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Thursday, May 27, 2021

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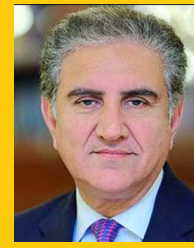
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UNGA President Volkan Bozkir in Pak on 3-day visit

Detailed News On Page-01

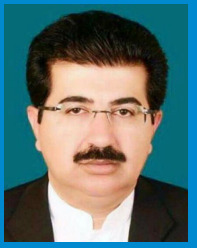
Pakistan wants positive ties with the EU

Detailed News On Page-01



Pak-Azerbaijan partnership need of the hour

Detailed News On Page-08



Briefs

Shehbaz' words are PML-N's policy

NAZIR SIYAL

BADIN: Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Wednesday said Shehbaz Sharif's statement would be taken as policy statement of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Addressing a press conference in Badin, Bilawal said the PPP was not answerable to PML-N Vice-President Maryam Nawaz or Nawaz Sharif. While responding to a question regarding Maryam's recent comments that PPP had not responded to the show cause notice sent to it, Bilawal said, "We are not answerable to Maryam or Mian Sahab."

PSX breaks record of daily traded volume

ATHAR SUFI

KARACHI: Pakistan Stock Exchange on Wednesday broke its previous record of the new daily traded volume, Federal Minister for Planning Asad Umar said. "New daily traded volume record set on the Pakistan Stock Exchange. Today's volume exceeded previous record by 39%," tweeted Umar after trading was suspended at the PSX. The minister said that record showed that market was "reacting to signs of sustained recovery".

UNGA President in Islamabad

ZUBAIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD: United Nations General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir has arrived in Islamabad on a three-day visit, on the invitation of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. During his stay in Islamabad, Bozkir will have detailed talks with the foreign minister, the Foreign Office said in a statement. The interactions will cover a wide range of political and socio-economic issues on the UN agenda. The UNGA president tweeted about his departure.

Hosting US: Taliban warn neighbours

The statement warned that if any country allowed US military bases on its soil, it would be construed as treachery

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Taliban have warned Afghanistan's neighbouring countries against hosting US military bases following the exit of foreign forces from the strife-torn country which appears to be on a cusp of a civil war. The Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Majahid said the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" wanted to clarify its position after "various well-known media outlets reported that the United States wants to stay in our neighbourhood after withdrawing from Afghanistan in order to carry out operations in our country." "The foreign forces in the region are the root cause of insecurity and war and the great tragedy that everyone has witnessed over the last 20 years, especially our afflicted people, more than anyone else," Majahid said on Wednesday in a statement shared on his Twitter handle. "We urge neighbouring countries not to allow anyone to do so," he added. The statement warned that if any neighbouring country of Afghanistan allowed US military bases on its soil, it would be construed as treachery and would go down in history as such.

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US completes 25% troop withdrawal

NEWS DESK

KABUL: As violence continues to surge across Afghanistan, the US has completed nearly 25% of the exit process in terms of troop withdrawal, handing over or destroying its equipment in the war-ravaged country. After nearly two decades of engagement in Afghanistan, the foreign troops began the retreat on May 1. According to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, the exact details of the departure plan for an estimated 9,592 foreign soldiers will not be announced at this time. "As we draw down, certain equipment must return to coalition home countries. Equipment which is not required to be returned, when we are able to, will be turned over to our ANDSF (Afghan National Defense and Security Forces) partners to leave them as best equipped and in

Continued on Page 06

PM vows action against DG Khan dacoits



BUREAU REPORT

LAYYAH: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday vowed action against dacoits in Dera Ghazi Khan, after a video of three kidnapped people went viral on social media, two of whom were brutally murdered on tape. Addressing a launch ceremony in Layyah of the Insaaf Sehat Sahulat Card, he said he was saddened to see poor people being killed in this barbaric manner. He said the Rangers have been given instructions to bring the perpetrators to book and provide all possible assistance to the police. "Now these dacoits will not be spared. No one will be allowed to pester area resi-

dents any longer," he promised, adding that if needed a police checkpoint will be established in the area. The Ladi gang had abducted three people from the Taman Khosa area. A video that went viral yesterday showed one being shot dead, while the limbs of the other were chopped off before he was killed by the ring leader, known as Khuda Baksh. All the while, his partner was filming the horrific events. The Ladi gang leader said in the video that he had "killed the murderers of his companion Haroon". Chief Minister Punjab Usman Buzdar also noted with grave concern reports of the incident and ordered immediate action against the gang. According to Hamza

Salik, political assistant of DG Khan's tribal area, the Ladi gang members are hiding in the Koh-e-Sulaiman mountain range. He said the border forces, with the help of Rangers and Punjab police, will "wipe out the gang". Speaking about the sehat cards, the prime minister said provision of health cards to the citizens would ensure complete and free of cost health coverage, which prior to this was unimaginable in the country's history. He said now with the extension of health card facility to every family of the Punjab province, the poor people would no longer have to worry about medical treatment.

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ISLAMABAD: Hamad Obaid Alzaabi, the UAE Ambassador in Pakistan, meets Farrukh Habib, Minister of State for Information of Pakistan, and discusses joint bilateral work, ways to strengthen the partnership and exchange of experiences in areas of common interest. - DNA

Maj Gen Abid Latif new DG ASF



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Major General Abid Latif Khan has been appointed as Director General Airport Security Force. He will assume charge of his new posting within a few days. Maj Gen Abid Latif Khan has previously served as Inspector General Frontier Corps Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and DG (C/N) ISI. He was posted in the General Head Quarters.

Nisar takes oath as MPA

LAHORE: Estranged PML-N leader and former interior minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan took oath as member of the Punjab Assembly on Wednesday after the Assembly Secretariat found no stay order against his formally becoming an MPA. He was administered the oath of office by Punjab Assembly Deputy Speaker Sardar Dost Mohammad Mazari. Khan entered the Assembly through government chambers. Speaking to reporters outside the Assembly, he said he would undertake a visit to Lahore again soon during which he would hold detailed talks with media persons. When he was asked which political party he would join, he answered: "I am not going [to any party] yet." Khan had been elected from Punjab Assembly's constituency PP-10 (Rawalpindi-V) in the 2013 general elections as an independent candidate with a margin of over 34,000 votes. - APP

Pak wants productive engagement with EU

Qureshi said trade was an important aspect of Pakistan-EU multi-faceted relationship

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday said Pakistan was ready to play its part for positive and productive partnership with the European Union as enormous potential existed in areas of trade, climate change and digitization. In his virtual address to the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET), the foreign minister said the Pak-EU Strategic Engagement Plan

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CPEC to transform region: Qureshi

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has called for forging energies to jointly build 'closer China-Pakistan community of shared future in the emerging era. He was virtually addressing the ruling parties' dialogue between Communist Party of China and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. He said Pakistan-China relations have transformed into an 'All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership' after seven decades. Shah Mahmood Qureshi said China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a transformational project and it is top priority of the PTI government to complete the ongoing CPEC projects.

Role of youth pivotal in development

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Hussain Chaudhary says role of youth is pivotal in the development of the country. Addressing a ceremony in connection with Kamyab Jawan Program at Bahria University in Islamabad on Wednesday, the Information Minister



said that it is the need of the hour to prepare skilled

workforce as per the requirements of the market. "The concept of an entrepreneur is fast emerging in the world and that the countries creating more entrepreneurs will be more successful in future," the minister said.

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Korean sponsored Islamabad Technology Park inaugurated

Construction of this Islamabad IT Park will provide a business friendly environment for Pakistani small and medium IT companies: Ambassador Suh Sangpyo

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, Suh Sangpyo accompanied by the Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications, Syed Amin ul Haque inaugurated the Islamabad Technology Park here on Wednesday. On the occasion, Suh Sangpyo commented that IT Park constructions are key projects of the Economic Development Cooperation Fund EDCF. In 2019, Korea signed the framework agreement with Pakistan to provide 500 million dol-



lars of EDCF loans that give financial space for the construction of infrastructure in Pakistan. Today we witness together a tangible outcome of EDCF projects. Islamabad IT Park will be a landmark in strong ties between Korea and

Pakistan. Korea is ready to support Pakistan's own IT capacity reinforcement with a long term perspective, such as capacity building, infrastructure and technology development. Suh Sangpyo remarked that the construction of

this Islamabad IT Park will provide a business friendly environment for Pakistani small and medium IT companies. Syed Amin ul Haque conveyed gratitude to the Korean Government and the Korean Ambassador to Islamabad for their full support in the construction of the IT Park. Syed Amin ul Haque further shared that the state-of-the-art IT Park project will be completed in 30 months and stated that the inauguration of this Park is another positive step towards the achievement of the Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision of a Digital Pakistan.

Inside...

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- Vaccine registration for 19 years and above starts today - Page 08

Briefs

Justice Sadaqat takes oath as CJ AJK HC

DNA

MUZAFFARABAD: Justice Sadaqat Hussain Raja took oath as Chief Justice (CJ) of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) High Court here on Wednesday after notification to this effect was issued by the AJK law, justice, Parliamentary Affairs and human rights department. Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan administered the oath of office to Justice Sadaqat Hussain at a well-attended ceremony at Aiwan-i-Sadr. Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider, some cabinet members, Chairman Public Accounts Committee of AJK Legislative Assembly Abdul Rashid Turrabi, former judges of High Court and Deputy Attorney General of Pakistan Raja Khalid Mahmood Khan attended the ceremony. Chief Justice Sadaqat Hussain Raja was born on June 9, 1963, in Khairabad village of district Muzaffarabad. After completing his early education, he graduated from Azad Jammu and Kashmir University in 1985 and received the degree in Law from Punjab University Lahore in 1988. He was elected Secretary General of the Central Bar Association Muzaffarabad four times in 1989, 1991, 1993 and 1997 and later President of the Central Bar in 2003, 2004, and 2007. Chief Justice Sadaqat Hussain Raja was appointed judge of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir High Court on March 25, 2016, and acting Chief Justice of the High Court on May 10, 2021.

Mock exercise held to deal emergencies

FAISALABAD: The Punjab Emergency Service (Rescue 1122) in collaboration with various departments arranged a mock exercise at Mari Patan, River Ravi, to deal with flood related emergencies during monsoon and rainy season. A Rescue 1122 spokesman said teams of the civil defence, livestock, health departments, agriculture and the district administration took part in the exercise. District Emergency Officer Rescue 1122 Ghulam Shabbir and Assistant Commissioner Tandlianwala Nauman Ali Dogar monitored the exercise.

