



# Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

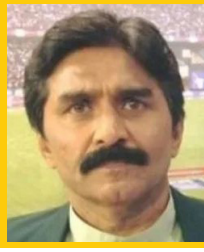
Price Rs. 20

**Naval chief meets mily leadership of Kingdom of Bahrain**

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**Javed Miandad opposes PCB's club reg fee**

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**RCCI shows concerns on new restrictions**

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## Briefs

**Blinken speaks on North Korea**

DNA

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday the United States would continue to work with allies towards the denuclearization of North Korea. Blinken made the remarks at a bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi in Tokyo, saying that his visit was meant to reaffirm the US-Japan alliance, Blinken said. He said democratic values were under threat in places like Myanmar and China.

**PDM is divided: Asad Umar**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar on Tuesday said the opposition was pretending unity just to save personal interests as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) was disintegrated. Talking to a private news channel, he said there was no ideology and consensus among the PDM except that to protect corruption of their leaderships. The minister said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan Peoples Party had no confidence on each other and both their leadership were trying to use each other.

**PDM leaders to be disappointed**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Punjab Chief Minister on Information and Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan Tuesday predicted that leaders of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) would soon face disappointment in their propaganda campaign launched against the ruling party to topple the system. In an interview with a private television channel, she said disgruntled leaders of PDM were facing political differences in their meetings that has also created a wide space in their relationships. "Mistrust and confusion among the leaders of PDM has wideen day by day," she said.

## Zardari asks Nawaz to come back

**Says PPP will not go for resignations; calls for collective movement against the sitting government**

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Former President and PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari has called upon the PML leader Nawaz Sharif to come back to the country and add a new force to the PDM movement. During the PDM session on Tuesday everybody was taken aback when former President made this demand. Sources privy to the meeting confided that Maryam Nawaz was almost stunned when she heard Asif Zardari asking Nawaz Sharif to come back. Upon this demand she retorted "Zardari sahib will you ensure safety of Mian sahib if he returns to Pakistan?" Asif Zardari according to sources further said resignations from the assemblies was not a viable option. His contention was that government can be given tough time while remaining part of the system.

Continued on Page 06

## Long march postponed

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has postponed a long march against the government. After the PDM meeting, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, head of the Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam and Opposition Alliance, came for a press conference. He said that 9 parties were in favour of resignations in the meeting and PPP has asked for time for this. Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that the long march of March 26 should be considered postponed till the response of PPP. The PDM chief then abruptly left the gathering, leaving

Continued on Page 06

## Belarus envoy discusses cooperation with minister

**Invites Hammad Azhar to visit Belarus**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Belarus Andrei Metelitsa met with Muhammad Hammad Azhar, the Federal Minister for Industries and Production Division of Pakistan. During the meeting the sides discussed the state of bilateral cooperation in industry and avenues of interaction between Belarus and Pakistan in this area.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Belarus Andrei Metelitsa in a meeting with Industries Minister Hammad Azhar. - DNA

The interlocutors paid particular attention to the issues of holding the third meeting of the Joint Working Group on industry, as well as preparation for signing of an amended inter-governmental agreement on cooperation in the field of industrial, scientific and

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan, India water talks on March 23

**A delegation officials including the FO Spokesman Zahid Hafeez will attend the meeting in New Delhi**

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The water talks between officials of Pakistan and India will be held on March 23 and 24 in New Delhi. A delegation of Pakistani officials including Indus Water Commissioner Mehr Ali Shah and the Foreign Office Spokesman Zahid Hafeez will attend the meeting in New

Delhi. The previous session of talks was held in Lahore, two years ago. Pakistan will present its objections over India's contentious water projects on Chenab river, sources said. Indus Water Commissioner Mehr Ali Shah has said that Pakistan's delegation will attend the two-day session in New Delhi.

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmed briefing Prime Minister Imran Khan on his recent visit to Qatar. - DNA

## Pak buys Chinese vaccine

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Tuesday has purchased coronavirus vaccine from China for the first time. According to the health ministry sources, the Pakistani authorities have signed an agreement with Chinese company Sinopharm for vaccines. The company will provide the vaccine to Pakistan in phases, however, the first batch of five million coronavirus doses from China was expected to land in Islamabad on Tuesday. The sources told that frontline health workers and elderly people will get vaccinated on priority basis. It is to be mentioned here that the campaign to vaccinate people above sixty years and health workers against coronavirus is already underway.

## 'PM wants e-voting as soon as possible'

**The cabinet also approved Ramadan Relief Package worth 7.8 billion rupees on 19 essential items**

ZUBAIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan wants elections to be conducted through an electronic system as soon as possible, said Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry Tuesday. Sitting beside federal minister Hammad Azhar, Chaudhry said the prime minister sought an update every week on shifting the electoral process to electronic machines. The federal cabinet also approved Ramadan Relief Package worth 7.8 billion rupees on 19 essential items to

facilitate the common people during the holy month through the network of Utility Stores across Pakistan. The government has voiced the demand for an electronic voting process ever since allegations of horse-trading and rigging were exchanged between the government and the Opposition parties after the recently-held Senate elections and the election for the post of Senate chairman. "The PTI's politics is based on accountability and transparency of the polls," he said. "The government's team is working to ensure transparent elections [in future]." The minister spoke about

the PDM's Tuesday meeting in Islamabad, saying that "political orphans" of the alliance will never accept anything. Praising PM Imran Khan, the minister said ever since he got elected to power, the prime minister has been concerned with solving the problems of the poor. Touching upon the economic situation of the country, Chaudhry said it was no easy task to pull the government out of an economic crisis. "Out of 85 enterprises, 51 are encountering losses," he said. "We will hold an audit of 10 important institutions that have been reporting losses," added the minister.

## Air Chief pays farewell calls on COAS, DG ISI

SHUJAAT HAMZA

RAWALPINDI: Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan, Chief of Air Staff (CAS), on his farewell visit, called on General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) at GHQ, on Tuesday. COAS



thanked the CAS for his services to the Nation during a long and illustrious career. COAS also appreciated CAS's dynamic leadership and professionalism displayed during op "Swift Retort" and critical support rendered in fight against terrorism. Because of his immense efforts and quality leadership, Pakistan Air Force today is a force second to none. Earlier on arrival at GHQ, the CAS was presented Guard of Honour at Yadgar-e-Shuhada. Separately, CAS Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan paid a farewell call on Director General Inter Services Intelligence Lieutenant General Faiz Hamid. DG ISI Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed received the Service Chief. DG ISI thanked the Air Chief for his contribution in enhancing the professional capability of PAF during his illustrious career. CAS also appreciated ISI's performance in guarding and furthering national interests.

## Protesters storm Yemen presidential palace

NEWS DESK

ADEN: Hundreds of angry Yemeni protesters on Tuesday stormed the presidential palace in the southern city of Aden, according to local sources. Demonstrators broke into the Maasheeq Presidential Palace amid public anger over the lack of services, poor living conditions and depreciation of the local currency, the sources said. Presidential guards failed to stop the protesters from forcing their way into the palace, the sources said.

## Virus cases continue to swell

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: In an alarming sign, the national positivity ratio of Pakistan shot past 7% on Tuesday after over 2,500 cases were reported in the last 24 hours. Daily data issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCCOC) showed that 35,303 tests were conducted in the country in the last 24 hours out of which 2,511 returned as positive taking the positivity ratio to 7.1%. While, the positivity ratio in the federal capital has reached 7.7%, the District Health Officer said. The DHO said that 414 cases came out positive.

## PTI Govt's austerity drive yields positive results

**Information Ministry spearheaded by Federal Minister Shibli Faraz plays its role in proper projection of govt activities and various developmental projects**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Prime Minister had promised to set an example of austerity while using public funds by the Prime Minister's house and Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister fulfilled his promise and has significantly reduced the expenditures to save the precious public money. The Prime Minister also set an example for the other government functionaries to save the public money wherever possible. The Strategic Communication Wing of this Ministry has tabulated data, which reflected saving made by the Prime Minister's office and Prime Minister. According to the data prepared and shared with various departments of the Ministry and the relevant quarters, the expenditure Rs. 46M were used against the allocation of Rs. 218M Providing an example to rest of the government to rationalize their expenditures caring leadership. Effective and efficient use of

tax payer money was also ensured thus setting an example of a responsible leadership. It is also a step forward towards Riasat-e-Madina. Similarly, Travel & Transport Head Tax payers Saved 10M out of allocated budget. Entertainment & Gifts Tax payers Expenditure of Rs.1000 were allocated to this head compare to 1.5M 4. Physical Assets Tax payers Rs. 4M were saved under this head. Tour Expenses Tax payers Rs. 1.2M were spent out of allocated budget of 20M. Discretionary Grant Tax payers Rs.1000 were allocated against Rs. 1M 7. Wages of House hold servants Tax payers Expenditure under this head were cut down by Rs. 30M. Likewise, Prime Minister's Estate Garden Establishment was done and tax payers Saving of Rs. 10M was made Busting the myth of enhance expenditure at PMO in a recent programme on a private channel, it was alleged that PM office has, in contradiction to austerity measures, increased the budget/

expenditures for the fiscal years 2018-19 and 2019-2020, this news lacks factual data and devoid of any supporting evidence from official sources. In the age of social media, where misinformation spreads with the speed of light, it is expected of traditional media to dig into facts before running a story. According to the official data from finance ministry, the expenditures for PMO has actually been reduced significantly as prom-

ised by PM Imran Khan. The federal Budget 2019-2020 volume 1 titled Current Expenditures serial no 13 PMO (page 302-310) clearly states a decrease in expenditures by PMO as compared to previous fiscal year. In any budget there are two types of expenditures 1) Employees Related Expenses (ERE) 2) Operating expenses (OE). As far as ERE is concerned, these are the expenses that comprised of pay and allowances of officials

and staff working at PMO and demand for ERE related expenses in 2019-2020 showed a slight increase that is an outcome of annual increments which is a basic right of government employees regardless of their posting which is also a cause of slight increase in total budget from previous year. 2: The demand estimates for the fiscal budget 2019 -2020 under the head of operating expenses amounted to approx. Rs.218460000 (218 million,) while actual allocated budget was approx. Rs. 46,399,000 (46 million), huge cut from proposed demand estimate. Similarly, a considerable reduction was done under "travel and transportation head" worth of approx. Rs. 10 million. In addition to that, a visible reduction of budget can be seen under the head of "Entertainment & Gifts" from 1.5 million to just only RS. 1000. (that too to keep head of account alive). As far as expenditures on "Physical Assets" are concerned, a reduction of approx. PKR 4 million was done on the instructions of

PM. Another massive cut was placed on "Tour Expenses" of worth Rs.1.2 millions. Moreover, an amount of approximately Rs.20 million was reduced from "Miscellaneous expenditures". The most important and prominent reduction was shown under "Discretionary Grants" where only Rs. 1000 were allocated (just to keep the head of A/c alive) from original estimate of Rs. 1 Million. The expenditure on "Wages of Household Servant" was cut by approximately Rs. 30 million that shows PM is adhering to his vision of austerity. Under "Prime Minister's Estate Garden Establishment" a reduction of approx. Rs. 10 million was done. PM Imran Khan has kept his words by reducing expenditures of his office so that a minimum burden may be placed on exchequer. This action of PM Imran Khan has set an example for all other political leaders to reduce unnecessary expenditures while not compromising on their performance.



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## Briefs

## Forest dept plants 820,919 saplings across division

FAISALABAD: The divisional forest department has planted 820,919 saplings so far against the fixed target of planting over 3 million saplings in the division during the current tree plantation drive. Divisional Forest Officer Muhammad Ali Butt said here Tuesday that 771,076 plants had been sown against the total target of 1.5 million saplings on the government and private lands in district Toba Tek Singh. He said that 8,700 saplings had been planted over the government land and nurseries against the fixed target of planting 128,000 trees in the district. He said that defence and other law-enforcement agencies would plant 246,000 saplings, while 1.13 million plants would be sown on private lands and farms in the district. Moreover, 49,843 new saplings have been planted against the total target of 1.5 million saplings in district Faisalabad. — APP

## Sindh to engage private hospitals, labs for vaccination

ATHAR SUFI

KARACHI: Sindh Cabinet has accorded approval to engage private hospitals and labs for mass Covid-19 vaccination across the province. The cabinet meeting, held in Karachi on Tuesday with Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in the chair, was informed that the Provincial Health Department has so far received a total of two hundred forty-one thousand doses of vaccine. The meeting was attended by provincial ministers, advisor law, chief secretary and concerned secretaries. COVID Mass Vaccination: The Sindh Cabinet has decided to engage private hospitals and laboratories in COVID-19 Mass Vaccination programme and encourage the private health sector to import COVID-19 vaccine, allocate human resources and establish vaccination centers, especially in Karachi. The health department told the cabinet that during COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial response to combat coronavirus was characterized by mixed public and private delivery of care. The private health sector played a critical role in providing essential health services, especially when the public sector was so overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients catered the need to test patients for COVID-19 as well as the isolation and treatment of patients who required hospitalization and critical care.

