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Don't play with fire on Taiwan, warns Zhao

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Asad Umar (UK variant causing problems in Pak

Detailed News On Page-01



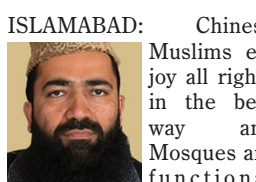
Sehr & Iftar Timings

CITY	SEHR	IFTAR
ISLAMABAD	04:12 am	6:36 pm
Faisalabad	04:17 am	6:36 pm
LAHORE	04:11 am	6:31 pm
KARACHI	04:52 am	6:54 pm

Briefs

Chinese Muslims enjoying all rights

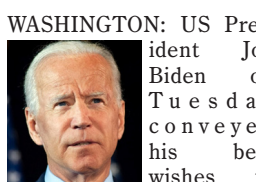
DNA



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Muslims enjoy all rights in the best way and Mosques are functional there, said Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, Chairman of the Ruet-e-Hilal Committee. The Chinese Government taking good care of Muslims. According to a report published by Gwadar Pro, he made these remarks during his visit to China-Window, a Chinese cultural center in Peshawar. The Center is devoted to providing information on China, all under one roof in Peshawar city. The Maulana who is also prayer leader at historic Badshahi Masjid Lahore said the Muslim of Xinjiang province are playing a positive role in the development of China. The Western media is presenting a wrong picture of Chinese Muslims; the way China is taking care of minorities including Muslims is commendable, he added.

Biden slams attack on Muslims

NEWS DESK



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Tuesday conveyed his best wishes to the Muslim community in America and other parts of the country, condemning the attacks and prejudice that takes place against American Muslims. In a statement published on the official White House website, Biden conveyed best wishes from him and his wife, Jill Biden, for the Muslim community around the globe as the month of Ramadan begins in the US. Biden's message came on the eve of the fasting month, when all Muslims in the country perform the first Taraweeh prayers, or special prayers performed after the Isha prayer. He started by recalling the difficult year America and other parts of the world experienced due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Inside...

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UK variant behind recent virus surge

Asad Umar Says over 1.3 mln people vaccinated against COVID-19 across country; no truth in reports of COVID-19 high infection rate among children

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Planning and Development Asad Umar on Tuesday said that UK coronavirus variant is behind recent surge in coronavirus cases in the entire region and stressed that strict implementation of SOPs can curb the spread of the virus. Talking to media persons in federal capital, the minister said that if Pakistan receives vaccines as per the commitments, the inoculation drive will be opened for all the Pakistanis after Eid-ul-Fitr. The minister expressed disappointment that the standard operating procedures (SOPs) against COVID-19 have not complied in the country. He said that the administration is now adopting tougher measures during the last 10 days to contain the spread of the virus.

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Protests disrupt oxygen supply

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Thousands of supporters of a religious party who blocked major roads to protest the arrest of their leader also disrupted critical oxygen supplies for Covid-19 patients. The party has led calls for the expulsion of the French ambassador. Punjab Health Minister Yasmin Rashid said the disruption of oxygen supplies during protests Monday night had been a "crisis". "Please do not block roads for ambulances and for visitors to the hospitals. Some ambulances are carrying oxygen cylinders, which are extremely essential for Covid patients," Rashid said.

Ambassadors extend Ramazan greetings



Ambassador of Japan

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: The Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Dr Geoffrey Shaw wished Ramzan Mubarak to all Pakistanis. In his special message at the start of Ramzan, he said, "I send



Ambassador of Switzerland

my warmest wishes to the people of Pakistan at the start of the holy month of Ramzan. Ramzan is a time for friends and family and for charity and compassion. Let us take inspiration from the spirit of this month to practice self-discipline and compassion in the current



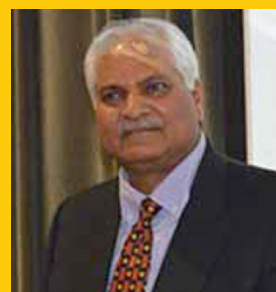
Australian High Commissioner

challenging times and focus on keeping ourselves, our families and those around us safe and healthy. This Ramzan, our thoughts will remain with all those who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in

Continued on Page 06

Court to indict ex-Pakistan ambassador to Bulgaria

ISLAMABAD: An Accountability Court (AC) on Tuesday fixed April 28, a date to indict all accused in a reference pertaining to embezzlement in funds of Embassy of Pakistan in Bulgaria. AC-III Judge Syed Asghar Ali heard the graft reference filed by National Accountability Bureau



(NAB) against former ambassador to Bulgaria A.S Babar Hashmi, accountant Tufail Qazi and others. The court directed all the accused to ensure their attendances on next hearing for the indictment process and also instructed them

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ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Nawaf Saeed Al Maliki meeting with Federal Minister for Energy Omar Ayub Khan. - DNA

Ramazan moon sighted

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Ramadan moon has been sighted and Wednesday April 14 will be the first of Ramadan in the entire country. This was announced by Chairman Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Maulana Syed Abdul Khabir Azad in Peshawar (Tuesday). Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD), and the Ministry of Science and Technology were also part of the meeting. Chairman of Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, had earlier said that people will observe the first fast (Roza) and Eid on the same day across the country.

COAS meets PM Imran

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa called on Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday to discuss Pakistan's security situation. The meeting comes a day after violence broke out in several cities of Pakistan as a religious party took to the streets to organise a protest. In some areas of the city, protestors clashed with police personnel, burnt tyres and pelted stones as well.

Pakistan set to open consulate in Munich

Qureshi interacts with Pakistani Diaspora; assures them of full cooperation

NEWS DESK

BERLIN: Pakistan, in a bid to tap economic potential with Germany, will soon open a consulate in Munich, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi announced on Tuesday.

Talking to media persons in the German capital, Qureshi said Pakistan and Germany had high prospects of cooperation in trade and investment and expressed confidence that the new consulate would pace up the development



in this regard. The foreign minister said a Consul General would be appointed at the Munich mission to supplement the diplomatic efforts of embassy in Berlin. He said Pakistan was committed to work out the Strategic Engagement Plan

of Europe and added that the country could explore cooperation with Germany particularly in areas of information technology, solar energy and electric vehicles. He expressed satisfaction that around 5,000 Pakistani students were currently studying at various educational institutions in Germany, adding that nation's visionary poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal also studied at an institute in Munich. Qureshi said efforts would be made to expand

Continued on Page 06

PDM gives another chance to PPP, ANP

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Democratic Movement chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Tuesday gave the PPP and the ANP one more chance to review their decision of parting ways with the Opposition alliance. "The PDM was not formed so that was bicker over some position or the other. We have seen many challenges through and were always able to sort things

PPP leaders resign from PDM posts

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has formally quit the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) as its leaders have resigned from the PDM posts. After written approval from

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Tehrik Labaik continues protests

BUREAU REPORT

KARACHI: Major sit-ins by a religious party which severely disrupted traffic and had thousands of people stranded for hours a day earlier started to wrap up Tuesday morning. The protests are, however, continuing for a second day, but are limited to certain areas. The chunk of the protests is taking place in Lahore. In Karachi, three areas have been closed for traffic. According to the traffic police, roads are closed in the Hub River Road area, Baldia No 4 and Korangi No 2. Meanwhile, the protest near Tower Chowk, Jinnah Bridge and Hassan Square has ended.

Uzbekistan, Pakistan leaders' summit a milestone: envoy

Ambassador of Uzbekistan Aybek Arif Usmanov says PM Imran Khan visit to Uzbekistan in July being finalised

EXCLUSIVE

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Uzbekistan Aybek Arif Usmanov gave an exclusive interview to Daily Islamabad POST on the occasion of an online summit between the leaders of Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It was indeed a historic contact between President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan. Here is the text of the interview of the Ambassador of Uzbekistan. Q: On 14th April, 2021 esteemed Leaders of our states held an Online Summit which was very positively accepted in Pakistan, especially in media, among political, expert-analytical, business and academic circles. Can you please brief us on outcomes of this historical event? A: Indeed, it is gratifying to note that virtual Summit at the highest level between Uzbekistan and Pakistan was successfully held and taking this opportunity, I would like to congratulate both brotherly nations on such high achievement. The agenda between Uzbekistan and Pakistan contained many topical issues on the further expansion of trade-economic, investment, transport and logistics partnerships based on the principles of mutual respect, benefit and equality.

The leaders of the two countries agreed on joint actions for cooperation in the areas of economic affairs, defense, security, as well as a partnership in combating against pandemic. At the end parties also agreed to organize the first official visit of Prime Minister to Pakistan Imran Khan to Uzbekistan in July of this year. This Online Summit was very positively perceived and it was the first virtual contact between the heads of Uzbekistan and Pakistan in the history of the two countries. Such active, open and sincere interaction between the heads of Uzbekistan and Pakistan is of great importance not only for bilateral relations but also for interregional connectivity. I am happy to mention that by strong will of our leaders, Uzbekistan and Pakistan



Aybek Usmanov, Ambassador of Uzbekistan

are becoming main partners, whose cooperation only strengthens projects for the sustainable development of the peoples of South and Central Asia. Q: Pl tell us something about the project on construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif - Kabul - Peshawar railway line. A: This significant trilateral project will provide a completely new transport and transit corridor for Central and South Asian countries. It diversifies the transport flows of the region. Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar route with subsequent access to the ports of Karachi



Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan

and Gwadar will allow us to significantly reduce export and import costs. From the position of South Asian countries, commissioning of Trans-Afghan railway corridor to Pakistan direction will significantly reduce the delivery time of goods to/from Central Asia, the CIS and Europe. For example, if the project would be fully implemented, the transportation of goods from Pakistan to Uzbekistan will have to spend not 35 days, but only 3-5 days. Instead of movement of almost a month, this will take less than a week.



Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan

The difference is enormous. Shortening the route means reducing the cost of transporting goods, which means saving money. According to preliminary calculations, laying the route will reduce cost of transporting of one container by almost 3 times. According to expert estimates, the cost of transporting goods from Tashkent to Karachi will be almost 1.5-2 times cheaper than the existing ones. Continuing this logical chain, we can already predict that an increase in the profitability of transportation will automatically contribute to an increase in freight traffic and interregional trade. The launch of Mazar-i-Sharif-Peshawar railway will also create a powerful platform for achieving inclusive economic development for Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The multiplicative socio-economic effect will be expressed in creation of new jobs and construction of roadside infrastructure along the railway route. Only during the construction of the line itself, it is planned to build 264 bridges, 7 tunnels, 641 culverts. This railway project will also contribute to the expansion of the transport and communication network within Afghanistan. Moreover, Mazar-i-Sharif-Peshawar line will become part of the broader infrastructural connectivity of Central and South Asia. (Continued on Back Page)

Briefs

Six die of coronavirus in Sargodha last week

STAFF REPORT

SARGODHA: Six people died of coronavirus while 400 new cases were reported in the district during the last week.