Four OPDs opened in teaching hospitals

Four Outdoor Patients Departments (OPDs) have been opened in teaching hospital for the general public. A spokesman for the health department on Wednesday said four OPDs, including ENT, skin, dental, had been closed for containing corona pandemic. Now after decreasing corona cases, the OPDs had been reopened to provide treatment to the general public, he added. — APP

PML-N MPA kidnapped' AC arrested

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MNA Mian Naveed Ali was arrested on Wednesday after the Lahore High Court (LHC) dismissed his bail petition in a case pertaining to allegedly manhandling and kidnapping an assistant commissioner in Pakpattan. Justice Shehram Sarwar Chaudhry of the high court dismissed the lawmaker's bail after the court was informed that the MPA was not cooperating in investigation into the case. A report was presented to the court stating that the PML-N MPA was asked to appear before the investigation officer of the case but he didn't turn up. Police arrested Mian Naveed Ali the moment he stepped out of the courtroom. Last year in November, the police registered an FIR against Mian Naveed Ali, his father Mian Ahmed Ali and others for allegedly abusing and kidnapping Assistant Commissioner Khawar Bashir.

CPEC, game changer for the ordinary citizens: Dr Mazari

The forum was organized by the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing in collaboration with the All China Women Association and APWA, with a special emphasis on women's rights, poverty alleviation and the role of women in post-COVID recovery

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Human Rights Minister Dr Shireen Mazari highlighted the achievements of women and girls in China and Pakistan in an online high level Women's Forum marking 70 years of China-Pakistan diplomatic relations. The forum was organized by the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing in collaboration with the All China Women Association and All Pakistan Women Association, with a special emphasis on wom-

en's rights, poverty alleviation and the role of women in post-COVID recovery. The Minister stressed the importance of China and Pakistan's strategic partnership, and the opportunities which CPEC will continue to create in Pakistan. She said "we hope to see women being included in the vocational and technical training being conducted under this vital strategic partnership", adding that "CPEC will be a game changer for the ordinary citizens in both countries". In the context of COVID-19,

she highlighted the measures taken by the present government to ensure the protection of women and girls during lockdown, especially since "pandemics exacerbate existing gender inequalities". In order to register human rights violations and complaints during the ongoing pandemic, the Ministry utilized its national Helpline 1099 as well as the Helpline 1099 App. A secret code has been embedded in MOHR 1099 helpline for female victims of domestic violence who

are unable to speak in the presence of their abusers. The Minister also emphasized that the Government of Pakistan has taken critical steps towards strengthening legislation regarding violence against women, harassment, rape, and discrimination. Recently, the Ministry of Human Rights reached an important milestone by getting the Domestic Violence Bill 2020 passed by the National Assembly of the Parliament in order to establish an effective system of protection, relief and reha-

bilitation of women, elders and any vulnerable person against domestic violence. During the pandemic, the Ministry of Human Rights also published a report on the impact of COVID-19 and disaster vulnerability in Pakistan. The research was carried out with the objective to improve understanding of the multifaceted impacts of Covid-19 on the lives and livelihoods of Pakistanis, and facilitating a people-centred approach to the pandemic. The Minister said that this "analysis can serve to guide

the State's strategic, operational and policy endeavours to combat the COVID 19 crisis in a more holistic manner." In the end, the Minister hoped for strengthening our relationship with China, in order to create opportunities for ordinary citizens, and share our common experiences so that we may "forge further ahead to empower women". The aim of the forum was to foster institutional linkages between leading representative organisations for women of the two countries.

Nine die of coronavirus in Faisalabad

FAISALABAD: Another nine patients died of COVID-19 while 37 people tested positive during the last 24 hours in Faisalabad. A spokesperson for the Health department said on Wednesday that 1,761 coronavirus tests were conducted in public and private sector labs during the period. He said that total active cases in Faisalabad were 1,058 while 18,976 patients had so far recovered from the disease. He said that 339 beds were allocated at the DHQ Hospital, 133 at the DHQ Hospital and 150 at Government General Hospital Ghulam Muhammad Abad for COVID-19 patients. At present, 135 patients were under treatment at the Allied Hospital, 53 at DHQ Hospital and 35 were admitted to General Hospital. He further said that 631 confirmed patients were isolated at their homes in the district. — APP

25 criminals held; drugs, weapons seized

FAISALABAD: Police claimed on Thursday to have arrested 25 criminals and recovered drugs and illegal weapons from their possession in the district during last 24 hours. According to police, raiding teams nabbed 8 proclaimed offenders and 7 drug pushers and recovered 1.8 kg hashish and 59 liters liquor from their possession. The police also held 5 gamblers with stake money of Rs. 3,330. In a crackdown against illegal weapons, police arrested 5 persons and recovered 3 pistols, one repeater, one rifle and a number of bullets from them. Further investigation was underway. — APP

IHC grants interim bail to Qaim Ali Shah

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court granted interim bail to former Sindh chief minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah while hearing his bail before arrest petition. A high court bench granted interim bail to Qaim Ali Shah till June 08 over surety bonds of Rs 2,00,000. Shah appeared in the court hearing with his counsel Barrister Qasim Nawaz. The counsel in his arguments said that the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has issued three call-up notices to his client and pleaded to the court to declare the notices as unlawful. The counsel also pleaded for granting bail before arrest to the former Sindh chief minister till the final court decision. The court issued notices to Chairman National Accountability Bureau (NAB), investigation officer and other concerned and summoned their reply. The high court adjourned further hearing on the bail petition till June 08.

Court extends judicial remand of Javed Latif

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: A local court on Wednesday extended judicial remand of PML-N MNA Javed Latif for seven days. Jail officials not produced the PML-N leader before the court today. The prosecutor informed the court that the jail authorities decided against production of Javed Latif in court owing to the corona SOPs. Judicial Magistrate Sabir Hussain Dar extended judicial remand of the PML-N leader for seven days and ordered his production in the court on June 02. The PML-N workers were gathered at the Model Town court complex for hearing of the case against Javed Latif and staged a protest and chanted slogans against

the government and for release of the party leader. The party workers also burnt tyres in the protest demonstration. Police took PML-N MNA Javed Latif into custody on April 27 after a sessions court dismissed his bail in a case pertaining to allegedly defaming state institutions. The PML-N leader appeared before the court as additional sessions judge Wajid Minhas resumed hearing. The court reserved a verdict after hearing arguments of both defence counsel and prosecutor. Latif left the courtroom before the pronouncement of the verdict. The Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) arrested him near Saggan Pul after the court dismissed his bail plea, according to his lawyer.



Faisalabad: PHP personnel getting vaccination at special counter for the officers/officials of Patrolling police at Children Hospital Faisalabad. — DNA

Well-being of PHP personnel, prime focus: SSP patrolling

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: in compliance of directions of Addl: IG Punjab Highway Patrol, Akram Naeem Bharoka, SSP patrolling established a special counter for the officers/officials of Patrolling police at Children Hospital Faisalabad. While talking to media, he said that the well-being of PHP personnel is his prime focus. The designated counter will facilitate the PHP staff to be vaccinated without any hassle. Most

of the force is between 30 years to 40 years old. He reiterated that it would be ensured that all officers be vaccinated as we are fighting with the criminals at the front line. The spokesperson Muhammad Rizwan Bhatti told that the focal persons have been appointed from the side of PHP and Children Hospital as well. Dr Asif will be coordinator in case of any problem. The vaccination process has been started, he further added. SSP Mirza Anjum Kamal appreciated the

cooperation of MS Habib Butter for arranging a special counter for the officers/officials of PHP. This step will definitely go a long way in establishing an unbreakable ties between organizations. The personnel of PHP showed their happiness upon the arrangement of Special counter for Covid-19 vaccination. They said that the arrangement are commendable and they did not face any anxiety to be vaccinated. Moreover, in case of emergency, happening of incident/accident, the

road commuters can call on help line 1124 of Punjab Highway Patrol police. If the road user faces any kind of harassment on the road or he notices any unlawful activity on the road, he can call on PHP Helpline 1124. Covid-19 Vaccination counter held for PHP personnel Faisalabad in compliance of directions of Addl: IG Punjab Highway Patrol, Akram Naeem Bharoka, SSP patrolling established a special counter for the officers/officials of Patrolling police at Children Hospital Faisalabad.

PPP raising water issue to divert attention

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice President and the leader of opposition in Sindh Assembly Haleem Adil Sheikh has said that the PPP rulers are raising artificial water issue to divert attention of masses from worrisome lawlessness in the province. Addressing to a press conference on Wednesday, Haleem Adil, flanked by PTI Ghotki president Mir Iftikhar Lound and other leaders, he said that Sindh government has made him busy in attending courts. He said bandits send their videos on Tick-tok, but the Sindh government is dubbing Haleem Adil Sheikh as terrorist, according to a communique here. Haleem Adil said that the case of killing and injuring cops in Katcha area of Shikarpur should be lodged against IGP Sindh. He said Prime Minister Imran Khan has asked the federal interior minister to hold a meeting on law and order in Sindh. Haleem Adil said that Sindh police says that they have

no modern weapons. He said after the 18th amendment law and order is a provincial subject. He said action is taken against Choto Gang but no action is being taken against the PPP gang. He said the federal government can send army and rangers if the Sindh government formally writes a letter. He said if the federal government send army and rangers on its own these people would cry that Sindh is attacked. He said when army came here it would arrest the dacoits of Pacca, but these people don't want such operation in Sindh. Haleem Adil said that 44 percent of development funds are being eaten by the corruption mafia. He said the PPP government has not introduced a single bus in Karachi during last 13 years. He said lawlessness is on the rise in Sindh, and poor people are deprived of basic facilities. He said the federal government would start Green Line service this year. He said the federal government is cleaning Nullahs in Karachi but the Sindh government is not cleaning any Nullahs.