## Heavy taxes on PFY declared alarming for textile export

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Importers and traders of Polyester Filament Yarn (PFY), which is the basic raw material of textile industry and small & medium units, has termed excessive rise in prices in local markets as catastrophic for exports and appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan to take steps to save the industry from catastrophe and demanded to abolish all taxes on import of PFY. They feared that if the government does not immediately allow duty-free import of PFY, Pakistan will lose a large number of export orders. In an appeal to Prime Minister Imran Khan, Khawar Noorani, deputy convenor standing committee on imports, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), former chairman Pakistan Yarn Merchants Association (PYMA) and Khalid Iqbal Gader, former vice chairman PYMA, said that local manufacturers of PFY have failed to meet the export oriented industry demand and SMEs, but despite this, the government protecting them, had imposed a regulatory duty on PFY imports, which is totally unfair.

## Pak needs qualified technologists to gear up industrialization

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD. Pakistan must produce a chain of highly skilled and qualified technologists to gear up the pace of industrialization, said Engineer Hafiz Ihtasham Javed, President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI). Addressing FCCI Standing Committee on Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers (IEEE), he stressed the need to further improve industrial academia linkages. He said that societal values have created a pompous trend of producing doctors and engineers by downgrading technologists and other professionals deemed necessary to strengthen the industrialization process. He said that it is a change that FCCI and IEEE have acknowledged the importance of technologists and are regularly organizing awareness sessions to harness the skills and expertise of the technologists in addition to elevating its social status. Engineer Hafiz Ihtasham Javed told that the textile printing sector has been using basic printing ma-



chinery for the last 8 years but still we have to invite technologists for trouble shooting from China and other European countries manufacturing textile printing machinery. He said that trouble shooting is a common phenomenon but the technologists from other countries have capacity to settle it down while our

technologists generally lack requisite skill and expertise. Regarding his practical experience as engineer, he said that he gave his debut from his own factory and saved approximately 30% of electricity just by implementing fundamental electricity laws. Continuing, he said that engineers are supposed to

facilitate masses and hence our engineers should also make concerted efforts to fulfill the needs of the huge population of 220 million. He said that engineers generally dig "Out of Box" solutions while technologists ensure expeditious implementation on it. He also mentioned problems in technology transfer and

told that an EU company demanded 2.5 million euro as its equity for a joint venture. He stressed the need to enhance the membership of IEEE to get latest technologies from the developed countries and replicating the same in accordance with the local needs. He said that he has good relations with Federal Minister

for Science & Technology Mr. Fawad Chaudhry which could be utilized for the collective benefits of the country and community. He also requested office bearers of the local chapter of the IEEE to give its suggestions in writing so that proper steps could be taken to ensure speedy implementation on the same.



ISLAMABAD: Students of different institutions are protesting against online classes and closure of educational institutions in front of national press club Islamabad. — DNA

## 37 children of martyred FESCO employees get appointment letters

DNA

FAISALABAD: Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) chief executive officer Engr. Arshad Munir said the glorious tradition of the children of martyred employees would be continued in future because they were proud of the department. Addressing a function of distributing appointment letters among 37 children

of FESCO martyred employees here on Tuesday, he said, "We are optimistic about our youth, adding that newly inducted employees should serve the department sincerely and service of the consumers should be their motto. He also directed the newly appointed employees to perform their duty with full dedication and honesty so that they could prove themselves as the best choice for the department.

## CDA demolishes various illegal constructions

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Anti encroachment campaign of Capital Development Authority (CDA) is underway. Various illegal constructions were demolished during operations on Tuesday. The Enforcement department of CDA demolished a boundary wall while conducting an operation in Dhoke Tahli Bari Imam. Similarly, a sale point of construction material was demolished at IJP road near Pindora Chungi. Heavy machinery of RWO which was deployed at Sangani toll plaza GT road was removed. According to the administration of CDA, the operations against encroachments and illegal constructions will be continued. Encroachments and illegal constructions will not be al-

lowed anywhere in the city.

**Water supply remains partially suspended:** Capital Development Authority (CDA) told the citizens that water supply in various sectors will remain partially suspended from March 18 to March 20 due to work of repairing and changing of 36 inch dia water pipeline. The sectors which will face the suspension of water supply include sector G-6, G-7, G-8, G-9, F-7, and F-8. However, supply will remain open with break of one day during the said period. CDA will give its best to complete work as soon as possible, so that citizens may get smooth water supply. The residents of said sectors are requested to store water for using during the days of no water supply. Water should be used carefully. Citizens should cooperate with CDA in this regard.

## UNHCR appreciates int'l support for Afghan refugees

BUREAU REPORT

ISLAMABAD: UN refugee agency (UNHCR) on Tuesday appreciated the commitment of international community to continue support to Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan. "Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for forty long years, many of them hoping to return home when they see conditions improve inside Afghanistan," said UNHCR Representative, Noriko Yoshida, adding "But Pakistan deserves more of our support. Today's visit to a refugee village in Haripur shows the international community's resolve and solidarity to meet the needs of Afghan refugees and their host



Ambassador of Spain handing over a technical and vocational training certificate to an Afghan refugee at a NAVTTC institute. — DNA

communities." Yoshida made these remarks during a field visit in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa accompanied by a delegation of several European countries — including Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland as well as the European Union. UNHCR and the delegation

met with Afghan refugees and Pakistani host community members in Haripur to listen their stories and how they live together side by side as communities, as well as their outlook on the future. In Kalabat Township, the delegation also visited a vocational and technical training center. Countries within the delegation have been contributing to technical and vocational training as part of UNHCR's sustainable livelihoods programmes for Pakistani host community and Afghan refugee youth. Yoshida said that the field visit was an opportunity for the delegation members to see how their support was being translated into tangible benefits for host communities and refugees in Pakistan. The Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees was also represented during the field visit. They helped provide further information about the local reality that Afghan refugees face, and the impact of both humanitarian and development assistance.

## DHQ Sargodha facing sanitation problems

MEHBOOB AHIR

SARGODHA: Due to weakness off in-charge MS doctors and in-charge security guards. We don't have time the waiting room in the civil hospital is designed for the families of the patients. It is a strong hold of drug dealers. The relatives of the patients coming from outside are also very worried. Relatives often steal mobile and other belongings from drug addicts and have no one to ask. Women from outpatients have also been harassed and involved in wrongdoing. They have no one to ask them. Worked but took no action. The relatives of the patients have appealed to the higher authorities to

take action against them and put an end to the drug cartel. The people present at saraha hospital also said that the past performance of inspector zaheer ahmed, Mehr Mohammad Yousaf ASI and constable Mohammad Nawaz of he concerned police station factory area was in front of the gate. They should also be taken special care of. So that they also have no trouble. **Motorcyclist killed:** A 35-year-old man was killed in a road accident in Khushab police limits. Police said on Tuesday that motorcyclist, Muhammad Farhan, resident of Ochal-i, was on his way to work when a speeding dumper truck hit the two-wheeler near Katha Sughral murr and managed to escape.

## Uzbekistan delegation visits Karachi Port

ISLAMABAD: Uzbekistan delegation visited the Karachi Port and witnessed container and cargo handling at Karachi Port Trust (KPT). The delegation was headed by Deputy Chairman of Uzbekistan Railways, Akmal Kamalov, said in a press release issued here on Tuesday.

During the visit, the delegation was briefed by Chairman KPT on port operations.

Ambassador of Uzbekistan Oybek Usmanov and Federal Secretary, Ministry of Maritime Affairs Rizwan Ahmed were also present on the occasion.

KPT assured the Uzbek side that they had sufficient capacity to handle Uzbek trade at Karachi Port.

The Head of delegation Deputy Chairman of Uzbekistan Railways Akmal Kamalov and Ambassador Oybek Usmani said that they were exploring the potential of KPT and in the near future, a significant volume of Uzbekistan cargo and containers would be availing KPT facilities. An interaction with the maritime business partners was also held at Port Dignitary House. Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Syed Ali Haider Zaidi assured the Uzbek delegation of an enabling environment to promote maritime development. The Uzbekistan Ambassador informed the Federal Minister Syed Ali Haider Zaidi that they were fast tracking this project and Minister reciprocated that this maritime initiative would be fast tracked and facilitated. — APP

## Sanitation charges approves for Faisalabad

DNA

FAISALABAD: The meeting of the Human Resource Committee of the Board of Directors of Faisalabad Waste Management Company was held at the FPMC Complex. Deputy Commissioner / Chairman Board of Directors Muhammad Ali presided over the meeting. During the meeting the matters related to the provision of sanitation services in new areas were discussed while approval was also given to impose sanitation charges in these areas. During the meeting, it was decided to continue action against those dumping garbage in residential and commercial areas. He also directed to run a public awareness campaign on standard sanitation, usage etiquette in public toilets, water conservation and sanitation. CEO Kashif Raza Awan, GM Operations Col (ret'd) Emad Gill, Dr. Shafaqat Gill, Muzammil Sultan and other members were also present in the meeting. Deputy Commissioner said that further steps should be taken to raise the standard of cleanliness in the city so that the city looks clean and beautiful in all respects as per the expectations of the citizens.

## Daraz launches Pak Day sale

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Daraz launches its first mega sale of 2021 on the occasion of Pakistan Day, with leading brands and local sellers. The platform has an assortment of 15 million products across 100+ categories, providing its users all kinds of products at the tip of their fingers through the Daraz App. With more and more consumers turning online for their shopping needs, Daraz strengthened its commitment to its users with increased safety, wider products ranges, better offers and special sale campaigns and faster deliveries than usual. During the Pakistan Day Sale at Daraz, sellers from every corner of the country will be selling their products at the best possible prices. Moreover, leading FMCG brands such as Unilever, P&G, and Nestle will be available on dMart, the platform's specialized online grocery channel, which saw exceptional growth and demand last year and contributed the most to orders on Daraz. Additionally, new brands like Maahru have also been featured.

## Pak-Arab forum to promote ties with Arab countries

RAJA PERVAIZ

ISLAMABAD: The formation of Pak-Arab Forum was being worked out for promoting tourism, strengthening economic, cultural and religious ties with the Arab Islamic countries, said Special Aide to Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Tuesday. Talking to the media, Ashrafi said Pakistan desired unity and solidarity among all the Islamic countries, which must develop a joint strategy to eradicate extremist organizations, groups

and individuals. He said the relations with the Arab countries were getting stronger and Pakistan's foreign policy in that regard was being praised everywhere. Ashrafi said Pakistan's stance on the issue of Islamophobia and Namoos-e-Risalat had been recognized in the entire Muslim world. "There is a need to streamline cohesive and coordinated struggle to eliminate the menaces of Islamophobia, extremism and terrorism at world level," he said. The stronger the Organization of Islamic Cooperation would



be, the stronger the Muslim Ummah emerged, said Ashrafi. He said Harmain Al-Sharifain were the center of the Muslim

Ummah. "If the security and stability of Saudi Arabia comes under threat, the Muslim Ummah cannot remain silent," he added. Pakistan, he said, welcomed reconciliation between the Gulf countries and Qatar and wanted to make an end to differences among other Islamic countries with one another. The problems of Islamic countries could only be solved through dialogue, he said. "Wars only bring destruction and countries in wake of hostilities and warlike situations can't build." Together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),

he said, Pakistan was raising the voice of the entire Muslim Ummah and the Islamic world at world forums. At the request of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the World Islamic League, the Sri Lankan government had allowed the Muslims' burial permission for coronavirus victims, he said. Replying to a question, he said it was unfortunate that the issue of Hijab was creating problems for the Muslims everywhere, including Europe. Ashrafi said that talks could be held with the opposition to eradicate corruption and for development of the country.

## Briefs

### Developers offer NPHP 189 sites to build houses

ISLAMABAD: The public and private sectors of the country have offered 189 sites to build low cost housing units to provide affordable accommodation for the lower middle class under Naya Pakistan Housing Programme (NPHP).

Out of these, 57 sites have been offered by private sectors to build around 104,912 houses and 132 sites have been offered by the government sectors which are being evaluated, an official in the Ministry of Housing and Works told APP.

He said the present government intends to build a total of five million housing units to cater for the needs of the shelter less and low-income people in the country.

The official said the government has received so far over two million applications, out of which 1.8 million are eligible. He said that various schemes are being launched to initially accommodate these applicants.

He said the housing schemes by Naya Pakistan Housing and Development Authority (NPHDA) in Islamabad and Lahore are being finalized. The official said that so far, 6769 houses have been completed under various schemes. The official said that it is expected that within short period of time, remaining planned housing schemes will be launched. Many of the eligible applicants who have opted for housing units in Islamabad and Lahore would be allotted units. — APP

### PNCA to launch "Seen Studio"

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) would launch its own "Seen Studio" on March 20.

PNCA Director General Dr. Fouzia Saeed while talking to APP said that the "Seen Studio" an out of box venture to celebrate all kind of modern and traditional music forms in a unique way. The prominent folk singers including QurbanNiazi, Banorehmat, Zarsanga, Ustad Abdul Sattar Tari Khan, FazalJutt, Salman Ahmed and others would perform in the studio.

