



Islamabad POST

Thursday, April 22, 2021

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

Price Rs. 20

Pakistan greatly values its ties with Tunisia, says PM Imran Khan

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Pak FM's Iran visit to open new chapter

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Bilawal demands PM's resignation over inflation

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Sehr & Iftar Timings

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ISLAMABAD	03:57 am	06:45 pm
FAISALABAD	04:03 am	06:42 pm
LAHORE	03:58 am	06:37 pm
KARACHI	04:42 am	06:58 pm
SARGODHA	04:03 am	06:44 pm

FIQA JAFARIA

CITY	SEHR	IFTAR
ISLAMABAD	03:47 am	06:55 pm
FAISALABAD	03:53 am	06:52 pm
LAHORE	03:48 am	06:47 pm
KARACHI	04:32 am	07:08 pm
SARGODHA	03:53 am	06:54 pm

Asad: complete lockdown if SOPs violated

At the NCOC, we reviewed the situation, which is bad. We have taken several decisions to impose more curbs



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

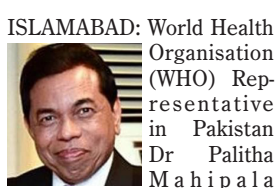
ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning Asad Umar on Wednesday warned of more restrictions due to the deteriorating coronavirus situation in the country. The federal minister, after chairing an important session at the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), addressed a media briefing to discuss the worsening situation. He said there was a lack of implementation of COVID-19 standard

operating procedures during the third coronavirus wave and critical cases have now exceeded 4,500. The NCOC noted that if the situation remains the same, then they would have no choice but to shut down major cities. "At the NCOC, we reviewed the pandemic situation, which is bad. We have taken several decisions to impose more curbs which would be announced on Friday," Umar said, adding major cities are not being closed right now, but a margin of only some days is left. He added that the positivity ratio in Karachi and Hyderabad is 13% and 14% respectively, while in Mardan it is 33% and 38% in Bahawalpur. "In several cities, more than 80% of ventilators are in use." Umar said the administration has failed to implement the SOPs and the results are evident. "Health facilities are under stress due to increasing number of positive cases which have now crossed 83,000." He also asked the chief ministers to take action against SOP violations and urged them to help the NCOC control the pandemic. "You are the elected leaders, people have voted for you. They will listen to you," he said.

Briefs

WHO lauds vaccination system

DNA



ISLAMABAD: World Health Organisation (WHO) Representative in Pakistan Dr. Palitha Mahipala on Wednesday lauded Pakistan's Covid-19 vaccination efforts. Taking to Twitter, he said: "I appreciate efforts of the Government of Pakistan for rolling out COVID-19 vaccination including vaccination of foreigners in the National Vaccine Development Plan & making excellent arrangements at the vaccination centers across Pakistan, with Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place." Pakistan started vaccinating people in the age group 50-59 against COVID-19 today. The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) last week decided to start vaccination of citizens aged from 50 to 59 from April 21 (today). Pakistan is expected to receive two million doses of COVID vaccine from China by April 24.

Rented spokesmen only tell lies

STAFF REPORT



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Mariyum Aurangzeb on Wednesday has said that it will be difficult to make powerful people accountable if the Prime Minister (PM) continues to facilitate them. Talking to media in Islamabad, the PML-N leader alleged that the government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had provided amnesty to the mafias for money in construction sector. Sugar price increased to Rs120 after getting approval from PM Imran Khan, she added. Mariyum Aurangzeb further said that rented spokesmen of PTI are deceiving the nation by telling lies day and night.

Pakistan asks Britain to deport Nawaz Sharif

The development came during a meeting between Interior Minister and British High Commissioner

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed met with British High Commissioner in Pakistan Christian Turner and submitted an application for the deportation of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. Sheikh Rasheed said the UK has said that Pakistan should request the extradition of Nawaz Sharif. "The UK did not respond positively regarding the extradition of Nawaz Sharif," the Interior Minister said and added the British envoy said they

would talk government to government on this issue. Sheikh Rasheed said Nawaz Sharif is facing cases in courts. Sheikh Rasheed was talking to newsmen at an important press conference in Lahore on Wednesday sharing the latest information about negotiations held between the government and banned outfit Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). It may be recalled that Nawaz Sharif, who was serving a prison sentence, had left the country to receive medical treatment in London in November 2019. The Lahore High Court (LHC) lifted a travel ban and the government rubber-stamped the decision.



ISLAMABAD: SHINDO Yusuke, Minister and Deputy Head of Mission visited Prof Aamer Ikram, Major General and Executive Director of National Institute of Health on April 20th and exchanged views on the recent COVID-19 situation in both countries. Japan and Pakistan fight COVID-19 together. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Tunisia Borhene El Kamel meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan. The ambassador delivered letter of his President to the Prime Minister. - DNA

Pakistan greatly values ties with Tunisia: PM

Tunisian Ambassador handed over a letter from Kais Saied, President of Tunisia in response to Prime Minister's letter

A.M.BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Borhene El Kamel, Tunisian Ambassador to Pakistan has met with the Prime Minister Imran Khan. Matters relating to bilateral relations and international issues were discussed. Prime Minister Imran Khan conveyed that Pakistan greatly valued its relationship with Tunisia, which is anchored in common faith, history and culture. It may be recalled that

Prime Minister Imran Khan had addressed letters to the leaders of the Muslim Ummah highlighting the scourge of Islamophobia and the need for Muslim world to take it up in unison with the rest of the world. During the meeting, the Tunisian Ambassador handed over a letter from Kais Saied, President of Tunisia, addressed to the Prime Minister, in response to Prime Minister's letter.

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Prime Minister to take part in Tokyo moot

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Japan has welcomed the online participation of Prime Minister Imran Khan in the 26th International Conference on "The Future of Asia", to be held in Tokyo, Japan on May 20 and 21! It is considered one of the most important global conferences in Asia. "The Future of Asia" is an international gathering where political, economic, and academic leaders from the Asia-Pacific region offer their opinions frankly and freely on

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Oman to impose travel ban on Pakistan

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Oman will impose a ban on the entry of travellers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as coronavirus cases in the three countries continue to surge. The decision was taken by Oman's supreme committee for coronavirus on Wednesday. As per the committee, the ban will come into effect from April 24. Those who have passed through these countries in the two weeks before travelling are also barred from entry.

The ban begins at 6 pm on Saturday, 24 April 2021, and continues till further notice. This is with the exception of arriving passengers who are Omani citizens, diplomats, health workers and their families. The exempted groups will undergo the prescribed entry procedures when they reach the Sultanate's land," read the press release issued by the committee. Among the three countries, India has reported the most number of coronavirus infections over the past few months.

'Pakistan values Turkey's efforts'

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday said it valued Turkey's efforts for peace and stability in Afghanistan and expressed hope that the Afghan parties would not miss the opportunity to work out an inclusive, broad-based and comprehensive political settlement, during next finalization of meeting.