Pak values its ties with SA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence Pervez Khattak during his meeting with High Commissioner of South Africa Mthuzeli Madikiza said Pakistan highly values its relations with South Africa and hopes to see them flourish in the times to come. Defence Minister expressed his resolve to give fresh impetus to bilateral defence cooperation through high level exchange visits and Joint Defence Cooperation Committee forum during his meeting with the South African envoy. — DNA



ISLAMABAD: Mthuzeli Madikiza, High Commissioner Of South Africa call on Federal Minister For Defence, Pervez Khattak. — DNA

Murad announces total digitalization of education system

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Education Minister Murad Raas Wednesday announced that provincial government was taking all practical measures to digitalis education system till end of 2021 and a new system would be introduced to replace the traditional way of academies for students of grade 9 to 12. The new education policies of Punjab government would not only improve the quality of education but also provide equal opportunities to all students, he said while talking to a private news channel. He said the new education system would become a role model for other cities of the country. He said his team was striving hard for continuous improvement of the educational system where students will act as contributors in uplifting the nation's economic growth. He said every information related to school kids, facilities and teacher's information regarding their promotions or ACR would be available through one click which would further bring transparency in

education system. Murad Raas said school councils are involving to engage with the local community to send their kids to schools who either dropped out during the recent closures or the already out-of-school children (OOSC) across the province. He said for the first time in Punjab, more than 27,000 Public Schools are being Upgraded-Primary to Elementary and Elementary to Secondary, this would retain 4,000,000 (Million) children in schools that dropout due to access issue. He said the target of over 0.9 million (9 lacs) drop out school children kids would bring back to school soon, adding, enrollment drive would continue throughout the year. Replying a query about teachers' vaccination, he announced that students and teachers' life protection is the topmost priority of the government and from coming Friday the vaccination drive for teachers would start in whole Punjab on district levels. — APP

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Arab states keen to promote ties with Pak Page: 20

Somalia-Pak relations strengthened Page: 10

Farzana Zahir
People-to-people contacts key to deeper cooperation

Serena Hotels host Nowruz event in style Page: 24

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Briefs

'Pakistan to achieve vaccination targets'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for National Health Services Dr. Nausheen Hamid Wednesday said Pakistan was successfully on its track to achieve the target of having 70 to 80 per cent of the country's population vaccinated against COVID-19 and subsequently creating herd immunity for the nation.

The government would complete its COVID-19 immunization programme by end of current year, covering almost 80 per cent of its population, she said while talking to a private news channel.

She said the government has been ensuring transparency in the procurement of vaccines and giving the utmost priority to the National Immunization Programme. She said Pakistan has no any shortage of vaccine as local production of vaccine had also been started in the country. Nausheen Hamid urged the citizens to come forward and get registered themselves as it would help the country get rid of from this virus.

The vaccination and strict implementation of SOPs (standard operating procedures) were main keys to tackle the virus effectively, she added. Replying to a query, she said the overall coronavirus situation was far better than previous months in Pakistan as the capacity of hospitals was increased, training of frontline health workers was focused, strict implementation of SOPs was being ensured. She said the government under leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan was doing its best to overcome the burden of virus as well as economy.

Special team to investigate attack on journalist

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Inspector General of Police (IGP) Qazi Jamil ur Rehman has constituted a special team to investigate into the incident of attack on journalist Asad Toor by unidentified persons.

According to initial reports, three unidentified men assaulted journalist Asad Toor after breaking into his apartment. The investigation team would be headed by SSP (Investigation) and it also includes SP (Saddar), DSP Ramana, DSP Special Branch and In-Charge Investigation Ramana. The IGP has directed the team to use forensic and technical resources to trace the perpetrators of this act. He also hoped that those involved in this act would be arrested soon by using CCTV footage, safe city cameras and other human resources.

Fire erupts at Gokina top in Margallas

ISLAMABAD: A fire erupted in the Margalla Hills National Park (MHNP) area on Wednesday at the Gokina top falling in the area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Haripur District.

The KP Forest Department teams were mobilised to reach the spot to put out the fire after reports reached the department's office, a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Forest Department official told APP when contacted for its version. The fire smoke hovering over the Margallas vicinity could be easily spotted in the vicinity during the afternoon.

Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) teams also reached the spot after witnessing thick smoke clouds lingering over the National Park's peaks and kept a close eye on the situation for amicable measures within its jurisdiction. — APP



ISLAMABAD: Visitors taking interest in pieces of art during an exhibition held at Satrang Art Gallery, Islamabad Serena Hotel. — DNA

Abrar ul Haq concerned over vaccine acceptability issues

Chairman says PRCS playing its role to convince relevant quarters to grant universal acceptability to all brands of Covid-19 vaccine

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) Chairman Abrar ul Haq on Wednesday expressed concerns over hurdles being faced by Pakistanis via-vis international travelling due to lack of universal acceptability of different brands of Covid-19 vaccine being administered in the country.

In a statement, the PRCS chairman said that under the directions of Honorable President of Pakistan the PRCS through the platform of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

(IFRC), the world's largest humanitarian network, has also been playing its role to convince relevant quarters to grant universal acceptability to all brands of Covid-19 vaccine so that hurdles being faced by Pakistanis in international travel could be brought to an end.

Abrar ul Haq said vaccination of people against coronavirus has started in almost all countries of the world and currently, multiple brands of vaccine produced by different countries are available in the international market. "As scores of vaccine brands are available in the international market, every country has approved some specific brands for



domestic use, in line with the local rules and regulations and policies framed by the respective governments. This has led to the issue of universal acceptability

of brands of Covid-19 vaccines developed so far," he added.

He said according to new global travel guidelines, Covid-19 vaccination is mandatory for all the inbound passengers. "However, since every country has approved some specific brands of vaccine, visitors are facing hurdles in international travels for having been administered with a brand of Covid-19 vaccine in their home country which has not been approved by the host country," he said. "The lack of universal acceptability of all brands of vaccine is not only hurting individual travelers but also those proceeding abroad for trade, education, employment,

medical treatment or other purposes," he added.

Abrar ul Haq said currently thousands of Pakistanis are also facing the similar situation and scores of Pakistani labourers working overseas, who had come to Pakistan to spend their holidays, are unable to go back despite having been administered the vaccine for the reason that the vaccine brands being administered in Pakistan have not been approved by several other countries so far. "It is feared that if left unresolved, this issue may grow into another crisis for the world, which is already staggering under the burden of Covid-19 pandemic," he cautioned.

ICCI greets Zafar on being elected as Secy Gen UBG

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) along with a delegation called on Zubair Tufail, former President FPCCI and Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and congratulated them on being elected as President and Secretary General, United Business Group (UBG) respectively. He hoped that in their new roles, they would play a more effective role for serving the cause of the business community of the entire country. Abdul Rehman Khan Vice President ICCI, Members Shakir, Omair, Khattak, Hafiz Bilal Munir Executive Members ICCI, Muhammad Ejaz Abbasi former President ICCI, Atif Ikram Sheikh former President ICCI, Malik Sohail & Khalid Chaudhry former Senior Vice Presidents ICCI and others were in the delegation.

Sardar Yasir Ilyas Khan said that the election of Zafar Bakhtawari former President ICCI as Secretary General UBG was a great honor for ICCI and its members. He said that Zafar Bakhtawari has already rendered great services for the business community in various capacities including former President ICCI and former Vice President FPCCI and hoped that as Secretary General UBG, he would play a more effective role for resolving the key issues of business community and promoting their business interests. He also lauded the services of Zubair Tufail, former President FPCCI and hoped that as President UBG, he would play a greater role for the betterment and welfare of the business community. He said that the government was working to come up with a new budget for the next financial year and urged that it should finalize the upcoming federal budget in consultation with all stakeholders including Presidents of key chambers of commerce & industry of the country.

ECC approves Rs 12000 to 8 million beneficiaries

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee of the cabinet has approved provision of 12,000 rupees each to eight million Ehsaas Kafalat beneficiaries by June this year under 2nd Phase of Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme.

The ECC, which met in Islamabad Wednesday with Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin in the chair, approved that four million, additional beneficiaries will be identified through the ongoing National Socio-Economic Registry Survey.

All these beneficiaries will be provided a six monthly tranche of 12,000 rupees per beneficiary for the period of January to June this year. According to a press statement here on Wednesday, the second phase envisages increasing the number of regular Ehsaas Kafalat beneficiaries to 8 million by June, 2021 through the ongoing National Socio-Economic Registry Survey (NSER).

Minister for Science and Technology visits COMSTech

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for science and technology, Mr. Shibli Faraz visited COMSTech secretariat on May 26. Coordinator General COMSTech, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary extended him a warm reception, along with his team.

The Coordinator General gave him a detailed presentation on COMSTech establishment, aims and objectives, past achievements, present programmes and future initiatives, including preparation of science profiles of OIC member states, COMSTech research pub-

lication program, research fellowships, technician training program, COMSTech initiative for health and innovation in Africa, and OIC technology innovation portal.

The Minister appreciated the current achievements of COMSTech and future plans devised for the socio-economic development of Ummah through the application of science and technology. COMSTech was established in 1981, in Makkah during 3rd OIC Summit. It is chaired by the President of Pakistan and co-chaired by the Prime Minister. It was established with the commitment of OIC leadership

to achieve an inter-Islamic cooperation for science and technology based development of the Ummah.

COMSTech takes follow up action for implementation of relevant resolutions of Islamic Summit Conference, collaborate with International, Regional and national organizations, and develop linkages. It reviews the work of expert groups and the tasks assigned to subsidiary organs and affiliated institutions of OIC working in different fields of S&T and submits progress report of COMSTech and new proposals for consideration of the Summit through chairman COMSTech.

President Alvi directs CDA to revamp public places

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has asked the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to increase the number of ramps at public places and construct toilets to facilitate physically challenged people. He emphasized the need for making public places more accessible to differently-abled people (DAPs) so that they would not face any problems during their visit to such places. The President said that society needed to adopt a cooperative and friendly approach towards DAPs enabling them to easily perform their routine tasks. He expressed these views while chairing a meeting on providing enabling environment to persons with disabilities, at Awan-e-Sadr, today. The meeting was attended by the Vice Chancellors and Heads of Departments of Architecture of various universities, Chairman, CDA, and senior officials of the government. — DNA

RCCI for promoting ties with African Region

Nasir Mirza also lauded the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad for organizing the event and added that this will highlight the Pakistan Government's Engage Africa Policy and cementing the economic linkages between Pakistan and African Countries

SAIFULLAH

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has said that the region of Africa is important for economic relations, trade and investment. The Government of Pakistan's Africa policy, especially the Look Africa policy, will set a new direction for the Pakistani economy.