Talking to the media here on Tuesday, Chief Executive Officer Health Dr Rai Samiullah said the death toll due to COVID-19 reached 162 while total cases 4846 and recoveries 3945 in the district since March 2020.

He said that 6,000 tests for coronavirus were conducted during the week.

He said that total active COVID-19 cases in Sargodha city were reported as 839, out of which, 824 were quarantined at their homes while 15 were under treatment at Isolation ward set up in DHQ Teaching hospital. "Twenty patients died of COVID-19 during the third wave of corona in Sargodha", he added.

He said 50 beds had been allocated in isolation ward at cardiology ward of DHQ Teaching hospital, 10 at TB hospital while 10 at all THQs of Sargodha district for COVID-19 patients.

Awareness session about helpline, road safety held

DNA

FAISALABAD: Punjab Highway Patrolling police Faisalabad region organized an awareness session about helpline, road safety & traffic rules and coronavirus SOPs at a private college here on Tuesday.

Incharge PHP mobile education unit Rizwan Bhatti during his lecture said, "We can save ourselves on highways by adopting preventive measures".

He said that wearing face masks, observing social distance of minimum 6 feet, avoiding going in public gatherings, and washing and sanitizing hands were the basic preventives which could save from corona pandemic.

Providing information about patrolling police helpline 1124, he said that patrolling police were providing quick help to people in emergency and controlling crimes on highways.

He said that if anyone facing difficulty while travelling on highways, he should call at 1124 for help.

He also provided tips to participants about traffic rules, importance of seat belts, helmets, side mirrors, indicator lights and disadvantages of cell phones during driving and doing wheelie.

Carpet sector should be patronized: PCMAE

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMAE) Tuesday said that the government should provide all possible patronage to the export sector in the current difficult situation and in view of this, relief should be given in the next budget.

These views were expressed by the senior vice chairman of the association Riaz Ahmed while addressing a review meeting held through video link. Chairperson Carpet Training Institute Pervez Hanif, Senior Central Leader Abdul Latif Malik, Saeed Khan, Muhammad Akbar Malik, Ejaz-ur-Rehman, Major (ret'd) Akhtar Nazir, Daniel Hanif, Faisal Saeed Khan and others were also present on the occasion.

The difficulties faced by the handloom carpet industry and related artisans were also discussed in detail. Riaz Ahmed said other countries, including traditional rivals, are earning billions of dollars from the export of handmade carpets due to the concessions and facilities provided by their governments, while our exports are not declining and Prime Minister Imran Khan should take notice and issue directions in regard to patronizing carpet industry.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan chairs the meeting of Federal Cabinet in Islamabad. – DNA

FDA DG for conceiving new projects of development

The private housing schemes would be brought into the circle of law and regulations. The vigorous operation against the illegal housing schemes would continue

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: The new projects would be conceived for city development to bring Faisalabad as par international standard. This was claimed by Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) Director General Dr Faisal Azim while talking to Islamabad correspondent. He elaborated his priorities with regards to uplift and beautification of Faisalabad city and said that new dimension would be given to the development programme and service delivery for boosting the image of FDA and it would be made more vibrant, active and strong institution by ensuring good governance.

He said that the private housing schemes would be brought into the circle of law and regulations. The vigorous operation against the illegal housing schemes would continue and the law breaker developers would not be allowed to



play the fate of citizens, he maintained. The Director General FDA said that the performance of the one window counter would be supervised regularly for speedy disposal of public applications while the doors of his office would be remained open for public and ap-

plicants can be contacted to him without any hesitation. He announced that corruption would not be tolerated and prompt relief would be provided to the public by following merit policy and transparency. Responding a question, the DG said that the services of WASA would be made as

per the expectations of the public. The sewerage and water supply system would be revamped by utilising the available resources and pace of on going mega projects of water supply and water treatment would be accelerated by adopting coordinated strategy. He added. He said the FDA would

play its due role to address the issues of traffic management in the city and Traffic Engineering and Planning Agency (TEPA) would be made functional on strong footings for durable roads planning for easy flow of traffic. To a question, he said that drive against land grabbers and encroachments would be continued without any discrimination. He said the special campaign had been designed for maximum recovery of dues from the defaulters and FDA would be made financial strong institution. He said that the all stakeholders would be taken on board in the process of City development and proposals would be welcomed for multidimensional development. He said that the best working relationship would be developed to raise the quality of service delivery through the consultation and cooperation of local political leadership and members of governing body.

'Quality items to be provided in Ramazan Bazars'

BUREAU REPORT

FAISALABAD: Divisional Commissioner Saqib Manan has said that no effort should be spared in providing quality essential items and maintaining good arrangements in Ramazan bazars during the hours and ensure high quality of items from the beginning to the end of the bazaar. He said this while inspecting the Ramadan Bazaar at Riaz Shahid Chowk, Islamabad. Assistant Commissioner City Syed Ayub Bukhari and other officers were also present. The Divisional Commissioner also

inspected the stalls of cheap flour and sugar in Ramazan Bazaar and while inspecting the weight, directed to save the consumers from the hassle of waiting. He reviewed the quality of various items in Ramazan Bazaar and the difference from normal markets. He met with buyers and inquired about the quality of fruits, vegetables and other items. The Divisional Commissioner also inspected the weighing scales and directed to check the weighing scales frequently and no user should complain of underweight. He directed to make CCTV

cameras functional and ensure cleanliness in Ramazan bazars at all times. He also urged for implementation of Corona SOPs in the bazars. Assistant Commissioner City Syed Ayub Bukhari said that there are 19 Ramadan bazars functional in the district where arrangements have been made to provide essential items to the consumers at controlled prices. Deputy commissioner inspects Ramazan Bazar No effort should be spared in making the Ramadan bazars in the district in line with the expectations of people. In this regard, standard necessities

should be available at all the stalls. Deputy Commissioner directed this while inspecting Sasta Ramazan Bazars in different areas. The Deputy Commissioner visited the bazars of Kaleem Shaheed Park, Chatri wali Ground, Jinnah Colony and other areas and inspected the stalls of vegetables, fruits and groceries and directed that steps be taken to improve them further. He asked the officers in charge to maintain the supply of essential items and their high quality and to check the items at the stalls themselves to ensure the availability of fresh vegetables and fruits.

Police flag march in Sargodha

MEHBOOB AHIR

SARGODHA: Police on Tuesday conducted a flag march in the city to create a sense of security among citizens in the holy month of Ramazan.

The flag march was held under the supervision of DPO Zulfiqar Ahmed and participated by SDPO City Circle Muhammad Jahangir, DSP traffic Kashif Masood, SHO City Circle, Elite Force, Muhafiz Squad and police patrolling officials.

The flag march started from Zakaullah Shaheed Police Lines, and concluded at the same point after passing through various areas of the city.

District Police Officer Zulfiqar Ahmed said that Sargodha police had ensured foolproof security arrangements for Ramazan. He said the purpose of flag march was to show preparations of the police and other law-enforcement agencies to cope with any untoward situation. The DPO directed the SDPOs and SHO to make effective security arrangements in their respective areas.

Sindh reports 366 covid cases

DNA

KARACHI: Fortunately no death stemming from Coronavirus reported, however 366 new cases emerged when 10,176 tests were conducted.

This was stated by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in a statement issued here from CM House on Tuesday. Mr. Murad Ali Shah said that fortunately no death was reported on today. He added that till the number death and was 4,530.

The Chief Minister said that 10,176 samples were tested which detected 366 cases that constituted 3.6 percent current detection rate. He added that so far 3,415,608 tests have been conducted against which 269,839 cases were diagnosed, of them 95.8 percent or 258,533 patients have recovered, including 583 overnight.

The CM said that currently 6,776 patients were under treatment, of them 6,439 were in home isolation, 12 at isolation centers and 325 at different hospitals. He added that the condition of 298 patients was stated to be critical, including 39 shifted to ventilators.

According to the statement, out of 366 new cases, 206 have been detected from Karachi. While district-wise statistics are as follows, East Karachi 99, South Karachi 42, Hyderabad 33, Tando Mohammad Khan 26, Central Karachi 26, Korangi, Malir and Mirpurkhas 15 each, Dadu & Nawabshah 13 each, Badin 11, West Karachi 10, Naushero Feroze & Thatto 9 each, Umakot 8, Sujawal 4, Jacobabad & Ghotki 2 each, Khairpur and Shikarpur one each new cases reported. The Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah urged people of the province to follow SOPs.

3 arrested over aerial firing

DNA

FAISALABAD: Balochni police arrested three persons on the charge of aerial firing, displaying weapons and uploading its video on social media.

Police said on Tuesday that Adnan, Afzal and Lakko, residents of Chak No.60-RB resorted to aerial firing when a political figure visited their village. They also made video of their weapons display and firing and shared the video with their friends by uploading it on social media.

On getting information, City Police Officer (CPO) Sohail Ahmad Chaudhary took strict notice and directed the police to arrest the accused without any delay. A special team headed by ASI Liaqat Ali Chattha was constituted who conducted raids and arrested the accused.

The police also recovered a kalashnikov and a rifle (244-bore) from their possession and locked the accused behind the bars for further investigation.

21 shops sealed for SOPs breach

DNA

LAHORE: The city district administration sealed 21 shops, restaurants, marriage halls and imposed Rs 35,000 fine on violation of coronavirus related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) here on Tuesday.

According to a spokesperson for the district administration, Assistant Commissioner Shalimar Mansoor Ahmed Qazi sealed 12 shops and a marriage hall over SOPs violation in Shalimar area. AC Cantt Zeeshan Ranjha sealed seven shops and a pharmacy in his jurisdiction.

The teams also inspected public and private transport vehicles and issued warnings to transporters and drivers to follow coronavirus SOPs strictly. Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioner Shalimar Mansoor Ahmed Qazi arrested five shopkeepers in tehsil Shalimar for overcharging and warned that price inspections would carried out on regular basis.

Pakistan Navy conducts annual safety review

DNA

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy Annual Safety Review 2019-20 was held here where Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

The safety review is held annually with an aim to create safety awareness and inculcate safety culture among naval personnel which provides a road map to further enhance safe working environment, said a Pakistan Navy news release.