Responding to media queries on the postponement of Afghan Peace Process conference due to be held in Turkey, Foreign Office Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said Pakistan hoped that the meeting of Afghan leadership in Turkey, on the new dates once finalized, would be an important opportunity for the Afghans to make progress towards a negotiated political settlement. "Pakistan has been consistently supporting and facilitating the efforts for durable peace and stability in Afghanistan. We have always maintained that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan," he said. The Spokesperson said Pakistan would continue to work with the international community in the efforts to seek lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

MONAL

WHERE AMBANCE SETS THE STAGE

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Buffalo milk to add to Pak forex as foreign capital shows interest - Page 07

Pak FM Iran visit to open new chapter in ties: Iran Envoy - Page 08

Rouhani stresses upon Pakistan, Iran security cooperation

FM Qureshi meets Iranian President; thanks him for support to establish border markets

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that security is a common concern of Iran and Pakistan, underlining the need for both countries to cooperate in this regard. The president made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with visiting Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. The foreign minister, on behalf of President Dr. Arif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan, conveyed a message of goodwill to President Rouhani and the brotherly Iranian nation.

Pak-Iran sign MoU for border markets

TEHRAN: Signing of "Memorandum of Understanding between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for the establishment of border markets along the border between the two countries" by the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. By signing this memorandum of understanding and with the aim of promoting economic relations between the two countries and the welfare of the border residents, the two sides agreed to establish joint border markets along the common border between the two countries. Accordingly, in the first phase, three bazaars will be opened in the border points of Kuhak-Chadgi, Rimdan-Gabd and Pishin-Mand, and joint border bazaars will be established in three other border points later. These markets will be managed according to the agreements made between the parties and according to the methods determined by the two countries. - DNA

President Rouhani urged the necessity for further expansion of ties between the two countries in different areas, including economy and trade. Foreign Minister Qureshi discussed with President Dr. Rouhani the ways and means to strengthen close bilateral relations, rooted in shared history, culture, faith and language. Foreign Minister underlined Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision to strengthen ties with Iran in diverse field with emphasis on expanding mutually beneficial economic cooperation and development.

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

47 policemen elevated to next rank

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: A total of 47 Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASIs) of Islamabad police have been promoted to the next rank following recommendations of Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) of the force. The decision was held in a DPC meeting following the directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Qazi Jamil ur Rehman. The meeting was presided over by Deputy Inspector General (Headquarters) while the Chairman DPC Kamran Adil, members including Assistant Inspector General Special Branch, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) (Headquarters), SSP (Traffic) and DSP (Legal). The committee reviewed 60 cases of Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASIs) and gave approval to promote 47 ASIs to the next rank of Sub-Inspector after scrutinizing their entire record. Islamabad police chief has greeted all the promotion holders and hoped that the officers would observe their professional duties with honesty in next ranks and would facilitate the general public through their professional attitude as well as hard work.

IHC clubs bail petitions of lawyers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday clubbed a bail petition of lawyer Hammad Dar with another identical case of in IHC building rampage case. A division bench comprising Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Mohsin Akther Kiyani heard the bail petitions of lawyers. The court instructed to club Hammad Dar case with another case of Naseer Kiyani. The investigation officer appeared before the court along with the case record. He produced the videos pertaining to involvement of Hammad Dar in the incident. After this, the court adjourned the case till April 27, with above instructions. Meanwhile, an anti-terrorism court (ATC) Judge Raja Jawad Abbas Hassan extended the judicial remand of the arrested lawyers in IHC attack case. Accused secretary Islamabad High Court Bar Association (IHCBA) Tasadaq Hanif, Naseer Kiyani and others could not be produced before the court due to security issues.

Three more succumbed to Covid-19

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: The novel coronavirus on Wednesday claimed three more lives in Attock district, while number of positive cases surged to 1826 during last 24 hours, health officials said. According to official sources, 53 years old Rukhsana Bibi and 75 years old Manzoor Ellahi both residents of Attock city and 65 years old Mareena Jan - a resident of Hazro who was admitted at district headquarters hospital was succumbed to Covid-19. District focal person for Covid-19, Kashif Hussain said that after detection of coronavirus among more persons, tally surged to 1,826. He informed that the number of active patients in the district is 269 and in which 262 are home isolated while six others seven others are hospitalized. While giving details about the active patients in the different parts of the district, he informed that in Attock city there are 124 positive patients, 59 in Hazro, 40 in Pindigheab, 29 in Jand, 10 in Hassanabdal while 7 are in Fatehganj. He informed that as many as 7 suspected patients are also admitted in district headquarters hospital and all are in critical condition. He informed that the number of suspected patients in the district rose to 31562 while screening of as many as 34814 persons was carried out across the district in which 28782 were tested negative.

CDA urged for regularizing all non-conforming businesses

President ICCI said that many businesses from trade and industry were operating in the federal capital since long and CDA has now started to seal shops in some areas due to non-conforming use, but this action was disrupting the business activities

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) leading a delegation visited CDA Headquarters and held a meeting with Amir Ali Ahmed, Chairman CDA to discuss matters for further of uplifting of the Capital and de-sealing of shops, which were sealed due to non-conforming use. Abdul Rauf Alam Convener ICCI CDA Committee, Tahir Abbasi former Senior Vice President ICCI, Shehzad Shabbir Abbasi President, Traders Welfare Association Super Market and others were in the delegation. Speaking at the occasion, Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said that many businesses from trade and industry were operating in the federal capital since long and CDA has now started to seal shops in some areas due to non-conforming use, but this action was disrupting the business activities. He said that CDA has also issued notices to some industries for non-conforming use while these industries



were promoting exports and providing jobs to thousands of workers. He emphasized that instead of taking direct action in markets and industrial areas, CDA should always take ICCI on board so that amicable solutions of such issues could be found with joint efforts. ICCI President said that all these businesses were doing legal business and CDA should con-

sider regularizing them instead of issuing them show cause notices or sealing shops. He said that due to Covid-19 pandemic, our economy was already facing great problems and this situation demanded that every business related institution including CDA should facilitate ease of doing business instead of taking measures that would cause

further contraction in business activities. He said that in this age of competitive business environment, business dynamics have changed significantly, therefore, he stressed that CDA Board should revise/amend CDA bylaws to allow change of trade to industries and regularize all non-conforming businesses that will also generate significant rev-

enue for the civic body. Abdul Rauf Alam, Convener, ICCI CDA Committee and other members of delegation said that CDA had started development works in markets and industrial areas, which was appreciated by the business community. However, its pace was very slow and stressed that the CDA should speed up pace of all development works including restoration of streetlights, carpeting of roads, repair of footpaths, renovation of sewerage, sanitation and water supply systems. Amir Ali Ahmed, Chairman, CDA appreciated the suggestions given by Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President ICCI and his delegation and said that they would be given due consideration. He also issued instructions to his team about tackling non-conforming issue of businesses and said that in these circumstances, measures should be taken to facilitate the growth of business activities. He assured that CDA would handle the issue of non-conforming use of businesses in cooperation with ICCI to find out amicable solution of such issues.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi in a group photo with a delegation of Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. - DNA

CDA to set up 200 pre-fabricated toilets for public

RAJA PERVAIZ

ISLAMABAD: Efforts are afoot to set up as many as 200 pre-fabricated toilets in the city to facilitate the citizens in responding to the nature's call at public places, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) Member Finance said on Wednesday. Talking to media, he said the CDA's directorates of Environment and Sanitation had already issued tenders for establishment of off-the-rack toilets at parks, picnic spots, jogging tracks, markets, highways and bus terminals. The senior official said of more public washrooms already underway and expected soon. He said the initiative was being taken in line with the directions of apex court which had ordered for construction of 500 toilets at the city's public places. To a query, he said remaining 200 toilets would also be built in the next couple of months. Earlier, Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chairman Amir Ali Ahmed, in a recent talk with media, said the civic agency would set up at least one toilet each for males and females at all public parks. "We have decided to establish toilets at all public parks of the federal capital, in addition to cycling and walking tracks," the chairman said while elucidating his plan for up gradation of parks in the federal capital. Ahmed said upgradation work on the parks was in full swing, adding the transformation of all of the 235 parks of Islamabad into fully-equipped recreational facilities would be completed shortly.



