiz Khattak and Arbab Shehzaad," he added. The negotiations were held with the employees in numerous meetings and the government representatives also met with the Pay and Pensions Committee and the Finance Minister, he told. The minister said many of the issues were already resolved including upgradations and mergers. He said hopefully remaining issues would also be resolved before and at the time of the budget presentation. "Despite limitations and difficulties of the government, the issues of employees would be settled," he assured.

Dry weather forecast

ISLAMABAD: PMD Wednesday forecast cold and dry weather in most parts of the country during next 24 hours. While very cold weather in expected in upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and north Balochistan. Fog is likely to prevail in few plain areas of Punjab during morning hours however continental air is prevailing over most parts of the country, a MET office reported.

IRSA increases water discharge from dams

ISLAMABAD: IRSA has increased water discharged from water reservoirs as per demand of the provinces. According to the data, on Wednesday IRSA released 83,200 cusecs water from various rim stations against inflow of 32,200 cusecs. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry, Spokesman Ministry of Foreign Affairs cutting cake on the occasion of 73rd Independence Day reception by the Sri Lanka High Commission in Pakistan which was confined only to Heads of Missions of SAARC nations in view of the Covid-19 protocols. - DND

PTCL group posts 38% profit growth in 2020

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), the country's leading telecom and ICT services provider on Wednesday announced 38 percent profit growth in 2020 in its Board of Directors. PTCL Group maintained its revenue at Rs. 129 billion, however, if normalized for the impact of Covid-19 and certain regulatory changes, group revenue is 5.2% higher than 2019 on a like-for-like basis, said a news release.

Ufone performed well despite Covid-19 challenges and was able to successfully cross 10 million data customers by smartly expanding its LTE footprint. Ubank continued its growth momentum and has achieved a 50% growth in its revenue over last year by increasing its customers loan portfolio and deposits. The topline stability coupled with cost optimization initiatives and favorable interest and exchange rate movements, translated into 38% improvement in Group's net profit for the year.

PTCL standalone revenue for the year is 0.4% higher than last year; the topline witnessed a decline of 0.7% until Q3, however, it picked up in Q4 to 3.7% YoY growth on the back of healthy customer acquisition. Year 2020 was an extremely challenging year, however, PTCL retail business managed to perform in all segments due to successful strategies applied by the management in the beginning of the year, which started yielding results in the second half of the year. - DNA

'Attack on IHC building disgraced legal fraternity'

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice Islamabad High Court (IHC) Justice Athar Minallah on Wednesday said a group of lawyers' attack on IHC building has disgraced the whole legal fraternity and they must be brought to book to avoid such untoward incident in future. Terming the incident as a disrespect for martyrs of lawyers' movement and an attack on judiciary and institutions, he said bar council was responsible to take action against such lawyers for vandalizing a sacred institution. The chief justice gave these remarks during

the hearing of different cases. He further said a group of some 100 lawyers has earned bad name for legal fraternity while 95 percent professional lawyers had to face embarrassment due to a five percent's wrong doings. Justice Athar Minallah said that he had to remain confined in his chamber for three hours owing to the protest. He could take action but he preferred to remain confined, he added. On the occasion, a senior lawyer Mian Abdul Rauf assured the CJ that such incidents would not take place in future. To this the chief

justice said it was possible only if the responsible of the current ambush were punished and be made an example for others. Abdul Rauf said it was also being ascertained that who instigated the other lawyers for the attack. The chief justice asked him not to give an impression of a conspiracy as all were known faces in the mob. The CJ questioned, "why the flower pots and windows were broken, what the way we have chosen to protest."

The incident was also discussed in other courts of law as well in which judges reprimanded lawyers for this illegal action and taking the law in their hands by a group. Former president IHCBA Waqas Malik said that the young lawyers were used to fuel this unfortunate incident. He however admitted that legal fraternity due to this ungracious incident was facing harsh criticism across the country. - Agencies

RCB Food Branch checks 2480 outlets

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Food Branch of RCB checked as many as 2480 food outlets and issued 1891 notices for unhygienic and poor cleanliness conditions during last seven months of the current financial year while fines amounting to over Rs 2.3 million were also imposed on the violators. According to RCB Food Branch, total 2480 food outlets were checked and the teams collected 989 food samples which were sent to lab for quality test. The cases of substandard food items were also sent to the court of the cantonment magistrate which imposed fines on the rules violators. Food Inspectors on the directive of the Cantonment Executive Officer conducted surprise visits of different markets including Saddar, Allahabad, Peshawar Road Tench Bhatta, Dhoke Syedan, Bakra Mandi and other areas.

Int'l Day of Women, Girls in Science being marked

ISLAMABAD: International Day of Women and Girls in Science is being marked on February 11(today) across the world including Pakistan aiming to ensure full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.

The resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 22, 2015. "On this International Day, I urge commitment to end bias, greater investments in science, technology, engineering and math education for all women and girls as well as opportunities for their careers and longer-term professional advancement so that all can benefit from their ground-breaking future contributions," said UN Secretary-General, António Guterres. According to a UN study from 14 countries, the probability for female students graduating with a Bachelor's degree in science is 18%, while the male equivalent is 37%. - DNA

**'A nation of 220 million cannot rely on others'**

This resolve was expressed during a national seminar organized by National Defence University

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pandemic has taught us a lesson that "no one will come to help us in global crises". A nation of 220 million people can not rely on others for literally everything, said Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Co-ordinator General, COM-STECH in his inaugural address of the national seminar on 'Global, strategic and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and Paistan' organized by National Defence University. The keynote address of the session was delivered by the Chief Guest, General Nadeem Raza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Dr. Choudhary said that without indigenous science and technology capacity and its linkages with the industry, we will remain dependent on others. Public health care have strategic importance, technology development to fight pandemics will help us in bio-risk management and national biosecurity, he highlighted. Dr. Choudhary said that Pakistan has the highest load of viral diseases in the world, very few trained professionals in the field, almost no institutional infrastructure in virology and vaccine development. He said COVID-19 is here to stay and it is fast mutating, creating a need of constant nation-wide genomic

surveillance. Our access to vaccines will remain limited, and we would need new vaccines every year, some especially designed for our own mutants. To meet these current and future challenges, Dr. Choudhary suggested to invest more in health care research. Train at least 1000 young scientists and health professionals in virology research and clinical practices, and strengthen existing virology laboratories. He emphasized the establishment of BSL-4 high-containment lab at national institute of virology, Karachi and at least one high tech viral disease diagnostic set up in each provincial and national capital.

Dr. Choudhary also suggested the establishment of 'National Disease Surveillance Center' with sample collection units in all major tertiary care hospitals. He stressed the need of setting up of "One Health Institute" to coordinate research on human and animal-borne virus outbreaks. Dr. Choudhary said that we should develop academic and research linkages with virology and genomic research institutions in China under the CPEC programs. He said that indigenous vaccine, biologicals, and diagnostic development and production facilities may be granted a long term tax holiday along with buy back guarantee.



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For further information please contact the following.

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Briefs

ANC awards jail term in smuggling case

DNA

RAWALPINDI: An Anti-Narcotics Court (ANC) Wednesday awarded three years and eight months imprisonment and a fine of Rs 16,800 to a lady accused in a drug smuggling case.

Sohana BB was found guilty of possessing 2200 grams hashish and was arrested by Naseerabad police in September, 2020. Additional Session Judge Waqar Mansoor pronounced the judgment after recording evidence of the witnesses and final arguments by the defence and prosecution counsels.

Nine train accidents occur in last two years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Around nine major accidents of passenger and goods trains have been occurred on Pakistan Railways' entire network across the country in the last two years. Out of the total nine mishaps, five accidents had occurred in 2019 and four accidents took place in 2020, an official in the Ministry of Railways told media.

In these accidents, around 153 persons died 179 sustained injuries while the financial damage incurred on the Pakistan Railways was Rs57.708 million. In order to control the accidents, several steps have also been taken including up-gradation of unmanned and vulnerable railway level crossings across the country in collaboration with respective provincial governments, he said. He said road surface of all level crossings was being improved together with improved warning boards and provision of reliable communication (VHF radio) between ground staff and locomotives crew.

The Directorate of Public Relations has produced video messages for circulations over social media to inform the public about the dangers associated with railway crossings, he said.

Rupee gains 04 paisas against US dollar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The exchange rate of Pakistani rupee strengthened by 04 paisas against the US dollar in the interbank trading on Wednesday and closed at Rs159.30 as compared to the previous day's closing of Rs159.34. Meanwhile, according to Forex Association of Pakistan, the buying and selling rates of dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs159.1 and Rs159.9 respectively.