"A platform for our viewers to experience the diverse musical range", she said. She said the PNCA audience would enjoy different music in episodes produced by "Seen Studio". Dr. Fouzia said that the studio would explore the creative musical stage of Pakistan National Council of the Arts. — APP

### Law-GAT to enroll as an advocate

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has announced to conduct Law Graduate Assessment Test (LAW-GAT) for eligibility to get enrolment as an advocate with bar council.

The objective of the assessment test is to ensure proper scrutiny and evaluation of a law graduates desirous to join the legal profession so that only competent individuals possessing necessary basic knowledge of law may enter the legal profession for practicing law, the official sources told APP on Wednesday.

Therefore, the sources said, a law graduate only becomes eligible to apply to a Bar Council for enrolment as an advocate if he/she qualifies the assessment test to be conducted by the Higher Education Commission, having been so authorized by the Pakistan Bar Council, pursuant to the aforementioned Order of the Supreme Court and read with the Section 26(cc) of Legal Practitioners and Bar Council's Act 1973 and rules of the PBC. They informed that the person having passed Bachelor's degree in Law or equivalent from a university recognized by HEC/PBC are eligible to apply. According to them, the test will consist of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs). —APP

## Egypt keen to boost trade relations with Pakistan

The ambassador of Egypt Tarek Dahroug expressed these views in a meeting with The Chairman of Pakistan Cultural Forum Zafar Bakhtawari, Ahsan Bakhtawari and Waqar Bakhtawari

### STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The last visit of Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mehmood Qureshi to Egypt was fruitful to enhance bilateral ties between two countries. There is a need for more such visits to further expand cooperation. The ambassador of Arab Republic Egypt Tarek Dahroug expressed these views in a meeting with

The Chairman of Pakistan Cultural Forum Zafar Bakhtawari, Ahsan Bakhtawari and Waqar Bakhtawari at his residence in Egyptian embassy. He further said that Gen.Nadim Raza the Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Committee would also visit Egypt this month to promote the defence cooperation between two countries.

Zafar Bakhtawari discussed the matter of mutual benefit and cooperation with the ambassador of Egypt including the establishment of Direct Airlink between Egypt and Pakistan. The



ambassador hoped that direct airlink would enhance the relation between two countries including Tourism

industry and Egyptian Airlink would start its operation in Pakistan very soon. Ahsan Bakhtawari & Waqar

Bakhtawari showed keen interest to develop economic ties and further added that the Direct Airlink and

more visits of Businessmen would be beneficial to boost trade and investment opportunities. Deputy Head of

mission of Egypt and commercial counselor of Egypt embassy were also present at the meeting.

### Pakistan Day sales attract buyers in capital

ISLAMABAD: With only less than a week left in the celebrations of Pakistan Day, famous brands in the federal capital have started offering sales on dresses, shoes and other accessories to give an opportunity to the buyers for having good stock of required stuff at the very start of the summer season. The trend of online shopping from the official websites of the famous brands is already in practice by a large number of people especially women in capital city which is also required at this time to prevent from risk of catching COVID-19. Samina Mushtaq, a housewife said, "It is in the larger interest of the citizens to adopt preventive measures in wake of the increasing cases of COVID-19. Online shopping is the best way to protect ourselves and others from this infectious virus".

Talking to APP, she said, "I have planned to make online orders for summer clothes for me and my family taking advantage of this biggest sale at the advent of the summer season to buy summer stuff in bulk to avoid frequent visits to the markets". "The online shopping facility offered by different brands, shopping marts and food outlets have made the lives of citizens quite easier especially at the time when staying at home and lessening social interaction is a best possible precaution to keep ourselves safe from the prevailing pandemic situation", Shaista Ameen said. She said these brands must take steps for promoting awareness about prevention from this threat by bounding the buyers to purchase the stuff online and not to visit the outlets. — APP

## PR to recover Rs8375 mil from various departments

Pakistan Railways has retrieved around 439.8 acres precious land worth billions of rupees from private individuals under its anti-encroachment operation across the country

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways (PR) was making all out efforts to recover the outstanding amount of Rs8375million payable by the departments of the federal and provincial governments on account of using its different services. The federal departments had to pay an amount of Rs709.084 million, provincial departments Rs1980.217 million and autonomous and private bodies Rs5685.736 million, an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. On the directives of Minister for Railways Azam Khan Swati, he said the Ministry of Railways has approached the federal and

provincial departments for recovering the outstanding amount. To a question, he said that Pakistan Railways has retrieved around 439.8 acres precious land worth billions of rupees from private individuals under its anti-encroachment operation across the country during the last two and half years. The official said the encroachment operation has been launched with the assistance of railway police and district administrations. Giving details, he said the department retrieved

230.33 acres land in Punjab, 115.92 acres from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 81.81 acres from Sindh and 11.74 acres from Balochistan. The official said that out of the total land, 66.687 acres were commercial, 285.9 acres were residential and 87.213 acres were the agricultural land of the Pakistan Railways. He said the government was taking several steps to retrieve encroached land from the land grabbers including detailed survey was being carried out to identify the encroached land,

occupied by the individuals and under illegal occupation of various government departments. The official said the campaign was being monitored by the Divisional Superintendents, Headquarters office and Ministry of Railways. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and joint procedure order have been issued since for strict implementation of this policy, the official added. He said that First Information Reports (FIRs) were being lodged and cases were registered and sent to Pakistan Railways Judicial Magistrates for expeditious trial. — APP

### SNGPL, SSGC detect Rs 8.855b gas theft

ISLAMABAD: The two-state owned companies, Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) and Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC), have collectively detected around 430,194 gas theft cases causing pilferage of 13,266 MMCF (Million Cubic Feet) gas worth Rs 8.855 billion during the last five years.

During a period from 2016-17 to 2019-20, the companies have also registered as many as 1,606 FIRs (First Information Reports) against the gas pilferers, according to an official document available with APP.

As per the break-up, the gas utilities detected 51,401 cases, pilferage of 3,814 MMCF gas of Rs 2,369 million and started legal proceedings against 457 thieves in 2015-16. In 2016-17, they registered 261 FIRs, identified 85,317 theft cases involving leakage of 2,457 MMCF gas amounting to Rs 1,250 million.

Similarly in 2017-18, the companies spotted 85,466 cases, theft of 1,881 MMCF gas worth Rs1,009 million and registered 263 FIRs against pilferers.

In 2018-19, they detected 110,058 cases, faced 3,086 MMCF gas theft of Rs 2,296 million and registered 257 FIRs, while in 2019-20 the companies identified 97,952 cases, pilferage of 2,028 MMCF of gas amounting to Rs 1,930 million and registered 368 FIRs.

A senior official privy to petroleum sector developments told APP that in line with the government strategy to reduce line loss, the gas companies were taking all possible measures to bring down the Unaccounted For Gas (UFG) ratio gradually in the coming years. — APP

### Satrang Art Gallery organizes exhibition

ISLAMABAD: The Satrang Art Gallery has organized a day-long exhibition titled "Heraa Khan: Losing Earth". The Losing Earth was a timely and significant exhibition, which was highlighting the rampant devastation to the environment, as a direct consequence of human excesses and behaviors" said a press release issued here.

The show, which was composed of a new body of work, marks a different direction for Heraa, who is an exceptionally skilled miniature artist. Beautiful jewel-like paintings depict the increasing threat to wildlife and nature, as well as changing ecologies and the visible effects of global warming. Heraa is building a sustainable practice and is inviting her viewer to engage with her thoughtful works and educate themselves about this crisis. Heera Khan is Lahore based artist. The exhibition was attended by diplomats and a large number of people from different walks of life. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam also visited the exhibition. — DNA

### CTP check over speeding on city roads

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Police (CTP) issued 1328 challan slips on over speeding and imposed fines on the rules violators during the February.

According to Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi Rai Mazhar Iqbal, CTP were checking over speeding on various roads of the district and taking action in accordance with the law against the violators.

He informed that the squad conducted operations to check over speeding through speed cameras on main roads particularly old Airport Road, New Airport Road and in other sectors including Taxila, Kalar Syedan and Meharabad. The CTO said that CTP had formed a special camera squad to check over speeding on various roads and the step had helped controlling fatal road accidents considerably in the district. — APP



ISLAMABAD: CDA worker busy in routine work at roadside greenbelt along 9th Avenue. — APP

## PTCL gets recognition for progressive practices

The organization's growing commitment to diversity and inclusion in terms of gender representation and development opportunities to PWDs has further fostered a workplace culture of inclusiveness

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) got recognition for its progressive practices in Inclusive Communication and Social Responsibility at the Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmark Standards (GDIB) Awards 2021. Being a large organization with a nationwide reach of staff and customer-base, it is a tremendous feat to be acknowledged for communication practices that are effectively tailored to the diverse characteristics of our customers

and employees, said a news release. Email bulletins, digital screens, IVR messages and SMS alerts are some of the many ways the company chooses to facilitate two-way communication. Pulse surveys are conducted to gauge feedback and interventions are designed to ensure optimum customer service. Furthermore, the company's social responsibility practices have put PTCL at a unique spot among its contemporaries. The organization's growing com-

mitment to diversity and inclusion in terms of gender representation and development opportunities to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) has further fostered a workplace culture of inclusiveness. With the launch of the Justuju Internship Program for PWDs this year, PTCL committed to go only forward with its pledge for excellence. PTCL employee volunteer force; PTCL Razakaar has set a benchmark for corporate philanthropy and continues to spread smiles year after year.

On the occasion, Group Chief Human Resource Officer, PTCL & Ufone, Syed Mazhar Hussain, said, "We are proud to have won these two prestigious awards by Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks (GDIB). We are fully committed to foster a culture of diversity and inclusion in not only making PTCL a more inclusive place, but we are also taking conscious steps in making our society at large more inclusive as well." These awards recognize and encourage organizations that use

GDIB standards to align organizational policies for sustainable financial and social performance. Approximately 30 companies were honoured in various categories at the prestigious awards ceremony in Karachi. With such recognition, the GDIB awards motivate companies to become more inclusive, diverse and agile. PTCL being honoured in the list of winners is a testament to its commitment towards its employees as well as the community at large. — APP

### Women with diabetes at risk of heart disease

ISLAMABAD: Women, who are under 55, with Type-2 diabetes are at greater risk of developing coronary heart disease, a new study suggests. The study indicates that women, who are less than 55 years and Type-2 diabetes, had a tenfold greater risk of having coronary heart disease over the next two decades, with lipoprotein insulin resistance (LPIR) proving to be a strong, predictive biomarker as well. "We're going to see, unfortunately, younger and younger people having heart attacks," said co-author Samia Mora, Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School in the US. "When a younger individual has a cardiovascular event, it will affect their quality of life going forward, their productivity, and their contribution to society," Mora added. For the study, published in the journal JAMA Cardiology, the researchers analyzed more than 50 risk factors in 28,024 women. — DNA

## Briefs

RCB starts  
'Quran Garden'

IBRAR KHAN

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) on Tuesday inaugurated 'Quran Garden' here at Raja Akram Road, established under 'Plant for Pakistan' campaign. President Cantonment Board Brig. Ijaz Qamar Kiani and Cantonment Executive Officer (CEO) Muhammad Umar Farooq Ali Malik were chief guests on the occasion.

Saplings of the plants which are mentioned in the holy Quran were particularly planted in the garden.

Brig. Ijaz Qamar Kiani addressing the participants said that 'Plant for Pakistan' is not only a campaign rather it has become a passion which was increasing day by day in all the seasons.

He appreciated the arrangements made by both the Boards, Rawalpindi and Chaklala to provide free saplings to the citizens during end of last week.

The President Cantt board also lauded the response given by the residents saying "I visited the distribution points set up to provide free saplings and witnessed, overwhelming response of the citizens who are now motivated and enthusiastic to make the plantation campaign a success."

He said, "I am confident that as a result of the struggle we are making, Pakistan will become a lush green country in near future."

## Islamabad Dialogue to hold objective discourse

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Security Dialogue, a two-day international conference, being organized by the National Security Division will bring together local and global intellectuals together for an objective discourse on traditional and non-traditional national security issues. The two-day international conference being held from March 17 to 18 would be inaugurated by the Prime Minister whereas the second day session would be opened by the Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, said an official of National Security Division.

The opening session will hold extensive discussions on diverse issue ranging from Comprehensive National Security, security challenges in a transforming global and regional environment to Pakistan's security imperatives, and the country's perception among the comity of nations. The session will be moderated by National Defence University. The second session will shed light on the vision of Economic Security and the importance of economic diplomacy. President, Center for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS) former Air Chief Marshal (R) Kaleem Saadat will convene the session with a diverse panel of local and international experts and economists.

## Pygopus twins successfully separated

RAWALPINDI: Six-month-old female conjoined twins Merab and Manahel were recovering at Holy Family Hospital after surgeons successfully separated them in a marathon surgery the other day.