IBCC modernizing national examination under PSDP

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) is making all-out efforts to modernize and standardize of national examination and assessment system at country level under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). The IBCC is also playing an advisory role to reshape the assessment systems and bringing uniformity in the standards for qualitative improvement in close liaison with all the education boards and other member organizations. IBCC Secretary Prof. Dr. Gulam Ali Mallah said this during a press briefing held here the other day to highlight the key initiatives taken to revamp the institution. He further said with the academic and technical support of examination boards, the IBCC is establishing Question Item Bank which will help to shift the assessment from rote learning to concept learning. "This is a revolutionary



step taken by the IBCC and surely, will have keen and fruitful impact on overall education system across the country" he hoped. The IBCC in collaboration with National Information Technology Board (NITB), will digitize and integrate the data of examination boards with attestation and equivalence e-portals of IBCC to convert the existing hybrid system into complete automated system. Dr. Mallah told the media that for ease of the business and to facilitate the general public, the IBCC is integrating technology in the services. The website of the organization has been completely revamped which is now completely service oriented, he added.

Dr. Mallah thanked to education federal secretary and NITB chief executive for their keen interest and utmost support in automation of all internal processes including launch of e-office project at Secretariat and regional offices. Elaborating the further steps taken to minimize the problems of the public and increase the accessibility, he said the Live Messenger Chat for live question answers is launched and universal access number (UAN), with integration of multiple lines, has also been installed. The complaint redressal mechanism has been evolved to timely address the issues or queries of the applicants, he mentioned. The IBCC has recently pre-

pared initial draft of the act and service structure and submitted to the ministry for further process for approval from the parliament. To ensure effective engagement of the students during pandemic, in collaboration with Inter University Consortium for the Promotion of Social Sciences Pakistan, largest network of Pakistani universities, a weekly online session "IBCC Live with Vice Chancellor" has been initiated, he told. The objectives of the session are the career counseling and guidance to the students, who are enrolled at the colleges and going to complete their intermediate level. The IBCC secretary proudly announced that the entire system of IBCC has been brought to the international standards. This is the reason, IBCC has been recently awarded ISO 9001:2015 certification which is a globally recognized quality management standard developed and published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), he briefed.

'NHMP ensuring eco-friendly travel on motorway'

The NHMP since its inception in 1997 was ensuring regular cleanliness of the motorway to keep it neat and clean, said Sector Commander NHMP, M-2 North Aashiq Hussain Chouhan in an exclusive talk with media in connection with World Earth Day

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: The National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) is ensuring an eco-friendly travel on motorway and penalizing automobiles emitting dark smoke and those throwing trash on non-designated places. The NHMP since its inception in 1997 was ensuring regular cleanliness of the motorway to keep it neat and clean, said Sector Commander NHMP, M-2 North Aashiq Hussain Chouhan in an exclusive talk with media in connection with World Earth Day. He said as per the vision of IG NHMP Dr. Syed Kaleem Imam and DIG Ishfaq Ahmed, the

NHMP patrols were strictly following the cars throwing trash, over speeding or emitting dark smoke and imposed fine right on the spot. The Sector Commander added that the Motorway Police was very sensitive on the matter of littering by the road users as it was ensuring a serene and clean environment after many arduous efforts. He underscored that motorway was a noise free zone without rush, pollution and garbage throughout the travel that offered a memorable journey covered in the greenery and beautiful landscape across the motorway to its users. "Courtesy, help and honesty are the benchmarks of NHMP and also the guiding principles of

the Police Force that helped to maintain its trust and honor in the nation," he proudly said. He highlighted that rice crop stubble burning was a serious issue that used to exist from Kellar Kahar to Lahore region of M-2 North Sector of NHMP that sprawled over 200 kilometers from Chakri to Kot Momin. The Sector Commander noted that rice stubble burning was creating thick screens of dark smoke that reduced visibility to a significant level for the commuters, hence resulting serious road accidents. To a query, he said, "250 challans per day are being issued only in Sector M-2 North of the motorway to the automobiles over speeding and

violating speed limit that includes cars, buses and carriage lifters." Interestingly, he said none of the challans issued were challenged by the masses in the Court as wrongly issued or factitious that further ensured the credibility and professional excellence of the NHMP. Responding another query, he said special briefing officers were deployed at the Toll Plazas to exhort masses on antilittering measures and also distribute garbage bags among the people. "They are advised to collect their garbage or trash in the waste bag and then dispose it in a trash container placed at every service station," he added. He also informed that district magistrates of area con-

cerned were also taken on board to implement section 144 for banning rice stubble burning in the above mentioned region effectively to ensure smog free motorway. In his message on World Earth Day, he said, "This is our country and this environment belongs to us and it's our job to keep it clean, green and plant more trees to conserve environment for a sustainable and safe future for our coming generations." On the occasion, the NHMP mobile education unit headed by Inspector Imran Abbass, Sub-Inspector Beenish Aii and JPO Anna Aziz also briefed on the efforts made during the Covid-19 pandemic to educate the masses on adhering to traffic safety rules.

IHC for ending forced labor at brick kilns

IBRAR KHAN

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday provided Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration last opportunity to end forced labor especially on brick kilns in the jurisdiction of federal capital. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah, hearing the case, remarked that the bench would summon interior secretary in person if the district administration failed to do so. If the bench did not receive any results, the matter would be sent to the federal Cabinet, he said. The lawyer of brick kilns owners said the Punjab government had a law for payment of Rs50,000 amount as advance loan to the workers. The chief justice observed that if the Punjab government had this law then it was a violation of the decision of Supreme Court. During the course of proceedings, Adnan Randhawa, the member commission set up by the court, said the under age children had been forced to work after payment of advance money to their poor parents. If the brick kilns owners stop this practice, their business could be at stake, he argued.

1,189 persons get Covid jobs

RAWALPINDI: The total district tally of coronavirus vaccination Thursday reached 25,257 with inoculation of 1,189 more persons against the deadly virus during the last 24 hours. District Health Coordinator for COVID-19 Dr. Jawad Khalid told media that 11,792 health workers while 13,465 other people including senior citizens have received their first dose of Chinese Sinopharm vaccine so far. He informed that the district health authority has registered total of 18,393 positive cases till date out of which 16,867 belonged to Rawalpindi while 1526 to other districts. - DNA

Six outlaws held, narcotics recovered

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad police on Wednesday nabbed six outlaws including two absconders and recovered narcotics from their possession, a police spokesman said. He said that Shahzad Town police arrested two drug pushers namely Nabeel and Muddassar and recovered 241 gram hashish from their possession. Sihala police arrested Saghir and recovered 220 gram hashish from him. Golar police arrested accused Allah Ditta involved in theft. Cases have been registered against these nabbed persons and further investigation is underway from them. During the special crackdown against absconders, police teams arrested two offenders from various areas of the city SSP (Operations) Islamabad Dr. Syed Mustafa Tanveer has appreciated the performance and directed all police officials for high vigilance and monitoring against those involved in anti-social activities. - APP

4 arrested in raid at Sheesha center

RAWALPINDI: Police on Thursday raided a 'Sheesha Center' in the jurisdiction of Mandra police station and arrested four persons, informed a police spokesman. The spokesman said said the Mandra police conducted a raid and arrested Hasnat Ali, Umair Khan, Adil Nisar and Husnain Ali and recovered 'Huqqas' and other smoking items from their possession. A case has been registered against all the accused, he added. He said the raids were being conducted to ensure implementation of anti-smoking law, 2002. - APP

Admin impounds 110 PSVs

MEHMOOD ABDULLAH
RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Administration including Regional Transport Authority (RTA) has conducted 134 raids at different routes and impounded 110 Public Service Vehicles (PSVs) besides imposing fines amounting to Rs 226,000 on those violated coronavirus Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued by the Punjab government to contain spread of coronavirus. According to a District Administration spokesman, the administration had conducted a large number of raids at PSVs at different routes to check implementation of the SOPs. 110 vehicles were impounded during last seven days besides penalizing the violators with fines amounting to 226,000, he added.