RCCI President Mohammad Nasir Mirza, addressing a virtual session on the occasion of Africa Day to mark the 58th anniversary of the founding of the African Union, said that the Chamber has always played an active and effective role in finding new markets and exploring new trade destinations. "We need to further strengthen the



linkages between the Chamber of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce and the trade and commercial consuls stationed in African countries to facilitate trade access to the African market," Mirza said. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Foreign Secretary Sohail Mehmood, Additional Foreign Secretary for Africa Ali Javed,

Director General of the Institute Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, South African High Commissioner to Pakistan Methuzuzeli Madikiza and other senior Foreign Ministry officials also attended the Web Celebration for Africa Day. Nasir Mirza also lauded the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad for organizing the event and added that this will highlight the

Pakistan Government's Engage Africa Policy and cementing the economic linkages between Pakistan and African Countries. He said that Pakistani products are in great demand in Africa. New opportunities and joint ventures can be explored in the Pharmaceutical, Services and Construction sector. He informed the participants that the RCCI recently signed a Mem-

orandum of Understanding with the Pakistan South African Trade Federation (PSATF) aimed at enhancing trade, increasing exports and networking between Pakistan and South Africa. In continuation of its series of Africa Trade Forum, RCCI is going to organize the second edition of Africa Trade Forum in July this year as well, he informed.

Dr Faisal visits F-9 Covid Mass Vaccination Center

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr. Faisal Sultan Wednesday visited the Mass Vaccination Center F-9 Park to monitor the services being offered to the citizens.

Talking to the media on the occasion, he said in order to enhance the vaccination coverage in the Federal Capital, the Mass Vaccination Center having 25 vaccination counters and 75 registration desks, was established at the F-9 Park to vaccinate 7,000 to 10,000 citizens against COVID-19 daily.

He said 100 trained vaccinators would remain on duty to provide standard services to the citizens at the center. He asked the people to come to the center for vaccination. He said it was the responsibility of every eligible citizen to visit the vaccination centers and protect them against the coronavirus. Dr. Faisal expressed satisfaction over the arrangements and available facilities at the Centre for the senior citizens.

He assured further improvements in the vaccination centers to properly guide the citizens. He said that keeping in view the interest of citizens for COVID vaccination, the staff and number of centers were being increased. He said issues have been discussed with the managements of hospitals concerned on receiving some complaints of citizens and assured to address all of them. Dr. Faisal personally met the citizens to know the exact situation and heard their concerns related to the corona vaccination. He urged the healthcare workers and those eligible to get vaccinated to protect themselves as well as their loved ones.

24,300 more persons get anti-Covid jobs

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: The total district tally of coronavirus vaccination Wednesday reached 290,377 with the inoculation of 24,300 more persons against the deadly virus during the last 24 hours. According to fresh data released by the District Health Authority 22,754 health workers while 267,616 other people including senior citizens have received their dose so far.

The report said that the district health authority has registered 56 new infections during the last 24 hours including 49 of Rawalpindi and 3 from outside the district while four people lost their battle of life.

It updated that patients reported during the last 24 hours included 15 belonged to Rawal Town, 23 Potohar town, 4 Rawalpindi Cantt, 2 Kotli 3 Islamabad and one each from Gujranwala, Taxila, Murree, Kalar Syeda, Kahuta, AJK, Attock, Haripur and Jehlum. "Presently 95 confirmed patients were admitted to various facilities of the city including 20 in Holy Family Hospital, 16 in Benazir Bhutto Hospital, 33 in Institute of Urology, 20 in Fauji Foundation Hospital, 4 in Bilal hospital and one each in Hearts International and Akhtar Rukhsana Memorial Trust" he added.

133 fresh Covid-19 cases reported in capital

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The National Command and Operation Center (NOC) Wednesday said 133 new coronavirus cases were reported from the Federal Capital during the last 24 hours. According to an NOC official, as many as 111 cases were reported on Tuesday while 106 cases were reported on Monday. He said so far 80,662 cases had been reported in the Islamabad Capital Territory. About 748 patients had died and 72,739 recovered completely, he added.

Briefs

8 Criminals held; Cash and valuables recovered

ISLAMABAD: Tarnol and Bhara Kahu Police on Wednesday busted eight criminals including three members of a formal jail bird 'Sirajo' gang and recovered cash and valuables from their possession. SSP (Operations) Dr Syed Mustafa Tanweer directed all zonal officers to accelerate their efforts to curb the crimes in the city and no laxity would be tolerated in that regard, a news release said.

Following the directions, SP (Saddar) Ferooz Amjad Butt constituted a special team under supervision of SDPO Sajjad Bukhari including SHO Tarnol Police Station Inspector Asjad Mehmood along with other officials. The team successfully held three members of 'Sirajo' gang, identified as Sultan, Akbar and Sameer, recovering mobile phones, cash, laptop and motorbike used in crimes.

The nabbed persons, during preliminary investigation confessed their involvement in several criminal incidents in the city. Cases have been registered against them and further investigation is underway. — APP

Residents benefiting from FIR SMS alert service

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police Islamabad Qazi Jamil ur Rehman on Wednesday said that the residents of the twin city are benefiting from the First Information Reports (FIR) Short-Message-Service (SMS) alert introduced by the Islamabad Police Investigation Wing.

IGP said in a statement that the complainants are being updated on the progress made in the cases by the police through the SMS service. So far 1300 complainants and Investigation Officers were informed through this service adding he said this service facilitates citizens about registration of an FIR and also update about the investigation process of the cases. The IGP said that citizens show their satisfaction about this service.

Islamabad Police is trying its best to facilitate public through digital policing, the IGP told. He emphasized that Islamabad Police will not leave any stone unturned for the safety and security of its citizens and every possible step would be taken in this regard.

ITP for safe road environment in city

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has introduced elaborate measures to ensure smooth traffic flow and safer road environment in the city, said Senior Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Farrukh Rasheed.

He said that an additional deployment of 211 policemen have been ensured and 52 bikes and 44 vehicles have been provided to them. These cops work in two shifts and patrol in different areas to check traffic violations and ensure smooth traffic flow in busy areas.

Highlighting the efforts of ITP, SSP (Traffic) Farrukh Rasheed said that speed cameras are being used to check over-speeding while PSV squads have been constituted to check violation by transporters. Moreover, Line Patrol Unit, Eagle Eye team, Monitoring Unit and Quick Response Unit have been constituted for implementation on traffic rules and provide assistance to road users in case of any difficulty. The helpline of ITP (1915) has been made more responsive while special campaign has been initiated to check completion of routes and fitness of vehicles. SSP (Traffic) Farrukh Rasheed said that ITP is using all resources to make Islamabad 'accident and smoke free' city while special teams are working for disciplined traffic system.

Biz community support Tareen initiatives to boost economy

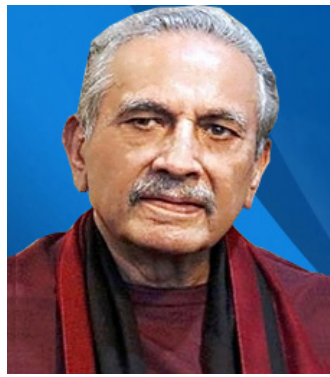
The masses are pinning high hopes on Tareen to boost the economy and settle the infamous circular debt which has become a threat for the economy

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt on Wednesday said the business community fully supports initiatives by Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin aimed at rapid economic development.

The decision of the finance minister not to increase power tariff and burden existing taxpayers while increase revenue has gone down very well with the business community and it has increased

the confidence which will reflect in economic figures soon, he said. The finance minister has decided to boost revenue by Rs one trillion without burdening masses and business community so that the overall collection can reach near the IMF's target of Rs5.9 trillion rupees for which the traders and industrialists will fully cooperate with the government, he added. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that the government has focused on construction, remittances, agriculture, and exports during the last eleven months, which has generated some economic activity despite the pandemic, but the business



community is awaiting more steps in the right direction to trigger growth and provide jobs.

He noted that increased revenue is imperative for reducing government's dependence on loans, provide cheap credit to the private sector, reduce the size of the undocumented economy, and increase per capita income.

The business leader noted that the government has decided to reduce the role of intermediaries by providing access to farmers that will boost their income and ensure the provision of agricultural products to the masses at reduced rates. Farmers should be encouraged to sell their products by themselves in the markets without unnecessary involvement of middlemen

and some more steps must be taken to overcome distortions in the agriculture market which has resulted in unprecedented inflation, he demanded.

The business leader said that price stability must be first priority as Pakistan was no longer a food surplus but a food deficit country. This has happened as the agriculture sector remained neglected for decades but now the situation should be changed for good.

The masses are pinning high hopes on Tareen to boost the economy and settle the infamous circular debt which has become a threat for the economy, he said.

'Govt not to control Friday sermons'

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony and the Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi has said that government has no intention to control over Friday sermons. Ashrafi expressed these views during meeting with Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaisar.

The meeting agreed to intensify efforts for harmony among scholars of all schools of thought in Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion Ashrafi said that the government will extend all possible cooperation to the scholars of all schools of thought aiming at to prevail harmony. — APP



ISLAMABAD: Yousaf Khan Hoti of PML Q met with the Ambassador of Palestine Ahmed Rabei and expressed solidarity with him. The ambassador thanked him for support and best wishes. — DNA

NAVTTTC Establishes Institute offering int'l qualifications

Pak-Finland School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts Inaugurated

DNA

ISLAMABAD: To make internationally recognized qualifications available in Pakistan, NAVTTTC is establishing "Pak-Finland School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts" at ITHM Lahore. The inaugural ceremony of institute establishment of Pak-Finland School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts, was held at National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) headquarters.

National Vocational and Technical Training Commission is striving to uplift the quality of TVET sector of Pakistan to bring it at par with international standards. In order to achieve this objective international collaboration for joint training programs and affiliation with institutions of international repute are NAVTTTC's core strategies. NAVTTTC collaborated with globally high-ranked and Finland's leading hospitality institute, the Turku Vocational Institute (TAI) to establish

Pak-Finland School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts in Lahore in collaboration with ITHM. In his message conveyed by H.E Ambassador of Pakistan to Finland the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi mentioned that establishment of this institute is an important milestone to commemorate the 70 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Finland and Pakistan. In his message he congratulated NAVTTTC and TAI on

establishment of institute and referred that is in accordance with the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan to develop the tourism sector in Pakistan according to the global standards. H.E Harri Kamarainen, Roving Ambassador of Finland in South Asia said on the occasion that Pakistan has huge potential for tourism and culinary arts and the establishment of this institute will further improve the quality of training in this field for Pakistani youth.