Talking to APP on Tuesday, Dr Mudassar Gondal, head of surgery of the Pediatric Surgery Department at the Holy Family Hospital (HFH), a team of doctors including anaesthesia team comprising Dr Ahmed and Dr Ayesha headed by Prof Jawad Zaheer and surgeons Prof Nadeem Akhtar comprising of Assistant Professor Dr Yasir Shehzad and Senior Resident Dr Mudassar Abbas Siddique, successfully dissected and reconstructed the spinal cord. He said pygopus twins were born six months ago at the HFH with a common sacrum and a common subarachnoid space, and their vaginas and anal canals shared a common posterior wall called as pygopus congenital twins in medical terminology. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Mr. Imran Ahmad Siddiqui, called on President Dr. Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. - DNA

## Tariq Sadiq elected as new president, IIA

AGM of Islamabad Industrial Association (IIA) was held at its office at Islamabad Industrial Association. Industrial Association's sub-trade bodies from manufacturing, Automobiles, Pharmaceutical, Oil, Marble, and Flour commended the tireless efforts of M Akram Farid



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The outgoing President of Islamabad Industrial Association Mian Akram Farid's services for industrial development are unforgettable. Establishment of Industrial Estate under his leadership is a historic achievement. Tariq Sadiq, new President of Islamabad Industrial Association (IIA) vowed he will take forward the mission of Mian Akram Farid to solve the problems. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Islamabad

Industrial Association (IIA) was held at its office at Islamabad Industrial Association. Industrial Association's sub-trade bodies from manufacturing, Automobiles, Pharmaceutical, Oil, Marble, and Flour commended the tireless efforts of M Akram Farid. Islamabad Industrial Association is the sole representative of the Industrialists in the Capital Area and the neighboring Industrial Estates including Kahuta Industrial Triangle. Leading industrialist and social figure of Islamabad Mian Akram Farid as the

President of Islamabad Industrial Association has worked tirelessly to bring industry and trade of Islamabad in line with the requirements of construction and development and modern times. He has always worked day and night to solve the problems of the industrialists on priority basis. The Islamabad Industrial Association, led by its senior vice president Nasir Qureshi and vice president Mirza Muhammad Ali, has played a significant role in highlighting the industrial identity of Islamabad. It is worth mentioning that

the various Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with the major defense establishments in various respects, today Islamabad's industry is one of the most important in Pakistan. A graceful event in the honor of M. Akram Farid, the outgoing President of the Association held in which changeover ceremony take place. During his address, the President IIA paid tribute to the services of late Faridooon Khatak (late), the Senior Vice President (SVP) and underlined his meritorious

services for Industry. Akram Farid threw light on evolution of Industry in Islamabad and the Industrial Association itself. He highlighted main problems of Industry and briefed on efforts made to resolve them. Farid briefed the house on achievements made so far and acknowledged the co-operation of CDA and CBR in this regard. The achievements regarding included improving security, tax matters, corporate social responsibilities (CSR) and welfare of people associated with Industry, he said. The President IIA apprised

that apart from solving Industry problems the main objective of the Association was to develop a soft image of industry. The Association kept liaison with Trade Bodies, Chambers of Commerce and other Industrial Associations. There was a great potential for Business community to join hands for indigenous production for defense organizations. The Association has done a lot for environment as well. Installation of pollution control plants in steel industry and plantation of 50,000 saplings are worth mentioning.

## RCCI shows concerns on new COVID-19 restrictions

The govt should focus on implementation of SOPs and traders assured full cooperation

RAJA PERVAIZ

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) President Nasir Mirza has expressed concerns on Punjab Government notification on lock-down amid COVID-19 third wave. In a statement, RCCI President Nasir Mirza said that closing shops at 6 pm will increase the rush which will increase the chances of more Corona cases. Ramadan is approaching. We have to understand the ground realities, he added. The business community of Rawalpindi has serious concerns over the lockdown notification from the Punjab government. Business activities that are



already in decline will be severely hampered if business closure is observed for Saturday and Sunday. He further added that customers normally shop on weekends due to not finding time on working days. However, closing businesses on Weekend will only cause more rush at markets on other days and lead to a further in-

crease in Covid cases. The government should focus on implementation of COVID SOPs and traders assured full cooperation here. He said that a uniform policy should be adopted in all the cities across the country to deal with the Covid epidemic. Smart lockdown policy should be formulated in collaboration with the stakeholders. Rawalpindi and Islamabad are twin cities. Under Smart Lockdown, the closing hours of shops should be kept the same, he demanded. He said that only by adopting a uniform policy can Corona be dealt with effectively. The Rawalpindi Chamber stands with the business community.

## Al-Khidmat to expand scope of services

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: President Khidmat Foundation Punjab North Rizwan Ahmad has said that they are expanding the scope of services and partnership at the provincial level. Together with national institutions, corporate sector and international NGOs will serve the underprivileged for which short and long term planning has been completed. Pakistani youth dedicated to the spirit of service will volunteer thousands of youth in the first phase. He expressed these views while addressing a meeting of the Board of Directors held at Khidmat Complex. Provincial SG Namir Hassan Madani, SVP Syed Atiq-ur-Rehman, VP Majid Mahmood Bhatti, Provincial Deputy Secy Gen Syed Majid Hussain Shah and other directors also spoke on the occasion.

## NTC to ensure safe, secure virtual meetings

ISLAMABAD: Since the third wave of coronavirus (COVID-19) is considered the most lethal, the National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) has started providing safe and secure services to ensure conducting virtual meetings. Taking precautionary measures, the government is mulling to restart virtual meetings of important nature including NCO, ECC, Federal Cabinet etc. It is also being considered to organize online parliamentary bodies' meetings of different ministries. Talking to the APP, NTC Managing Director Brig (Retd) Vigar Rashid Khan said the NTC would continue to provide safe and secure services to the government without any interruption in the current third wave of COVID-19. "Like previous practice (in corona crisis), NTC will continue to provide its services," he maintained. The NTC, he said, during COVID-19 pandemic first and second waves, has proactively provided Data Hosting platform and Video Conference System to the federal government for conducting PM office, Cabinet, ECC and NCO meetings in a secure environment. The MD said that, NTC was probably one of the few federal government's organizations which has recovered from a loss making entity to a profitable, as it has earned a record profit of Rs578 million in last FY 2019-20 especially during COVID-19 pandemic without any allotment of funds/resources from the government. In order to facilitate PM's initiative "AAP KA WAZIRE AZAM AAP KAY SAATH" to directly talk to the people, the NTC has provided a telecom platform through master number 051-9210809. - APP

## President for enhanced ties with Bangladesh

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Tuesday said Pakistan highly valued its ties with Bangladesh and wanted to further expand cooperation by using the existing bilateral mechanisms.

He stressed the need for improving commercial and cultural relations with Bangladesh and promoting Political Consultations at Foreign Secretary Level and Joint Economic Commission.

The President made these remarks while talking to the Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh Imran Ahmed Siddiqui here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Dr Alvi asked the High Commissioner to work for improving bilateral ties between the two countries. He underscored the need to enhance commercial relations, business-to-business cooperation and people-to-people contacts for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

He urged the need to enhance bilateral cultural and political exchanges as well as increase cooperation in the field of sports to further cement cooperation between the two sides.

## Cultural portion of mega festival postponed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The first Cultural portion of mega ten-day festival "Derajat 2021" postponed on Tuesday due to third wave of Covid-19 pandemic. A 10-day grand 'Derajat festival' was planned by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to start from March 20 in Dera Ismail Khan with having variety of attractive cultural activities to amuse citizens.

MPA Faisal Amin Khan Gandapur told APP that three-day 4 x 4 Jeep Rally will be held from March 26 to March 28 with SOPs and negative tests of COVID for all participants.

He said that the decision was taken in a meeting of COVID Task Force Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Rupee extends gains against dollar

ISLAMABAD: The exchange rate of Pakistan rupee strengthened by 28 paisas against the US dollar in the interbank trading on Tuesday and closed at Rs156.71 as compared to the previous day's closing of Rs156.99.

According to Forex Association of Pakistan, the buying and selling rates of dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs156.7 and Rs157.3 respectively.

Similarly, the price of euro was depreciated by 42 paisas and closed at Rs186.88 against the last day's trading of Rs187.30, the State Bank of Pakistan reported.

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs1.43, whereas a decrease of Rs 2.29 was witnessed in the exchange rate of British Pound, which was traded at Rs216.54 as compared to its last closing of Rs 218.83.

The exchange rates of Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal decreased by 08 paisas each to close at Rs 42.66 and Rs 41.78 respectively. - APP

## RWMC kicks off cleanliness drive

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) and Al-Bayrak on Tuesday formally kicked off multi-faceted and multi-purposed cleanliness and public awareness campaign against dengue and corona pandemic among the people living in localities of Rawalpindi city and its suburbs.

During their door-to-door campaign on first day, the residents, shopkeepers, traders and mosque clerics in Dhoke Kashmiryan locality of UC-23 were requested by the special teams to follow the SOPs regarding COVID-19 i.e to wash hands with soap for 20 seconds, observe social distancing minimum up to six feet, wear face masks, avoid participation in gatherings, cover nose and face having flu or cough. - APP

## Nepalese ACSC delegation visits ISSI

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry briefly covered Pakistan's quest for regional connectivity. He highlighted the transformation in the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan from geo-politics towards geo-economics and the economic opportunities for the South Asian nations

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted 47-member delegation of the Nepalese Army Command & Staff College. Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry delivered a talk to the visiting delegates whereas the Chairman Board of Governors ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mehmood and Director India Study Centre of

the ISSI Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik were also present on the occasion. Director China-Pakistan Study Centre, Dr. Talat Shabbir gave out welcome remarks and briefly introduced the objectives, scope and achievements of the Institute. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry briefly covered Pakistan's quest for regional connectivity. He highlighted the transformation in the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan from geo-politics



towards geo-economics and the economic opportunities for the South Asian nations. He emphasized Islamabad's firm resolve in refraining from meddling in the domestic affairs of neighbouring countries. During his remark, Ambassador Aizaz underscored the pivotal importance of the South Asian region and expressed his concern over persistent lack of connectivity among its South Asian Countries. He also stressed that India

needs to play a larger role by the virtue of its larger share of the landmass and economic power. Later, Dr. Talat Shabbir moderated an interactive session, where officers from the Nepalese Army Command & Staff College actively participated. DG ISSI Ambassador Aizaz responded to the questions of the delegates. Major Shobit of the Nepalese Army thanked the Institute for making arrangements for the event.

## Suspicious suicide

WITH the mysterious death of Shahzaib, a seventh grader allegedly arrested for pointing a gun at police officers, the Gharbi police station has become the subject of controversy. With opposing claims over what exactly happened, an investigation has been launched to uncover the truth. Regardless, special attention needs to be directed towards the prevalence of increasingly gross misconduct of police officers, how exactly the child died and why juvenile specialists weren't present to handle the case. While the official investigation is underway, the entire staff of the police station has been suspended in light of the magnitude of the incident and the drastically different accounts of the series of events that led to Shahzaib's death. The police officers claim that the boy committed suicide while in captivity but failed to mention the precise details as to how it all unfolded. Meanwhile, his father addressed his suspicions of his son being tortured to death in the custody of the police. In both narratives, it is the police which comes off as supremely suspicious and is thus, implicated. If nothing else, this highlights how faulty and fraudulent our official processes are. Any minor arrested should not only be handled in a manner governed by the law but should also be handed over to juvenile specialists immediately. Furthermore, they should always have an adult, preferably a relative, present with them at all times. It is only such an environment that enables the procedure of apprehending cases much more transparent. Straying away from this results in a loss of credibility of state institutions that are supposed to retain the trust of the public instead of violating it. It is vital that the government questions the deplorable police culture exhibited in this case to uncover why this was condoned, who the perpetrators were and why an innocent minor was even near a situation involving potential torture and violence.

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## Electoral controversy

WITH the political landscape in Pakistan fraught with turmoil, the government extended a hand to the opposition, opening up room for possible mediation and discussion on electoral reforms. However, the ruling party also officially went after the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Monday, asking all of its members to resign after—according to the government—the public had lost trust following the outcome of the Senate elections. The government's offer may not be reciprocated by the opposition. The PDM alliance is busy plotting its next move. A long march is likely. The question of resignations is one on which various parties in the alliance are still reportedly divided over. If resignations come, it is likely that the strategy to seek a no-confidence motion for the National Assembly speaker might also not come to pass. Either way, engaging with the government does not look to be a consideration for the opposition at this point. With the ECP, the government would be well-advised to keep the electoral watchdog away from the political domain. The callout was unnecessary and harsh, given that even under the government's own supervision, the election for the Chairman was also marred with controversy. PTI's press conference on ECP was clear in indicating that this was a political response to the electoral outcome, and not an official reference. And while the party claims that all other political outfits would back this call, it is unclear where this belief comes from. The ECP, as stated before, is to act under its constitutional mandate. The government's request to make ballot papers traceable would not have changed much in any case, since it is reported that the ruling party is aware of which members of parliament voted against party lines. A better strategy would be to censure those that defied the stance by PTI's leadership.