Inclusive Internet Index Report

ACCORDING to the Inclusive Internet Index report 2021 released by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Pakistan ranks 90th among 120 countries. It is sad to note that we are just above the poorest of the poor nations on the index. This should be a point of concern for the government. We have succeeded in increasing the numbers of internet users; at least 42.2 percent of Pakistan's population benefits from broadband services. Yet Pakistan's poor performance in digital literacy and the inability to bridge the gender gap, are just two of the many stumbling blocks not allowing us to go completely digital. In today's world, no government can imagine growth, development and progress if citizens lack access to the internet. Developed countries and those on the fast track to development know this better. They constantly compete with each other in improving their ranking on the list. But the Pakistani state is unique in the way that our ranking has been falling for the third consecutive year, and there have been no steps to remedy this as of yet.

The government can reap great rewards for both itself and the Pakistani population by ensuring the availability, affordability, relevance and readiness of the internet. We must stop bringing in regressive policies regarding the digital space. In terms of access, the Punjab government could rethink its decision about closing down the free wifi spots; this would be just one step in many to try and allow for a larger and well-equipped userbase. In contrast, one area where Pakistan is far ahead of many regional countries is the affordability of the internet. Since affordability is the most crucial factor, the government can improve its ranking in the remaining three categories. The only lacking thing is commitment on the part of the government. The state must incentivise internet companies to create a healthy competitive environment that will benefit ordinary citizens the most. While our digital population has indeed grown over the past few years, we still need to keep up our efforts to reduce the gap between on and offline users.

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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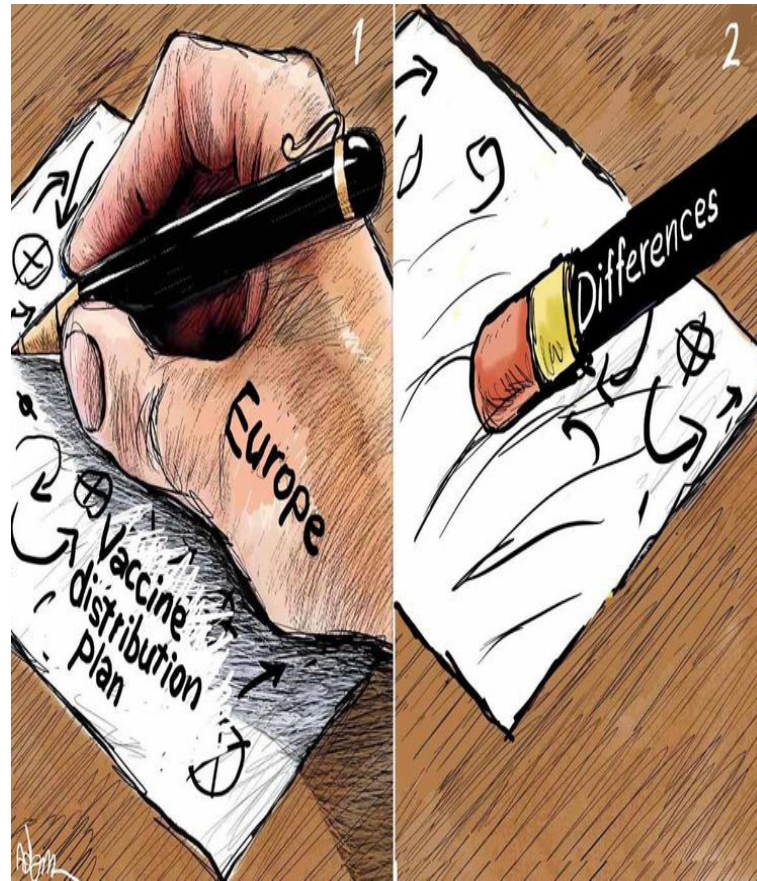
ABC CERTIFIED

Vol: 01 Issue: 333

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Precautionary measure

OBSEVING the dramatic surge in Covid-19 cases in India, along with the havoc it has wreaked across the country, Pakistan imposed a travel ban on India. The pandemic looks to be spiralling out of control in the region; our authorities must also consider expanding such restrictions on travelling to and from other countries as well. Any preventative measure that can safeguard our numbers from rising should be enacted immediately.

The government's decision to ban all travel to and from India comes in light of the fact that the virus seems to be spreading like wildfire in the country. An average of 200,000 cases are reported every day and a total of 15.3 million cases are active in India currently. To say the circumstances are dire would be an understatement. Another factor to be concerned about is that the Indian variant has doubly mutated which had made it partially resistant to vaccines. Thus, not only will the little immunity we are nurturing through the vaccination campaign will be rendered useless but the devastation it will cause internally will be hard to recover from. This ban was necessary and it is good that outside of Pakistan, other countries like the UK and Hong Kong are also following suit.

Somewhere along the line, we got lethargic with our policies towards the pandemic and became lax—we stopped regulating international travel in particular. This led to the arrival of the UK variant and, if proactive measures had not been taken by the authorities, could have resulted in the arrival of the Indian one as well. While the sharp rise in the positivity ratio can be attributed to internal failures like a lack of compliance with social and procedural protocols, it is certainly more than justified for the government to take this step to eliminate the probability of the environment getting worse while the vaccination drive is expanded. Otherwise, we might be subjected to further travel bans by other countries.

A journey towards liberation: Aghdam City, Azerbaijan

Khalid Taimur Akram



The flora and fauna-enriched region has been known for their minerals and thermal waters. The district of Istisu of Kalbajar is known to have curing mineral waters that are perceived to be richer than any place in the world

WHILE visiting Azerbaijan for the International Conference on "New Vision for South Caucasus: Post Conflict Development and Cooperation" I had the opportunity to visit the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. On 12th April 2021, at the invitation of the Azerbaijan government, I visited Aghdam city. I witnessed the repercussions of the war on the region by the brutal actions of the Armenian forces.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Region: Historical Perspective
The conflict between Azerbaijan and its neighbour Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent regions continued before its independence from the Soviet Republic in 1991. The territory was disputed even before the creation of the Soviet Union. The brutal Armenian military illegally occupied the Azerbaijani territory. With several disputes and border skirmishes, Azerbaijan had left no stone unturned to liberate its occupied territory from Armenia. Internationally, the Nagorno-Karabakh and its seven adjacent regions were recognized as a part of Azerbaijan. However, Armenia illegally occupied the territory.