While addressing the participants, Naval Chief urged that each individual of Pakistan Navy bears the responsibility of safeguarding not only his life but also the expensive, state of the art assets with

which he has been entrusted with, by the Government, through inculcation of robust safety culture.

"The same can only be ensured through strict adherence to safe practices and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)," he added.

He advised the audience that our concept of safety must draw its impetus from an honest retrospection of yester years. The Naval Chief expressed his satisfaction over adherence to safety culture in Pakistan Navy and said that Safety Review is actually a process of self-accountability which helps to evaluate and gauge the safety standards in the light of previous occurrences.

The Admiral appreciated the Field Commands for maintaining high standards of work and per-

sonal safety particularly under the challenging COVID-19 environment.

At the end, Chief of the Naval Staff gave away the safety trophies and awards to the winners of Pakistan Navy Annual Safety Review. The event was attended by officers, sailors and navy civilians from the Field Commands.

CNS confers Military Awards In an impressive Investiture Ceremony held at Bahria Auditorium, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi conferred military awards upon Pakistan Navy personnel.

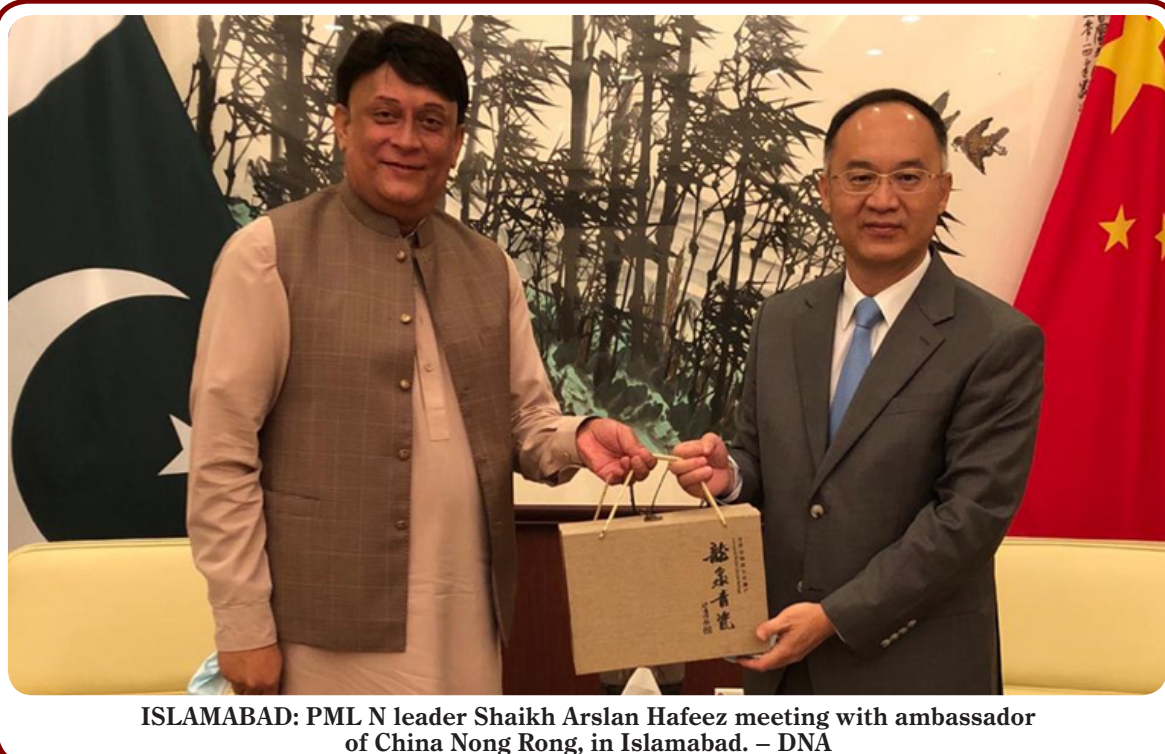
The recipients of Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Military) were Cdre. Khyber Zaman, Cdre. Shaqat Hussain Akhtar, Cdre. Adnan Majeed, Cdre. Muhammad Imran Rana, Cdre. Rizwan Ahmed, Capt. No-

aman Imam, Capt. Khalil Ahmed, Capt. Atif Raees Khan and Capt. Farhan Ahmad Siddiqi, said a news release on Tuesday

The recipients of Tamgha-i-Imtiaz (Military) were Cdr. Muhammad Haseeb, Cdr. Talha Mateen, Cdr. Zaheer Ahmed Majid, Cdr. Abid Hussain, Cdr. Tajamal Hussain, Cdr M Maoz Akrama, Cdr. Atta Ullah Jehangiri, Cdr. Irfan Bashir, Cdr. Tassaddaq Hussein, Cdr. Irfan Parvez Khan Khattak, Cdr. Abdul Musawir, Lt. Cdr. Sajid Bari, Lt. Cdr. Muhammad Mobeen-Ul-Haque, Lt. Cdr. Siddiq Akbar, Lt. Cdr. Husnain Raza, Lt. Cdr. Haider Abbas, Lt. Cdr. Muhammad Wahab Usama, Lt. Cdr. Hassan Shahid, Lt. Cdr. Imran Khan and Lt. Cdr. Imran Khan. The recipients of Tamgha-i-Basalat were Capt. Saiyad Uzair Khalid,

Lt. Cdr. Najeem Ullah Khan, Lt. Cdr. Mahboob Ul-Haque Siddiqui, Lt. Waleed Nawaz, Lt. Rao Junaid Ahmed, Lt. Ahmad Hassan Shah, Lt. Hafiz M Ameer Hamza, Usman Ali LCDT, Imran Masih LSW, Zia Ur Rehman SFTI and Wasif Ur Rehman SFTI.

The recipients of Imtiaz Sanads were Cdre. Rizwan Ahmed, Lt. Muhammad Saqib Majeed and Lt. Muhammad Haris Naghman. 22 Awards of TK (M)-I, 65 awards of TK(M)-II and 29 awards of TK(M)-III have also been conferred upon CPOs and Sailors. Letters of Commendation from Chief of the Naval Staff have been awarded to 99 Officers, CPOs/Sailors and Navy Civilians. The ceremony was attended by serving and retired officers of the Pakistan Navy.



ISLAMABAD: PML N leader Shaikh Arslan Hafeez meeting with ambassador of China Nong Rong, in Islamabad. – DNA

Briefs

CDA starts construction in I-14

RAJA PERVAIZ

ISLAMABAD: Upon the special directions of the Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), developmental work in sector I-14 has been started after the delay of 13 years. Work on roads of the sector has been started since April 12. Chairman CDA had directed for initiating the developmental work in the said sector in December 2019. According to detail, CDA has started developmental work in sector I-14 as the work was being delayed for last 13 years. Work on service roads of the said sector is continued. 5700 RFT long roads will be constructed. The authority had started work on service road north in 2007, but the agreement was dismissed for not getting the occupation. After that all the projects were dismissed. Chairman CDA worked again on PCI of these projects and issued directions for initiating the developmental work in the said sector in December 2019. Tenders for the developmental projects in the sectors were opened in March 2021. The developmental work has been started since April 12, 2021. Work of 2000 RFT will be completed in four weeks. The developmental work will be completed within the time period of 05 month till September 11, 2021.

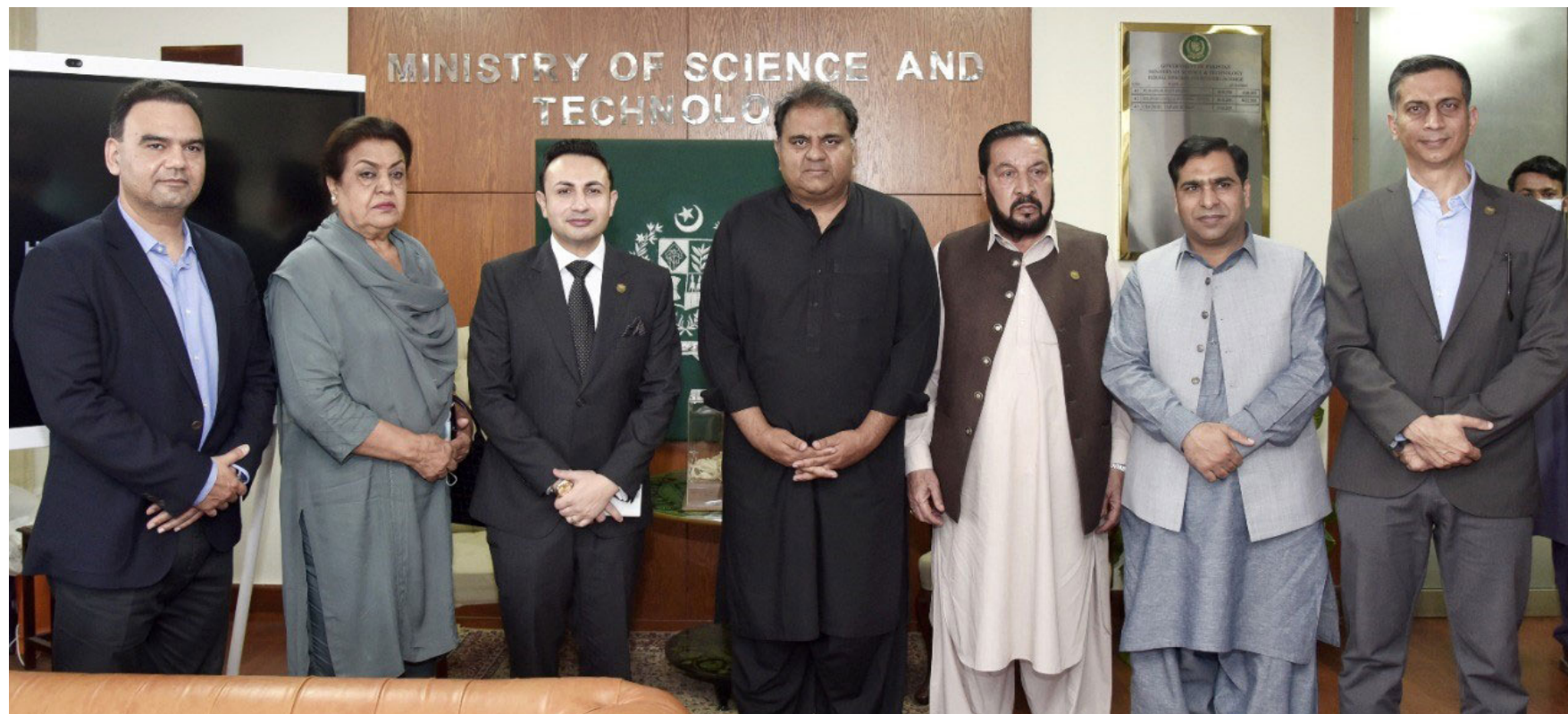
Fire breaks out in MHNP area of Sinhari Village