# Saudi Arabia and Iran have not always been foes

Mustafa Menshawy /  
Simon Mabon

Despite this hostility, however, there is a glimmer of hope that the situation can improve. Since the dynamics of Iranian-Saudi relations have been highly influenced by the intervention of third parties, mostly the US, it is possible that the new administration in Washington could have a positive effect and alleviate tensions. Indeed, Washington might realise that some form of collaboration between Iran and Saudi Arabia might be beneficial to its regional interests

THE outbreak of the Arab Spring triggered a number of conflicts and regional tensions in the Middle East, which over the past 10 years, have acquired an increasingly sectarian tinge. At the forefront of what some analysts have identified as "Sunni-Shia conflict" have been Saudi Arabia and Iran. Emboldened by the fragmentation of states across the region, Riyadh and Tehran have sensed an opportunity to increase their own standing in the Middle East and have entered a fierce competition for regional influence. The frequent use of religious rhetoric and loyalties in proxy conflicts has led some observers to conclude that this competition is mainly sectarian in nature and stems from a historical Sunni-Shia struggle. But a closer examination of recent history demonstrates that this is by far not the case. In this article, we challenge the "ancient hatreds" thesis and contend that the present sectarian tensions are predominantly a political construct serving the domestic and regional agendas of the two countries. Tensions between Sunni and Shia groups and countries have often been portrayed as deeply ingrained and a consequence of historical and theological antagonism.

The roots of today's "Sunni-Shia conflict" are often sought in the disagreements over the succession of Prophet Muhammad as the leader of the Muslim community (whether it should have been kept within his family or not). The subsequent killing of his grandson, Hussein ibn Ali, at the hands of forces loyal to the Umayyad caliph Yazid in the Battle of Karbala of 680AD is seen as having solidified the split between the Shia and the Sunni. The Shia are said to perceive the Sunni as supporters of power usurpation by the Umayyads and responsible for the death of a succession of Prophet Muhammad's true heirs, while the Sunni perceive the Shia as "apostates", deviating from "true Islam". In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Safavid dynasty gradually transformed Sunni Iran into a bastion of Shia Islam. Then, in the 18th century, the House of Saud embraced the ultraconservative Sunni Wahabiyya doctrine. These two developments are considered by some to mark the onset of sectarian Saudi-Iranian rivalry. In recent years, both Tehran and Riyadh have actively used religious language in their hostile rhetoric towards each other. They have also sought to channel their influence through proxies, seemingly along sectarian lines, prompting some to talk about a "rebirth of the Shia-Sunni divide". But to look at the tensions between the two countries solely through the prism of sectarianism would yield flawed conclusions. The line between Sunni and Shia Islam has been historically and theologically blurred at times and has not always been such a divisive element. Furthermore, historical events and developments of the past 60 years demonstrate that religious sentiments are by far not the main factor in decision-making in Riyadh and Tehran. The main considerations on both sides of the Gulf have been regional influence and internal stability. Both countries have had the resources and ambition to seek regional security and hegemony and both have had a weak spot – a religious/ethnic minority based in their oil-rich provinces. And whenever their interests have not clashed directly, there have been quite a few moments of positive engagement and collaboration between the two countries. With the onset of the Cold War, the United States looked to regional powers in the Middle East to establish a solid front against the expansion of Soviet influence and secure the export of oil from the Gulf region. As a result, Iran – under the Pahlavi dynasty – and Saudi Arabia became part of the United States' "twin pillar" to provide regional security. In the 1960s and 70s, the two countries collaborated closely and enjoyed good relations. The Egyptian army's intervention in the Yemen War (1962-70) to back the coup led by Arab nationalist officers also brought Riyadh and Tehran together, as they backed the forces fighting to preserve the rule of the Zaidi King-Imam. Some fighters loyal to the imam travelled from Saudi Arabia to Iran to receive training. Sharing long borders and historical and tribal ties with Saudi Arabia, Yemen represented a "red line" for the Saudis. The Iranians, for their part, feared the influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism, which was stirring anti-Shah sentiment in Iran's Arab-populated oil-rich province of Khuzestan. The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 shook the region and soured Iran's relations with the House of Saud. Supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini directly called for the overthrow of American-backed Arab rulers and sought to export revolutionary activity under the banner of an "uprising of all Muslims" guided by his leadership. Of particular concern for Saudi Arabia was the outbreak of protests in its Eastern Province, home to the majority of

its Shia population and its oil reserves. Riyadh launched a bloody crackdown to end the upheaval, which resulted in the death of dozens of civilians. Meanwhile, the clerical establishment issued a flurry of anti-Shia publications portraying the protests not as Muslim but as a Shia conspiracy in an attempt to blunt the revolutionary appeal of the Iranian Revolution. Meanwhile, Iran itself faced ethno-religious upheaval, as Arab communities in Khuzestan province – where 80 percent of the country's onshore oil reserves are located – rose up to demand autonomy and an end to their marginalisation. The Arab uprising was violently suppressed by the security forces, with more than 100 people killed. After the death of Khomeini in 1989, relations between the two countries began to improve. In January 1990, when a devastating earthquake in the Iranian city of Manjil took the lives of tens of thousands, Riyadh rushed in to send aid to the ravaged areas. In 1991, the two countries resumed their diplomatic relations, just as the United States launched the First Gulf War against Iraq, whose Baathist regime was a nemesis to both the House of Saud and the Islamic Republic. In May 1997, Iran's newly elected reformist President Mohammed Khatami undertook a tour of Arab countries and paid a visit to the Saudi port city of Jeddah, where he met King Fahd. At the end of the meeting, they issued a joint communique in which they pledged "non-interference in each other's internal affairs, respect for national sovereignty and independence and peaceful coexistence derived from the ties of religion and heritage which bind the states of the region". In December 1997, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah travelled to Iran to attend a summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and was greeted by Khatami, who symbolically kissed him on both cheeks. The Saudis made it clear that "if the two governments have the political will, there are no limits to cooperation with Iran". The US invasion of Iraq and the fall of the Baathist regime in 2003 opened a new chapter in Iranian-Saudi relations. Under the leadership of the more hawkish President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was elected in 2005, Iran was quick to use its extensive links to the anti-Baathist opposition – part of which it had long hosted – to establish a strong foothold in weakened and fragmented Iraq. Reeling under heavy US and UN sanctions, the Islamic Republic sought to curb US presence and influence on its western border and become the main player shaping Iraqi affairs. Over the next few years, Tehran managed to establish extensive influence over the security sector and various political forces (both Shia and non-Shia) in Iraq. Elsewhere in the Arab world, it sought to gain the support of ordinary Arabs by emphasising its commitment to the Palestinian cause and opposition to Western imperialism. As one Shia scholar put it, at the time the Iranian foreign policy was "Sunni". In Saudi Arabia, however, Iran's growing influence in Iraq was perceived as a major threat. Saudi officials repeatedly urged the US to stay engaged in the region and even asked Washington to launch military strikes on the Iranian nuclear programme to "cut off the head of the snake". A few years later, the outbreak of the Arab Spring pushed the hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran to a new level. Each of them sought to shape the outcomes of the Arab uprisings to favour their interests, and in doing so adopted seemingly contradictory policies. They backed some uprisings while opposed others. Iran supported the protests in Bahrain in the name of respecting the "will of the people", but was quick to send military support and personnel to Bashar al-Assad in Syria, as he tried to crush na-

tionwide protests against his regime. Saudi Arabia did the opposite. It dispatched its army to help the Bahraini monarchy regain control of the streets, but in Syria, it backed the armed opposition, providing it with generous military and financial assistance. In pursuing these goals, Saudi Arabia and Iran embraced the use of sectarian rhetoric and allegiances, to complement the deployment of military force in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. While the conflicts in these three countries easily lend themselves to a Sunni-Shia rivalry interpretation, the reality in all three is much complicated. The example of Yemen perfectly illustrates the fallacy of the sectarian argument. Just as in the 1960s, "Wahhabi Riyadh" and "secular Tehran" backed the pro-imamate Zaidi Shia forces out of political considerations rather than religious ones, after 2011, they supported various political players depending on their current interests. After supporting Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh (himself a member of the Zaidi sect) for years, Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries brokered a deal for him to step down in 2011. By 2014, Saleh had made a comeback to Yemen and allied with the Houthis, a Zaidi armed group, who he had previously tried to obliterate, only to betray them as an opportunity to reconcile with Riyadh emerged. And even though Saudi Arabia launched a war against the Houthis in 2015, declaring them an Iranian proxy, it did engage with the group in the months after Saleh's overthrow, as it tried to shape the outcome of Yemen's political transition. Iran, for its part, approached leftist forces and separatists in the south, trying to expand its influence in Yemen. The Arab Spring and the Iranian-Saudi escalation of tensions have also inevitably spilled over onto the domestic scene in both countries. In Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, protests broke out inspired by the Arab uprisings. The monarchy felt threatened and again launched a bloody crackdown, claiming the protesters were "terrorists", "Iranian agents" and "fifth column". Iran has also witnessed similar disturbances by ethnic minorities in Khuzestan and Sistan-Baluchistan provinces and by disaffected youth and ordinary citizens in Tehran and other big cities. The Iranian government has repeatedly accused Saudi Arabia of agitating unrest among its Arab population and sponsoring violence, such as the 2018 attack on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' parade in Ahvaz. Despite this hostility, however, there is a glimmer of hope that the situation can improve. Since the dynamics of Iranian-Saudi relations have been highly influenced by the intervention of third parties, mostly the US, it is possible that the new administration in Washington could have a positive effect and alleviate tensions. Indeed, Washington might realise that some form of collaboration between Iran and Saudi Arabia might be beneficial to its regional interests. President Joe Biden has already signalled that he is looking into rejoining the Iran nuclear deal, which his predecessor pulled out of. This has provoked a mixed reaction in Tehran and alerted some US allies in the region, including Saudi Arabia. However, a nuclear deal could be an opportunity to get both countries on the negotiating table. There are already proposals to include Riyadh in any future talks with Tehran. Finding a way of balancing the competing interest – and fears – of Riyadh, Tehran and Washington is not an easy task but understanding the ways in which the rivalry plays out is essential. One thing is certain, while religion has a role to play, this rivalry is more about politics and regional security than "ancient hatreds". That is why, peace – or at least some degree of normalised relations – is quite possible.

– Courtesy: Al Jazeera

# A better way forward for Afghanistan

Yasar Yakis



The time to act is now. If the emphasis could be shifted from military assignments to civilian and developmental assistance, Afghanistan may become a completely different country in just one or two generations

AFGHANISTAN news channel TOLOne's last week disclosed the contents of a letter that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had written to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. It concerned the slowness of progress in the peace process and the US' intention to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by May 1. This was one of the first major concrete steps of the Biden administration in terms of foreign policy. Both the content and narrative of the letter varied from the established diplomatic practice. Since it was signed by the secretary of state, it should have been addressed to Blinken's counterpart, the foreign minister of Afghanistan, or it had to be signed by President Joe Biden and addressed to Ghani. Blinken's letter stated: "We are considering the full withdrawal of our forces." The established practice in international relations requires that, when such an important step is being considered, it is more appropriate to present the move as a common decision of the two countries. As a reaction to this unilateral approach, Amrullah Saleh, the first vice president of Afghanistan, said: "They (the US) make decisions on their troops, not on the people of Afghanistan. We will never accept bossy and imposed peace." Ghani, in turn, said that the future transition of power would occur via elections based on Afghanistan's constitution, not plans made by "others." The US should have avoided such an exchange of harsh sentences. In the letter addressed to the Afghan authorities, there was a reference to two sets of

meetings with a view to relaunching the peace process. One of them was proposed at the ministerial level with the participation of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India and, of course, the US. The State Department declined to disclose whether these countries were consulted beforehand. If not, some of them may decline the invitation simply because this news was prematurely divulged. We also learned from Blinken's letter that the second set of meetings is scheduled at the senior officials' level and that it will be held in Turkey in the coming weeks. The State Department also declined to disclose whether Turkey had agreed to host such a meeting. I presume that, if Ankara was informed beforehand, irrespective of whether it would agree to host the meeting, it would have jubilantly announced it to demonstrate how Turkey could be helpful to the US in its initiatives. Meetings between senior representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban are at present taking place in Doha, Qatar, but the Taliban is doing everything it can to drag the process out. The Biden administration may believe that Turkey has stronger leverage with the Taliban and that more concrete progress might be achieved by moving the meetings from Qatar to Turkey. If this assumption proves to be true, the Afghan peace process may be revitalized. If not, the limits of Turkey's leverage will be displayed. The US will not lose anything in either case. Blinken's letter also says that US military assistance will continue after the withdrawal of its troops, so the emphasis is still on a military

solution. The international community may now reassess the entire process of the Afghan crisis, bearing in mind that the country has been at war for more than 40 years. It might be more appropriate to look for nonmilitary options. The US last year disclosed its military budget for the Afghan crisis. In 18 years – from 2001 to 2019 – it amounted to \$778 billion. This does not include the funds spent by the other countries that contributed soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. More importantly, it does not include the human suffering, casualties and damage caused to the physical infrastructure. One may wonder whether Afghanistan would not have suffered less if this \$778 billion had been channelled into education and agriculture. It is, after all, a mainly agricultural country. It is not easy to quench the defense industry's thirst, but if even a fraction of the US military budget for the war in Afghanistan were allocated to agricultural development, Afghan society could be transformed. Together with an emphasis on education, this could transform Afghan society completely and the country would cease to be a den for terrorists. This opportunity has been missed, but we may now turn to the next generations. The time to act is now. If the emphasis could be shifted from military assignments to civilian and developmental assistance, Afghanistan may become a completely different country in just one or two generations.