RAWALPINDI: Delegation of RCCI visited the residence of Mr. Zafar Bakhtawari to congratulate him on his recent appointment as General Secretary of UBG group. Group leader Mr. Sohail Altaf spoke high about Mr. Zafar and wished him for his successful appointment. Also President RCCI Mr. Nasir Mirza, Mr. Zahid Latif Khan Chairman Stock Exchange, Malik Shahid Saleem, Mr. Khurshid Barlas, Mr. Fahad Barlas, SVP Mr. Osman Ashraf and VP Mr. Shahraiz A. Malik were present. — DNA

Dr. Talat, honoured as 'Champion of Change'

RINSTRAs recognizes Champion of Change, individuals and institutions, who are contributing in improving Pakistan's image globally and ensuring change in Pakistan at the grassroots levels

DNA

ISLAMABAD: RINSTRAs, Pakistan's first short-form digital media platform has honoured Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director China Pakistan Study Centre with "Champion of Change" gold medal. This distinction for Dr. Talat Shabbir was in recognition for his commitment to change and improving perception and ensuring better understanding between Pakistan-China relationships. His efforts also included better understanding of the Pakistan China relationship at Policy, business and citizens' level. The gold medal "Champion of Change" was presented by Amir Jahangir, Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of RINSTRAs at a ceremony held in Islamabad. The event was jointly organized by RINSTRAs and (ISSI) Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. Speaking on the occasion, Amir Jahangir said, "We are pleased to recognize Dr Talat's services towards building the strong knowledge base

and enabling perception change which is more fact based for better understanding the relationship between China and Pakistan. He is a true champion of change, who has done so much with selfless service and dedication." He further said, "this gold medal also puts the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of Dr. Talat to push his efforts an extra mile".

Dr. Talat Shabbir Director China Pakistan Study Centre, in his acceptance speech said that, "this is a great honour and responsibility and I am humbled by this Award. China Pakistan Study Centre provides a platform for quality policy input through informed research, objective analysis and dialogue on regional and international issues affecting peace, security and development of Pakistan. I will keep working to create knowledge resources among the youth and the business community alike while providing strategic direction for policy makers." Diplomatic relation between Peoples Republic of China and Pakistan

was established on 21 May 1951. Although people to people understanding between the two countries is exemplary however cultural understanding between businesses and people can be improved. More than 60,000 Chinese expats live



in Pakistan and more than 20,000 Pakistani students are studying in Chinese universities. Pakistan exports to China stood at US\$1.87 Billion during 2020. Multibillion dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor has strengthened China Pakistan partnership yet there is much more

work required in People to People Relationship Building in Knowledge Development.

Dr. Talat Shabbir is Director China Pakistan study Centre at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, where he oversees research and advocacy on all facets of Pakistan-China relations. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. He has M. Phil in International Relations from University of Karachi, Masters in International Relations from University of Balochistan and Masters in Political Science from University of Punjab. His research areas include Pakistan, South Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC and Pakistan-China relations. Dr. Shabbir has been a visiting scholar at Sigur Centre for Asian Studies, George Washington University, USA. He has been on the faculty of Institute of Strategic Studies Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University (NDU) where he was responsible to conduct national security and national media work-

shops. Besides editing a quarterly magazine for China Pakistan Study Centre, he regularly contributes to newspapers on domestic, regional and global politics and participates in panel discussions on various TV channels to address issues impacting Pakistan. He has diverse experience of management, administration, public relations, advocacy, HR and media. Dr. Talat also has literary interests and has two books to his credit, a book of short stories and a collection of selected poetry. RINSTRAs is the outcome of the thought leadership of Dice Foundation USA's Creative Arts and Media Initiative (DICE CAM). It is part of Dice Foundation's National Innovation Basket (NIB) program, which aims to create media as a corner stone of Pakistan's growth strategy. Creative and independent content with premier shows and films can be accessed on RINSTRAs by visiting the website <http://www.rinstra.com> or downloading apps from the Google Play Store and/or Apple App Store.

FDE for 'Early childhood education system'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Education Wajaha Akram on Wednesday said that government education institutes of Islamabad as per the vision of PM's Digital Pakistan would implement various digital-based projects including teachers' tools trainings and introducing 'Early Childhood education system' in Islamabad soon. The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training joined hands with Tech Valley and Google to scale up the Google for Education pilot program in government schools across Islamabad, she said while talking to a Private news Channel. She said with the current challenges of Covid-19 faced by students and for the promotion of IT-based education, Federal Directorate of Education, Google and Tech Valley had signed a historic memorandum of understanding (MoU) to transform all schools in Islamabad into 'Digital School's. She said under this project, students would gradually get chrome books and modern gadgets for education learning, adding, paper-free environment in capital would facilitate students for adopting new techniques of education. She said initially Tech Valley would deploy cloud-based infrastructure-based Google Workspace in 200 schools (male and female) in Islamabad, while Google would provide schools with tools for distance learning and Chromebooks.

She said under this project professional teachers were received level-1 certified training, adding, these teachers would further train other staff as well. She said Teachers would also train the students regarding the online education and use of gadgets effectively. Wajaha Akram said after success of this project, the federal government would expand this program for other cities as well. In the second phase, all teachers will be given virtual training on how to use and utilize these tools.

12 held, 5 societies sealed over violations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority's (CDA) Building Directorate on Wednesday sealed five housing societies and arrested 12 persons over violation of building by-laws at the area of Bharakahu.

A grand operation was conducted against illegal construction at various areas of Bharakahu, including Chattar, Phulgran and Simly Dam Road, said a news release. The authority also sealed four plazas and one apartment for carrying out construction without obtaining no objection certificates from the federal apex agency. The CDA continued taking actions against the violations of building by-laws and layout plan. The action was taken after serving prior notices to the owners of buildings and housing societies. Meanwhile, in an anti-encroachment drive in the area of Bari Imam, the authority demolished several restaurants and illegal shops. The Assistant Commissioner Secretariat provided magisterial cover.

8 anti-social elements arrested

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: The Police claimed to have arrested eight anti-social elements including four drug peddlers, two proclaimed offenders and two gamblers. The police recovered 4.32 kg Chars, three litre liquor and other valuables from their possession. Those arrested include Muhammad Ismail, Zubair Mehmood, Alabaz, Noor Muhammad, Mehbob Elahi, Faisal Naveed, Gulam Ahmad and Ansar Mehmood. Meanwhile, one bike rider was died in a road accident on GT road near Gondal. Saleem s/o Yaseen died on the spot when his bike was hit by a truck. Rescue 1122 shifted his body to THQ Hospital Hazro.

Tax breaks

THE concerns of the Ministry of Information Technology over the withdrawal of tax exemptions for the IT industry in the upcoming budget are not misplaced. The decision of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to bring changes in the government policy regarding IT and IT-enabled services can prove detrimental to the growth of the sector. Even though the sector under discussion has shown phenomenal growth in recent years, it is still in its developmental stages when compared to the global IT industry. While the government should have provided it protection and offered it as much support as possible, the FBR's removal of tax breaks can stunt IT/ITES growth. The policy change can also potentially result in the flight of capital and brain drain. Many young Pakistanis professionals are already looking to find permanent residencies in countries like Canada and Australia. With the removal of exemptions to the sector, the government might as well reverse all the gains that it has made so far. It is worth mentioning that the industry had shown astounding growth of 40 percent in FY 2019-2020. Experts believe that the export figure could reach \$2 billion by the end of this year. This remarkable expansion would not have been possible had the government not offered support through various initiatives and incentives, including the existing tax exemptions. Ideally, the government must formulate a long-term plan—clearly chalked out with milestones for every year—to generate revenues from this industry beyond taxation. The government can partner with private organisations to make incubators and revenue generation streams. The government can potentially assign this task to the Special Technology Zone Authority, already established for promoting IT and emerging technologies in the country. Relying little on taxation and adopting the developmental state model concerning the tech industry would help the state in the long run, both in terms of generating revenue and spurring high levels of growth in the sector.

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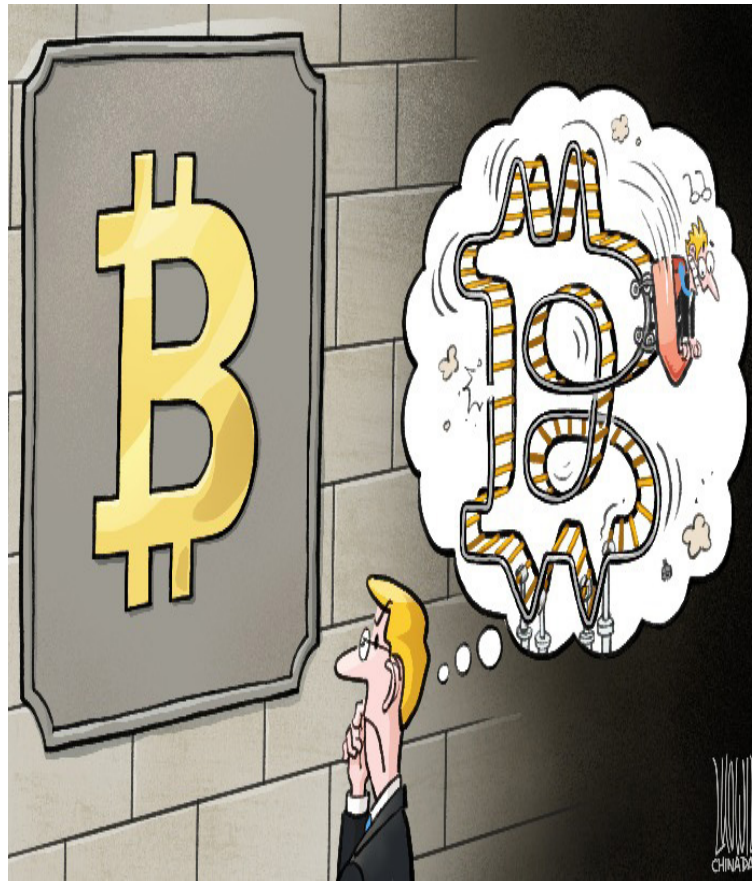
ABC CERTIFIED

Vol: 02 Issue: 21

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PDM and the future

FOR a short while, the PDM, which not too many weeks ago had appeared to have turned into a forum with no relevance, gained some semblance of new life with opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif making efforts to talk to parliamentary leaders of the parties of the alliance. And it is to be seen how he uses this in the case of the PDM. While Bilawal Bhutto Zardari did not attend the dinner hosted by the leader of the opposition, the PPP did send in a delegation. However, the feeling of a return to bonhomie was short-lived since it seems not everyone in the PML-N is on the proverbial same page regarding what the dinner meant. While the Shahbaz Sharif was seen as an effort at rapprochement by most political observers, PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz has said that the dinner was meant to devise an opposition strategy for the budget session. Add to this Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's talk to the media that the PPP must apologise for 'breaking the trust' of the rest of the PDM, and it seems things are not well in the land of the opposition. Perhaps what will worry the PTI the most is the suggestion that the Tareen Group or members of the group may be invited to join the PDM. This will certainly create a flurry, particularly at the provincial level in Punjab. The PTI insists it faces no problems and will continue to pursue its agenda of justice. Where this agenda is leading is something the ruling party needs to answer. If Jehangir Tareen lends a hand, the alliance would obviously gain strength. Things then are becoming a little more complex. The PTI has yet to show its ability to deliver the governance that people demand. This could be the factor that plays best into the hands of the PDM, despite the rifts within the alliance itself. Shahbaz Sharif, a leader who has in the past depended mainly on negotiation, diplomacy, and support from key quarters, will also need to show what type of leadership he intends to follow and what this means for the more vocal parts within the PML-N, led by Maryam Nawaz.