ISLAMABAD: A lush green patch of Margalla Hills National Park on Tuesday caught fire in the Sinhari Village of the National Park and Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) staff has rushed to the scene to put out the fire. The fire has flared in the Sinhari Village vicinity falling at the backside PAF Headquarters near Kalajar village the firefighting team of IWMB was moved to the spot soon after receiving reports of fire, said an IWMB official when contacted to confirm fire incident. He added that the fire extinguishing operation was underway and further details would be communicated once the operation culminates after putting out fire. It may be mentioned here that since April 1 fire season has started in the Margalla Hills National Park where most of the fires were allegedly set by the local masses in revenge to the IWMB enforcement measures. - APP

Classes from 1-8 to continue online

IBRAR KHAN

ISLAMABAD: As per decision taken in the Inter Provincial Education Ministers' Conference (IPEMC), the schools from class one to eight would be closed till April 28, however the educational activities during this period will be continued through online mode. According to a notification issued by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), the classes from 9th to 12th will be resumed from April 19, while the annual exam of class five and eight to start from 18th May. The notification further stated that the exams from class one to four and class six and seven would start from June 1 which will be announced by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) soon. As per the notification, the date of exams could be changed. The children will attend their schools on alternative days as directed earlier. The educational institutions will strictly adhere the COVID-19 SOPs. The transport for the schools and colleges will be opened completely and the SOPs and cleanliness in the buses will be observed as per issued guidelines, it added. The notification further directed the Area Education Officers (AEOs) to ensure the implementation of the directions.



ISLAMABAD: Sardar Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry pose for group photo with Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, Federal Minister for Science and Technology after a meeting with him along with ICCI delegation. Fatma Azim Senior Vice President, Abdul Rehman Khan Vice President ICCI, Omair Khattak, Umar Hussain and Rana Qaiser Shehzad are also in picture. - DNA

Government to promote innovation in industries

Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said that the Pakistan Council for Science & Technology (PCST) has been tasked to carry out the First Industrial National Innovation Survey (FINIS) to identify the factors hampering the innovations in industries

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, Federal Minister for Science and Technology said that the government would promote innovation in industries for improving their competitiveness in national and international markets. He said this while exchanging views with a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry that called on him led by Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President. Fatma Azim Senior Vice President, Abdul Rehman Khan Vice President ICCI, Omair Khattak, Umar Hussain and Rana Qaiser Shehzad Executive Members ICCI were in the delegation.

Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said that the Pakistan Council for Science & Technology (PCST) has been tasked to carry out the First Industrial National Innovation Survey (FINIS) to identify the factors hampering the innovations in industries and take remedial measures to encourage industries for undertaking innovation activities that would enhance their competitiveness and promote exports. He said that MoST was working to encourage indigenous production of solar panels to shift gradually to solar energy that was more cost effective. He said that the government was considering fixing computer chips on flour bags to monitor the movement of flour in the country and to

overcome its shortage created by vested interests. He assured that his ministry would cooperate in resolving industrial problems and promoting industrial efficiency in local industrial units. He also briefed that delegation about the various projects of his ministry for technological development of the country including certification incentive program for SMEs. Speaking at the occasion, Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) briefed the federal minister about the key issues of the local industrial and sought remedial measures to address them. He said that pharmaceuticals, steel, marble, flour, soap & chemicals, IT and light engineering were the

major industries working in the federal capital and they needed the cooperation and support of the government in upgrading technology and machinery for producing innovative and value added products. He said that the government should abolish taxes and duties in the forthcoming budget on the import of industrial technology & machinery to facilitate upgradation of domestic industry. He said that most of these industries were relying on imported raw material for manufacturing of finished products, but due to restrictions caused by Covid-19 pandemic and hefty devaluation of rupee, the cost of imported raw material has increased significantly. He highlighted the need for developing indigenous

raw material producing industry in the country that would help in producing competitive products and improving exports. Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said that ICCI was working for the establishment of a new industrial estate in the region and urged that the government should extend all possible support for realization of this important project. Fatma Azim Senior Vice President, Abdul Rehman Khan Vice President ICCI and other members of ICCI delegation also highlighted the various issues of the local industry and emphasized that the government should take measures to address them for accelerating the pace of industrialization in the region.



ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of Maldives Farzana Zahir has congratulated Maldivian Cadet Ismail Hizwath for winning the Best Foreign Officer Award at Pakistan Military Academy. High Commission is extremely proud of his hard work and achievement. - DNA

Ehsaas Kafaalat payments begin: Dr. Nishtar

ISLAMABAD: Ehsaas has opened 8171 SMS campaign here on Tuesday to enable the new deserving households to check their eligibility under Ehsaas Kafaalat programme. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation, Dr. Sania Nishtar said that the deserving families desiring to find out their eligibility status in the Kafaalat programme should send their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) numbers on the SMS code 8171, which is activated from today. "The 8171 SMS service has been made free of charge for the public and the entire cost will be borne by Ehsaas", Dr. Nishtar added. "Ehsaas has begun the process of enrolling new beneficiaries, which have been identified on the basis of the 2021 Ehsaas survey which is now 81% complete", she said. Beneficiaries identified through the survey undergo "wealth profiling" through a data analytics mechanism to further clean the list of beneficiaries. When beneficiaries send their 13-digit CNIC number on 8171, they will either get a message that they are eligible and will be asked to collect money; or they will be informed that they are ineligible, or they will get a "wait" instruction. Those in the third category will be analyzed and will get a final message about their eligibility by June this year. The process of the survey will continue till June 2021. Since the survey is 80% complete and 20% of the population is not in the database yet, if/when they send SMS to ascertain their status, they will be told to wait till they are surveyed. - DNA

Arts Council arranged online Photo Exhibition

The special guest of the function was MPA Abida Raja, Naheed Mantoor and Director Actors PUCAR Waqar Ahmed were also present on the occasion

RAWALPINDI: An online exhibition of works by artist Iram Batool Gilani was organized at the Punjab Arts Council. More than 60 works of art are on display in the exhibition. The special guest of the function was Member Punjab Assembly Abida Raja, Naheed Mantoor and Director Actors Arts Council Waqar Ahmed were also present on the occasion. While addressing the ceremony, she said that the works of art in the exhibition are close to reality. Iram Batool Gilani has summarized the personalities of world famous leaders in a beautiful way. Pakistani artists are rich in art and are shining the name of the country all over the world. Iram Batool Gilani is an asset of Pakistan. The Punjab government under the leadership of Chief Minister Sardar Usman Bazzar is taking significant steps to promote art. He also thanked the Arts Council for organizing the event. Director Arts Council Waqar Ahmed said that Arts Council has always provided a platform to the youth so that they can take their art to the world. Arts Council has so far presented the work of hundreds of young artists to the world, which has further boosted the morale of young artists. The online exhibition lasted for 3 days. - DNA



IPS, PMSA MoU for capacity building in maritime domain

The scope of cooperation, as per MoU, entails facilitation in conducting research, co-organizing of seminars, and capacity building activities in the maritime interests of Pakistan

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) on Tuesday to strengthen collaboration between the two organizations in maritime domain. The signing ceremony was held simultaneously at PMSA Headquarters in Karachi and IPS in Islamabad via video link. Director Training PMSA Commander Farooq accompanied by other fellow officials represented PMSA whereas former ambassador and Vice Chairman IPS Syed Abrar Hussain along with

Shafaq Sarfaraz, manager outreach, Hafiz Inam, deputy manager outreach and publications, and Kulsom Belal, research officer at IPS, attended the ceremony on IPS' behalf.

Both organizations agreed to foster cooperation in maritime domain to counter prevailing maritime blindness in the country and to bring into academic discourse the mechanisms and challenges

with regards to law enforcement at seas. The scope of cooperation, as per MoU, entails facilitation in conducting research, co-organizing of seminars, and capacity building activities in the

maritime interests of Pakistan. Commander Farooq said on the occasion that PMSA is the only maritime law enforcement agency at sea having extended roles and tasks for effectively policing and ensuring national and international laws in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Pakistan. He hoped the MoU will pave way for more collaborative efforts to bolster joint maritime research initiatives and also invited IPS team to visit PMSA headquarters in Karachi. Director Training PMSA also wished to collaborate and share academic research resources with IPS and offered support to facilitate IPS researchers carrying out research in the maritime sector as part of PMSA endeavors to promote maritime learning.



SC issues notice to IHC registrar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday issued contempt of court notice to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) registrar in case of demolition of lawyers' chamber in Islamabad's F-8 court. A two-member bench comprising Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed and Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan heard the review petition filed by the Islamabad Bar Association. During the course of proceedings, Additional Attorney General Aamir Rehman said the IHC registrar had submitted a reply regarding the demolition of the lawyers' chambers. Expressing dissatisfaction over the registrar's reply, the chief justice said the registrar did not take court orders seriously and left the execution of the court order to the junior officers. He said the registrar was mentally ill and why not he should be suspended from the office. The additional attorney general said illegal chambers' structures had been demolished in the F-8 court. The chief justice said the structure of the chambers was demolished because of the court, the registrar had nothing to do with it, if the registrar was convicted of contempt of court, he would be fired, he added. Later, the court issued a contempt of court notice to the IHC registrar seeking a reply within seven days and adjourned hearing of the case.

ADC directs to expedite anti-dengue activities

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdullah Mehmood Tuesday directed the officials concerned to expedite anti-dengue activities as prevailing weather suitable for the growth of dengue larvae. Chairing a meeting held to review anti-dengue arrangements, he said that as the temperature was being increasing day by day, the threat of dengue fever spread increases, so there is a need to combat it on an emergency basis. Abdullah directed the officials to accelerate anti-dengue activities for tracing the larva and its eradication so that the growth of dengue larvae could not spread. The ADC directed the officials to ensure the implementation of anti-dengue SOPs, adding, a vigorous awareness campaign was essential for effective community participation to defeat dengue and COVID-19.