In interbank trading, the price of euro appreciated by 97 paisas and closed at Rs193.26 against the last day's trading of Rs 192.29, State Bank of Pakistan reported.

The Japanese Yen gained one paisa to close at Rs152.5, whereas an increase of 99 paisas was witnessed in the exchange rate of British Pound which was traded at Rs220.36 as compared to its last closing of Rs219.37. The exchange rates of Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal decreased by 01 paisa each to close at Rs 43.37 and Rs 42.47 respectively.

Body found near Railway station

RAWALPINDI: Dead body of an old man was found near Saddar railway station in the limits of Cantt police station. According to Rescue-1122, some passers-by witnessed a human body lying at Muhammadi masjid, near railway station, Saddar and informed them. On information, rescue teams rushed to the spot and shifted the body identified as Muhammad Ashraf 59 to District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) for mortuary. Meanwhile, the police and forensic team immediately rushed to the spot and started to collect the evidence while further investigation is under progress, spokesman added. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad women chamber of commerce and industry Samina Fazil giving certificate to a participant during a monthly gala organised by IWCC. - DNA

'Aman exercises excellent effort for security at sea'

In his concluding remarks Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman, BOG ISSI, said that in today's maritime domain security and economic interests are interlinked. He emphasized the need for cooperative security and the need to learn from other navies

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Arms Control and Disarmament Centre (ACDC) organized a Web Talk on "Evolving Strategic Environment in the Western Indian Ocean and Significance of Aman Exercise 2021," by Vice Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmed Rao HI (M) on Wednesday. Vice Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmed Rao HI (M) emphasized that today maritime interests and challenges are common such as freedom of navigation, safe flow of commerce, protection against criminal activities like piracy, smuggling, drugs, and human traf-

ficking, deterrence against terrorism and protection of the oceans' resources.

He noted that today's threats are of a transnational or global nature. Also, the maritime challenges go beyond the narrow concept of interstate conflict. Thus, the concept of collaborative maritime security has gained preeminence. The Aman exercises are an effort to this end. He said that Aman series exercises are very important and a commendable effort in promoting peace and security at sea. They are unique because they are not aimed at any country or perceived threat from any country or



group of countries. They are aimed at common threats to peace and security at sea and in the region.

Thus, they are inclusive, not exclusive. The exercises have brought 45 countries together including China, the US, and Russia. Pakistan has chosen to act as a bridge in the region and a

peacemaker in the maritime domain. This, he said, is a message of solidarity against miscreants. It will help enhance interoperability between regional and extra-regional navies with Pakistan Navy acting as a bridge in the region. It will also help learn from each other's experiences. Pakistan also

aims to promote maritime diplomacy and soft image through various events on the sidelines of the exercise. Earlier, in his welcome remarks Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General, ISSI said that the Aman exercise has now become an institutional affair, contributing to regional and extra-regional efforts to combat piracy, human and drug trafficking. It aims to contribute to peace and security through economic prosperity and by bringing regional navies together. Having large navies like the US, Russia China is a testament to the importance of bringing these countries for

a cooperative effort. Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director ACDC-ISSI, in his introductory remarks said that with a motto of "Together for Peace," "Aman 2021" is aimed at promoting peace and cooperation and countering evolving maritime challenges including non-traditional and common security threats like piracy, arms, and drug trafficking, human smuggling, terrorism, and climate change. Pakistan Navy has always contributed towards regional maritime security and through the Aman exercise, it is playing the role of a bridge between other regional navies.

RCCI organizes virtual int'l trade forum

RAWALPINDI: RCCI organized virtual international Trade Forum UK Chapter via zoom meeting. The Online Program discussed the Trade & Investment opportunities in Pakistan and brief discussed about export opportunities after Brexit. Chief Guest Joint Secretary Ministry of Commerce Aaisha Makhdom, Group Leader RCCI Sohail Altaf, President RCCI Nasir Mirza, Chairman Regional Trade Promotional Committee RCCI Khurshid barlas, President Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, UK Steve Allen, Trade Counselor London Shafiq Ahmed Shahzad, Attaché Trade & Investment London Muhammad Akhtar, Chairman UKPBC Javed Malik and hundreds of investors from Pakistan and UK attended this session. Joint Secretary Ministry of Commerce Aaisha Makhdom said that Ministry of commerce give all possible support to investors for trade friendly. Group Leader RCCI Sohail Altaf said that Pakistan & UK enjoy historical cordial relations that boost our trade opportunities. President RCCI Nasir Mirza said that we are excellent economic relations with investments on both sides. Chairman Regional Trade Promotional Committee RCCI Khurshid barlas said that After the successful Virtual International Trade Forums for Africa, ECO & Gulf/Middle East Chapters. Reason for these forums is to connect & provide orientation for respective regions to our businesses, with the aim of increasing the exports and investment to Pakistan. President Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce UK Steve Allen added that there are huge opportunities for Pakistan's export in agriculture, textile and food items to UK. In this context, there is a need of early formulation of Pakistan's trade delegation to UK for getting new orders from UK. Moreover, Pakistani community in UK also plays a crucial role in Pak-UK Trade and at present, 80% of our trade with UK is conducted by Pakistani companies. Counselor Trade & Investment London, UK Shafiq Ahmed Shahzad said that UK was the third largest export destination of Pakistani goods. - DNA



RAWALPINDI: General Nadeem Raza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee addressing to National seminar on "Global, Strategic and Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and Pakistan" organized by Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) at National Defence University (NDU). - DNA

Horse-trading video shot at Speaker House Peshawar, says Asad Qaiser

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Asad Qaiser on Wednesday clarified that the "horse-trading" video was not shot at his official residence, rather the place that can be seen in it is from the Speaker House Peshawar.

Asad Qaiser, in a tweet, distanced himself from the horse-trading video that allegedly shows PTI lawmakers receiving money to vote against their party candidates in the Senate elections 2018. The speaker further said that in 2018, PM Imran Khan had informed him about several PTI MPs selling their votes for money and the entire party favored action against the lawmakers who were involved in the controversy.

"Statements like these are only an attempt to deflect from the actual issue," he said. Earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the opposition parties will cry foul if upcoming elections of the Senate are not held through open vote as government can secure more seats through secret voting.

Prime Minister, while talking to media persons, said that rate of one seat of upper house of Parliament is between Rs500 million to Rs700 million and asked how is it possible that a person who spend this much money will not want a payback. The premier further said that timing of video is not important and clarified that he would have used the video as evidence in cases if he had it in his possession earlier. It is pertinent to mention here that a video of horse-trading during Senate elections in 2018 by some provincial lawmakers has emerged.

The lawmakers can be seen counting bundles of notes and putting them inside a bag. Federal Minister Fawad Chaudhry, while talking to a private news channel has said that selling votes for financial benefits is very shameful and urged Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) to take suo moto notice of the incident. - DNA

USF awards contract to Telenor for Chitral, U.Dir, L.Dir

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Universal Service Fund (USF) awarded contract worth approximately PKR 1.37 Billion to Telenor for providing High Speed Mobile Broadband services in Chitral, Upper Dir and Lower Dir districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication, Syed Amin Ul Haque and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & HRD, Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari witnessed the contract signing ceremony held at the USF Office, Islamabad on Wednesday. The contracts were signed by Haaris Mahmood Chaudhary, CEO, USF with Irfan Wahab Khan, CEO Telenor. The Federal Secretary for IT & Telecommunication and Chairman USF Board, Shoaib Ahmad Siddiqui, Chairman PTA, Major General (R) Amir Azeem Bajwa and other officials were also present at the ceremony. Chief Guest of the ceremony, Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication, Syed Amin Ul Haque said: "With the help of

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), districts of Chitral, Upper Dir and Lower Dir can achieve better visibility, communication and integration into economic and tourism flows.

High Speed Mobile Broadband services will enhance tourism and attract tourists, thus creating jobs. The Ministry of IT and Telecommunication will continue close cooperation to support the tourism industry of Pakistan and provide the basis for achieving

sustainable rural development". Furthermore, he extended his warm felicitations to the teams of USF and Telenor on the contract signing and emphasized on making Digital Pakistan vision a reality.