Freedom Fights Against Oppression

Wajeaha Bilal



Apart from their historical betrayal by the Britishers, the similarities between Netanyahu and Modi are extremely coercive. They both have used their powerful positions to manipulate and influence the media. Modi like Netanyahu has planted techniques of dispute amongst communities for his political benefits. They live on breaking the populace and dividing them on ethnic and religious basis, using the tactics to their political gains

PORTRAYING a fight against oppression as eternal or as religious makes it appear obscure in a way that makes it impossible to solve. As much as we know about history, religion has not been able to solve conflicts over territories. The obsession to control Palestine has been an existential war for Israel as it promises security to the people against the real inhabitants of the Arab land. Similarly, India's constant battle over Kashmir apparently assures the oppressors of their domestic and international identity. Kashmir and Palestine are often considered as two identities striving for their right to exist and gain freedom from oppression. Both are Muslim-dense lands, but it is not necessary to be a Muslim to understand the spirit of their struggle, you just need to be a human to empathize with the oppressed. Both Indian and Israeli armed occupation of these regions dates to 1947-48, with a constant threat to security and peace. The war between Israel and Palestine breeds from Britain's heinous desertion of the Palestinians. The UK along with France incised a hefty part of the Arab world after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, with little regard for demographics. The creation of Israel was an import of the European Jewish problem to the Middle East resulting in the homelessness of many Palestinians, with Israel fighting the neighbouring Arab states for its forceful existence. As for India, control over Kashmir is more than just a matter of geo-political rivalry. The conflict began after the Britishers left, following the partition of India in 1947 and it remains one of the primary causes of territorial instability, intensified by three wars between India and Pakistan. India under Nehru was trying hard to stick to secularism against Pakistan's identity and Kashmir's annexation to India would have proved that. For secular India, it was a way to prove that a Muslim majority region could be a part of it, by negating Pakistan's claim of a two-nation theory prior to independence.

Apart from their historical betrayal by the Britishers, the similarities between Netanyahu and Modi are extremely coercive. They both have used their powerful positions to manipulate and influence the media. Modi like Netanyahu has planted techniques of dispute amongst communities for his political benefits. They live on breaking the populace and dividing them on ethnic and religious basis, using the tactics to their political gains. However, the tactics are not always beneficial as the elections carried out in critical Indian states lately proved that facts are not always manipulated through power. After the recent ambiguous elections, the Israeli prime minister wanted to eliminate the dogma of corruption charges. He needed to destroy the probability of an alliance by the Israeli Arabs and Jewish parties that could go against him. The police assault on Muslim worshippers at Al Aqsa mosque and missile attacks on Gaza, resulted in a continuous violence that has wrecked any vision of reconciliation. The politically induced Arab-Jewish violence in Gaza is like the aggressive nationalism in India under Modi. The political ideology that Modi has promoted through Hindu extremism defies diversity and commends violence. Through these violent, ethnic, and religious tactics, Modi and Netanyahu have marked themselves as advocates of sectarian extremism by demeaning the helpless. In 2017, Mr Modi became the first Indian prime minister ever to visit Israel, "We have waited 70 years for you," Netanyahu told Mr Modi in Tel Aviv. Netanyahu also made the first visit by an Israeli prime minister to India in fifteen years and planned to make another quick visit before Israeli elections. They both face the electorate's verdict at about the same time and exert force against uprising charges. Victory cannot be guaranteed where a political demise is in store for the two. Mr Netanyahu is besieged by corruption accusations and Mr Modi by political and public unrest yet what unites them is their desire to stay in power through a brutal and violent manipulation.

These problems are not many centuries old as they rose in the British mandatory period but unfortunately, any effort to solve them often degenerates into Islamophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. There is also a western support for Israel, which helps it in getting away with any kind of violence. Any analysis of Israeli state violations against Palestinians is wiped away by using the Anti-Semitic ticket. The forceful existence of modern-day Israel is justified in the west on moral grounds for the unfair persecution of Jews in history. And sadly, the ruling party of India perceives the idea that connecting their nature to the Jewish establishments will help them ride along the Israeli Foyer in the West. The matter of Palestine and Kashmir was handed over to the UN by the Britishers after the colonial era, but the issues have still not been resolved, leading to the instability of western and southern Asia. Hundreds of thousands of people have died in these conflicts and millions have been injured. Palestinians and Kashmiris have every right to oppose and resist their foreign oppressors. We, as Muslims know for a fact the effects of biased religious logos and do not believe in extending these unfair attributes to other sects. The Palestinian and Kashmiri crisis are aggressive ethno-political conflicts over land and demographics. The Palestinians and Kashmiris have a legitimate authenticity on their side with a hope for a normal life and dignity. For more than seventy years, the freedom fighters of the occupied lands of Kashmir and Palestine have been struggling for identity and sovereignty. Let us hope that by understanding the fact that this is not a constant religious war, we will be soon witnessing the end of these conflicts. Let us help our brothers and sisters in their fight against oppression and cruelty, through care, prayer, and cooperation.

— Wajeaha is a freelance columnist. She has authored "The Conscious Ego", "The Beautiful Present"

May peace be prevailed: US pullout from Afghanistan

Jamal Akbar

Pakistan has a clear view of creating peace in the region. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan is a first step and further will be followed also but the issues remain that Taliban post Doha deal, does not require any assistance and are no more dependent on Pakistan. Thus, if the tensions escalate in Afghanistan, Pakistan has to open its gate for more refugees. If did so, the high chances will emerge of blaming Pakistan by the government of Afghanistan. If Taliban gains power in Afghanistan, the ideology of extremist movements in Pakistan may appear which can get out of control

THE long two decades of the war has come out as the longest war for US. This war did not only produce uncertainty in the region but equipped it with the deadly patterns of war. The US war against the Taliban is coming to an end but still there is a long way to go to make peace in the region. The decision of President Biden on pulling out all the remaining troops will be followed by September 11 this year, although the strict check on Afghanistan will remain. Going back to President Trump led Doha Deal, after the long efforts of Pakistan, the both US-Taliban agrees on certain terms and conditions. Those were withdrawing of troops: in first phase 5000 troops, followed till May 1st, 2021 to third phase, US war against ISIS in the region, power sharing of Taliban in the government and not to use Afghanistan soil for any purpose of security in future. When Biden came in power, his administration made it clear that the deal made in rush, Taliban gained more. This puts Taliban to pin a statement that they have been in war since long and they can remain in war until US did not withdraw. So, what changed the mind and perspective of Joe Biden? The project objective of US in Afghanistan was to defeat Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in the region. Although, it took too long and too costly to act in this war, the national security advisor of white house made a statement that US has gained its objective by defeating Al-Qaeda and killing

Osama Bin Laden in 2011. Withdrawing from Afghanistan is conditional as Taliban will not indulge themselves in connection with Al-Qaeda and prevention of own land from any security threats. It is not easy as it comes with hurdles for not only Afghanistan but also the region due to the stressful situation as any step now can lead to a bigger challenge. The prospects for Afghanistan will surely enlighten the situation. This long-awaited decision will build a sense of harmony among the state and in the region. Still, some serious factors do not involve the uprising of Afghan state. The internal administration of Afghanistan is not quite satisfactory. As there are no dialogues and agreements between Afghan government and Taliban, it sets a challenge for Pakistan. Afghan government does not agree on sharing the interim government while the Taliban disagree on the ceasefire on Afghan government installations. Even the withdrawal of US is not conditioned to it. This escalation will lead Pakistan to another challenge of solving the internal issues of Afghanistan as it might leads to civil war which will cause unrest in the region. Pakistan has a clear view of creating peace in the region. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan is a first step and further will be followed also but the issues remain that Taliban post Doha deal, does not require any assistance and are no more dependent on Pakistan. Thus, if the tensions escalate in Afghanistan, Pakistan has to open its gate for more refugees. If did so, the high chances will emerge of blaming Pakistan by the government of Af-

ghanistan. If Taliban gains power in Afghanistan, the ideology of extremist movements in Pakistan may appear which can get out of control. To play safe, Pakistan has to build a safe side by interacting with both Taliban and government through the medium of China which will help in concerning peace through the geoeconomics. The withdrawal of US from Afghanistan will pave path for the regional integration and cooperation. China, Russia, and Turkey, cooperating with Afghanistan to bring back peace in coordination with Qatar. The likely chances of economic cooperation will enrich the country, as China has already initiated the Zaranj Delaram road in Afghanistan under the Chahbahar deal. Thus, the economics invested in states build a base not to engage in any conflict. It will all be possible when the internal affairs of state will function smoothly. Afghanistan's history has been rich with wars, if not external powers then internal tribes fighting for power. To say that withdrawal of US troops will pave a gap for power sharing will not be wrong, as Britain, Soviet and US tried to fill that gap. For now, there are not many options on the table for Biden but to withdraw. To think that peace can be achieved after the US withdrawal still remains a question as the shady truth of the political terrain of Afghanistan cannot be unseen.

— The writer is a graduation student at Quaid-i-Azam University and Internee at Islamabad Institute of Conflict Resolution (IICR)

Briefs

DR Congo volcano rattle residents

GOMA: Aftershocks from the Mount Nyiragongo volcano in eastern DR Congo rattled the nearby city of Goma on Wednesday, four days after its eruption, badly damaging several buildings and prompting hundreds of residents to flee.

The tremors were felt throughout the night. Two powerful shocks from Africa's most active volcano caused terrified people to run out of their homes.

The seismic monitoring agency RSM in neighbouring Rwanda, whose border runs close to Goma, said it had detected a 5.1-magnitude quake at 5:46 am (0346 GMT), followed by a 4.1-magnitude tremor at 6:12 am. Authorities shut down the market, shops and several building sites as a precaution.