Jl Women Wing felicitate Ummah on eve of Ramzan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Nazima of Jamaat Islami Women Wing North Punjab, Samina Ihsan and Nazima District Islamabad Nusrat Naheed have felicitated the Ummah on the advent of the holy month of Ramzan and said that Allah has once again blessed us with the opportunity to please Him during these blessed moments. In a joint statement issued here Tuesday, they said every moment of this holy month was very special. During this month, Allah decorates the Janah for his servants and chains the satanic forces, so that his servants could get trained during this month with patience, perseverance, empathy and benevolence and be prepared to fight the evil during rest of the year. They said piety could only be achieved if fasting, Sehra and Iftar were arranged according to their true Islamic spirit. They quoting a Hadith said that fast was not only for the stomach, but to control every part of the body from evil doings.

The gentle warrior

HE was an embodiment of resistance against tyranny, a tower of strength for human rights activists, and a beacon of hope for those who want to make this country a truly democratic place. Perhaps never before in its history has Pakistan needed a voice of reason and rationality, such as the one that came for decades from Ibn Abdur Rehman, better known to us all as IA Rehman or Rehman Sahib, who passed away on Monday at the age of 90. In doing so, he has left the country's progressives without the light that guided them through the frequent dark times they have faced – and continue to face. Through both written and spoken words, for many years IA Rehman outlined the contours of a democratic society. He was an activist for freedom of expression, and challenged all authoritarian and dictatorial regimes and tendencies in Pakistan. He was also a journalist, an editor par excellence and someone who generously imparted his expertise and wisdom to his peers and juniors. Born in Haryana, IA Rehman migrated to Pakistan after Partition. Being a progressive, he involved himself in the left-wing politics of the 1950s and 60s, and developed a close relationship with journalists, intellectuals, poets, and writers. His circle of friends, mentors and comrades included Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Hameed Akhtar, Mazhar Ali Khan, MinhajBarna, NisarUsmani, SaleemAsmi, Sibte Hasan, and many others. After nearly 20 years of active journalism, in 1970 Rehman Sahib and a couple of his friends launched their own newspaper Azad. During the 1971 military action in East Pakistan, IA Rehman was one of the very few voices that raised questions about the undemocratic path the regime was taking. Rehman Sahib's was one of the most powerful voices against the dark dictatorship of Gen ZiaulHaq. In the 1980s, he played an instrumental role in the formation of an independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRC) in the country. Since then, he remained associated with the HRC and held various positions there. From 1978 to 1988, he was also the executive editor of the leftist weekly Viewpoint of Mazhar Ali Khan. After the restoration of a controlled democracy in Pakistan in 1988, the young PM Benazir Bhutto requested him to lead the daily Pakistan Times as its chief editor. He accepted the offer but then BB herself was removed in 1990, just after 20 months in office. Since then, IA Rehman had been writing for some of the leading national and international journals, magazines and newspapers. His incisive pen did not spare both civilian and military rulers when they transgressed their authority. He could not brook any violation of fundamental rights in the country and with the likes of Asma Jahangir, HinaJilani, Hussain Naqi and Dr. Mehdi Hasan stood fast in his struggle against the violators of human rights. Rehman Sahib's last column was published in Dawn on April 8, 2021, just four days before he departed. For those who value the fundamental rights accorded to citizens of a free country, IA Rehman became synonymous with the struggle to attain these rights. His was a quiet but firm resistance, which was usually complemented by the much-missed late Asma Jahangir. With Rehman Sahib's death, it is not enough to say that we have lost an icon of resistance. We may just have lost one of the last great warriors that spoke truth to power, and stood by the people – no matter what their city, their gender or class.

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Covid panic

THERE appears to be some sense of panic over the coronavirus pandemic raging through Pakistan. There are now clear indications that fear is spreading as news of deaths widens around the country. Since it began early last year, Pakistan has suffered 721,000 infections and over 15,000 deaths as a result of the virus. To add to the problems, the country's vaccination programme has been moving at a slow speed. Meanwhile, while Pakistan is one of the very few countries in the world that has allowed the private imported vaccines, there are simply not enough to go around as panicked people rush to receive what supply exists. And the death toll continues to climb. Hospitals in Punjab report that they have very little capacity left to place people who need oxygen on ventilators and almost no beds on which to take in new patients. The situation is becoming desperate. There are fears that the ability of hospitals to cope with the epidemic may soon run out. The Punjab health minister has warned that this could happen and has suggested a total lockdown. While 'smart' lockdowns have been imposed in some cities, and some localities in various cities, Pakistan has so far not gone once again into the complete lockdown that some health experts warn may be the only way to stop the pandemic from spreading further. The situation is somewhat nightmarish. The vaccine supply that had been hoped for has not quite come in, with the donations Pakistan had decided to rely on somewhat slow in reaching the country, and private companies not able to keep up with the demand. In some good news, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has said that the country has been promised 15 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine from the WHO's Covax scheme by May. As the death toll continues to rise, we have also seen the presence of the UK variant of the virus, which is quickly becoming dominant, claiming the lives of younger people. But even now, some skepticism still exists about the pandemic. SOPs are being enforced more strictly by the government, at least in major cities, but are still not observed by a majority in the country. As Ramazan starts, the fears are that the 'third wave' could prove to be deadlier than was previously expected. In this situation, we hope the government has a plan to keep the people safe.

The HEC Affairs

Dr. Yousaf Alamgirian



Dr Javaid Laghari was the second chairman from 2009 to 2013. He unearthed the fake degrees of politicians and refused to accept any pressure on this issue. He was replaced by Dr Mukhtar Ahmed. Dr Tariq Banuri became the fourth chairman of HEC in November 2018 for a period of four years. It is worth mentioning that appointment of chairman HEC is considered equal to the federal minister from protocol point-of-view

THE Higher Education Commission (HEC) has turned into another example of bad governance due to many reasons. It has unfortunately gone through many phases of experiments in the hands of different tenures. HEC was once a University Grants Commission, established in 1974 with the mandate of funding, overseeing, regulating and accrediting the higher education institutions. During Musharraf rule, its name was changed into HEC and Dr Atta urRehman became its Chairman in 2002. He evolved HEC into modern lines. New avenues in the research sector were introduced. Numerous scholarships were announced and hundreds of research scholars were sent abroad for PhD and post-doctorate level research. When Musharraf left, the new government put cut on the funds of HEC and many of the research scholars who were busy in research abroad were caught in the doldrums because of not issuance of the rest of the instalments in time. Many of them have to work to meet their left out charges and a number of them came back without completing their research and degrees. Dr Javaid Laghari was the second chairman from 2009 to 2013. He unearthed the fake degrees of politicians and refused to accept any pressure on this issue. He was replaced by Dr Mukhtar Ahmed. Dr Tariq Banuri became the fourth chairman of HEC in November 2018 for a period of four years. It is worth mentioning that appointment of chairman HEC is considered equal to the federal minister from protocol point-of-view. However, chairman HEC enjoys much more powers than that of the federal ministers. He can appoint the staff even in grade 20/21 on a regular basis. For that, he has to fulfil the formality by calling selection board meeting. Whereas federal ministers can only appoint people on non-gazetted vacancies because from grade 17 onwards appointments are made through Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) where federal ministers can't intervene. The outgoing chairman HEC however used this power only a few days before his removal. Keeping in view the ill intentions and favouritism it is a need of the hour that recruitment in autonomous bodies should also be made through FPSC. Resolution could be passed through parliament or the president can issue the ordinance. This will only be done when any government would like to ensure merit and transparency in the recruitments. This is major trauma in our country that policies

of the institutions are not permanent. Overnight changes are made in the policies. Indeed, governments must not interfere in the affairs of the organisations which are protected legally and constitutionally. This cover allows them to perform with full freedom. Nevertheless if govt. sees that some specific person or institution is going beyond its limitations and it is harming the organisation then options are always there to mend things. During the last few years several untoward changes were made in higher education. If we take the example of PhD course only, HEC has notified that in future the students will be able to go for PhD only attaining the BS degree. M.Phil. course will be abolished. Matter of the fact is the MPhil degree was very useful in terms that researcher were taught new research techniques before they start PhD course work and research. Whereas BS level is not that mature level to do research work of PhD level. However, if new PhD policies are implemented as it is what will be the fate of the thousands of research scholars who have done MPhil? There should be an independent body that approves certain education policies undertaken by HEC sort of organisations. Outgoing chairman Mr. Tariq Banuri may be a very upright and honest person but few facts, however, prove that he has certain motives and agenda to fulfil during his tenure that's why when he came to know that government has brought an ordinance to cut his tenure, he immediately called the selection board to appoint people on senior-level appointments mostly advisors and DGs in grade 21 and 20 respectively. A report published in the newspaper says that "A statement issued by Officers Welfare Association (OWA) HEC said that the officers and staff of HEC welcome the decision of the Federal Government to remove the Chairman HEC. The statement alleged that after the decision of his removal by the federal government, the Chairman HEC called the meeting of the selection board for selection of his blue-eyed/favourite individuals on the position of 12 regular DGs in grade 20, advisors in Grade 21, four positions on MP-I, and two positions of MP-II and MP-III. It said that the HEC employees showed grave concerns over calling the Selection Board in haste in violation of the HEC Recruitment Policy and Rules. The HEC Employees demanded the Prime Minister of Pakistan (who is also the controlling Authority of HEC) to stop the Chairman from holding the illegal selection board, especially when NAB has already initiated

an inquiry about illegal appointment of dozen of consultants". Such reports reflect dubious intentions on the part of the outgoing chairman. Uprightness and high moral values demand that if the chairman was removed he should have relinquished by allowing the next chairman/competent authority to do the brainstorming, get the applications shortlisted on merit and call the selection board accordingly to select the competent and professional candidates for very senior level appointments. The things done in haste also put questions on the working of HEC and the weakness of the state which could not interfere to stop the loot sale of the recruitments. There is a need to understand that HEC is a national organisation and not a personal property of any of the chairmen. NAB/FIA should intervene and ascertain the level of misappropriation made in recruitments. If all the candidates selected for the appointments, fulfil the criterion they should be allowed to work otherwise recruitments made in haste be cancelled and documents of all the candidates who applied for different vacancies be reviewed and eligible candidates be called for interviews. There must be many candidates who qualify the given criterion but were not called for interviews. However, it is not the first time when any government has put a cut on the duration of tenure of any head of the organisation. During the Musharraf era tenure of the then chairman FPSC Jamshed-GulzarKiani was decreased from 5 years to three years. And he had to relinquish from the duty. Now President of Pakistan has issued an ordinance to decrease the tenure of the HEC chairman. Nonetheless, tussles are obviously not good for the institutions especially which are related to education as education is the only influential road towards the future of the country. What future will our nation have, depends upon the policies, undergoing now. We all have to be a bit more calculated, careful and honest when it comes to the issue of nation and state. The HEC is a precious institution of the state, so, the responsibility lies with the state to save this organization from Kakistocracy and take measures to prevent it from becoming a personal estate of the people sitting at the helm of affairs. Therefore, viable solutions are needed because tussles never work, they simply ruin. – The writer is Rawalpindi based author and analyst. yousafalamgirian@gmail.com Twitter @YusafAlamgirian