Guest of Honor of the ceremony, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & HRD, Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari while congratulating USF and Telenor on the signing of the contract



said, "The use of ICT in tourism is a welcoming step for the residents of Chitral, Upper Dir and Lower Dir districts. High speed internet connectivity will expedite activity in the region and make the travel process efficient and pleasant". In addition, he expressed gratitude to the Federal Minister and the Ministry of IT and Telecommunication for the guidance and support.

Sharing his views on the development, CEO Telenor Pakistan, Irfan Wahab Khan said, "We are committed to ensure the basic right of connectivity to the people of Pakistan. At Telenor Pakistan, we are driven to continue empowering the country by bridging the digital divide, creating access to opportunities and uplifting the lives of millions. We stand firm in our commitment of connecting people to what matters most to them and aim to continue providing opportunities in the future."

Also, sharing his thoughts at the ceremony, CEO USF, Haaris Mahmood Chaudhary said: "This project will benefit an unserved population of 0.7 Million in 648 unserved mauzas, thereby covering an unserved area of 18,212 sq. km. of Chitral, Upper Dir and Lower Dir districts.

NASC propose autonomy for Railway Factory

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Railways on Wednesday recommended financial autonomy to the Railway Carriage Factory to increase its capacity and make it more efficient.

The recommendation was made during a meeting of the Standing Committee at Divisional Superintendent (DS) office, Pakistan Railways under the chairmanship of the Standing Committee Muhammad Moeen Wattoo. The meeting was briefed by the officers of Pakistan Railways that during nearly 40 days, over 700 kanal of the Railway land were retrieved from the occupation of the encroachers.

The Railway officers informed the meeting that 4,000 acres of the Railways land was occupied across the country, of which 1,600 acres were under residential encroachments. The officers further said that 88 acres of the Railways land had been retrieved across the country since January 1. The committee was also informed about the pensions and arrears of the Railway employees and all pensions and arrears will also be cleared up to June. The committee also reviewed other agenda items including the issue of construction on the Railway land in Quetta and the revenue of the Railways.

DS Railway Rawalpindi Division Syed Munawar Shah also briefed the committee about Rawalpindi division and informed that the division had imposed ban on use of electric heaters in the Railway offices and also seized more than 600 electric heaters.

Traders demands to end illegal construction

DNA

RAWALPINDI: City traders have expressed concern over ever increasing encroachments on roads and demanded of the district administration to remove these illegal encroachments to end frequent traffic jams which was affecting their business. A trader's delegation led by President Traders Welfare Association Sharjeel Mir met with the Deputy Commissioner Captain (R) Anwar Ul Haq here Wednesday and conveyed their concern regarding growing encroachments in the markets.

He said illegal car parking was a common problem even in the presence of traffic personnel, creating massive traffic logjam and also causing accidents. Mir said due to lack of parking space many markets of downtown areas were losing customers and distances of minutes are being covered in hours due to acute road encroachments and traffic stuck ups. "It is need of the hour to construct parking plazas for city markets at the earliest and strict action must be taken against the encroachers", he demanded. The DC acknowledging the veracity of the traders complaints assured them that their concerns would be addressed on priority.

World Pulses Day marked

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations on Wednesday marked World Pulses Day with an aim to raise awareness of the nutritional benefits of pulses and their contribution to sustainable food systems as well as addressing the issues of poverty.

A press release issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said that pulses were critical in addressing the challenges of poverty, food security, human health and nutrition. It was vital for soil health and environment, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

Building on the success of the International Year of Pulses in 2016 led by FAO, the United Nations General Assembly designated 10 February as World Pulses Day, which has since been supported by many member countries, it added.

A dark day

WHAT happened at the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday was extremely unfortunate. The Court was stormed and damaged by angry lawyers, with a group of them laying siege to the courtroom and the chamber of IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah, virtually keeping him hostage for about three hours. Windows and doors were broken, tables were turned over, and FIRs were registered against the offending lawyers; in short, there was utter chaos in what was undoubtedly a dark day for the Islamabad judiciary.

Violence and vandalism is never the answer and is never acceptable. Lawyers of all people should know that one should never take the law in one's own hands, and that the judiciary and the sanctity of the court must be respected and trusted to make the right decision in the end. Physical attacks on the Court can never be a way to hasten justice; instead, such incidents cast a dark shadow on the honourable fraternity of the law and fosters an environment of intimidation and fear. Following the incident, the High Court ordered shutting down of the courts and lawyers went on strike—these sequences of events only disadvantage the ordinary citizens who are already suffering from a backlog of cases and inordinate delay in the justice system.

The lawyers may have had genuine grievances for which they registered a protest. According to sources, lawyers had gathered in the district courts on Monday morning to pose resistance to an operation where dozens of illegally-constructed offices of the lawyers were demolished. This is a conflict that requires negotiation and fraternity to resolve—posing violent resistance, however, will only sabotage the cause. Here, the lawyers' bodies—the Supreme Court Bar Association, Islamabad Bar Council, Islamabad High Court Bar Association and the District Bar Association of Islamabad, are needed to take a mature response to this crisis. The Bar Associations need to find a way to shed light on lawyers' legitimate grievances, without letting the situation escalate into violence and terror.

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A win-win deal

AT last, the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) and the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), have approved payment of Rs403 billion to 46 IPPs. This is an enormous amount that the government will be paying to the producers. The liquidation of outstanding charges in two instalments is a revision of the earlier scheme in which the government was giving IPPs money in three tranches. However, IPPs had rejected that payment mechanism, deeming payment in three instalments unacceptable and equated that with reopening of the memorandum of understandings (MoUs).

Nevertheless, the settlement of dues is a win-win situation for all the parties. Perhaps, the most significant gain that the government will make from warding off the dues will be the immediate materialisation of the MoUs that the government signed with the IPPs. Under these MoUs, power purchase agreements (PPA) are altered in favour of the government. The new MoUs of these agreements will reduce the fixed costs that the state used to pay to the IPPs whether they produced electricity or not. Thus, the government is optimistic that the revision of fixed costs will help in barring the accumulation of circular debt. Besides, the officials predict that the amended PPA will save the government Rs836 billion in the long run.

Moreover, the effects of the above development can be far-reaching. On the one hand, the payment of dues will improve cash flows for the IPPs. On the other, IPPs will have no choice but to clear their payables to the gas companies as well. In addition to this, the federal government needs to revisit power tariffs and ensure their rationalisation. Amid all these developments, the government already increased the base electricity tariff last month. Hopefully, the officials have already brought it up to the cost in which case one can expect that the circular debt might finally be on its way out.

Europe will redefine itself despite Biden presidency

Ramzy Baroud

The US commitment to the post-war paradigm was clearly faltering. Consequently, statements from Europe's political elites in recent years suggest a massive rethink among European governments regarding their definition of the relationship with Washington, an alliance that ran the world for decades. In an unprecedented statement in May 2017, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, articulated the massive shift in Europe's new political outlook when she said, "The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over"

DESPITE the long-awaited political change in Washington, Europe is unlikely to resume its previously unhindered reliance on its trans-Atlantic partner. The four years of Donald Trump were rife with tension and strife between the US and Europe — in fact, between the US and its traditional allies, including Mexico and Canada. However, the strain in the US-EU relationship long preceded Trump's presidency. Trump's eccentric personal style — and often blunt rhetoric and action — was an indicator to Europe that the continent urgently needed to create its own leadership alternatives to Washington. Following World War II, the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) in 1949 and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact in 1991, the US became the uncontested leader of the West and, eventually, the globe's only superpower. These dynamics are now experiencing an unparalleled influx.

The US commitment to the post-war paradigm was clearly faltering. Consequently, statements from Europe's political elites in recent years suggest a massive rethink among European governments regarding their definition of the relationship with Washington, an alliance that ran the world for decades. In an unprecedented statement in May 2017, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, articulated the massive shift in Europe's new political outlook when she said, "The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over." In that momentous speech in Munich, Germany's strong leader signalled the beginning of the end of the disproportionate reliance on the US and the UK.

The reason behind the distrust in Washington and London was obvious. On the one hand, President Trump has laboured to disrupt and

reverse traditional US policies towards Europe, including a scathing attack on the integrity and the mission of Nato, and the latter's usefulness to the US in terms of global security.

The UK, no longer a member of the European Union, on the other hand, has confronted the EU with its greatest challenges, as it rejected not only EU's fiscal, migration and other policies but also the very notion of the 'European Community'. Coupled with Washington's global retreat, 'Brexit' decisively ended any illusion that a post-WWII political scenario can still be possible.