– Courtesy: Arab News

## Briefs

## Miandad opposes PCB's club reg fee

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Batting maestro Javed Miandad on Sunday urged the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) not to charge any fee from the cricket clubs willing to register themselves with the board. In an exclusive interview, the former cricketer requested the PCB's high-ups to provide all sorts of financial support to the clubs until city or provincial associations can afford to support these grassroots nurseries. Miandad said he was surprised to learn that the clubs were being asked to submit different types of fees for registration.

"These clubs are traditional nurseries of cricket and were rendered idle for the last two years," he said. "How could they generate finances to meet the PCB conditions for registration? Instead, the PCB must start supporting all those clubs which are active and have participated in the last recognised Club Championship (Fazal Mehmood Trophy)." The batting legend added that the PCB must appoint a team of professional accountants in each of the associations and start helping clubs financially to get them back on track. "It is the responsibility of the city or provincial associations to generate club activities," he said. "Till the time these associations start generating funds, the PCB should look after the financial requirements of the clubs. The members of every club need cricket gear and extra expenses to play club matches."

## Pakistan, India water talks on...

From Page 01

"We stand our stance with regard to four contentious Indian hydro electric projects including Pakal Dul and Ratle power project," Shah said. In the previous round of talks in Lahore, officials from both the countries had failed to gain any progress over the river water dispute and had ended in a stalemate.

The Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) was formed under the Indus Water Treaty which includes Indus commissioners of both the countries. The treaty specifies that the waters of three eastern rivers namely Ravi, Beas and Sutlej, had been reserved for India whereas western rivers, namely Indus, Chenab and Jhelum, are for Pakistan.

The conundrum arises on the Indian claims that it has unrestricted rights to develop hydroelectric power projects on the western rivers. The meeting will also review the objections to two new Indian hydropower projects - 19MW Darbak and 24MW Naimu Challing.

## Long march postponed

From Page 01

PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz to address the conference, flanked by PPP's Yousaf Raza Gillani. Maryam said that she does not wish for speculations to rise so will not be speaking about the time sought by PPP. She spoke, however, of PPP President Asif Ali Zardari's remarks whereby he had asked Nawaz Sharif to return to Pakistan and reportedly said to him that the party's resignations will only be handed in when he comes back.

Maryam denied such an exchange having taken place, saying: "No, that is not what he said. He simply said that Mian sahab you must come back and so must everyone else so we can struggle together."

## Belarus envoy...

From Page 01

technical cooperation. Muhammad Hammad Azhar received an invitation from Petr Parkhomchik, the Minister of Industry of Belarus, to visit Belarus in order to get acquainted with leading Belarusian industrial companies and to discuss issues of strengthening industrial cooperation between the countries on the topics of mutual interest.



KABUL: Pakistan ambassador to Afghanistan calls on Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, Afghan minister of refugee return (MORR). Minister appreciated Pakistan for hosting millions of Afghan refugees. Both discussed need for close engagement on plans for dignified return and reintegration of refugees in Afghanistan. - DNA

## Naval chief meets top military leadership of Bahrain

DNA

MANAMA: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Anjad Khan Niazi is on official visit to Bahrain. During the visit, the Naval Chief called on Commander-in-Chief Bahrain Defence Forces (BDF) H.E. Field Marshal Shaikh Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Commander Bahrain National Guard (BNG) His Royal Highness Major Gen Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Forces (RBNF) Rear Admiral Mohammed Yousif Al Asam and Deputy Commander US NAVCENT Rear Admiral Curt Renshaw, in separate meetings.

Upon his arrival at RBNF Headquarter, the Admiral was received by Commander RBNF and a ceremonial Guard of Honour was presented to the Naval Chief on the occasion. A comprehensive briefing was also given to the Admiral regarding RBNF.



During the separate meetings with military leadership of the Kingdom of Bahrain, matters related to maritime security and bilateral defence collaborations were discussed.

The Naval Chief highlighted Pakistan Navy's initiative of Regional Maritime Security Patrol and contributions of Pakistan Navy to maintain peace and order at Indian Ocean Region. The dignitaries greatly appreciated role and contributions of Pakistan Navy in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Later, the Naval Chief also called on the Deputy Commander HQ NAVCENT, Rear Admiral Curt Renshaw and discussed shared commitment towards maritime security.

It is expected that the visit of Chief of the Naval Staff to Bahrain would greatly enhance bilateral cooperation between both the countries in general and navies in particular.

## Cultural cooperation between Pakistan, Belarus discussed

MINSK: Today, Ambassador of Pakistan to Belarus Sajjad Haider Khan accompanied by the Deputy Head of Mission Abdullah Amin visited Creative Center in Borisov. The centre is almost 90 years old with around 6000 students. The Head of the Education Department of Borisov region Ms Sadovskaya Irina, Director of the Creative center Ms. Luzkovskaya Galina, Deputy Director Ms. Kaminskaya Svetlana also attended the event. Ms Marina Laikova, Head of the Literature project "Oktava" together with "Vir" ensemble performed the song about the friendship of Belarus and Pakistan as well as the poem of a Pakistani poet translated into Belarusian, the young poets represented their verses that were translated into English, the students of the Center also prepared a dancing, vocal and musical program, the Fashion theatre demonstrated the stylized Belarusian costumes. The Ambassador also visited the exhibition of the Decorative and Applied Arts, created by the members of the center. The two sides agreed to develop bilateral cultural ties through series of activities in the fields of music, dance, painting, poetry and fashion shows. - DNA



## Toyota Gazoo Racing thrills at the 8th Hub Rally

HUB: The 8th Toyota Hub Rally culminated here amidst huge fanfare after an exhilarating, adventure filled two days. Organised yearly under the Toyota Gazoo Racing umbrella, the Hub rally was sponsored by Indus Motor Company (IMC) in collaboration with the company's dealer, Toyota Highway Motors. The event included the country's renowned motorsports celebrities participating in the race, including women racers, who displayed their driving prowess to the tee.

Also at the event, the "Fast Fun Fest" organized by IMC was another crowd puller where motor enthusiasts got the opportunity to explore and unleash the adventure spirit of the Toyota Hilux Revo and Fortuner. Participants had a chance to enter a competition which required completing the track in minimum time.

The Rally route extended as far as the Gaddani coast where a 50 km track was prepared to excite off-roading aficionados. The total winning purse this time was more than Rs 2 million, doubled compared to 2020.

Commenting on the event, CEO IMC, Ali Asghar Jamali, said "First of all my congratulations to all the winners. I think everyone on the track did a wonderful job. Motorsports in Pakistan is a trend fast picking up pace. The thrill and the adrenalin rush the sport generates, is unmatched. At Toyota we call it the 'waku-doki' experience. I am happy to see that the turn out this year has been great, a welcome respite in the COVID-19 era". - DNA

## Two UAE crickets banned for 8 years

KARACHI: United Arab Emirates (UAE) players Mohammad Naveed and Shaiman Anwar Butt have been banned from all forms of cricket for eight years. Both were found guilty of breaching the ICC Anti-Corruption Code by ICC Anti-Corruption Tribunal. "The bans are backdated to 16 October 2019, when they were provisionally suspended for attempting to corrupt matches of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier 2019 in the UAE," ICC said in a statement.

The tribunal after a full hearing and presentation of written and oral argument found both Naveed and Shaiman guilty of Article 2.1.1 - for being party to an agreement or effort to fix or contrive or otherwise influence improperly the result, progress, conduct or other aspect(s) of a match or matches at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier 2019. Article 2.4.4 - Failing to disclose to the ACU full details of any approaches or invitations received to engage in corrupt conduct under the Code at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier 2019.

Naveed was also found guilty of breaching the following two counts of the Emirates Cricket Board Anti-Corruption Code for Participants of a cricket league in Dubai. - DNA

## Anchors XI wins by 2 runs against ICCI XI

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Sports Committee of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) organized a Family Gala friendly cricket match between Anchors XI and ICCI XI at Shalimar Ground, P-6, Islamabad. Asim Raza was the captain of Anchors XI while Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain, Kashif Abbasi, Samar Abbas, Syed Mohsil Ali and others were in the team. Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry was the captain of ICCI XI with Zareef Khan, Ch. Nasir Mehmood, Asif Shah, Muhammad Rizwan, Malik Mohsin, Zia Khalid Chaudhry, Kashif Us-

man and others as team members. Anchors XI won the toss and elected to bat. They put up a target of 158 runs in 15 overs for ICCI XI with the fall of only 3 wickets. Talat Hussain with 57 runs was the top scorer for Anchor XI and Hamid Mir remained not out at 28 runs. Muhammad Rizwan with 41 runs was the top scorer for ICCI

XI. The Anchors XI won the match by 2 runs as ICCI XI could score 155 runs in the allotted 15 overs with the loss of 4 wickets. Speaking at the occasion, Sardar

Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry said that the sports events were an important source of keeping people healthy and generating economic activities. He said that sports activities would enhance the immunity in people against the Covid-19 pandemic and should be encouraged. He said that after the improvement in the coronavirus situation, ICCI would organize more matches of various sports. He also appreciated the efforts of ICCI Sports Committee for organizing a friendly cricket match between anchor-persons and business community in a successful manner. At the end of the match, prizes were distributed amongst the top performers.



## Pakistan team to undergo 4 rounds of testing

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan men's cricket team will undergo four rounds of COVID-19 testing before their departure for the South Africa series. In the first phase, players and officials will be tested for the virus today in their respective cities. The squad will then gather in Lahore on March 18 for the second phase of the COVID-19 tests.

The third and fourth rounds will take place on March 21 and 24 respectively, while the squad will depart for South Africa on March 26.

The training camp of the national squad will be held in 'Bio-secure Bubble'. PCB has also approached the Punjab government for approval of the camp. PCB hopes to get permission for the camp. Note, the Punjab government has suspended sports activities due to increasing cases of COVID-19 across province.

## Messi equals most appearance record

SPORTS DESK

BARCELONA: Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi equaled club legend Xavi Hernandez's appearance record in the club, playing in his 767th match for the Spanish powerhouse on Monday evening. "Leo Messi keeps setting new highs and with his appearance in the starting XI [eleven] against Huesca on Monday, he adds another special record to his collection, setting a club record of 767 appearances in a Barça shirt," Barcelona said on its website.

Barça thrashed Huesca 4-1 at Camp Nou Stadium as Messi scored two goals. In addition, Barcelona did a video to pay tribute to the Argentine superstar as both former and current Barcelona players praised him in this video. "Leo #Messi, touching the sky #Messi767," Barcelona said on Twitter. Messi will be the record holder in this field if he plays against Real Sociedad in a La Liga match on Sunday. A pure Barcelona product, Xavi, 41, played for Barça in 1998-2015. Former Spanish midfielder Xavi left Barcelona in 2015 to join Qatar's Al-Sadd. Then he retired from the game in 2019.

## Zardari asks Nawaz to come...

From Page 01

Asif Zardari was of the view that leaders should not be afraid of jails. He said he himself had spent 14 years in jail. Leaders should lead from the front therefore Nawaz Sharif should come back to lead the movement. Zardari's demand went viral immediately leaving the participants nonplused. Everybody present in the meeting wanted to know that who leaked this information to the media.

Maryam Nawaz seemed quite uneasy with the statement and tried to convince the parties and especially Asif Zardari that Nawaz Sharif life was in danger in Pakistan. This development appears to have caused serious dents in the already fragile PDM, which was still in a state of shock after defeat in the Senate chairman election. PDM chief Fazalur Rehman also raised issue of deputy chairman election in which his candidate Ghafoor Haideri got seven less votes. He asked the PDM parties why their candidate could not win despite having majority in the Senate.

Analysts believe Asif Zardari's demand is well calculated and timely. PPP has more stakes in the system rather than PML N therefore it wants to move cautiously especially on the issue of resignations. PPP insiders told that party is quite wary of the statements of Nawaz Sharif against the establishment particularly.

They are of the view that Nawaz delivers hard-hitting tirade against the establishment while sitting abroad and the opposition parties on ground have to face the consequences. The PPP therefore wants him to come back to Pakistan and then say whatever he wants and PDM will be with him.

## Briefs

## N Korea warns US to 'avoid causing a stink'

## FOREIGN DESK

Kim Jo Yong, the powerful sister of the North Korean leader, has threatened to scrap inter-Korean co-operation as she condemned ongoing military drills between South Korea and the United States, and cautioned the US against "causing a stink" if it wants peace, state media reported on Tuesday. The statement comes a day before America's top diplomat and defence chief, who are currently in Japan, are scheduled to arrive in Seoul.