Pak-Russia relations will change the region

Attiya Munawar



Russia's announcement to provide Pakistan with modern special weapons in the fight against terrorism in response to Pakistan's goodwill message is a significant development as Pakistan has long had its weapons needs from the United States and Western countries. Since then, it has stepped into the field of automatic armaments with the cooperation of China and is rapidly moving towards self-sufficiency

IN view of the Iran-China agreement, the growing proximity between Beijing and Moscow, and the recent developments in the region, the Russian Foreign Minister's visit to Pakistan is a matter of special significance. It is the first visit by a Russian foreign minister to Pakistan in nine years. There is a lot of talk in the national and international media that Pakistan's focus is now on the East. This process of looking towards the East is positive for Pakistan. Pakistan, Iran, Russia, China, Turkey and Central Asian countries together form a new political bloc. Russia, on the other hand, has made a concerted effort to reshape and expand relations with Pakistan. This development could be a game-changer for both Pakistan and South Asia. Critical strategic dynamics and policy changes in South Asia could change the perceptions that drove Pakistan into an anti-Russian camp during the Cold War between Russia and the United States. There is no denying the fact that relations between Pakistan and Russia have been strained for a long time. India has always used these relations against Pakistan. Russia was a superpower compared to the United States in the case of the Soviet Union, so India stayed close to it but when the United States through Pakistan smashed the Soviet Union in the background, India stepped up its efforts to move to the US camp. India is a big market, so the United States also wants good relations with India. India extended a hand to the United States for relations, then the United States welcomed it at the expense of Pakistan since then the United States in

relations with Pakistan has grown cold. While India has made it possible to pursue its interests by getting closer to the United States, it has not spared any effort to fill the ears of the United States against Pakistan. This has led to a breakdown in the warmth of Pakistan-US relations. The United States cut off aid to Pakistan and began to make unreasonable demands on Do more. Pakistan has been threatened to teach a lesson in the Trump era while on this occasion, Pakistan has patiently continued its efforts to keep the relations and the situation normal, which is why the US-Taliban peace agreement was signed, but India and the Afghan administration are trying their best to sabotage this agreement. This peace agreement is still in force, but its future is in question. At present, in view of the changing situation in the region, the United States has also come closer to India as it needed a parasitic country in the region to compete with China. At the behest of the United States, India continues to be at loggerheads with China and other neighbors. On the other hand, Russia's distance from India has become a major reason for Russia's closeness to Pakistan. Russia and Pakistan have gradually come so close that the Russian Foreign Minister is on a long visit to Pakistan. Earlier, Russian forces had conducted exercises in Pakistan now Russia is also becoming part of the CPEC. It had a dream to reach the hot waters which Pakistan had thwarted by force, but now an atmosphere of friendship and reconciliation, Pakistan is welcoming Russia to use the port of Gwadar. Russia's announcement to provide Pakistan

with modern special weapons in the fight against terrorism in response to Pakistan's goodwill message is a significant development as Pakistan has long had its weapons needs from the United States and Western countries. Since then, it has stepped into the field of automatic armaments with the cooperation of China and is rapidly moving towards self-sufficiency. There was almost no cooperation with Russia in this area but for the past few years, the procurement of modern weapons including helicopters has progressed while India under US auspices, is stockpiling arms in the region. Pakistan has relied on China's cooperation to compete with India. If Russia moves forward to meet Pakistan's needs for modern weapons, it will be a great help in maintaining the balance of power in the region. The warmth in Pakistan-Russia relations will make a significant difference in the region but the US-India alliance could pose further threats to peace, especially in South Asia. To address this, the major powers and countries of the region must unite, which has become a natural environment. For lasting peace in the region, a defense bloc comprising China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey should be formed which may include Malaysia and Saudi Arabia as the opportunity arises. Pakistan is one of the most important countries in the region yet Pakistan's foreign policy is no longer the rarity and breadth that its role demands. Unlike in the past, Pakistan's changing foreign policy is important as is the relationship with distant friends from neighboring countries far more important which can improve the situation in the region and make Pakistan's role more prominent and important.

Briefs

Pak-India Kabaddi series in Nov 2021

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: Pakistan and India will go head to head for a Kabaddi series later this year in November, media reports. According to Secretary Pakistan Kabaddi Federation (PKF) Rana Sarwar, they have also received NOC for the three-match series in Kartarpur. Rana revealed that the series was initially planned in the month of April, however, it has now been shifted to November due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time, there will be a Kabaddi series in the Kartarpur corridor in the tehsil Shakargarh, Narowal District in Punjab.

Envoys extend Ramazan...

From Page 01

Australia, Pakistan and across the world. I am proud that Australia is playing its part in helping Pakistan deal with the pandemic through our development assistance, that includes support to Ehsaas nutrition centres, provision of medical equipment and helping women access essential health care. Australia has contributed \$80 million to the COVAX Facility, a global initiative to share vaccines equitably across the world. I hope our contribution through COVAX will help Pakistan deliver life-saving vaccines to the vulnerable. Australia is home to more than 600,000 Muslims from all over the world, including more than 80,000 Pakistanis. Our people-to-people links continue to strengthen the longstanding friendship between Australia and Pakistan. To Pakistanis here, and back home in Australia, Ramzan Mubarak. Meanwhile, MATSUDA Kuniori, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, extended his best wishes to the people of Pakistan upon the start of the Holy month of Ramadan. Ambassador MATSUDA said, "I would like to express my sincere respects and solidarity with the Pakistani people and Muslims on the occasion of Ramadan-ul-Mubarak. I wish you a blessed and happy Ramadan. I also hope that the difficult situation due to COVID-19 will end soon and we will be able to go back to normal life."

PDM gives another chance...

From Page 01

out with dialogue and mutual understanding. "Even today, the PPP and ANP have the opportunity to review their decision," he said, as he addressed a press conference in Islamabad, alongside other leaders of the alliance, including PML-N's Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Ahsan Iqbal. The media briefing followed a meeting of the Opposition alliance, sans PPP and ANP. The session was reportedly convened at Fazlur Rehman's residence. It was called a day after PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced his party's departure from the alliance. Both the PPP and the ANP parted ways after they were served show-cause notices by the PDM to explain why they sought the support of a government ally (Balochistan Awami Party) in getting Yousaf Raza Gillani elected as Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

PPP leaders resign from PDM posts

From Page 01

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the resignations were delivered at the residence of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman by PPP leader Syed Nayyar Hussain Bukhari. The PPP leaders who quit their PDM posts were Senator Sherry Rehman, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Qamar Zaman Kaira. Earlier on Monday, after a meeting of CEC, PPP decided to resign from steering committee of opposition's Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that in first phase, Raja Pervez Ashraf, Sherry Rehman and Qamar Zaman Kairwar will tender their resignations.



BERLIN: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi inaugurating facilitation center for Pakistani community. - DNA

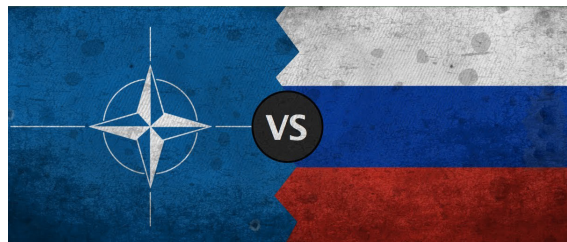
Russia-West discord deepens over Ukraine conflict

Deputy FM Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying that military support provided by Washington to Kyiv posed a serious challenge to Russia, and warned that Moscow would do everything possible to ensure its security in the event of an escalation in the Donbas conflict

FOREIGN DESK

BRUSSELS: Tensions between Russia and the West rose on Tuesday over fears Moscow is attempting to escalate its conflict with Ukraine over the Donbas region. Addressing reporters alongside Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, the alliance's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg accused Russia of having moved "thousands of combat-ready troops to Ukraine's borders". Stoltenberg urged Russia against the "unjustified" and "largest massing of Russian troops" since Russia annexed Ukraine's southern Crimean peninsula in March 2014, after an uprising that toppled former Kremlin-friendly President Viktor Yanukovich, and called on Moscow to reverse course.

"Russia must end this military build-up in and around Ukraine, stop its provocations and de-escalate immediately," Stoltenberg said, describing the troop deployment as "deeply concerning". Meanwhile, Moscow on Tuesday accused NATO and leading member the United States of turning Ukraine into a "powder keg" with increasing arms supplies, Russian agencies reported, citing the foreign ministry. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying that military support provided by Washing-



ton to Kyiv posed a serious challenge to Russia, and warned that Moscow would do everything possible to ensure its security in the event of an escalation in the Donbas conflict. Ryabkov also urged Washington to ensure two US warships due to arrive in the Black Sea this week stay well away from Crimea "for their own good", saying the risk of unspecified incidents was very high. "There is ab-

solutely nothing for American ships to be doing near our shores, this is purely a provocative action. Provocative in the direct sense of the word: they are testing our strength, playing on our nerves. They will not succeed," Ryabkov was cited as saying. Ukrainian government troops have battled Russian-backed separatists in the country's eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions, which form part of

Donbas, since the rebels seized a swath of territory there in April 2014. While a ceasefire halted full-scale warfare in the area in 2015, sporadic clashes never ceased and fears of an escalation in hostilities have mounted in recent weeks amid renewed front-line clashes and Russia's reported mass deployment of military units close to Ukraine's eastern border and in the Black Sea region of Crimea. Russia says the troop movements pose no threat and are merely defensive, describing them as preparation for regular drills. Moscow has also said the military units would remain there as long as it saw fit. While Moscow has repeatedly denied interfering

in Donbas, Ukraine and several Western countries have said separatist forces in the region have been armed, led, funded and aided by Russia. NATO's plea came a day after Kyiv accused the Kremlin of ignoring its request for talks between the two countries' presidents over the military build-up. Ukraine's Kuleba said on Tuesday that Kyiv would continue to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis. But he added that further economic sanctions against Moscow and more military support could help protect Ukraine from an escalation. "At the operational level, we need measures which will deter Russia and which will contain its aggressive intentions," Kuleba told the news conference.