Attesting to this seismic change in the attitude of Europe's mainstream politicians, were the remarks by French President, Emmanuel Macron, in November 2018 when he called for a "true European army" to protect the continent from outside threats. "We must have a Europe that can defend itself on its own without relying only on the United States," Macron said.

While there is some truth to media assertions that "the EU sighs with relief as Biden enters White House," this should not be confused with hyped European expectations that the new American President is able to fully reset EU-US ties of yesteryears, nor should it indicate European eagerness to engage the US with unfiltered trust and enthusiasm. Actual data from a large pan-European survey commissioned by the European Council on Foreign Relations confirm Europe's fundamentally changing attitude toward the US. The survey included more than 15,000 people in 11 EU countries and was held after it became clear that Biden had won the US elections.

According to the survey, the majority in leading EU countries believe that "the US political system is broken," that "China will be more powerful than the US within a decade" and, finally, that "the Europeans cannot

rely on the US to defend them." Particularly interesting, the ECFR's commissioned poll signalled a massive geopolitical shift in Europeans' view towards global alliances, viewing "Berlin, rather than Washington, as the most important partner".

On the issue of trust, only 27 per cent of polled Europeans believe that 'Americans can be trusted' after they voted for Trump in 2016. With Germany currently being Europe's de facto leader, the views of Germans towards their American counterparts are particularly critical. Hence, the US must take note that 53% of German respondents have lost trust in a country that once was a close partner.

ECFR chose the eve of Biden's inauguration to release the findings of the report, itself a message to the new administration to tread very carefully while attempting to repair broken ties on both sides of the Atlantic.

The ball is no longer in Washington's court alone. The fact that the majority of Europeans believe in China's impending global leadership in a matter of a few years means that the EU will have no patience for any American ultimatum to choose between Washington and Beijing. The latter is no longer a fleeting economic phenomenon but an irreversible force on the global stage that cannot be easily dismissed, effectively 'sanctioned' or simply wished away.

The next few years should be enough for Europe to determine its new identity. Considering Europe's brewing political crises, with Italy being the latest example, and the unavoidably dire economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, Europe's journey to a revamped version of itself is likely to be a painful one and, like all difficult choices, rife with challenges and much introspection.

— Courtesy: Gulf News

What is India trying to achieve in Kashmir?

Hamza Gillani



Kashmir, a Muslim-majority area, decided to align with Pakistan, but its Hindu ruler, Raja Hari Singh had his inclination towards India. Kashmir, termed the 'jugular vein' of Pakistan by the country's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, remains an issue yet to be resolved, if bilateral relations between India and Pakistan are ever to normalize

THE State of Kashmir, located between northwestern India and northeastern Pakistan, is a Muslim majority area of the Indian subcontinent. Before 1947, the region comprising Pakistan, India, and Kashmir was known as British India. It was a colony of the British Empire consisting of hundreds of small princely states controlled by local rulers known as maharajahs. When the British left the region in 1947, it was up to the individual states to determine which of the two newly independent countries they wished to join. Those countries with Muslim majorities opted to become part of Pakistan, while those with Hindu majorities chose to become part of the new India.

Kashmir, a Muslim-majority area, decided to align with Pakistan, but its Hindu ruler, Raja Hari Singh had his inclination towards India. Kashmir, termed the 'jugular vein' of Pakistan by the country's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, remains an issue yet to be resolved, if bilateral relations between India and Pakistan are ever to normalize.

India's approach towards Kashmir has become burdensome because it has become a testing ground for new ideas governing the state of affairs projected by the fascist ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This unique symmetry is based on their philosophy of 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduness' — a rogue, extremist ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life in the region. Kashmir has its ethos built on the Islamic faith of a unique strand of tolerance. It would be a great tragedy if

this unique inheritance were submerged to BJP's resolve to impose its violent vision of India.

The ongoing agitation in Indian-administered Kashmir is rooted in the struggle of the people for the exercise of the right to self-determination. Peaceful processions chanting demands for freedom were fired upon by Indian army and police. Thousands of men, women and children have been killed or wounded. Allegations of assistance to the Kashmiri people from the Pakistan side is unfounded. Objective reports in foreign media testify that the Kashmiri agitation is indigenous. Pakistan upholds the right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir to self-determination in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. These resolutions of 1948 and 1949 provide for the holding of a free and impartial plebiscite for the determination of the future of the state by the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The basic points of the UN resolutions are that the complaint relating to Kashmir was initiated by India in the Security Council, the Council explicitly rejected India's claim that Kashmir is legally Indian territory, and the resolutions established self-determination as the governing principle for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. The resolutions endorsed a binding agreement between India and Pakistan reached through the mediation of United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP), that a plebiscite would be held, under agreed and specified conditions.

The Security Council has rejected the Indian contention that the people of Kashmir have exercised their right to self-determination by participating in the "election" which New Delhi has from time to time organized in Indian-administered Kashmir. The 0.2% turnout during the 1989 'election' was the most recent and clear repudiation of the Indian claim. Pakistan continues to adhere to the UNCIP laid down formulae for the holding of the plebiscite.

The Indian government, to maintain public popularity or perhaps to justify its massive military budget, has recently embarked on the trajectory of misadventures towards Pakistan. But all the feeble and fancy manoeuvres have been appropriately and vehemently reciprocated, earning the Indian government huge embarrassment, domestically and internationally. The Abhinandan episode was the latest in line.

In August 2019, India revoked Articles 370 and 35-A from its constitution — which had granted Jammu and Kashmir significant autonomy from the rest of the country along with numerically inflating its military presence in Kashmir. A simple question from a saner mind would ask: what is India attempting to achieve? To engage in a war with Pakistan? To be more brutal towards Kashmiri Muslims? That is already a norm after years' long practice. Therefore in the ultimate analysis, India's weak, muscular move is nothing more than a power show designed as a diversion strategy to reassert itself in the international arena.

— Courtesy: Arab News

Briefs

Miller unavailable for PSL 6's first half

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: Hard-hitting South African batsman David Miller will not be available for the first half of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season 6, Cricket South Africa (CSA) confirmed. Miller was picked up by Peshawar Zalmi in PSL 6's draft earlier in January this year. PSL's upcoming edition is scheduled to start on February 20 in Karachi with the second phase to take place in Lahore.

"Miller will be returning to South Africa with the T20 squad to participate in the CSA domestic T20 Challenge. He will return to Pakistan to take part in the second half of the PSL at the conclusion of the South African tournament," CSA released a statement.

It must be noted here that CSA T20 Challenge will be played from February 19 to 28 in Durban.

PCB confirm tickets to be sold online only

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has signed an agreement with an e-ticketing platform for the sale of tickets of Pakistan Super League's (PSL) sixth edition, media reported.

According to a statement issued on Tuesday, PCB shared the details of how fans can be part of Pakistan's most exciting T20 tournament.

"With a socially distant seating plan cricket fans can now be a part of the game again as both HBL PSL 6 venues Karachi and Lahore will have 20% of the total seating capacity of the stadiums available for the spectators," the cricket board said.

Earlier last week, the National Command and Control Centre (NCCC) had permitted PCB to allow a limited number of spectators in the stadiums during PSL with strict COVID-19 SOPs, including social distancing.

Around 7,500 ticketed spectators will be allowed access inside the National Stadium Karachi (NSK) per match day, while around 5,500 will be able to attend the games at Gaddafi Stadium Lahore (GSL). Regarding the pricing and availability of tickets, the PCB said that details will be shared soon.

Violations reported in vaccine admin

From Page 01

ensuring transparency Since commencement of the inoculation process, 27,228 FLHCWs have been vaccinated including 21,121 in Sindh, 4,458 in Punjab, 691 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 274 in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 239 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), 312 Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and 133 in Balochistan.

The FLHCWs can check their eligibility by sending their CNIC number to 1166 or visit nims.nadra.gov.pk website.

In the first step a confirmation message containing Adult Vaccine Center (AVC) and a pin code will be sent whereas in the second step the FLHCW will be informed about his appointment for vaccination at the designated AVC.

In the third step, he or she will visit the Adult Vaccine Center (AVC) along with his or her CNIC and pin code. The health staff at the Adult Vaccine Center (AVC) will confirm their appointment and verify CNIC and pin code. The FLHCW will be vaccinated upon his turn. In the next step, the vaccination staff will confirm vaccine entry in NIMS and confirmation SMS will be sent. Finally, the FLHCW will have to stay for 30 minutes for monitoring after vaccination at the Adult Vaccine Center (AVC). Moreover, in case of double shot vaccine the message will be sent after seven days.