"We take this opportunity to warn the new US administration trying hard to give off powder smell in our land," Kim said in a statement carried by state news agency KCNA. "If it wants to sleep in peace for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are expected to focus on foreign and security policy during their time in northeast Asia. The timing of Kim's comments - the first direct address to the new US administration since Biden took office in January - seems designed to ensure that North Korea will be at the top of Blinken and Austin's agenda when they land in Seoul, said Ramon Pacheco Pardo, a Korea expert at King's College London.

## Uganda opposition leader arrested

KAMPALA: Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine was arrested on Monday as he took part in a protest in the capital, according to a post on his Twitter page.

The 39-year-old pop-star-turned-presidential contender last week had called on Ugandans to "rise up peacefully and unarmed" against President Yoweri Museveni who won a sixth term in office following disputed elections in January.

"Bobi Wine arrested as he led MPs and other leaders in a peaceful protest against the abduction, torture and murder of his supporters," said the post, written by an account administrator.

Around 15 MPs and activists from Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) political party, wearing business suits and red ties, took part in the brief protest which was quickly halted by police officers and soldiers. Bystanders cheered their support for the small group of protesters but did not join the demonstration itself. - APP

## Pakistan's textile exports increase 6.69%

ISLAMABAD: The exports of textile commodities witnessed an increase of 6.69 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The textile exports were recorded at \$9,999,770 million in July-February (2020-21) against the exports of \$9,372,819 million in July-January (2019-20), showing growth of 6.69 percent, according to latest data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

The textile commodities that contributed in trade growth included knitwear, exports of which increased from \$2090.039 million last year to \$2467.006 million during the current year, showing growth of 18.04 percent. Likewise, the exports of yarn (other than cotton yarn) increased by 7.70 percent, from \$18.879 million to \$20.333 million whereas, exports of bed wear increased by 13.71 percent from \$1597.868 million to \$1816.882 million. The exports of towels increased by 16.31 percent, from \$525.048 million to \$610.684 million; exports of tents, canvas and tarpulin grew by 33.27 percent, from \$61.704 million to \$82.230 million; ready made garments by 2.56 percent, from \$1961.293 million to \$2011.505 million; madeup articles, excluding towels and beadwear by 15.14 percent, from \$439.460 million to \$505.986 million. - APP

## Pakistan must develop export potential: President Arif Alvi

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: "The initiatives undertaken by Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP) and its Vision are vivid examples that a focused and pragmatic approach is crucial if Pakistan has to march on the avenue of prosperity. Pakistan must develop the export potential of indigenous resources and products and strive for value addition. I would also advise the Economic Council to develop linkages and synergies with countries that are involved in mining and exports of minerals. EFP should also take maximum advantage of the technological advancements and best mining processes while at the same time advocate investment in the mining value addition sector. It is of utmost importance that minerals are not wasted away due to presently used obsolete mining processes and equipment. This is of pivotal importance in the economic progress of Pakistan". This was stated by President Dr. Arif Alvi at the EFP Employer of the Year Award 2020. Dr. Alvi added that it is the responsibility of employers to ensure that their workers are provided better working conditions and well-being through Occupational Safety and Health standards and that workers should be able to avail all benefits under various worker welfare



schemes. The double digit growth in Large Scale Manufacturing, the encouraging rise in exports, the uptick in foreign direct investment, the feel-good increase in the Stock Exchange Index, the reduction in non-essential imports, and the emphasis on new sectors such as tourism and hospitality, etc. speaks volumes of the determined efforts of the government to increase and improve the economic environment. The government has now initiated a process to make its activities more transparent, more has-

le-free, and more productive so that the red-tape, the lethargy, and the element of corruption are immensely minimized. These actions of the government have already borne fruit and have been commended by the industrial and business community too. Pakistan wants to develop all sectors on a top priority basis. President Alvi added that he is profoundly happy that EFP is honoring top employers since last eight years and that he is sanguine that these employers would continue to be

role models and examples of excellence. He added that strong efforts are essential to increase exports because Pakistan needs a formidable inflow of Dollars and Euros to fuel the growth of the economy. He further said that EFP, being the Apex Body of Employers, must take the lead and shoulder the responsibilities of motivating the private sector to establish more industries and undertake projects to maximize employment, foreign exchange earnings, and adherence to global condi-

tionality's. Earlier, Ismail Suttar, President EFP, in his welcome address stated that this is the first time that any Pakistani Head of State has graced any EFP event. Introducing EFP, he disclosed that from 1950 to 2017, the EFP domain is based around Industrial Relations, Human Resource Development, ILO, International Organization of Employers, and the Labor Departments. The EFP is involved in labor legislation, worker's welfare agencies, and assisting the

members with labor related legal and management issues. EFP organizes various signature local and international events such as on OSH, Industrial Relations, Child Labor, Skill Development, Cotton Supply Chain, Compliance of International Labor Standards by MNEs, etc. and also training programs in various cities. EFP is a constituent of ILO, member of International Organization of Employers, Confederation of Asia Pacific Employers and South Asian Forum of Employers.

## Ex Chinese minister indicted on corruption charge

BEIJING: Li Jinzao, former vice minister of culture and tourism, has been indicted on a charge of taking bribes, according to the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP).

Li was accused of taking advantage of his former positions to seek gains for others in qualification approval, project contracting and job promotion among other matters, and accepting huge sums of money and gifts in return, the SPP said in a statement released on Tuesday.

Li's case has been handed over to the Shenyang Municipal People's Procuratorate of Liaoning Province for review and prosecution upon the designation of the SPP after the National Supervisory Commission concluded its investigation, the statement said.

The prosecution has been filed to the Intermediate People's Court of Shenyang, it added. The prosecutors had informed the defendant of his litigation rights, interrogated him and listened to the opinions of the defense counsel, according to the statement. - APP

## Countrywide bank strike hits India for 2nd day

## WEB DESK

NEW DELHI: Banking services across India were hit Tuesday for the second straight day in wake of a countrywide two-day strike against the proposed privatization of two public sector banks and retrograde banking reforms, officials said.

The strike that began on Monday saw scores of bank employees taking to streets across several states and raising slogans urging the government to stop privatization of banks.

The strike was called by United Forum of Bank Union (UFBU), an umbrella body of nine bank unions in India.

According to UFBU, nearly a million bank employees participated in the protest and abstained from work.

Reports pouring in from various states across India said banks remained shut for the second straight day.

The strike comes about a month after federal finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the country's budget, announced the privatization of two public sector banks (PSBs) as part of the government's disinvestment plan.

Due to the strike, services such as deposits and withdrawal at banks, cheque clearance and loan approvals would be affected. However, ATMs are likely to remain functional.

The ongoing bank strike will affect people as banks were already closed on March 13 (the second Saturday in India is a holiday for banks) and March 14 (Sunday), leading to a four-day break in regular banking operations. UFBU said the strike is supported by nine banks unions.

Reports said apart from bank unions, all the unions in four general insurance companies will be on strike on March 17 and all the unions in life insurance corporation will observe strike on March 18.

## Thai PM gets AstraZeneca jab as country resumes rollout

## DNA

BANGKOK: Thailand's prime minister on Tuesday received the AstraZeneca vaccine as the Southeast Asian nation began the drug's rollout, lifting a suspension that was triggered by European nations raising safety concerns. The country became the first outside of Europe to temporarily delay the Covid-19 vaccine after several EU nations - including Ireland, the Netherlands and Denmark - moved to delay it due to reports that some recipients had suffered blood clots. Thailand is already admin-

istering China's Sinovac vaccine, with millions more imported doses expected in the coming months. But it was expected to add the Oxford/AstraZeneca injection to its vaccine options on Friday, before health authorities abruptly suspended it as a precaution. By Monday, it had cleared its use after the World Health Organization, the European Medicines Agency and many countries, including Britain and Canada, declared it safe for use. "Today, we will start injections on another vaccine. I think it will create confidence for people to get the vaccine," Thai premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said.



BANGKOK: Thailand's Prime Minister has received a shot of the COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by AstraZeneca. - DNA

## Sweden suspends AstraZeneca vaccine

STOCKHOLM: health authorities said Tuesday they had suspended the use of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, following the example of many other EU countries after reports of possible serious side effects. The Public Health Agency (FHM) said it was halting the use of the vaccine "as a precautionary measure" following reports of "suspected side effects". Sweden's state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell told national news agency TT that 10-20 cases in Europe of post-job haemorrhages were the main concern and needed further investigation. Other EU countries have suspended the use of the vaccine amid reports

of blood clots, but FHM stressed that no such serious side effects had been confirmed in the Scandinavian country. The European Medicines Agency is to hold a special meeting on Thursday to decide whether measures are needed. The World Health Organization has meanwhile said countries should continue to use the jab, saying no association between blood clots and the vaccine had been found and that the benefits of the jab outweighed the risks of any side effects. The World Health Organization has also said it would convene its expert panel on Tuesday to review the vaccine's safety. - APP

## Changan gains foothold in Pakistan automotive market

## ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: With eye-catching designs, luxury amenities and affordable prices, Master Changan Motors (MCM) assembled vehicles, have gained a foothold in Pakistan's automotive market. According to Gwadar Pro, Pakistan's Master Group and Changan carmaker from China in a joint venture established the MCM in 2017 in Karachi. Changan chose Pakistan to assemble right-hand-drive vehicles and shortly took big leaps into the Pakistani automotive market. Presently, the annual production capacity of the plant is 30,000 units. Changan has

20 dealerships around the country. The Changan Khyber Motors dealership was established in Peshawar in mid-2019. "Despite corona pandemic, we have sold around 300 units of Changan in 2020," Mansoor Khan, Sale Executive MCM Peshawar told Gwadar Pro. "The way potential customers are coming to the dealership, I expect Changan cars and pickups to get a major share in KP's auto market very soon," he said. Mansoor Khan said that Changan Alsvin, the "smart" sedan has taken the automotive market by surprise. When MCM opened pre-booking, according to him, 17,000 units of Alsvin were booked in a very short

period. "Changan Khyber Motors had 55 units of quota in Alsvin, which was pre-booked in just 36 hours," he added. He said that Alsvin contains Euro-5 engine, which is introduced for the first time in Pakistan. "The Bluecore Technology engine of Changan offers both efficiency and environment friendliness," Mr. Khan said. Muhammad Shah, who has pre-booked Alsvin sedan, said it was truly the smartest choice in this category of cars. "The main competitive advantage of Alsvin is its price, which is almost equal to the price of a used Japanese hatchback car," he said. "It is up to the customer to

buy a new luxury car or a used car with fewer options for the same price," Shah said. Interactions with different drivers in Peshawar revealed that Changan M9 and M8 are popular and demanding mini-loaders in KP. Both are powerful light trucks with good cargo capacity and fuel average. "The vehicle comes with a powerful engine and above all it is fuel-efficient," said Ijaz Ahmed who owns M9 PICKUP. He said drivers could open all three sides of the M9's bed, which is quite handy during loading and unloading. It is the level of his satisfaction that Ijaz Ahmed has pre-booked KARVAAN MPV Plus, the mid-sized van for his family.

## Armenia to pay for all damages to Azeri heritage

## DNA

BAKU: President Ilham Aliyev has said that Azerbaijan will urge Armenia to compensate for the damages it inflicted on the country's historical heritage, Azertag has reported. He made the remarks as part of his visit to liberated Fuzuli and Khojavand regions on March 15. First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva and their daughter Leyla Aliyeva accompanied the president during the visit. "Now we will enter the Azykh cave. This cave was discovered by Azerbaijani scientist and archaeologist Mammadali Huseynov in 1960, and since then research has been conducted here. It is one of the oldest human settlements in the world, belongs to the history of Azerbaijan, is our historical treasure. Armenia illegally worked in this cave, illegally brought scientists from abroad. They have caused great damage to this cave and our historical heritage. They will pay for all this

damage. We will force them," Aliyev said.

The president added that research by local and foreign scientists will continue in the cave in the future.

"Azykh cave is located on Azerbaijan's territory. After that, Azerbaijani scientists and foreign scientists invited by them in the future will conduct research here legally," he said.

As part of his visit to the region, the president laid the foundation of the Fuzuli-Hadrut and Hadrut-Jabrail-Shukurbayli highways.

He said that the construction of the highway is of great importance for the restoration of the liberated areas.

"This is not the first project. Several road projects are already underway. The restoration of the liberated lands has begun. The road from Fuzuli to Shusha is being built, the Victory road is being built. At the same time, the construction of the Barda-Agdam road will be completed in the near future. The road will be



built from Horadiz to Zangilan. In short, despite the fact that four months have passed since the war, great creative work has been

done," he said. The Fuzuli-Hadrut road originates from the Victory [Fuzuli-Shusha] road and connects to

the new Hadrut-Jabrail-Shukurbayli highway. The 13-kilometre road will have four lanes. Road bridges will be built along

the road. The Hadrut-Jabrail-Shukurbayli highway starts from Hadrut settlement and passes through Jabrayil region and joins the Hajigabul-Minjivan-Zangazur corridor in Shukurbayli village. Its length is 43 kilometres. Road bridges will be built along this four-lane road, Azertag said. As part of the visit, Aliyev visited ancient Albanian churches in Hunarli and Tug villages vandalized by the Armenians. Speaking about the church in Hunarli village, Aliyev said Armenians' attempts to Armenianize the church failed.