The United Nations says 32 people have died and at least 5,000 are feared to be homeless after the volcano erupted on Saturday. The UN humanitarian affairs office OCHA said 24 of the victims were burned alive by lava, adding that 40 adults have been reported missing. By the time the eruption ended on Sunday the volcano had spewed out two rivers of molten rock, one of which came to halt on the edge of Goma after obliterating villages in its wake.

PM vows action against...

From Page 01

He said every family in the Sahiwal and Dera Ghazi Khan divisions could now avail health treatment worth Rs720,000. They are free to get health facilities in public and private hospitals alike. An additional Rs300,000 can be given to the deserving families when required, he added. The prime minister also underlined the need to encourage the private sector to fully participate in health initiatives.

He observed that the government-owned lands could be offered to the private sector at affordable prices for the construction of hospitals and other health facilities, especially in the far flung areas of the country.

Hosting US: Taliban warn...

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"The people of Afghanistan will not remain silent in the face of such a provocative act. They will fulfill their religious and historical responsibilities in the same way as they have done throughout history," he added. US Centcom chief said in a Pentagon briefing that al Qaeda, Islamic State and other terrorist groups could regroup in Afghanistan post US-exit. And that he would like to keep a small "quick response force (QRF)" on-call in the region to neutralise any threat.

This statement set off speculations that the United States could be looking for keeping the "QRF" in a military base in one of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. Russia's presidential envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said on Monday that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan would not allow the US to establish military bases on their territories. The same day, Pakistan also sought to quash speculation on this issue. "There was no US military or airbase in Pakistan, nor is any such proposal being envisaged. Any speculation on this account is baseless and irresponsible and should be avoided," Foreign Office spokesperson said.

US completes 25% troop withdrawal

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the best posture as we can as they depart," the alliance's press office told Turkish news agency. The US Department of Defense (DoD) has also engaged its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Arabian Sea and six B-52 bombers based in Qatar to support the exit of the US and coalition forces from Afghanistan. By May 24, the Eisenhower had conducted over 600 flight operations in the last week alone that aided the drawdown, it said.



ISLAMABAD: Chaudhary Fawad Hussain, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting in a meeting with H.E Tarek Dahroug, Ambassador of Egypt in Islamabad on May 26, 2021. - DNA

Ireland recognises Israel's 'de facto annexation' of Palestine

Some of the Irish parliamentarians wore face masks bearing the Palestine flag

FOREIGN DESK

DUBLIN: The Irish government has supported a parliamentary motion condemning the "de facto annexation" of Palestinian land by Israeli authorities, in what it said was the first use of the phrase by a European Union country in relation to Israel. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Tuesday that the motion, brought forward by opposition party Sinn Fein, "is a clear signal of the depth of feeling across Ireland". "The scale, pace and strategic nature of Israel's actions on settlement expansion and the intent behind it have brought us to a point where we need to

be honest about what is actually happening on the ground. ... It is de facto annexation," Coveney, of the centre-right Fine Gael party, told parliament.

"This is not something that I, or in my view this house, says lightly. We are the first EU state to do so. But it reflects the huge concern we have about the intent of the actions and of course, their impact," he said. If passed, the amendment would require the government to expel the Israeli ambassador to Ireland and to impose economic, political and cultural sanctions against Israel. Most countries view settlements Israel has built in territory captured in the 1967 war as illegal and as an obstacle to peace with the

Palestinians. Coveney, who has represented Ireland on the United Nations Security Council in debates on Israel in recent weeks, had insisted on adding a condemnation of recent rocket attacks on Israel by the Palestinian group Hamas before he agreed to government support for the motion. Some of the Irish parliamentarians wore face masks bearing the Palestine flag or of the checkered keffiyeh pattern. The left-leaning Sinn Fein party refused to support the government amendment condemning Hamas attacks. The motion came days after a ceasefire ended 11 days of the worst fighting between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in years. The violence sparked large

pro-Palestinian protests in Dublin. At least 253 Palestinians were killed, including 66 children, according to Gaza's health ministry, while about 2,000 were injured. At least 12 people were killed in Israel. The Irish parliament, or Dail, is set to debate the People Before Profit amendment of the Sinn Fein Private Members motion on Wednesday, with a vote expected later. Some welcomed Ireland's move on social media. "Ireland has become the first EU state to recognise Israel's de facto annexation of Palestine in contravention of international law," tweeted Ronan Burtenshaw, editor of the UK's socialist Tribune Magazine. "A landmark on the road to isolating

an apartheid state as we did in the 1980s. Next stop: Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions."

John Brady, a Sinn Fein politician, tweeted: "We have forced a massive shift on the position of the Irish Government. They have stated that Israel has de-facto annexed Palestinian lands. Ireland is 1st EU country to state Israel's actions break international law. There must be consequences for these actions #FreePalestine."

People Before Profit's Richard Boyd Barrett described Wednesday's coming vote as "historic". More than 5,200 people have signed Barrett's petition, which calls on the Irish government "to publicly declare that the state of Israel is guilty of war crimes".



BELGRADE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns to Germany's Mats Moraing during their ATP 250 Belgrade Open round of 16 singles tennis match in Belgrade, Serbia. - DNA

Syrians vote in polls set to extend Assad's grip

WEB DESK

DAMASCUS: Voters in government-held parts of Syria are heading to the polls to cast ballots in an election that is set to cement a fourth term for Bashar al-Assad - but is dismissed by the opposition and Western powers as a farce. Wednesday's presidential vote is the second since the beginning of Syria's uprising-turned-war a decade ago, a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced millions to leave the country. In 2014, al-Assad won nearly 89 percent of the vote. Al-Assad is running against two government-approved opposition candidates: Abdullah Salloum Abdullah, former state minister of parliamentary affairs; and Mahmoud Ahmad Marei, head of the National Democratic Front, a small, state-endorsed opposition party. Forty-eight other presidential aspirants had submitted requests for candidacy, but their applications were rejected. Al-Assad cast his ballot in Douma near the capital, Damascus, a previous rebel

stronghold and the site of a suspected chemical weapons attack by government forces in 2018. Damascus-based student Layla said polling stations were packed with voters all morning and that many students were being forced to cast ballots. "Some universities will fail or even expel you if you don't vote," she told Al Jazeera. "But it doesn't matter; we all know what the results will be because these elections are just a show," she said, adding that none of the three candidates represented her. Al-Assad, whose "Hope Through Work" electoral campaign heavily focused on creating jobs, is certain to secure another seven-year term despite 10 years of war, poverty and an economy in freefall. Nadine, a Damascus resident who decided not to vote, said people in the country have been more outspoken in conversations about the economic crisis. "People are complaining about the poverty and inflation," she told Al Jazeera. "But the opposition is far more hated than the regime." Danny Makki, Middle East Institute nonresident

scholar, says the economic crisis has led to "peak discontent" even among the most biggest supporters of the government. "Although the elections have been celebratory, to say the least, [the] post-election [period] is where the true challenge awaits," he told Al Jazeera. "Just how much can al-Assad keep the economy afloat and manage Syria's problems, even with Russian and Iranians help its a hard ask," he added, noting the president eyed consolidating power in parts of Syria that were captured from rebel groups in recent years. Al-Assad allies Iran and Russia, as well as Belarus, sent delegations to monitor the election. Meanwhile, the foreign ministers of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy issued a joint statement in which they described the polls as a sham. "For an election to be credible, all Syrians should be allowed to participate, including internally displaced Syrians, refugees, and members of the diaspora, in a safe and neutral environment," the statement said.

Germany pulls out of cycling c'ship

BERLIN: The German Cycling Federation (BDR) said Wednesday it had pulled out of the European track championships scheduled for Minsk in June over Belarus's diversion of a passenger plane and arrest of a dissident on board. "After the events of last weekend, we have made contact with the European Cycling Union (UEC) and made clear that our participation is not possible under these circumstances," said the BDR in a statement. The German federation added that they had urged the UEC to come up with "an alternative solution" amid growing calls for the tournament to be moved. The UEC said on Tuesday it was considering moving the track championships, scheduled in the Belarusian capital from June 23-27. - APP

Pak wants productive engagement with EU

From Page 01

signed in June 2019 had ushered in a new phase in relationship. Qureshi mentioned that Pak-EU relationship had provided a solid foundation and framework for cooperation in multiple domains, including) political and defence, trade and investment, promotion of democracy, rule of law, good governance and human rights, migration and mobility, sustainable development, education and culture and science and technology. He expressed satisfaction that Pak-EU relationship was moving steadily in a positive direction in all spheres of cooperation and expressed commitment to "remain engaged to further expand our multidimensional partnership". He said the EU was a traditional friend and a major economic partner of Pakistan with their cooperation based on shared values of democracy, pluralism, mutual understanding and respect.

He lauded the EU's efforts and contributions to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Qureshi said trade was an important aspect of Pakistan-EU multi-faceted relationship.

While the GSP Plus has supported our exports, we have introduced reforms to attract foreign direct investment to maximally utilize this facility, he added.

Role of youth pivotal...

From Page 01

The minister stressed the need for adopting such skills that could be useful in facing the life challenges and the changes taking place around the world, saying "our thoughts must be progressive and should match the changes emerging around the globe." Fawad said the skills always made people superior to others, adding "if we want to change Pakistan and our life, we have to adopt skill and nobody can deny the importance of the skill in this modern era." He was of the view that the country's institutions would have to rise and meet the needs and standards of the developing world.

The minister said the skill development was the real work that needed to be done in Pakistan, as the country's 60 per cent population was under the age bracket of 30 years. He was of the view that technology had changed the whole world and the same would happen in Pakistan too.

The minister said that today's world had been shaped by the young generation, adding the whole modern technology including Facebook, Google, PayPal, Twitter was developed by the youngsters.

"The people who developed these technologies were not 60 years or 70 years old but they are the young people who changed the whole world. They are youngsters," he added. The minister said that technology had changed the whole world and the countries that followed the changes had started emerging and moving towards the road of progress, prosperity, and development. He advised the youth to increase their knowledge and gain awareness from the world.