TURIN: FC Inter's Alessandro Bastoni (L) vies with FC Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo during the Italy Cup semifinal second leg football match between FC Juventus and FC Inter. - DNA

China reiterates principled stance on UNSC expansion

The Indian delegation briefed the Chinese side on India's priorities during its UNSC tenure. India will hold the presidency of the UNSC in August 2021. China's support as a permanent member of the UNSC will be key during India's presidency of the council

DNA

BEIJING: China on Wednesday reiterated its principled stance on the expansion of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and sought a package solution that takes into account the interests and concerns of all parties. (Expansion) should be done through the widest possible democratic consultation and seek a package solution that takes into account the interests and concerns of all parties, a Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said during regular briefing in response to a question regarding India's

candidature for permanent membership of the UNSC. The spokesperson said, as for India's bid for permanent membership to the UNSC, he could reiterate China's principled position on this issue. "China supports UNSC reforms in a manner that increases the authority and efficacy of the UNSC, increase the representation and voice of developing countries so that small and medium sized countries have a greater opportunity to participate in the decision making of the UNSC," he added. He informed that the Chinese and India sides held consultations on Security Council issues and added, the two sides exchanged

views on upholding multilateralism, peacekeeping operations and counter terrorism. Last month, Yang Jiechi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in his meeting with Joanna Wronecka and Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, co-chairs of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Reform of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, through video link said China firmly upholds multilateralism and safeguards the authority of the UN. At the same time, China supports

reasonable and necessary reform of the UNSC to increase the representation and voice of developing countries. Yang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, said China will work with all parties to firmly support the IGN as the main channel for pursuing Security Council reform. Wronecka and Al-Thani, who are permanent representatives to the UN of Poland and Qatar respectively, expressed their willingness to maintain close communication with China on UNSC reform issue. They pledged to work to build consensus under the IGN framework and sustain the momentum of dialogue and negotiation.

According to media reports, China and India held consultations on UNSC agenda and discussed a wide range of issues in this regard during a meeting held yesterday. The Indian delegation briefed the Chinese side on India's priorities during its UNSC tenure. India will hold the presidency of the UNSC in August 2021. China's support as a permanent member of the UNSC will be key during India's presidency of the council. The Chinese delegation was led by Yang Tao, director general of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. Prakash Gupta, Joint Secretary (UNP & Summits) led the Indian delegation.



MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic of Serbia celebrates after winning the men's singles second round match between Novak Djokovic of Serbia and Frances Tiafoe of the United States at the Australian Open. - DNA

Osaka thwarted Garcia into Aus Open

MELBOURNE: Japanese sensation Naomi Osaka thwarted Caroline Garcia on Wednesday with an effortless straight sets victory, as she stormed into the Australian Open third round. Osaka, the third seed, faced a tricky contest against the Frenchwoman, who was ranked a career-high of fourth in late 2018, but never gave her a sniff in the 6-2, 6-3 victory in 61 minutes. "I stayed focused throughout the match and I tried to play within myself," Osaka, who hit 23 winners, told the crowd at Rod Laver Arena. "She's a tough opponent because you don't know how she might play." The three-time Grand Slam winner is riding a 16-match unbeaten streak - including the US Open final - dating back 12 months, and is building momentum having not played before arriving in Australia since her triumph in NY. The 2019 Australian Open champion cruised through the opening set to draw first blood and snuffed out any challenge from 43-ranked Garcia with a break in the sixth game of the second before finishing it off in style with her 10th ace. - DNA

WHO official derides US intelligence on COVID-19

WEB DESK

NEW YORK: US intelligence on the supposed origin of the coronavirus pandemic is not reliable, a member of the special WHO mission to China said on Wednesday, after Washington cast doubt on the transparency of the probe. The World Health Organization mission ended on Tuesday without finding the source of the virus, but members had to walk a diplomatic tightrope during their stay, with the US urging a "robust" investigation and China warning against politicising the issue. Information dribbled out via their personal Twitter accounts during the mission, but more details and opinions emerged as they prepared to leave the country. Peter Daszak, a member of the WHO team, waded directly into the murky geopolitics that covers the pandemic origin story. US President Joe Biden "has to look tough on China", he said in a tweet, adding: "Please don't rely too much on US intel: increasingly disengaged under Trump & frankly wrong on many aspects." Daszak also tweeted the WHO team worked "flat out under the most politically charged environment possible". His comments were linked to an article referencing US Department of State comments that cast doubt over the transparency of China's cooperate with the WHO mission. Department of State spokesman Ned Price said the White House "clearly supports this investigation", but shared criticism that China concealed information. Asked if he thought China had fully cooperated with the WHO team, Price told reporters: "I think the jury's still out." Coronavirus has killed 2.3 million, infected close to 107 million people, and devastated the global economy. Questions over the handling of the initial outbreak in central China have sparked an intense diplomatic row between Washington and Beijing. In turn, China emphasised on Wednesday the Wuhan probe is just "one part" of an investigation into the origins of the coronavirus.

Thai protests resume, taking aim at royal insults law

"Today is the first gathering, first opening and a battle after an unjust system jailed our friends," Panupong Jadnok, a protest leader said. They renewed last year's three demands: ousting Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, rewriting the military-backed constitution, and reforming the monarchy

FOREIGN DESK

BANGKOK: Hundreds of protesters gathered in Bangkok on Wednesday to demand the release of four activists jailed a day earlier pending their trial for insulting Thailand's king, a crime punishable by 15 years in prison. The demonstration had originally been organised by activists to show solitary with anti-coup protests in neighbouring Myanmar, but it morphed into calls to change or end the strict "lese majeste" law. Many protesters banged pots and pans, borrowing from Myanmar's nightly displays of discontent at last week's military intervention, while some held Myanmar flags to show support for its pro-democracy movement. Youth-led protests in Thailand last year broke traditional taboos by openly calling for reform of the powerful monarchy and the denial of bail on Tuesday for four key

leaders prosecuted for royal insults has enraged activists. About 1,000 protesters had gathered by nightfall, some holding signs that said "free our friends" and "abolish 112", referring to the article of the Thai criminal code that covers royal insults. Others struck metal pans bearing the numbers 112. Some 44 opposition lawmakers earlier on Wednesday submitted a proposal to amend the article. Protest leaders declared the rally a resumption of last year's

street demonstrations, which were disrupted by a second wave of coronavirus infections that has seen Thailand's cases increase five-fold since mid-December. "Today is the first gathering, first opening and a battle after an unjust system jailed our friends," Panupong Jadnok, a protest leader said. They renewed last year's three demands: ousting Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, rewriting the military-backed constitution, and reforming the monarchy.

Panupong said events in Myanmar should inspire the Thai pro-democracy movement. "If today, Myanmar, our neighbours, can defeat this coup, then we will also be victorious, but if they cannot overcome then we should not lose hope," he said. Prayuth, who led a coup in 2014, said the return of protests will harm Thailand. "Is it appropriate? If it's not, then don't go support them. Haven't we had enough in Thailand?" he said.

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KK signs PIA as official airline partner

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: Karachi Kings' owner Mr. Salman Iqbal and Pakistan International Airline (PIA)'s CEO Arshad Malik signed an MoU for the upcoming sixth edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

PIA has now become the official airline partner of Kings for the second consecutive year. Similar to last year, PIA will paint Kings' logo on their planes. PIA's Boeing 777 will have Kings' logo on it. During the PSL 6, the passengers onboard will also get live updates of Kings' matches. On the MoU signing occasion, Malik wished Mr. Salman and his team 'Best of Luck' for the event. "I believe in Salman and his team Karachi Kings. I pray for them and Inshallah they will defend their PSL title," he said.

It must be noted here that PSL 6 will start on February 20 here at National Stadium. Karachi will host 20 matches in the first half of the event after which the league will shift to Lahore who will host last 14 matches including Playoffs and the Final on March 22.

Weather radar system granted...

From Page 06

It is expected that the project will improve weather surveillance capacity and the weather forecasting and warning system in the country. In the inauguration ceremony, H.E. MATSUDA Kuninori, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan stated "We will follow in the footsteps of our pioneers who built the old weather radar in Islamabad 30 years ago; Japan will remain committed to continuously enhance Pakistan's resilience in coping with natural disasters".

FURUTA Shigeki, Chief Representative, JICA Pakistan Office, while speaking at the event said "I hope that the project enables Pakistan to forecast weather more accurately and contribute to mitigation of damage caused by natural disaster in Pakistan".