The Second Karabakh War: A Turning Point
Azerbaijan and Armenia had indulged in clashes over the past three decades. The events of September 2021 changed the whole landscape of the conflict. As the conflict started in the region, Azerbaijan was able to liberate its towns and nearly 300 settlements from the Armenian occupation. The fighting continued for six weeks and Moscow brokered ceasefire deal that Azerbaijan and Armenia signed. The aftermath of the ceasefire, Azerbaijan came along with a robust agenda of rebuilding the liberated lands.

Post-war Effects

The Armenian forces had been destroying cities and districts of Azerbaijan since their occupation. There was

the destruction of buildings, infrastructures, plundering of natural resources. The religious, historical, and cultural sites were also vandalized. There are more than 2,600 cultural and historical sites and monuments in liberated regions of Azerbaijan in the preliminary estimate. Out of those, 706 of the monuments are included in the State registry. With 11 of those monuments holding world significance, including six architectural and five archaeology items. There are also 240 monuments of national significance, 455 monuments of local importance including, 23 botanical gardens, parks, and monumental statues. Unfortunately, a large number of these sites, monuments, cultural properties, and objects have been vandalized, taken, or demolished by the Armenian forces.

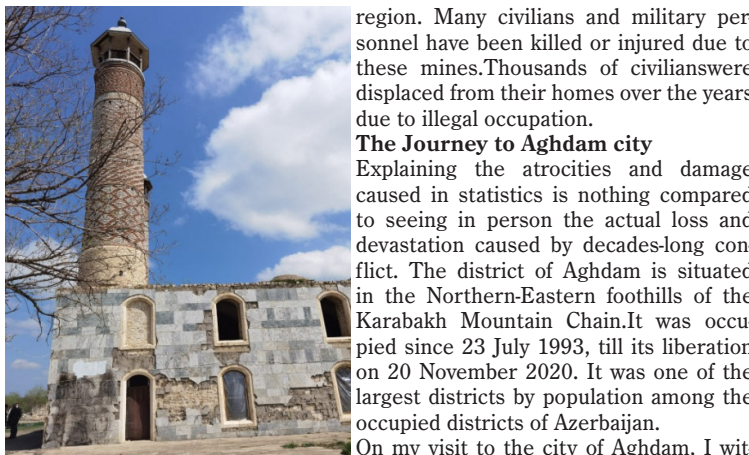
There were also over 40 thousand art objects conserved and collected in 22 museums. 4.6 million books amassed in 927 libraries, 808 clubs, 85 musical schools, two concert halls, eight parks of culture and leisure, four theatres, and art galleries. The brutal Armenian forces destroyed 150 thousand houses, 7000 public buildings that included 855 kindergartens, 693 schools, and 695 medical facilities. They did not spare houses of worship with, 65 out of the total 67 mosques having been razed to the ground and the two others severely damaged.

The flora and fauna-enriched region has been known for their minerals and thermal waters. The district of Istisu of Kalbajar is known to have curing mineral waters that are perceived to be richer than any place in the world. Moreover, the district of Zanglin had been known for its lush and green forests before the Armenian occupation. It was home to the Basitachay State Natural Reserve and the forests of the Kalbajar district that covered 24000 hectares. These all areas have been cut down significantly under the Armenian occupation. This is the material cost of the occupation and war. It does not include the human cost of the region's people. Since the early 1990s, the occupied region has been littered with mines and unexploded ammunition. It has been referred to as a "carpet of land mines" by both military experts of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The worse af-



Destruction in Aghdam City

fectured areas are near Tartar, Aghdam, and the districts of Fuzuli and Cabrayil. Experts from the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action have estimated that it could take up to 10 years to demine the territory. After all these atrocities, Armenia has refused to provide any map of the land mines. It is a massive task to clear mines and ammunition from the battlefields in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh



The Juma Mosque of the Aghdam City

region. Many civilians and military personnel have been killed or injured due to these mines. Thousands of civilians were displaced from their homes over the years due to illegal occupation.

The Journey to Aghdam city
Explaining the atrocities and damage caused in statistics is nothing compared to seeing in person the actual loss and devastation caused by decades-long conflict. The district of Aghdam is situated in the Northern-Eastern foothills of the Karabakh Mountain Chain. It was occupied since 23 July 1993, till its liberation on 20 November 2020. It was one of the largest districts by population among the occupied districts of Azerbaijan.

On my visit to the city of Aghdam, I witness the devastation caused by the war. Roads were destroyed, tank trenches dug out and driving around the area was difficult. The land was razed to the ground, and mines scattered all around. We were taken to the Tomb of the Khans of Karabakh, which were abandoned and destroyed. At a closer look, we also saw the desecration of gravesites all over the city and around the tomb. The downtown area of the city was also destroyed, with not a single standing building. It was hard to imagine that the area was once the cultural hub of the city. As we drove around the city, we saw every part of the city was vandalized or destroyed by the Armenian troops. There were abandoned army posts, trenches dug out by Armenian forces, showing remnants of war. We also visited the areas where land mines had been planted, again restating the atrocities of Armenian forces. Journalists were right in calling this place the 'Hiroshima of the 21st Century' or the 'Hiroshima of the Caucasus' because the devastation cannot be denied.

The Aftermath of the War: Prospects and Policies

There is hope and high moral among Azerbaijan's people that they will rebuild and return to their homes as the conflict is finally over. They have a high spirit to reconstruct and reconcile the area. Azerbaijan is very proud of its secular stance among its population and hopes to continue this with the local Armenian population. Recently, a multi-faith



The Mausoleum of Karabakh Khans

congregation was hosted in the Aghdam city's mosque with religious leaders of Muslims, Jewish and Christian populations of the nation. This joint prayer exemplified the religious tolerance, coexistence, and inter-religious dialogue and harmony among the people of all faiths in the country. The government has always been keen on promoting multi-religious coexistence to show tolerance, diversity,



Destruction of the Aghdam State Drama Theater

and moderation. Even with a Muslim majority population, Azerbaijan has worked hard to peacefully coexist with its minority population. The Christian and Jewish populations have also played their part in the restoration of the nation's territorial integrity. They will work towards reconciliation among the populations in the liberated territories. It might be a difficult path, but with determination and faith, there is hope that the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations that once lived side by side in the Nagorno-Karabakh region can once again find ways for peaceful coexistence.

I must commend the visionary leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, who, with a firm resolve guided his country into an exceptional path of prosperity. His tenacity under such a complex situation helped him liberate the occupied territories and restore the original borders of Azerbaijan. It was a pleasure to meet him in person and commend his visionary policies towards this tremendous victory and plans to restore and rehabilitate the liberated territories. He was gracious to personally thank Pakistan for its support of Azerbaijan over the years and during the war. He reiterated Pakistan's supportive stance for Azerbaijan.

It was an honor to visit Azerbaijan and witness the steps towards peace, stability and building nation's resilience. Many of us take peace and freedom for granted, but witnessing the actual situation in the Karabakh region shed light on the



Desecrated Gravesites

fact that peace is a luxury, we must all be grateful. Now, the prospects for peace and a bright future in the Nagorno-Karabakh region are high. Azerbaijan plays a vital geostrategic role in the Caucasus region, and its victory is a clear sign of its significant role in the region's strategic future.