Pak HC visits Nagananda int'l Buddhist University



DNA

COLOMBO: The High Commissioner met Venerable Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero, the Chief Incumbent of the Alan Mathiniyaramaya at his temple in Kirulapona and wished him on his birthday. Both also cut a cake to celebrate the occasion. Later on, both discussed the historic relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka and ways to further strengthen people-to-people

contacts. They also underscored the importance of interfaith harmony and pluralism especially in multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries like Sri Lanka. The High Commissioner apprised him of the proposed Buddhist Heritage Trail of the Government of Pakistan which was well-appreciated by the Venerable Thero. They also spoke about the precious relics of Lord Buddha preserved in Pakistan which are a source of great reverence for Bud-



dhists. Both stressed on the need for these relics and Gandhara Buddhist heritage sites to be made more accessible to Sri Lankan pilgrims through regular visit of Sri Lankan pilgrims to Pakistan. The High Commissioner also visited the Nagananda International Buddhist University in Kelaniya and met the Executive Director, Venerable Dr. Bodagama Chandima. Both spoke of the Knowledge Corridor between Sri Lanka and Pa-

kistan including the fully funded Allama Iqbal Scholarships being offered by the Government of Pakistan to Sri Lankan students. Ven. Dr. Chandima showed his keen interest in the scholarship program as well as other training programs being offered by Pakistan. The High Commissioner greatly appreciated the University and underscored the need for the educational institutes of Pakistan and Sri Lanka to maintain close academic linkages.

India's reports world's highest COVID cases

MONITORING DESK

NEW DELHI: India has reported 161,736 new coronavirus infections, hitting the world's highest tally once again, for a total of 13.69 million cases, health ministry data showed. Numbers typically fall on Tuesdays because of delayed results from tests done on the weekend. Deaths rose by 879 to 171,058. Even those figures, experts say, are likely lower than reality. Over the past week, India has averaged more than 130,000 cases a day. Its toll pushed past Brazil's on Monday, making it second only to the United States in the number of coronavirus infections, though both countries have much smaller populations. Nearly all the Indian states are showing an uptick in cases as daily new infections hit record levels, and experts say that mistakes stemming from the belief that the pandemic was "over" are coming back to haunt the country. "Nobody took a long-term view of the pandemic," Dr. Vineeta Bal, who studies immune systems at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, told the AP news agency. When infections began plummeting in India in September, many concluded the worst had passed. Masks and social distancing were abandoned, while the government gave mixed signals about the level of risk. When cases began rising again in February, authorities were left scrambling, with some saying the government's confused messaging failed to communicate the risk. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has noted the need for people to wear masks due to the "alarming" rise in infections. But over the last few weeks, while on the campaign trail, he has delivered speeches in front of tens of thousands of maskless supporters. The federal government has also allowed huge gatherings during Hindu festivals like the Kumbh Mela (Pitcher Festival) celebrated in the Himalayan city of Haridwar, where millions of devotees take a daily holy dip in the Ganges River.

Real Madrid skipper Ramos tests positive

MADRID: Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos, who was already out of this week's Champions League meeting with Liverpool because of a calf injury, has tested positive for Covid-19, the club announced on Tuesday. "Our player Sergio Ramos tested positive in the last Covid-19 test he performed," Real Madrid said in a statement. Ramos is the second case of coronavirus detected in the Real Madrid squad in a week. French defender Raphael Varane tested positive last Tuesday. Varane has not yet been given the green light to rejoin his teammates. Ramos is injured while playing for Spain during the international window but he has been a positive force since he tested positive from his teammates until he tests negative. The 35-year-old defender is going through one of the most difficult seasons of his career - he underwent knee surgery in February and, after returning in mid-March, missed the Liga game against Celta Vigo on March 20 because of a shin injury. Ramos has still revealed his plans once his contract with Real Madrid expires on June 30. - DNA



Arshad Nadeem wins gold medal

LAHORE: Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem has won a gold medal in the Javelin Throw event of Imam Reza Athletics Cup at Mashhad, Iran. Arshad also improved his personal best throw of 86.29m and registered a new national record by managing an 86.38m throw in the event, leading him to bag a gold medal for Pakistan. On the other hand, his throw was way better than other participating nations. His throw was 10 to 12 meters ahead of silver and bronze medalist winners. President Athletics Federation Major General (ret'd) Akram Sahi congratulates Arshad Nadeem on his victory. "Hopefully Arshad Nadeem will also win an Olympic medal. This success during the training is a reflection of the fact that Arshad Nadeem's training is going in the right direction," Akram said. - APP



HANOI: Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam, Samina Mehtab had a courtesy meeting with ambassador of Bangladesh to Vietnam, Samina Naz. - DNA

Fakhar available for third T20I

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Left-handed batsman Fakhar Zaman is available for selection for the third T20I against South Africa. According to sources, team management is hopeful that informant Fakhar will be fit and ready for the third T20I of the four-match series. The 31-year-old Fakhar had complained of a minor allergy in his left leg before the second T20I, therefore it was decided to rest him. Sharjeel Khan replaced him and batted as an opener. It must be noted that the series is level at 1-1. The third T20I will be played tomorrow at SuperSport Park, Centurion.

UK variant behind...

From Page 01

He said that the infection rate has visibly reduced due to the recent steps and asked nationals to take precautionary measures for the next two weeks. He added that the positivity rate of COVID-19 cases could be increased due to crowded markets. Regarding the vaccination drive, the federal minister said that the process is underway and will be expedited after the Eid festival. He said that the number of vaccines is not enough to meet the demand across the globe. It is impossible to administer coronavirus vaccines to billions of people at the same time, he added. Umar said that all countries are trying to procure vaccines for their citizens. In Pakistan, more than 1.3 million people have been inoculated so far. Pakistan has the availability of 0.9 million vaccines till Monday night and 60,000 to 70,000 nationals are being vaccinated on a daily basis. The federal government has continued its efforts to make COVID-19 vaccines available in the country, said Umar. Umar further detailed that 1.3 million people were given free-of-cost vaccines and only 13,000 people got COVID-19 jabs privately. Elderly citizens are more vulnerable to the pandemic, however, the vaccines would be made available for all nationals after Eid. He asked citizens to keep registering themselves for the vaccination. He admitted that out-of-turn use of the vaccines was witnessed by some people, especially in a province.

Pakistan set to open consulate...

From Page 01

the scope of cooperation in education sector by engaging Higher Education Commission so that Germany could become a top destination for Pakistani students. In a meeting with a representative delegation of the Pakistani diaspora in Germany, Qureshi said the government was making serious efforts to give the right of vote to the Pakistani living abroad. He said the option of electronic voting was under consideration to facilitate the expatriates. FM Qureshi acknowledged the services of the Pakistani community, terming it an important linkage for strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. He mentioned that the government had launched the 'Digital Roshan Pakistan' project for easy transfer of money through legal means.

Court to indict ex-envoy...

From Page 01

to file surety bonds worth Rs0.5 million each. The NAB had alleged in its reference that the former ambassador and accountant for allegedly misappropriating the funds during 2016 to 2018 and had been bringing the embassy's funds in personal use. The accused even didn't submit any receipt to chief accountant officer after withdrawing the funds. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had itself sent the matter to NAB for investigation as the corruption scandal surfaced after the appointment of new ambassador there. - Agencies

Briefs

Iran sees record spike in COVID cases

WEB DESK

TEHRAN: Iran on Tuesday reported a record 24,760 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours, as the worst-hit country in the Middle East faced a fourth coronavirus wave. Authorities have blamed the latest surge on millions traveling across the country for Iranian New Year last month and taking part in family gatherings in defiance of health precautions promoted by the government. Health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV on Tuesday that 24,760 new daily cases were identified, taking the total to 2,118,212 cases. The daily death toll rose to 291, the highest since Dec. 9, to bring the total to 65,055. Lari said 295 counties have been classified as very high-risk "red" zones, and 99 as high-risk "orange" areas, while 45 counties were rated "yellow" and just 9 as low-risk "blue" zones. On Saturday, Tehran imposed a 10-day lockdown across most of the country affecting 23 of the country's 31 provinces.

Textile exports decrease by 1.42%: SBP

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The exports of textile and its articles from the country witnessed decrease of 1.42 percent during the eight months of current financial year 2020-21 as compared to the corresponding month of last year. Pakistan exported textile and its articles worth US \$9057.503 million during July-February (2020-21) against the exports of US \$9152.889 million during July-February (2019-20), showing negative growth of 1.42 percent, according to the data issued by the State Bank of Pakistan. The commodities that contributed in growth were man-made staple fibers, export of which grew from \$206.962 million last year to \$208.318 million during the period under review, showing growth of 0.65 percent. The exports of articles of apparel and clothing accessories grew by 1.63 percent from \$2247.134 million to \$2058.455 million while the exports other made-up textile articles (sets, worn cloth) also increased by 9.86 percent from \$2692.131 million to \$2957.635 million.

Egypt frees journalist Khaled Dawoud

FOREIGN DESK

CAIRO: Egypt has freed prominent dissident journalist and politician Khaled Dawoud after more than 18 months in detention, a fellow journalist and a lawyer said Tuesday. A former head of the liberal opposition Dostour party and a senior journalist for the English edition of state newspaper Al-Ahram, he had been arrested in September 2019 after rare anti-government protests. "At around 5:00 pm on Monday, a police official informed us that the prosecutor had decided to release him," said Hisham Younes, a member of Egypt's press club. "He got out at around midnight... no charges were brought against him." Lawyer and rights activist Khaled Ali said on Facebook that the prosecution had "decided to free" Dawoud. "Khaled left prison and was taken to State Security. He retrieved his car and went home, where he is now with his family," Ali said. Dawoud, who is an adjunct professor of journalism at the American University of Cairo, was detained after rare protests calling for the ouster of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The general-turned-president has overseen a massive, crackdown aimed at quashing dissent, jailing many journalists, lawyers, academics and activists, both secular and Islamist. Dawoud was accused of "collaborating with a terrorist organisation", "publishing false information" and "misusing social media", charges often levelled against dissidents.

President Ilham Aliyev thanks Pakistan over Karabakh support

We are very grateful to the Pakistani government and the Pakistani people for a very consistent approach to the issues related to our territorial integrity



BAKU: Ilham Aliyev President of Azerbaijan chairing International Conference in Baku. — DNA

DNA

BAKU: "Pakistan was among the countries which openly supported Azerbaijan from the first days of the confrontation. And until the last days, Pakistan was always on our side," said President Ilham Aliyev as he responded to a question at the "New vision for South Caucasus: Post-conflict development and cooperation" international conference held at ADA University. We are very grateful to the Pakistani government and the Pakistani people for a very consistent approach to the issues related to our territorial integrity. Pakistan is one of the very few

countries did not establish diplomatic relations with Armenia because of the aggression and occupation. And there are only very few countries like Pakistan. We are always grateful for that and this is a real sign of our brotherhood," the head of the state noted. President Ilham Aliyev said that more work must be done in Azerbaijan and Armenia to build bridges between the two countries following the war that ended the long-standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Aliyev made the remarks while addressing the "New vision for South Caucasus: Post-conflict development and cooperation" conference held at ADA University on April 13.