Pakistan has a high frequency of natural disasters such as floods, landslides, cyclones and earthquakes. Quite notably, every year Pakistan experiences heavy damages to whole country due to floods triggered by heavy rains during the monsoon season. The Government of Japan and JICA will continue to assist the disaster risk management initiatives conducted by the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Open ballot: PM rejects PDM's...

From Page 01

The premier addressed a ceremony in connection with the second phase of Ehsaas Kafalat Program at Kallar Syedan Tehsil of Rawalpindi District and assured to fully support and provide social protection to the poor segments of the society.

The prime minister said the scope of Ehsaas Program will be further expanded to meet the basic necessities of the deserving families. Imran Khan said that seven million families will benefit from the second phase of Ehsaas Kafalat program. He said the disbursements will be made in the most transparent manner without any favoritism or political bias.

The prime minister said the poor families will also be provided with health insurance cards under which they will be able to get medical treatment worth seven hundred and fifty thousand rupees per annum. Apart from the cash assistance, the prime minister said the poor families will also be provided with assistance so that they could start their own businesses.

Imran Khan said the students of deserving families are also being provided with scholarships including at the level of under graduates so that they could also excel in their life. He said another program has also been started with the cooperation of an NGO to help the poor families build their own houses. He said Naya Pakistan Housing program will also provide shelter to the homeless people.

Briefs

FB releases update regarding Vaccine

DNA

NEW YORK: Facebook has released an official update about the largest worldwide campaign they have been running to promote authoritative information about COVID-19 vaccines. Under this campaign, they are:

- Helping people find where and when they can get vaccinated.
- Giving \$120 million in ad credits to help health ministries, NGOs and UN agencies reach billions of people around the world with COVID-19 vaccine and preventive health information.
- Expanding efforts to remove false claims on Facebook and Instagram about COVID-19 and vaccines.
- Providing data to inform effective vaccine delivery and educational efforts to build trust in COVID-19 vaccines.

A year ago, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency and since then, Facebook has helped health authorities reach billions of people with accurate information and supported health and economic relief efforts. They have connected over 2 billion people from 189 countries to reliable information about the coronavirus through their COVID-19 Information Center and informational messages, and removed more than 12 million pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram containing misinformation that could lead to imminent physical harm.

German govt seeks to extend shutdown

DNA

BERLIN: Chancellor Angela Merkel's government wants to extend strict pandemic curbs until March 14, according to a draft text seen by AFP on Wednesday, even as Germans grow increasingly weary of the shutdowns. Coronavirus infection numbers have come down in Europe's top economy after more than three months of shutdowns, but fears are growing over more contagious virus variants first detected in Britain and South Africa.

The new strains "are spreading especially quickly and require significant additional efforts", the government said in a draft document that still needs to be approved by leaders of Germany's 16 states. Merkel and the state premiers are due to hold crunch talks later on Wednesday to decide the next steps in their pandemic response.

Under Germany's federal system, regional states have significant decision-making powers and some have strayed from the government line in the past to loosen some restrictions.

The draft text stresses that schools and daycare centres should be "the first to gradually reopen", but that it is for individual states to decide how and when. Hairdressers could reopen on March 1, the document suggests, if they take the necessary hygiene precautions.

Xi extends Spring Festival greetings

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping, on behalf of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council, extended Spring Festival greetings to all Chinese Wednesday at a reception in Beijing. Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, delivered a speech at the gathering at the Great Hall of the People, greeting Chinese people of all ethnic groups, compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and overseas Chinese. This year's Spring Festival, or the Chinese Lunar New Year, falls on Feb. 12. Achieving the first centenary goal of finishing building a moderately prosperous society in all respects is a great feat of milestone significance, Xi noted. Demanding the virtues of modesty and prudence, Xi called for efforts to achieve the second centenary goal and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and make new and greater contributions to the noble cause of securing peace and development for all mankind. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan A. Rakhmetullin held a bilateral meeting with the chairman of the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan, General Nadeem Raza. During the meeting, the sides discussed issues of developing military and military-technical cooperation between the two countries. - DNA

EU was late to approve vaccines, von der Leyen admits

"We were late with the approval. We were too optimistic on mass production. And perhaps we were also too certain that the orders would actually be delivered on time," she said. "In a way, science surpassed industry"

FOREIGN DESK

BRUSSELS: The European Union was too late to approve COVID-19 vaccines and overly optimistic regarding production, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged, as she faces mounting criticism over vaccination drives on the continent. Addressing politicians in the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday, von der Leyen said 26 million vaccine doses had been delivered and that by the end of the summer, 70 percent of adults in the 27-nation bloc should have been inoculated. The EU has so far approved three vaccines - those produced by BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca, but

roll-outs have been hampered by delivery delays, production bottlenecks and political blunders. That has led to criticism from frustrated politicians and citizens across the bloc, especially as vaccination rates fall behind the US, UK, Israel, and other wealthy countries. "It is a fact that we are not today where we want to be in the fight against the virus," von der Leyen said. "We were late with the approval. We were too optimistic on mass production. And perhaps we were also too certain that the orders would actually be delivered on time," she said. "In a way, science surpassed industry."

Von der Leyen also admitted mistakes made in a bitter row last month over vaccines between the EU and the UK. The bloc had in-



tended to use emergency Brexit measures to restrict shipments of COVID-19 vaccines from crossing the Irish border into the UK but eventually retired the plan after it sent shockwaves through Northern Ireland, London and Dublin. "I deeply regret that," she said, adding that the European Com-

mission would do its utmost to protect peace in Northern Ireland. Avoiding a border between EU member Ireland and Northern Ireland, a constituent part of ex-EU member the United Kingdom, is seen as key to protecting the peace process there. Von der Leyen added that the health crisis has demonstrated there were lessons to be learned. Clinics in the continent should share more data, regulations to allow the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to move faster in authorising vaccines should be improved, and industrial bottlenecks that impede vaccine production should be addressed, she said. The EU will launch clinical trials to give regulators data more promptly and the Commission will

create a task force to help boost vaccine production, she said. Al Jazeera's Natacha Butler, reporting from Paris, said von der Leyen's comments were an attempt to "put across her point of view" after facing "a lot of personal criticism" over the EU's vaccine strategy. "It is worth noting that only three percent of adults in the EU have been vaccinated so far," Butler said. "[Von der Leyen] repeated her assertion that managing a pandemic like this is a 'marathon, not a sprint'." Defending her position, von der Leyen claimed the EU was right in choosing conditional market authorisation over emergency approval for vaccines, saying the bloc could not have cut corners in its regulatory checks, even if this led to weeks-long delays.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani exchanging views with Tapas Adhikari, ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan at parliament house. - DNA

Pests and drought led to massive decline of cotton production: PCGA

DNA

BEIJING: Cotton production in Pakistan witnessed a massive decline of about 35% to 5.57 million bales by the end of January, 2021, the lowest in 30 years, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday quoting Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA).

While multiple reasons can be identified behind the cotton plight, vigorous efforts are under way to reverse the tide. The decline in cotton growth is mainly due to pests and drought, seed degradation, and reduction of planting area. "The main problem is pest infestation and increasing temperature", said cotton grower Zafar Mehmood Khan. "This year, white fly had caused se-

rious impacts on cotton, even higher than those caused by pink worm." As estimated by Prof. Dr. Jalal Arif from the Agriculture University of Faisalabad, the devastation brought by pink worm and white fly is as high as four million bales. In addition, high temperatures during the critical month of September hampered the development of fruiting bodies.

UK quarantine violators face heavy fines

WEB DESK

LONDON: Travellers to the United Kingdom caught violating newly imposed quarantine restrictions could face a heavy fine of up to 10,000 British pounds (\$13,800), and 10 years in prison, as the British government tightens measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 and its new variants. The UK's Department of Health and Social Care said that the tough new enforcement rules, which include mandatory hotel quarantines for the first time, will come into force on February 15. Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said that the new measures were necessary "to protect the progress that we've worked so hard to accomplish." "The compliance and enforcement regime is end-to-end and all passengers should expect to be checked at various points throughout their journey," he said. Starting on Monday, all passengers to England regardless of where they are coming from are required to take two coronavirus tests on the second and eighth day of a 10-day quarantine period. The new measures build on those already in place, including a requirement for all overseas arrivals to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test no more than three days prior to departure. For contact tracing, all passengers are also required to provide contact information and travel history on arrival. Under the changes, passengers coming from so-called "red list" countries, where the virus continues to spread widely or where new potentially more transmissible variants have emerged, are also required to buy a "quarantine package" to cover both testing and hotel accommodation during the mandatory quarantine. The government has so far contracted at least 16 hotels with an initial 4,600 rooms. Other passengers coming from countries not included in the red list are allowed to self-isolate for 10 days. The 33 red list countries considered high risk include Portugal and the United Arab Emirates, as well as several countries in Africa and South America.