— The writer is the Executive Director, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad

The end of America's 'forever war'

Maleeha Lodhi



The focus will now be on the upcoming diplomatic parley in Turkey – the Istanbul Conference on the Afghan Peace Process – which aims to accelerate the intra-Afghan dialogue

THERE was little surprise in President Joe Biden's announcement last week that the US will unconditionally withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan by September and end its "forever war." The US president had long been of the view that retaining troops in Afghanistan was not only untenable but had lost any rationale once the Al-Qaeda threat had been downgraded. That is how he framed it in his much-anticipated address. "We delivered justice to Osama bin Laden a decade ago," he said, but "stayed in Afghanistan for a decade since... Our reasons for remaining in Afghanistan have become increasingly unclear." He added another compelling reason for his decision: The new strategic challenges that Washington needed to focus on. To pre-empt expected domestic criticism, especially in view of the Pentagon's advice of a gradual conditions-based drawdown, he said: "We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan hoping to create the ideal conditions for our withdrawal, expecting a different result." With this announcement, the US is set to start pulling out its forces on May 1 and complete the drawdown by Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of the attacks on America that led to the invasion of Afghanistan. What does this mean for the future stability of Afghanistan? How will this affect the Afghan peace process, which has been deadlocked for months now? What of the peace plans Washington unveiled more than a month ago, which envisaged UN-mediated talks between the Afghan parties in Turkey, scheduled for April 24 to May 4, as well as a conference of regional states to mobilize consensus to support the peace process?

The Taliban, even before Biden's announcement, said it would not participate in the talks in Turkey and threatened

"consequences" if the withdrawal deadline agreed in the February 2020 US-Taliban Doha accord was shifted. Its initial response to Biden's announcement reiterated the position that a delay in the withdrawal was a violation of the Doha agreement, which freed the group to take "every necessary countermeasure." Otherwise, the statement was nuanced enough to leave space open for diplomatic engagement. It is possible that the Taliban might come round to accepting the new drawdown end date, as it is clear and unconditional, and also rethink its participation in the Istanbul conference. Having won international recognition, the Taliban is unlikely to risk losing it by adopting an intransigent stance. Their leaders may also see this as an opportunity and therefore take a restrained position.

The focus will now be on the upcoming diplomatic parley in Turkey – the Istanbul Conference on the Afghan Peace Process – which aims to accelerate the intra-Afghan dialogue and take it forward from where it was left in Doha last November. The prolonged impasse has had much to do with the wait-and-see posture adopted by both parties in light of the new US administration's review of its Afghan policy. The UN mission has described the Istanbul conference as an "important opportunity to put in place a concrete plan to end the war."

The indications are that the US will intensify its diplomacy to push the Afghan parties to break the stalemate in Istanbul and then start substantive negotiations in Doha. Whether the announcement that the Americans are leaving will force the Afghan parties toward accommodation, as some hope, is yet to be seen. What is known about the UN-led peace summit is that talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban will be preceded by a meeting of foreign ministers and representatives of regional states, which is

expected to evolve a "unified approach" in support of an inclusive peace process and a call for a reduction in violence. One of the critical factors in whether the Turkey peace process will succeed – or even start – is how seriously the US engages, especially the pressure it brings to bear on President Ashraf Ghani to abandon his uncompromising stance and how the Taliban plays its cards. US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is in the region intensifying efforts to persuade the two sides to go to the Istanbul conference with an open mind, which is a formidable task. The US certainly has an interest in leaving Afghanistan having achieved progress in negotiations for a peace settlement. But the question is how much leverage does it have now that it is leaving and what tools is it prepared to use to achieve a last-ditch outcome?

As for the Taliban's leaders, who have been wily negotiators, the unanswered question is whether they will be able to resist the view of those among them who may want to wait for the Americans to depart and see no value in resuming the intra-Afghan dialogue. On the other hand, the Taliban leaders may calculate that, after two decades of military struggle, the opportunity to secure their desired outcome also presents itself through negotiations – an option that would help them receive the international support and assistance they will need in post-American Afghanistan and, most importantly, offer a better chance of achieving lasting peace.

The danger, however, is that if the path of negotiations is spurned and talks fail, Afghanistan could once again descend into chaos and a bloody civil war that would only prolong the tragedy for its long-suffering people, who yearn for peace. In that case, Afghanistan's "forever war" will continue, even as America's ends.

— Courtesy: Arab News

Briefs

Kyiv calls for talks with the Kremlin

DNA

KYIV: In a separate development, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a law on Wednesday allowing reservists to be called up for military service without announcing mobilisation. Approved by parliament late in March, the measure makes it possible to significantly boost the country's armed forces. "This will make it possible to quickly equip the military units of all defence forces with reservists, thereby significantly increasing their combat effectiveness during military aggression," Zelenskyy's office said. Kyiv has also called for talks with Moscow, in an apparent bid to calm the continuing tensions. In an address to the nation delivered on Tuesday, Zelenskyy challenged his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to meet him in the Donbas region for talks to end the conflict there.

The Ukrainian president, who was elected in 2019 on promises to bring an end to the fighting, also accused Russia of playing a double game by participating in peace negotiations while massing troops on Ukraine's border. Recent satellite images showed hundreds of Russian military vehicles stationed at multiple bases, firing ranges and field camps along the border with Ukraine. Dozens of warplanes parked at airbases in southwestern Russia and Crimea have also been seen. "A considerable number of Russian troops are concentrated near our border," Zelenskyy said.

PCB reopens club registration process

RAJA PERVAIZ

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has reopened the portal for online registration of clubs in the country. According to the PCB, the portal has been reopened on the massive requests of the club who missed the previous chance to submit their application. Now, the portal will go online from 9 am on Thursday, 22 April till 5 pm on Wednesday, 28 April. Earlier, PCB received record applications for registration. As many as 3,807 clubs applied for registration between 10 March to 8 April. This was a 22 per cent increase in the last club registration process that ran prior to the introduction of the new PCB Constitution in August 2019. PCB had received the most number of club registrations (231) from Karachi followed by Lahore (222). 102 clubs from Faisalabad, 94 from Hyderabad, 87 from Rawalpindi, 83 from Bannu, and 82 from Quetta have also applied for registration.

Most clubs (845) have sent their applications from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) cricket association. 774 clubs from Central Punjab, 676 from Sindh, 524 from Southern Punjab, and 486 from Northern have applied for registration.

ICC bans another UAE's cricketer

SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: International Cricket Council (ICC) put 5-years ban on the United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s cricketer Qadeer Ahmed for breaching its Anti-Corruption Code. After Mohammad Naveed and Shaiman Anwar Butt got banned for eight years for the same reason, Qadeer became the third UAE cricketer to face the ban across all formats. Qadeer was found guilty for breaching Article 2.4.4 - failing to disclose to the ACU full details of any approaches or invitations received to engage in conduct that would amount to Corrupt Conduct under the Code in relation to the Zimbabwe v UAE series in April 2019, and Netherlands v UAE series in August 2019. He also breached Article 2.3.2 - disclosing Inside Information in August 2019 in circumstances where he knew or should have known that the information might be used for betting purposes.