"The Armenians wanted to Armenianize this church as well and wrote articles in Armenian, but they could not. Now, if it were an Armenian church, would they put it in such a situation? It looks... as if it were stable. This is our ancient historical monument, the temple of our Udi brothers," he said.

The president stressed that the Armenians insulted the ancient Albanian temples just as they did with the mosques.

## Briefs

### Seven coal miners killed in Balochistan

DNA

QUETTA: Seven miners were killed in a blast at a coal mine in the southwestern Pakistani province of Balochistan on Monday night, the second such deadly incident in the region in a week.

A build up of methane gas in the mine in the Torghar gas field in the district of Harnai caused an explosion as the workers were inside, Deputy Commissioner Sohail Anwar Hashmi said.

"Rescue teams recovered the bodies of all seven coal miners this morning, who burnt to death as a huge fire broke out in the mine after the blast," Chief Inspector of Mines Shafiq Fayyaz said. Fayyaz said the workers who lost their lives were working at a depth of about 1,500 feet when the explosion occurred, adding that a mine has been closed and a probe has been ordered into the incident.

On March 12, eight miners were trapped around 1,000 feet below ground in a mine in the district of Marwar, near the border with Afghanistan, when a buildup of methane gas exploded. Six workers were killed and two other rescued.

### ECP declares PPP's plea not maintainable

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has rejected the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) petition against the issuance of funds to lawmakers by Prime Minister Imran Khan after declaring it as not maintainable.

A three-member bench headed by Irshad Qaiser heard the petition against the issuance of funds to the National Assembly (NA) lawmakers. After the conclusion of the arguments, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) reserved its verdict earlier in the day regarding the maintainability of a petition challenging the issuance of funds to the lawmakers by the premier.

During the hearing, Nayyar Hussain Bukhari told the ECP bench that NA lawmakers used to cast votes for electing senators and a corrupt practice was made by the issuance of funds to the legislators. Bukhari said that the prime minister violated the law by issuing funds to lawmakers.

The ECP member from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Irshad Qaiser, questioned Bukhari whether he has filed the petition personally or on behalf of a political party. Qaiser further questioned whether the premier announced the funds as the head of the state or as a chief of a political party.

Another ECP member Nisar Durran remarked, "Is there any scheme announced by the prime minister for the lawmakers?"

# Pakistan's biggest industries have been evading tax: PM Khan

Imran Khan said big sector of economy including tobacco, cement and sugar were witnessing mass tax evasion, adding that sugar industry alone did not pay the tax of Rs 400 billion in five years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "Some of the biggest industries in Pakistan have been evading taxes for decades," Prime Minister Imran Khan said. Chairman a meeting of the Federal Cabinet on Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that industries such as sugar, fertilisers, and cigarettes have been conveniently evading taxes. "For the last five years, the Federal Board of Revenue has been trying to bring a track and trace system." The Prime Minister asked Barrister Farogh Naseem to "convince

the Sindh High Court that the non-imposition of the automated system would incur loss of billions to the country". The Sindh High Court issued a stay order on FBR's proposed tax mechanism, for which the Prime Minister mentioned that FBR had given assurance to roll out the system by June.

He said FBR had been making efforts for last 15 years to implement the Track & Trace (T&T) System, however regretted that the move was "sabotaged" every time. Prime Minister Imran Khan addresses the meeting of federal cabinet on March 16.



Imran Khan said big sector of economy including tobacco, cement and sugar were witnessing

mass tax evasion, adding that sugar industry alone did not pay the tax of Rs 400 billion in five years. In tobacco industry, he said, only 19 percent of the tax was paid by two big companies while the 40 percent was being evaded resulting in loss of billions to the country.

He said tax evasion led to imposition of indirect taxes by the government which inflated the prices of commodities of everyday use. The FBR's Track & Trace system aims at providing minimum human interface, preventing leakage of revenue, under-reporting sales of specified goods and to ensure

proper payment of duty and taxes. On Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), the Prime Minister said the system was important to ensure transparency in general polls and check corrupt practice of vote-purchase. He termed provision of online voting for overseas Pakistan a priority of his government and stressed an effective strategy for its implementation. The Prime Minister sought progress reports in every cabinet meeting on the matters of installation of EVM and voting process for overseas Pakistanis. The federal cabinet discussed several development projects on the agenda.

### NA-75: ECP holds Punjab govt responsible

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has rejected the ruling PTI's plea to suspend the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision ordering re-election in NA-75 Daska.

A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Umar Ata Bandial was hearing the PTI appeal against the ECP's ruling on the Daska by-election.

As the proceedings began on Tuesday, the PTI's counsel urged the bench to suspend the ECP decision which was rejected by Justice Bandial, who remarked "Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is a constitutional institution."

Justice Bandial further said "The re-election will be held anyway. The court will only decide whether it will be held in the whole constituency or in limited polling stations." He further said "We will hear the case as the apex court respects the Election Commission."

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Tuesday submitted a reply in Supreme Court, declaring Punjab government responsible for mismanagement during by-election in NA-75 Daska.

The ECP told the apex court that the polls were made controversial by deploying selected officers in the area. On March 5, the PTI had challenged in the Supreme Court the ECP's decision of re-election in NA-75 Daska after declaring as null and void the outcome of the February 19 by-election.

PTI candidate in the by-election Asjad Malhi had filed a petition in the apex court, pleading the court to nullify the ECP's decision. In his petition, Malhi contended that the ECP did not take into account the facts while pronouncing the decision since it did not properly scrutinize the available record. - DNA

### Fayyaz Chohan says PDM is dead and buried

LAHORE: Punjab's Provincial Minister for Prisons has said that after today's developments, the Pakistan Democratic Movement is dead and buried. He said that the government is not afraid of PDM's planned long march on March 26.

In an exclusive interview with Dunya News, Fayyaz-ul-Hassan Chohan said that Nawaz Sharif is sitting outside the country trying to become the next Nelson Mandela or Imam Khomeini, but he is unwilling to make the sacrifices that those two leaders made.

He said that Asif Ali Zardari has rightly demanded the return of Nawaz Sharif, who wants to sit comfortably in London and make PPP's workers and leaders sacrifice for his corruption and dishonesty.

The Minister said that Asif Zardari has made it clear to the PML-N leadership that they will have to take part in the political struggle and work alongside his party, adding that one has to die to become a martyr. - DNA



BAKU: Pakistan ambassador to Azerbaijan Bilal Hayee in a meeting with his counterpart ambassador Ali Alizada to discuss bilateral issues requiring follow up on both sides. - DNA

### Houthi ballistic missiles target KSA

RIYADH: Yemen's Houthi fighters have fired two ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia, both of which landed in uninhabited border areas in the country's south, according to the Saudi-led coalition fighting the rebels.

In a statement carried by Saudi state-run Al Ekhabariya TV, the coalition said the missiles were launched from the northern Yemeni province of Saada on Tuesday. The coalition said it responded by destroying a bunker for ballistic missiles in Saada and launchpads from which the missiles were fired.

"We are taking operational measures to neutralise and destroy sources of threat to protect civilians," it added. There was no immediate comment from the Houthis. Separately, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said Tuesday it had shot down an explosive-laden drone fired by Houthi rebels towards southwestern Saudi Arabia. - DNA

### Lanka says burqa ban "a proposal"

COLOMBO: After criticism from allied states regarding Sri Lanka's decision to impose a ban on Muslim women covering their full faces in public, the country on Tuesday said that it was "merely a proposal...under discussion."

Sri Lanka's minister for public security, Sarath Weerasekera, had said on Saturday it would "definitely" ban the full-face covering worn by some Muslim women on national security grounds, pending cabinet approval.

"The government will initiate a broader dialogue with all parties concerned and sufficient time will be taken for necessary consultations to be held and for consensus to be reached," it said in a statement. Muslims make up around a tenth of the population in majority-Buddhist Sri Lanka. The statement follows criticism from Pakistan's ambassador to Sri Lanka, Saad Kattak, who said in a tweet on Monday a ban "will only serve as injury to the feelings of ordinary Sri Lankan Muslims and Muslims across the globe".

Ahmed Shaheed, a Maldivian diplomat currently serving as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, said a ban was incompatible with international laws that protect religious belief and freedom of expression. Several Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, are among the 47 nations that will vote on Sri Lanka's human rights record at a United Nations session in Geneva next week. A UN resolution passed against Sri Lanka could allow for prosecutions of government and military officials involved in ending a decades-long civil war in 2009, and Colombo is sensitive to anything that may impact voting there, according to a person familiar with the developments. Almost a third of the 47 nations are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which last year criticised a Sri Lankan policy to forcibly cremate coronavirus victims in the country. - Agencies

### COVID-19 claims 58 more lives

ISLAMABAD: The national tally on Tuesday of total active COVID-19 cases was recorded 23,355 with 2,511 more people tested positive for the deadly virus and 1,307 people recovered from the disease during the last 24 hours. Fifty-eight corona patients have died during past 24 hours, 55 of whom were under treatment in hospitals and three out of hospitals in respective quarantine or home, according to the latest update issued by the NCOC. During the last 24 hours most of the deaths had occurred in the Punjab followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Out of the total 58 deaths occurred during last 24 hours, 24 of the deceased had died on ventilators during their treatment. Some 35,303 tests were conducted across the country on Monday, including 8,511 in Sindh, 13,727 in Punjab, 6,205 in KP, 5,369 in ICT, 398 in Balochistan, 377 in GB, and 716 in AJK. - DNA

### NAB: Maryam's statements attempt to hinder probe

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Lahore on Tuesday strongly rebutted the allegations levelled by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice-President Maryam Nawaz against the Bureau on print and electronic media.

In a statement, a spokesman for the Bureau said that the PML-N vice-president was nominated in Chaudhry Sugar Mills and money laundering cases, and that she tried to incite people to violence whenever she was summoned in connection with these cases.

He further said Maryam's statements against state institutions such as the NAB, judiciary and law-enforcement agencies were full of

rebellious sentiments, and the purpose of issuing these statements was to throw a spanner in the ongoing investigations against the Sharif family in connection with corruption cases.

The spokesperson said PML-N vice-president through her inflammatory statements provoked people's sentiments so much so that this led to the law and order situation as was the case in August 2020 when she had stormed the anti-corruption watchdog's Lahore office along with her party activists. Furthermore, he added, the NAB had nothing to do with any political party and its sole aim was to ensure the prosperity of Pakistan and its people.

On Monday, PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz lashed out at the Nation-

al Accountability Bureau (NAB) for making an issue about her statements and questioned who gave the accountability watchdog the right to judge her statements.

She was speaking to the media at her Jati Umra residence in Lahore, before a hearing in the Lahore High Court on a NAB petition for cancellation of her bail in the Chaudhry Sugar Mills (CSM) case.

"Who gave you the right to judge statements? Your job was to supposedly stop corruption. Now that you've failed in that, you have changed your responsibilities?"

She said the various institutions such as the army and the courts had their own spokespersons so who had appointed NAB as the spokesperson.

### Pak-Afghan economic cooperation key to peace

Dr.Mohammad Afzal Hadeed, chairman of the Balkh provincial parliament, received the Pak delegation

DNA

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Mohammad Farhad Azeemi, Governor of Afghanistan's northern Balkh province says durable peace can open many doors to trade and economic development but it should not be the primary condition.

"Our northern neighbours are pursuing peace in Afghanistan via economic activity. They have told us we will not wait for peace to return but instead will incentivize it through economic projects in Afghanistan," Azeemi told a Pakistani Track II delegation including four parliamentarians at his office in Mazare Sharif, the provincial capital.

Azeemi thanked Pakistan's new liberal visa policy and said this offers new opportunities for transit and bilateral trade. "We wish this could happen with Mazare Sharif

as the conduit for Pakistan's trade to and from Afghanistan", the governor told the delegates visiting as part of Center for Research and Security Studies' track II initiative Beyond Boundaries.

"This also creates demand for direct flights between Mazare Sharif, Islamabad and Peshawar", Azeemi said in a strong recognition of the new visa regulations under which all Afghans are getting one-year multiple entry visas - a move that has begun rehabilitating Pakistan's image in Afghanistan.

Dr.Mohammad Afzal Hadeed, the chairman of the Balkh provincial parliament, also received the delegation at his office and expressed his gratitude to Pakistan for the visa relaxation as well as Islamabad's support to the peace process.

Hadeed also thanked the Pak-Afghan Parliamentary Friendship Group (PAPFG) led by Speaker Asad Qaisar

for having played a key role in resolving lingering bilateral and transit issues as well as pushing for visa relaxation. This has been greatly beneficial particularly for patients who find it more convenient and cheaper to get treatment in Pakistani hospitals instead of going elsewhere.

Both leaders also expressed their gratitude to Pakistan for having established a full-fledged engineering faculty at the Balkh University, something other countries emulated later, they said.

Ms.Shandana Gulzar and Ms. Nafisa Khattak, who are both active members of the PAPFG, informed governor Azeemi and Chairman Hadeed of the strong desire within the Pakistani parliament of friendly and friction-free relations with Afghanistan through economic cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, health and education.

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