CJCSC hails Pak-Kazakh military ties

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Nadeem Raza highly appreciated the relations between the military authorities of Kazakhstan and Pakistan, noting that the parties traditionally pay special attention to defense and security issues. Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan, General Nadeem Raza expressed this in a meeting with Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan A. Rakhmetullin. During the meeting, the sides discussed issues of developing military and military-technical cooperation between the two countries.

A. Rakhmetullin noted that purposeful work is being carried out in Kazakhstan to develop the Armed Forces in accordance with modern requirements. In this context, great importance is attached to military cooperation with the Pakistani army, which have extensive experience in conducting combat and special operations.

UNSC fails to agree on joint Syria declaration

WEB DESK

NEW YORK: The UN Security Council failed to agree on a joint declaration on war-torn Syria, capping a day of negotiations in which the body's special envoy to the country called to jumpstart the deadlocked peace process. Russia, Syria's main ally, repeatedly blocked negotiations on the matter, diplomats said on Tuesday, although Moscow did not respond to a request for comment as to why.

The latest meeting comes nearly 10 years after Syrians followed their neighbours and joined the Arab Spring, a wave of protests that spread across the Arab world, starting from Tunisia and Egypt.

But what started as peaceful anti-government demonstrations in March 2011 quickly turned into a bloody years-long war.

The Syrian conflict has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced half the country's pre-war 23 million population, including more than five million refugees mostly in nearby countries.

Endless rounds of UN-backed peace talks in the decade since have failed to stem the bloodshed and in recent years have been largely overtaken by parallel negotiations led by Russia and Turkey, which backs some opposition factions in Syria's north-western region.

Cambodia begins vaccination

DNA

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia launched a COVID-19 vaccination campaign on Wednesday here in four hospitals after receiving a donation of Sinopharm vaccines from China on Sunday.

Hun Manet, the eldest son of Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen, got the first dose of the jab at the Calmette Hospital in the capital Phnom Penh as the drive started at 8:00 a.m. local time.

Hun Sen said on his official Facebook page, "Finally Cambodia began officially the vaccination program for its people. This is the result of fruitful cooperation between Cambodia and China, the iron-clad friends."

Ministry of Health secretary of state and spokeswoman Or Vandine said health authorities will initially vaccinate priority groups including frontline health workers, government officials, armed forces, and journalists, among others, at four hospitals in Phnom Penh. "This vaccine is safe and highly effective, and I'd like to encourage people to receive it because it will protect us, our family and the community from COVID-19," she told reporters after receiving the shot of the vaccine.

Myanmar protests continue after violence

FOREIGN DESK

YANGOON: People returned to the streets of Naypyidaw, Myanmar's remote capital, and Yangon, on Wednesday, after the police used rubber bullets and water cannon to break up protests, leaving two people in hospital, one of them fighting for her life. Several civil servants from the energy ministry were seen walking out of their workplace on Wednesday, as they denounced the coup leaders and called for the restoration of parliament. "The coup must fail," the protesters shouted. In the country's largest city, Yangon, thousands of protesters also took to the streets, with many young female demonstrators wearing costumes as a way to creatively show their opposition to the military. Meanwhile, images on social media showed dozens of Myanmar police officers

from Kayah State joining the protest and raising the three-finger salute in defiance of the military. Healthcare workers, in their green hospital gowns and with their masks on, also joined in the protests in Karen State's Myawaddy Township, according to a report by the Irrawaddy News. The United Nations and the United States condemned the use of force against the protesters, who want elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) released and a return to civilian rule. "We cannot stay quiet," youth leader Esther Zs Naw told Reuters news agency. "If there is blood shed during our peaceful protests, then there will be more if we let them take over the country." Hundreds of government workers marched through Naypyidaw in support of a civil disobedience campaign that sprung up in the wake

US, UN condemn violence against protesters

WASHINGTON: The US on Tuesday condemned violence against protesters in ongoing protests against a military coup in Myanmar. US State department spokesman, Ned Price said that everyone had a right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. "We repeat our calls for the military to relinquish power, restore democratically elected government, release those detained and lift all telecommunication restrictions and to refrain from violence," said Price. The United Nations also expressed "strong concern" over the violence. "The use of disproportionate force against demonstrators is unacceptable," said Ola Almgren, the UN resident co-ordinator in Myanmar. Meanwhile, the EU's foreign policy chief said the bloc could impose sanctions on Myanmar's military and was "reviewing" all options. The US and UN's concern followed a raid by the military on the Yangon headquarters of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party late on Tuesday. "The military dictator raided and destroyed NLD headquarters at around 9.30 p.m.," said the National League for Democracy, Suu Kyi's party. Earlier in the day, security forces in Myanmar used rubber bullets and tear gas against anti-coup protesters who rallied to defy a ban on gatherings. Demonstrators want power restored to the deposed civilian government and freedom for the nation's elected leader, Suu Kyi, and her allies. - DNA

of last week's coup and has been joined by people including doctors, teachers and railway workers. Tens of thousands have taken to the streets across the country in recent days. Late on Tuesday, the military raided the Yangon headquarters of the NLD. "The military dictator raided and destroyed NLD headquarters at around 9.30pm (15:00 GMT)," the National League for Democracy announced in a short statement on its Facebook page. The raid was carried out by about a dozen police personnel, who forced their way into the building in the commercial capital after dark, elected lawmakers said. The party, which won November 2020's election by a landslide, had been due to start a second term on the day the military seized power. The raid followed the fourth day of demonstrations across Myanmar with police using water cannon

in several cities, firing rubber-coated bullets in Naypyidaw and deploying tear gas in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city. The US condemned the escalation, urging the military to free Aung San Suu Kyi and others detained in last week's coup and step down. "We strongly condemn violence against demonstrators," US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington, DC. "All individuals in Burma have rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, including for the purposes of peaceful protest." Price said the US's attempts to reach Aung San Suu Kyi "in the hours and days after the coup" had been denied, but he said the international community was "attempting every avenue to ensure that democracy and civilian leadership is restored in Burma." Myanmar was previously known as Burma.

Briefs

Pak, China to celebrate 70 years of diplomatic ties

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan Ambassador to China, Moin ul Haq said on Wednesday that Pakistan and China are planning more than a hundred activities to commemorate the 70 years long diplomatic relations between the two countries. The events would include exchanges of high-level delegations, cultural exhibitions, photographic exhibitions, fashion events and publication of books. "We are also planning to twin a number of cities between China and Pakistan to add to what we already have along with holding the webinars of trade and investment", he said. Talking to China Economic Net (CEN) he said, "This year is a special year for China and Pakistan. I hope that this year can mark a new chapter in our relationship, a glorious chapter. With the Chinese Spring Festival approaching, he also wished a happy Chinese New Year and extended greetings. He told CEN that the embassy was also working on many interesting ideas. "We hope to set up a Pakistani special area in the World Park in Beijing. We could name some of the streets in China as well as in Pakistan in the name of a Pakistani or Chinese leader or city", he said. Pakistan National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser and Chairman of the Chinese National Peoples Congress Li Zhanhu recently have agreed on the formation of a joint parliamentary committee for China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For the next stage of development of CPEC, Ambassador Haque also shared his opinion. Along the corridor, we are going to set up nine special economic zones.