Super League collapses as founding clubs withdraw

We accepted the invitation to participate in the Super League project with the genuine intention to deliver the best possible European competition for football fans around the world and in the best interest of the club and our own fans

SPORTS DESK

LONDON: Plans for a breakaway European Super League seem on the verge of collapse just days after being announced, as Spain's Atletico Madrid and Italy's Inter Milan on Wednesday became the latest clubs to quit the troubled new venture. Eight of its 12 founding football clubs - Manchester United, Chelsea, Manchester City, Arsenal, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, Inter Milan, and Atletico Madrid - have already officially left the nascent European Super League. Atletico Madrid Board of Directors, meeting this Wednesday morning, has decided to

formally communicate to the Superliga and the rest of the founding clubs its decision not to finally formalize its adherence to the project," Atletico Madrid said in a statement. "Atletico de Madrid took the decision on Monday to join the project due to circumstances that no longer exist today," it added.

Inter Milan

"FC Internazionale Milano confirm that the Club is no longer part of the Super League project," Inter Milan said in a statement. "We are always committed to giving fans the best football experience; innovation and inclusion are part of our DNA since our foundation. Our engagement with all stakeholders to improve the football industry will never change."



Milan

Milan said they are the sensitive voice of the fans who share their concerns on the Super League project, adding that the club will remain to work for 'a sustainable model for football.'

"We accepted the invitation to participate in the Super League project with the genuine intention to deliver the best possible European

competition for football fans around the world and in the best interest of the club and our own fans. Change is not always easy, but evolution is necessary for progress, and the structures of European football have evolved and changed over the decades," the Italian club said. Juventus said the club still believe

in the 'soundness of the project's sport, commercial and legal premises' but accept that there is a slight chance to complete the Super League with the current format. "With reference to the press release published by Juventus Football Club S.p.A. on 19 April 2021, relating to the proposed creation of the Super League, and the ensuing public debate, the issuer clarifies to be aware of the request and intentions otherwise expressed by certain clubs to withdraw from this project, although the necessary procedures envisaged by the agreement among the clubs have not been completed," Italy's Serie A club said. "Juventus remains committed to pursuing the creation of long-term value for the

Company and the entire football industry." Manchester City Football Club can confirm that it has formally enacted the procedures to withdraw from the group developing plans for a European Super League," the northern English club said in a statement.

Liverpool

"Liverpool Football Club can confirm that our involvement in proposed plans to form a European Super League has been discontinued," the Merseyside club announced.

"In recent days, the club has received representations from various key stakeholders, both internally and externally, and we would like to thank them for their valuable contributions."



HARARE: A view of 1st T20I match between Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Pakistan won the match by 11 runs. - DNA

Pakistan bags 11-run win over Zimbabwe

SPORTS DESK

HARARE: Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan and bowlers helped Pakistan to clinch the T20I series opener against Zimbabwe by 11 runs at Harare Sports Club. Green Shirts while defending 150, restricted the hosts to 138/7 in 20 overs. Luke Jongwe tried his best at the backend but couldn't receive ample support to hand Zimbabwe a win after a great bowling display. Earlier, Pakistan scored 149/7 in 20 overs courtesy of a lone effort by Rizwan, who scored unbeaten 82-ball 61 with no other batsman scoring big. Fakhar Zaman (13) and debutant Danish Aziz (15) were the other two batters to cross double-figures. The visitors lost in-form captain Babar Azam (2) in the second over of the match after Zimbabwe's skipper Sean Williams opted to bowl first. Blessing Muzarabani once again had the better of Babar, who gained second spot in ICC T20I Ranking.

Fakhar also looked rusty and managed to score 13 with the help of two fours. Madhevere took his scalp followed by a wicket of veteran Mohammad Hafeez (5). Debutant Danish handed an easy catch to a short third-man fielder in the 13th over while Haider Ali once again disappointed fans. He scored five off nine balls. Faheem Ashraf was the next one to depart courtesy of a brilliant fielding by Tadiwanashe Marumani as they tried to sneak a single. He was run out on the last ball of the 16th over. Green Shirts had a breather in the last over where Rizwan smacked 20 runs to guide Pakistan to a competitive total. In his 61-ball inning, he stroked 10 fours and a six. For Zimbabwe, Luke Jongwe bagged 2/24 while Wesley Madhevere took 2/11. Zimbabwe started the chase with Wesley Madhevere (14) smacking three boundaries inside three overs, however, Mohammad Haseeb pulled back the flowing rate of runs by picking two wickets in consecutive deliveries.

Derek Chauvin is convicted in George Floyd's murder

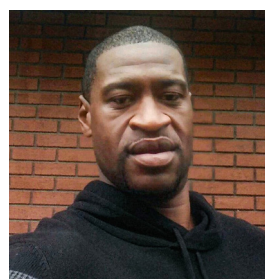
FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin has been convicted of murder and manslaughter for pinning George Floyd to the pavement with his knee on the Black man's neck in a case that touched off worldwide protests, violence and a furious reexamination of racism and policing in the US. Chauvin, 45, could be sent to prison for decades. The jury of six white people and six Black or multiracial ones came back with its verdict on Tuesday after about 10 hours of deliberations over two days. Chauvin was

Biden reacts on verdict

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and first lady Jill Biden called members of the Floyd family moments after the verdict, according to video posted by family attorney Ben Crump. Biden told the family, "Nothing is going to make it all better, but at least now there is some justice." He added, "We're all so relieved." Biden said he hoped the verdict would give momentum to congressional police reform efforts. According to the White House, Biden and Harris watched the verdict live from the private dining room just off the Oval Office.

found guilty on all charges: second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. His face was obscured by a Covid-19 mask, and little reaction could be seen beyond his eyes darting around the courtroom. His bail was immediately revoked and he was led away with his hands cuffed behind his back. A crowd gathered outside the heavily guarded downtown Minneapolis courtroom erupted in cheers when the verdicts were announced after Chauvin's three-week



trial. The verdict was read in a courthouse ringed with concrete barriers and razor wire and patrolled by National Guard troops, in a city on edge against another round of unrest, not just because of the Chauvin case but because of the deadly police shooting of a young Black man, Daunte Wright, in a Minneapolis suburb April 11.

Putin vows 'harsh' response to rivals

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin has warned Russia's rival powers against threatening his country, vowing a tough response to anyone who crosses Moscow's 'red lines.' In his annual state-of-the-nation speech on Wednesday, Putin told an audience of top officials and lawmakers that he hoped no foreign actor would cross the red lines. He did not single out one rival. The president said Russia would decide where its red line lies on a case-by-case basis. The 68-year-old Russian leader said Moscow's response to foreign provocations would be "harsh," "quick" and "asymmetrical." "They will regret it more than ever before." Elsewhere in the speech, Putin praised Russia's education, hypersonic weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles. But Russia wants peace and arms control agreements, he stressed simultaneously. Putin devoted most of the 90-minute speech to domestic issues. The speech came against the backdrop of Russia's deteriorating relations with the United States and the European Union (EU). Russia over alleged cyberattacks, human rights violations and activity in Ukraine. Russia on Tuesday restricted civilian flights over rising tensions with Ukraine and its Western border with Ukraine, prompting Moscow to build up presence of Russian troops in the region. The Kremlin has warned that the US and NATO are turning Ukraine into a "powder keg" by increasing arms supplies to Kiev and inflaming tensions in the country's volatile east, where government forces are fighting ethnic Russians.