Commenting on the post-war cooperation, Aliyev said: "It is difficult to predict how Azerbaijanis and Armenians will interact in the future. I think to a large degree it will depend on the will and political wisdom of politicians, because I think we need to be more active here and in Yerevan in order to try to build bridges, of course, if Armenia wants that. We don't know what are their intentions. They never elaborated on that." Aliyev said that Azerbaijan considers the page of the conflict turned down, adding that "we will do everything if Armenia has positive signals to us to try to build these connections. And what already has been

done from our side unilaterally, I already mentioned, is a clear demonstration of that." "We even can talk and I already said it a couple of times about a possible peace agreement with Armenia. These are our plans. But we do not have any messages of this kind from the Armenian side. Armenian prime minister is silent, Armenian foreign minister is very aggressive and Armenia is not in the situation now to afford themselves to be aggressive against Azerbaijan. They should remember what happened during the war. Armenian opposition is now actually in hysteria. And Azerbaijanophobia, Turkophobia became one

of the main, it always was very important but now, I think, it is the only factor. I am sure that they will build their election campaign on Azerbaijanophobia, Turkophobia and the feelings of revanchism. Therefore we cannot establish this interaction unilaterally. Our position is clear. We are ready for that. It will not be easy." The president said Azerbaijan is ready for peace with Armenia despite the level of destruction on Azerbaijan's formerly occupied territories. "Those former refugees who will return to Aghdam and other cities will see what Armenians have done to their lands, to the graves of their beloved ones, to

their religious monuments. What will they feel? I can predict. I felt the same. When I was approaching the line of contact during the war and was only able to see Aghdam through lenses from binoculars and when I went there, to all the occupied territories. Yes, I am a President and I must be in line with my duties but we are all people we have feelings, we can hide them, we can control them but sometimes it is very difficult. I can predict what will be the feelings of former Azerbaijani refugees but as a President, as a person who looks to the future we will do everything if Armenia has positive signals to us to try to build these connections."



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Spain Manuel Duran meets Abdur Razzadq Daowood. — DNA

Merkel's govt agrees law on curfews, tougher virus curbs

BERLIN: The German government agreed Tuesday on controversial changes to a national infections control law, handing Berlin more power to impose tougher measures such as night-time curfews to halt the raging coronavirus pandemic. The adjusted law, which still needs to be approved by parliament, would allow Chancellor Angela Merkel's government to impose curfews from 9pm to 5am and close schools and businesses in areas with high infection rates. Private gatherings and sports will also be subject to tighter restrictions as Germany remains gripped by a dangerous third wave of the pandemic which is putting increased strain on the country's health system. The move aims to end a political tug-of-war between the federal government and powerful regions over coronavirus measures, with manouevring ahead of September elections adding to the tensions. Currently restrictions are decided on in consultation with Berlin and - in theory - implemented by the federal states. Yet in many cases, regional leaders have failed to put in place shutdown measures which they agreed with Merkel, with some even allowing shops and cinemas to reopen. Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said Monday that the aim of the new law was to apply "uniform national" rules. — DNA

US to deploy more military personnel in Germany

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States will station 500 more military personnel in Germany to strengthen bilateral ties, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said at the start of his first official visit to Europe. The move pivots the administration of President Joe Biden away from his predecessor Donald Trump, who set out to reduce troops and shift military commands from Germany over allegations the key NATO ally did not pay its fair share towards defence. "Today I am happy to announce that we will be increasing the US force presence in Germany," Austin told reporters after talks with his counterpart Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer in Berlin on Tuesday. "I briefed the minister on our intention to permanently station approximately 500 additional US personnel in the Wiesbaden area as early as this fall," he said. Kramp-Karrenbauer lauded the development as a "strong signal" of a healthy US-German relationship. The Biden administration said in February that it would put on hold the Trump-era plans to pull back about 12,000 troops from the roughly 34,500 stationed in Germany. Although the prospect had been looming for years,

Trump's decision had been met with shock and opposition from Germany, particularly from states where the bases are located. The Biden administration has stressed a multilateral approach to global affairs and has said it will seek to strengthen ties with long-time allies. Continuing that change in tone, Austin pledged that Germany would "continue to be an important security and economic partner" for the US "for the years ahead". When asked if the decision means Washington will not carry out Trump's planned withdrawals, Austin said the Pentagon has "ceased planning" for troop reductions.

Turkey releases ten retired navy commanders

ANKARA: A Turkish court has released 10 retired naval commanders whom President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had accused of eyeing a "political coup", local media reported on Tuesday. The former admirals were detained after their names appeared on an open letter signed by 104 retired commanders in support of the 1936 Montreux Convention. The treaty is aimed at demilitarizing the Black Sea by setting strict rules on warships' passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits leading to the Mediterranean. But Erdogan is planning to

build a new canal in Istanbul to the west of the Bosphorus to take the pressure off one of the world's busiest waterways. Countries such as Russia insist that the new canal must be covered by the old treaty's rules to preserve the delicate balance of power in the region. But Erdogan has remained non-committal and the retired admirals expressed a fear that the old treaty's collapse could have negative repercussions for Turkey. Erdogan lashed out at the commanders after convening a special security meeting about the letter. — APP

United States recommends 'pause' for J&J vaccine

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The US is recommending a "pause" in the administration of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots. In a joint statement on Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration said it was investigating reports of blood clots in six women in the days after vaccination, in combination with reduced platelet counts. One woman died and a second in Nebraska has been hospitalised in critical condition, the New York Times reported, citing officials. More than 6.8 million doses of the J&J vaccine have been administered in the US. US federal distribution channels, including mass vaccination sites, will pause the use of the J&J shot, and states and other providers are expected to follow. CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet on Wednesday to discuss the cases and the FDA has also launched an investigation.

Russia detains two after huge Petersburg fire

SAINT PETERSBURG: Russia on Tuesday detained two people after a huge fire gutted a historic factory in Saint Petersburg, as firefighters continued putting out the blaze. On Monday, a fire broke out over several floors of the red-brick Nevskaya Manufaktura building in Russia's second city. The inferno killed one firefighter and left two more hospitalised with serious burns. The fire continued burning into Tuesday over an area of 500 square meters (5,381 square feet), the emergency ministry said, adding that nearly 40 firefighters were involved in extinguishing the blaze and clearing the debris. The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said that it launched a criminal probe into a death caused by negligence and added that law enforcement had detained the general director of Nevskaya Manufaktura and his deputy. Investigators cited a "number of violations" regarding fire safety and said that management "knew for a fact" that the premises could not be operated. They estimated the total area of the blaze at some 4,000 square meters, causing a large part of the roof to collapse and even spreading to nearby trees. Listed by the Saint Petersburg city government as a cultural heritage site, the building was home to one of Russia's largest textile companies in the 19th century. In recent years parts of the building continued to operate manufacturing cloth, while others were rented out as office space and some areas had been abandoned. Fires are relatively common in Russia due to dilapidated infrastructure or non-compliance with safety standards.

UN announces short film competition

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations (UN) has announced a short film competition for youth on multiple topics. The deadline for the entries is June 18, 2021. "The UN video competition is open worldwide for the filmmakers ages 25 and younger," said a news statement. It said the interested youth were invited to submit films on migration, diversity, social inclusion and prevention of xenophobia. 'Plural + Youth Video Festival' is a competition which is sponsored by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration. Videos must be less than 5 minutes, include English subtitles and produced after December 31, 2018. There are three age categories as well as the Special Awards for the prevention of Xenophobia, SafeWorship and Solidarity amid COVID-19. Winners will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to attend the Plural+ 2021 Festival and awards ceremony late in 2021 in a location to be announced later.

Iran and Russia discuss ties, nuclear deal

Iran and Russia should also boost bilateral economic activity, especially using private companies, in the oil, energy, transportation, and nuclear sectors

FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Iran and Russia have held high-level talks on bilateral ties, the region, and Iran's nuclear deal with world powers during Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's trip to Tehran on Tuesday. In a meeting with Lavrov, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran wishes to expand regional cooperation with Russia on Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen in order to help establish stability and combat American interventions. He also called for more defence and military cooperation, especially as a United Nations Security Council arms embargo on Iran ended in October 2020.

"Opening the Zionist regime's foothold to the Persian Gulf region as a destabilising and tension-creating element will be a dangerous act," Rouhani said of Israel, which Iran has accused of orchestrating "nuclear terrorism" on its facilities at Natanz on Sunday. The president further said Iran and Russia should also boost bilateral economic activity, especially using private companies, in the oil, energy, transportation, and nuclear sectors. He called on Russia to accelerate the process of delivering more doses of the Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19 to Iran and said Iran is eager to finalise a plan to establish a joint vaccine manufacturing line with Russia. Iran has so far received more than half a million doses

of the vaccine, and has had difficulty in administering it as the first and second doses of Sputnik V - that need to be injected 21 days apart - are different. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, was also a main topic of talks as multilateral talks in Vienna to restore the deal

was originally signed. "We are neither willing to accept anything less nor wish to achieve anything more," the president said. Lavrov told Rouhani that Rus-

sia is of the same opinion as Iran on the fact the US must come back into full compliance with the JCPOA, and that trying to add new conditions to the deal would not be acceptable, according to the president's website. "Any complementary or additional documents on different issues, including regional issues or military development, can be considered outside the framework of the JCPOA and with the participation of regional countries in order to ensure the safety of the region and the Persian Gulf," he was quoted as saying. The Russian foreign minister welcomed boosting bilateral ties with Iran, saying "there are no limitations" on developing technical and defence relations.

Earlier on Tuesday, Lavrov signed a "cultural cooperation agreement" with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, the specific details of which have yet to be disclosed. The two countries were also expected to discuss the renewal of their comprehensive cooperation accord, which was originally signed in 2001. Iranian officials had previously said if neither of the two sides has any objections, the accord will automatically renew for another five years. In a late January trip to Moscow, Zarif had also signed an "information security" cooperation agreement with Russia that the Iranian foreign ministry called a turning point in joint cybersecurity work.



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