PMC increases seats for colleges

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Medical Commission on Thursday announced that it is increasing the seats of medical and dental colleges across the country. The development came after the PMC received requests from provinces for an emergency enhancement of medical and dental college seats to accommodate various quotas. "PMC had reviewed these requests and authorised the enhancement of seats in certain colleges," the medical body said. The distribution of these seats to accommodate various quotas is the purview of provincial governments, and they may proceed under their mandate and authority. According to the statistics given by the PMC, 495 seats have been added to the existing numbers. Two hundred and forty seats have been increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 240 in Punjab, and 15 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Explosions in Kabul kill two

KABUL: A chain of bomb explosions targeting Kabul police on Wednesday killed a district police chief and his bodyguard and also wounded five people, officials said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blasts, which were all caused by so-called sticky bombs, explosive devices attached to vehicles that are remotely detonated or set off by timers. The largest of the attacks struck a police car in a western Kabul neighbourhood; the force of the blast was so strong that the car flipped upside down, killing the city's District 5 police chief, Mohammadzai Kochi, and his bodyguard. The driver of the car was wounded, according to two Afghan officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to the media. - Agencies

CULTURAL HERITAGE ALONG THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD

Book 'From Landi Kotal to Wagah' launched

The development and publication of the book was supported by the Embassy of Switzerland, the European Union and the World Bank. The author is Mr. Salman Rashid, a preeminent travel writer and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society

NAVEED MIRAJ

ISLAMABAD: UNESCO and Government of Pakistan Launched Coffee table book, 'From Landi Kotal to Wagah: Cultural Heritage along the Grand Trunk Road at the Pakistan National Council of Arts. The result of a collaboration of more than two years, the coffee table book explores the built and intangible heritage along the Grand Trunk Road (GT Road) in Pakistan, combining a thoroughly researched narrative with a wealth of photos that illustrate the diverse and rich panorama of this 2500-year-old historical trade road. Over the centuries, the road has been extensively travelled by traders, pilgrims and great civilizations like the Greeks, Turks and Mughals who left their marks, perpetuating the mythical status of this legendary road. The aim of the book is to foster tourism, promote awareness and ultimately protect the little known historic sites (largely non-Muslim) along the GT road that spans over 2400km from Bangladesh to Afghanistan. The development and publication of the book was supported by the Embassy of Switzerland, the European Union and the World Bank. The author is Mr. Salman Rashid, a preeminent travel writer and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. The book is richly illustrated with photographs taken by Mr. Asad Zaidi. It is distributed in a co-publishing arrangement with Sang-E-Meel Publishers. At the book launch, Ms. Patricia McPhillips (Country Representative and Director, UNESCO) welcomed the guests and thanked all partners for their support and contribution. She stated that, through this book, UNES-



CO hoped to highlight the vast potential cultural development in various parts of Pakistan, and the pressing need to preserve and protect heritage sites, in order to further our shared cause of encouraging cultural pluralism and social cohesion. Welcoming the publication of the book, Mr. Benedict de Cerjat Ambassador of Switzerland highlighted the rich and impressive cultural heritage of Pakistan. He emphasized that

the Grand Trunk Road is one of Asia's oldest and longest major roads, which linked Central Asia to the Indian Subcontinent, facilitated trade for centuries and is still used for transportation. He commended UNESCO for its valuable initiative and encouraged the guests to follow the author's journey and discover the many fascinating places among the historical road. In her speech Ms. Androullah Kaminara Ambassador of Eu-

ropean Union to Pakistan emphasized; "Over the centuries, along the Grand Trunk Road not only goods but Cultures, Ideas, Religions and languages were exchanged, leaving the permanent trace on the societies along the road today. The rich manifestation of Cultural diversity that needs to be protected and promoted, especially for its key role in attracting tourism and boosting economic growth—which are both priorities of the

Government of Pakistan." The author of the book Mr. Salman Rashid spoke about the many years he has spent traveling around the GT Road, and the fascinating history and culture he has experienced in his travels, which can now be shared with readers through this book. The Chief Guest, Mr. Shafiqat Mahmood Federal Minister for the National Heritage and Culture Division appreciated

the role this book will play in fostering tourism, while also preserving the history and heritage of Pakistan for generations to come. All partners emphasized that this unique book serves to encourage the people and government of Pakistan to protect and preserve the heritage which forms an integral part of the history of the land that is now Pakistan. The book will be available for sale online and in major.

FM urges diplomats to be innovative

FM Qureshi stressed that a better civil service is important to provide good governance

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has urged the diplomats to be innovative and mould themselves according to modern demands of diplomacy to achieve goals efficiently and effectively. Addressing the graduation ceremony of a diplomatic course at the Foreign Service Academy in Islamabad on Wednesday, he said a series of reforms have been instituted in the foreign ministry which is today more open to inputs for policy formulation. He said we are interacting with different segments of the society including the think tanks to get a fresh perspective. He however said the foreign policy has to be led by the diplomats whilst accommodating the inputs



from different stakeholders. The Foreign Minister said our diplomats need to be more articulate and effective team members who think out of box and deliver results. He said we are employing images, graphics and videos to better communicate with the wider array of audiences. He said specialized cells including crisis management and Kashmir cells have been established to

deliver better results. The Foreign Minister stressed that a better civil service is important to provide good governance. He said the political leaders give their ideas and policies and it is the civil service which have to implement them. He said we want the foreign ministry to be such an institution that is strong enough to give the leadership that the nation requires.

Turkey to resolve S-400 dispute

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: Turkey's proposal to not fully activate its controversial Russian S-400 missile system offers an olive branch to the new US administration to start negotiations over the issue that has severely strained bilateral ties, according to analysts. Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said in an interview with a Turkish newspaper that his country is open to a deal similar to one with Greece, another NATO member, which was made after it bought S-300s – an older generation of the Russian defence system – in 1997. "There is no decision to use them [S-400s] constantly," Akar was quoted as saying by the Hurriyet daily on Tuesday, adding the missiles could be deployed only if Turkey comes under threat. Turkey's purchase of the S-400 system has been one of the key issues that have clouded relations between Turkey and the United States, leading to the imposition of American sanctions.

Passenger plane catches fire in Houthi attack

RIYADH: Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday targeted Abha International Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia, causing a civilian plane on the tarmac to catch fire, the kingdom's state television reported, an attack that threatens to escalate Yemen's grinding war. Firefighters brought the blaze under control, Saudi state-owned Al-Ekhabariya TV said, without offering word on possible casualties from the assault. Saudi officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack soon afterward, with military spokesman Yehia Sareai saying the group used four bomb-laden drones to target Abha airport. "This targeting comes in response to the continued aerial bombardment and the brutal siege on our country," Sareai said, noting that the Houthis consider the airport a military not civilian target. Col. Turki al-Maliki, the spokesman for the Saudi-led military coalition fighting in Yemen, said the forces intercepted two bomb-laden drones launched by the Houthis toward the kingdom. He condemned the assault as a "systematic and deliberate attempt to target civilians in the southern region" of the country. Since 2015, the Houthis battling the Saudi-led military coalition have repeatedly used ballistic missiles and drones to target international airports, along with military installations and critical oil infrastructure, within Saudi Arabia. Those attacks, often focused on the southern cities of Abha and Jizan, have wounded dozens and killed at least one person over recent years. In November 2017, the Houthis even reached Riyadh's international airport, deep inside the kingdom. No one was hurt in the attack, which marked the first time that a Houthi missile had come so close to a heavily populated center. Riyadh is around 620 miles (1,000 kilometers) north of the border with Yemen. - DNA

Pakistan condemns attack on Saudi airport

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has strongly condemned Houthi militants' drone attacks on Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia, causing a civilian plane on the tarmac to catch fire. These attacks threaten peace and security of Saudi Arabia, as well as the region. We call for the immediate cessation of such attacks. Pakistan reiterates its full support and solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against any threats to its security and territorial integrity. Since 2015, the Houthis battling the Saudi-led military coalition have repeatedly used ballistic missiles and drones to target international airports, along with military installations and critical oil infrastructure, within Saudi Arabia. Those attacks, often focused on the southern cities of Abha and Jizan, have wounded dozens and killed at least one person over recent years.



RAWALPINDI: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Ali Alizada held a warm and productive meeting with General Nadeem Raza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and discussed the possibilities of further strengthening and deepening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. - DNA

Pak congratulates UAE over Mars mission: FO

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday congratulated the leadership and people of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the success of the Emirate's Mars mission, Hope Probe. In a tweet, Foreign Office Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said it is a testament to the vision of the UAE leadership, and a pride for its people, as well as Muslim Ummah. The successful Mars mission was a testament to the vision of the UAE leadership, and pride for its people, as well as Muslim Ummah. It is pertinent to mention here that the United Arab Emirates' first mission to Mars reached the red planet and entered orbit on Tuesday after a seven-month, 494 million km journey, allowing it to start sending data about the Martian atmosphere and climate. This makes the UAE the fifth space agency to reach the planet. The Mars programme is part of the UAE's efforts to develop its scientific and technological capabilities and reduce its reliance on oil. The UAE Space Agency even has a plan for a Mars settlement by 2117. "Contact with #HopeProbe has been established again. The Mars Orbit Insertion is now complete," the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) said.