Explosion rocks 'sensitive' Israeli missile factory

WEB DESK

JERUSALEM: A powerful explosion has rocked a sensitive Israeli missile factory during a test for advanced weapons, according to a report. The explosion took place on Tuesday during a 'routine test' by the Tomer factory for advanced weapons, Israel's Haaretz daily newspaper reported on Wednesday. There have been no reports of casualties so far. The factory develops rocket engines and houses various types of missiles. Locals said they heard an explosion and saw a mushroom cloud at the weapons manufacturing facility, which is located in the central city of Ramla and produces rocket and missile systems used by the Israeli military. Tomer's offices

are located in proximity to residential areas. "This was a controlled test with no exceptional circumstances," Tomer claimed in reaction to the blast. Meanwhile, Haaretz said officials may have underestimated the "collateral damage" of the test, which led to the explosion. Investigations into the cause of the incident has been launched.

Established in 2018, Tomer is affiliated to the Israeli ministry of military affairs and is the manufacturer of a new ballistic missile system, the Arrow-4. Israel's Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 missile systems are already operational to intercept incoming missiles in the atmosphere and space. Back in February, Israel announced that it was developing the Arrow-4 with the United States.

India coronavirus 'storm' hits new records

FOREIGN DESK

NEW DELHI: India's COVID-19 outbreak has set new records with 2,023 deaths in 24 hours - the highest single-day tally for the country so far - as hospitals run perilously low on oxygen amid rising demand for beds. Coronavirus infections also rose by a record, increasing by 295,041 over the last 24 hours, the health ministry data showed on Wednesday. Total deaths reached 182,553. India's overall case tally is now at 15.6 million, second only to the United States which has over 31 million infections. But Indian hospitals are scrambling to shore up supplies of medical oxygen amid rising demand for beds as a fast-spreading second wave of coronavirus stretches the country's chronically underfunded medical infrastructure to breaking point, officials and doctors said. Seema Gandotra, sick with the coronavirus, gasped for breath in

an ambulance for 10 hours, as it tried unsuccessfully at six hospitals in India's sprawling capital, New Delhi, to find an open bed. By the time she was admitted, it was too late, and the 51-year-old died hours later.

Rajiv Tiwari, whose oxygen levels began falling after he tested positive for the virus, has the opposite problem: He identified a hospital that could accommodate him but the 30-something resident of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh state could not get to it. "There is no ambulance to take me to hospital," he said. Indian hospitals are understaffed and overflowing. Intensive care units are full. Nearly all ventilators are in use and the dead are piling up at crematoriums and graveyards. Delhi's government hospitals reported they only had enough oxygen to last another eight to 24 hours while some private ones had enough for just four or five hours. "We are facing huge problems in

Japan PM cancels trip to India

FOREIGN DESK

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has cancelled plans to visit India and the Philippines during his country's extended holiday starting in late April amid a sharp rise in cases, a senior government spokesman said. Japan's government is considering a state of emergency for Tokyo and several other prefectures, while Indian data showed there had been 295,041 new infections nationwide overnight and 2,023 deaths, India's highest in the pandemic. Asked about media reports that Suga's trip to the two countries has been cancelled, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsumoto Kato said, "In order to take all possible coronavirus countermeasures, it has been decided Prime Minister Suga won't take any overseas trips during the Golden Week."

oxygen supply but somehow we are managing. Yesterday, it was very critical. We had only four to five hours oxygen in the evening," said Ronit Kumar, head Biomedical Engineering at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute. Replenishment came before dawn on Wednesday, with enough to last through the day, he said, adding they were pushing their suppliers. "Since they are also facing huge requirements, so I don't know. I have not got confirmation," he said. A source at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital in New Delhi, a top private hospital, said staff had a "crazy night" as they ran short of oxygen but two tankers finally arrived after midnight. The hospital has 12 to 14 hours of oxygen left for 200 patients relying on it, the source added. "We were hand to mouth but hoping the supply levels will increase from today," said the hospital source, who is not authorized to speak to media. There were no beds either for

COVID-19 patients in about 80 of 142 hospitals in Delhi, according to government data. Kamla Devi, a 71-year-old diabetic, was rushed to a hospital in New Delhi when her blood sugar levels fell last week. On returning home, her levels plummeted again but this time, there were no beds. She died before she could be tested for the virus. "If you have corona(virus) or if you don't, it doesn't matter. The hospitals have no place for you," said Dharmendra Kumar, her son. The government issued a call for help on social media, saying large government hospitals only had enough oxygen to last another eight to 24 hours while some private ones had enough for just four or five hours. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who on Tuesday went into self-isolation after his wife tested positive, tweeted late on Tuesday that some hospitals in the capital "are left with just a few hours of oxygen".

Babar moves to 2nd T20I rankings

WEB DESK

KARACHI: Pakistan's all-format captain Babar Azam has moved one place to reach the second position in the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings in Wednesday's weekly update. The 26-year-old Babar, who dethroned India's Virat Kohli at the top of ICC ODI Player Rankings last week, smacked his maiden T20I century, helping him to overtake Australia's Aaron Finch in the T20I rankings. Babar has the opportunity to take the top spot from England's Dawid Malan as Pakistan are scheduled to play a three-match series against Zimbabwe from today. On the other hand, wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan surged to career-best 15th position while Fakhar Zaman moved to 33rd spot. Left-arm fast bowler Shaheen Afridi has attained a career best-equaling 11th spot after grabbing a wicket each in the two matches while Faheem Ashraf (up 12 places to 16th), Mohammad Nawaz (up four places to 24th) and Haris Rauf (up 43 places to 38th) have also moved up in the bowlers' list.

Rouhani stresses upon Pak...

From Page 01

The Foreign Minister thanked President Rouhani for support to the Prime Minister's initiative to establish border markets, which would benefit people in the border region. The opening of international border crossing point at Mand-Fish-in would facilitate pedestrian movement and enhance bilateral trade.

The Foreign Minister expressed gratitude for Iran's consistent support to the Kashmiri people, especially from the Supreme Leader. While discussing rising Islamophobia, Foreign Minister Qureshi appreciated convergence between Pakistan and Iran to show a common resolve against xenophobia, intolerance and incitement to violence on the basis of religion or belief.

President Rouhani expressed happiness over Prime Minister Imran Khan's recovery from COVID. He reiterated Iran's desire to enhance bilateral relations in diverse fields.

Referring to the US decision to withdraw forces from Afghanistan, he said that the US military presence would not help the security and stability in the region and rather Iran and Pakistan, as the main neighbors of Afghanistan, have to play their role to guide the peace process in the country.

Rouhani also called for enforcement of already signed agreements between Tehran and Islamabad, voicing Iran's readiness to supply Pakistan's energy needs. The Pakistani foreign minister, for his part, hailed the cordial relations between the two countries, calling for promotion of relations in all the areas.

PM to take part in Tokyo...

From Page 01

regional issues and the role of Asia in the world, which has been held by one of Japan's top newspapers, Nikkei, every year since 1995. The theme of this year is "Shaping the post-COVID era: Asia's role in the global recovery." The coronavirus outbreak is changing the shape of Asia. Ambassador MATSUDA Kuninori has announced that Imran Khan will be a part of this global event held in Japan, becoming the first Prime Minister to attend from Pakistan, and believes that this will be an excellent opportunity for the Japanese people to understand Pakistan and to realize the important role of Pakistan in the international community.

Pakistan greatly values ties...

From Page 01

The Prime Minister's letter sent to all the Muslim leaders had highlighted the need for urgent efforts to confront campaigns targeting Muslims and that Muslim Ummah should further strengthen channels of dialogue and coexistence between different religions.