Lukashenko defends Belarus flight diversion

The EU and the US have imposed sanctions against Minsk over its response to the protests. However, the measures have seemingly had no effect on the behaviour of Lukashenko, who has continued to clamp down on dissent

FOREIGN DESK

MINSK: President Alexander Lukashenko has accused outside "ill-wishers" of waging a "hybrid war" against Belarus as he defended Minsk's forced diversion of a passenger plane, an incident that led to global outrage. Belarus on Sunday forced a Ryanair flight heading from Greece to Lithuania to land in its capital in response to an alleged bomb threat. Belarusian authorities then detained Roman Protasevich, a 26-year-old reporter and critic of longtime ruler Lukashenko, along with his girlfriend Sofia Sapega, who were on board. Both now face criminal charges. In his first public comments on Sunday's move, Lukashenko said he had acted legally and in accordance with international norms,

the state-run Belta news agency reported. The 66-year-old claimed he wanted "to protect people" by diverting the flight and dismissed reports that a Mig-29 fighter jet forced the aircraft to land as an "absolute lie". Lukashenko accused critics of trying to use the plane episode to undermine his 27-year-long rule. "As we predicted, our ill-wishers from outside the country and from inside the country changed their methods of attack on the state," Lukashenko told members of parliament. "They have crossed many red lines and have abandoned common sense and human morals." Lukashenko vowed to respond harshly to any sanctions or provocations, threatening to weaken the country's border controls halting Western-bound migration and drug trafficking.



Russia, which has provided security, diplomatic and financial backing to Minsk, said on Wednesday that it had no reason to mistrust the Belarusian explanation. In response to the plane diversion and arrest of Protasevich, the European Union is imposing more sanctions on the ex-Soviet nation and has banned Belarusian airlines from the 27-nation bloc.

Several air carriers have also suspended flights over Belarusian airspace. Lukashenko's remarks came after Protasevich - who left Belarus in 2019 - and Sapega appeared in separate videos to make confessions that the president's opponents say appeared forced. In a video posted online on Monday by Belarusian authorities, Protasevich said he was in good health and being held in a pretrial detention facility in Minsk. He acknowledged having played a role in the mass anti-government rallies that shook Belarus last year following a disputed August election that handed Lukashenko a sixth term. In a video aired on state TV on Tuesday, Russian citizen Sapega said she was an editor of a Telegram messaging app channel that had publicised the personal data of Belarusian law enforcement personnel, a crime in Belarus.

The Russian foreign ministry said in a statement that Sapega, a 23-year-old student, could face criminal charges under several articles of the Belarusian criminal code. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of the Belarusian opposition who is in exile in Lithuania, tweeted that Sapega appeared to be under psychological pressure. Belarusian authorities will keep Sapega in a pretrial detention facility for two months, Russia's TASS news agency reported, citing her father, Sergey Dudich. Sapega's mother, Anna Dudich, told Reuters her daughter was innocent. Lukashenko on Wednesday said Protasevich had planned a "bloody rebellion" in Belarus and said street protests would no longer be possible in the country, TASS reported.

Briefs

Arrivals from UK must self-isolate: France

PARIS: People arriving in France from Britain will have to self-isolate to prevent the spread of Covid-19, notably its Indian variant, government spokesman Gabriel Attal said on Wednesday. Attal told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting that details of the measure would be given in the coming hours, including its start date. Germany had already imposed additional measures for people arriving from Britain, he said, "and France will take similar measures". Since Sunday, travellers arriving in Germany from the UK have to submit to a quarantine period of two weeks, regardless of whether they can provide a negative test result for the virus. A French quarantine order is already in place for arrivals from Brazil, India, Argentina, Chile, South Africa, Colombia, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Bahrain, Turkey, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. — APP

Dutch judges visit MH17 plane wreckage

THE HAGUE: Dutch judges visited the shrapnel-pierced wreckage of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 for the first time Wednesday in an "emotionally loaded" day for the trial of four suspects in the crash. Torn shreds of the front of the plane, which was shot down in 2014 over Ukraine with the loss of all 298 people on board, have been reconstructed on a wire cage at Gilze-Rijen air base in the Netherlands. The trial of three Russians and a Ukrainian over the downing of the Boeing 777 began in March 2020 but has moved slowly due to legal arguments. The suspects are being tried in absentia. "We realise that this visit to the reconstruction of MH17 as part of the official criminal process will be very emotionally loaded for relatives," presiding judge Hendrik Steenhuis said. "This is a reconstruction of an aircraft in which their loved ones were underway to a destination that they never reached because the aircraft crashed during the flight and all on board perished." The judges inspected the outside of the painstakingly reassembled wreckage, still coated in Malaysia Airlines' white, red and blue paint, and then climbed up a ladder to look inside at the damage. The jet was travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it was shot down over part of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian rebels. All passengers and crew on board were killed. — APP

Ex-aide says UK Covid policy failed

LONDON: The British government "disastrously" failed the public by mishandling the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's former top adviser and Brexit architect Dominic Cummings told lawmakers on Wednesday. In an exhorting account of the crisis's early days, Cummings — a divisive figure who carved out a uniquely powerful role in Johnson's government before stepping down in December — said senior ministers and officials "completely failed" to adequately plan. Covid-19 has claimed nearly 128,000 lives in Britain — the fifth-highest official death toll in the world — while the virus is noted on more than 152,000 UK death certificates, in a sign of its true impact. Cummings accused Johnson of branding coronavirus "a scare story" and of being too reluctant to impose a lockdown because of the economic impact. He also hit out at Johnson's leadership, assessing the crisis as a case of "lions led by donkeys over and over again". And he repeatedly singled out Health Secretary Matt Hancock for extraordinary criticism, alleging he lied to colleagues on numerous occasions and could have been fired for "at least 15 or 20 things". — APP

Is Modi too focused on his public image during pandemic?

Modi's government received criticism not just from the political opposition and civil society, but also from quarters that previously defended his every move, from demonetization to last year's migration crisis

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, like most politicians seeking to remain in public office, is highly conscious of his image and managing public perception. However, Modi's willingness to expend energy on maintaining his public image while India reels under the devastating second wave of the coronavirus pandemic has been called a colossal mismanagement of governance by his critics. This criticism comes as people publicly questioning the government's handling of the crisis have faced threats, intimidation, and arrests. Meanwhile, senior government ministers in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have begun to actively take part in image-building exercises and arguing on social media with opposition politi-

cians. These activities were previously limited to the ruling party's spokespersons and its army of online supporters. In January, India launched an initiative to distribute millions of its domestically produced coronavirus vaccines to countries around the world. The "vaccine diplomacy" drive was seen as an effort aimed at bolstering the global image of India, and by extension, Prime Minister Modi. Three months later, the initiative was suspended after India's domestic vaccination drive was hampered by a shortage of doses as the daily number of coronavirus infections and deaths in India shattered world records. Hundreds of thousands died due to a lack of essential medical supplies, as hospitals across cities became overwhelmed. India also began receiving foreign aid such as ventilators



and oxygen tanks, marking a major shift from its 16-year-long policy of not accepting help from abroad. As a result, Modi's domestic and international image has taken its biggest thrashing since he rode to power in 2014. Government credibility ratings have also plunged, with experts saying the actual number of infections and COVID-related deaths could be almost two to three times higher than official figures.

Modi's government received criticism not just from the political opposition and civil society, but also from quarters that previously defended his every move, from demonetization to last year's migration crisis. The BJP and Modi's image managers have responded by accusing critics of conspiring against the government to create what they have called a "false narrative." "The government still appears to be obsessing about

electoral fortunes and maintaining the popularity of the party leadership," Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch, told DW. "Politicians presumably seek public office because they have a genuine interest in delivering good governance and upholding rights," she said. "Hiding the truth, aggressively deflecting criticism, and punishing the messenger, is not good governance." Ganguly said that ideas for dealing with the pandemic coming from opposition parties or civil society groups were undermined by the government. She added that senior BJP ministers were engaging in petty public squabbles. In one instance, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and the youth wing of the opposition Congress party got into a social media spat after the latter provided oxygen

supplies to foreign embassies in New Delhi. Indian embassies around the world have also been embroiled in the government's image management exercises. Last month, Foreign Minister Jaishankar instructed Indian envoys to counter the narrative in international media that Modi and his government have been incompetent in dealing with the COVID crisis, the Indian Express newspaper reported. Bajajant "Jay" Panda, a BJP vice president and spokesperson, however, has denied accusations that the government has been overly focused on managing bad press. "Very little effort has been devoted to 'managing the narrative,'" he told DW in an emailed response. "It is shocking to see a concerted effort by many to deliberately paint only a negative picture of India," Panda said.

Amazon buys MGM for \$8.45 billion

WEB DESK

CALIFORNIA: Amazon has reached a deal to acquire the film and TV company MGM for \$8.45 billion, the companies announced today. It's a significant acquisition for the e-commerce giant, and it means it will own a library of content that's reported to consist of around 4,000 films and 17,000 hours of TV. The acquisition is likely to help Amazon attract even more big-spending Prime subscribers as its Prime Video service competes with the likes of Netflix and Disney Plus. MGM is perhaps most notable for being the Hollywood studio behind the James Bond and Rocky franchises, but its library runs the gamut from classic films like 12 Angry Men to modern TV shows like The Handmaid's Tale and Vikings. MGM's library also includes unscripted TV shows like The Voice and Shark Tank. Amazon says the acquisition will "provide customers with greater access" to MGM's works and "empower" the studio to continue its "great storytelling."

UK's Raab meets Israeli, Palestinian leaders

WEB DESK

LONDON: UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab held talks on Wednesday with his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi on a cease-fire between Israel and Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip. "The events of the last month demonstrate the urgent need to make genuine progress towards a more positive future for both Israelis and Palestinians [...] and to break the cycle of violence that has claimed so many lives," Raab said in a statement. "The UK supports a two-state solution as the best way to deliver a lasting peace," he said. A statement by the Israeli Foreign Ministry said Ashkenazi thanked Raab for "the UK's support for Israel during Operation Guardian of the Walls [code-name of Gaza offensive] and its condemnation of Hamas' rockets at Israeli civilians". Following his talks in Israel, Raab met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah. He is scheduled to meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Foreign Minister Riad al-Malki later in the day.

Pak Mango exporters eyeing Iranian market

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As mango season has started in Pakistan, producers of the fruit are ready to export the product to the international market with a special focus on the Iranian market for being a close neighbor of the country. Pakistan is the fourth largest mango producer in the world and the second-largest mango exporter in the world. Producers of this popular fruit hope to increase exports abroad, including neighboring countries, especially Iran, as the closest destination to Pakistani mangoes. Mango is known among the people of Pakistan as the 'King of Fruits', and according to statistics, 170 million hectares of the country's agricultural land is dedicated to the cultivation of this crop, and until three years ago, 8% of the country's horticultural crops were mangoes. Last year, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge of climate change led to a decline in mango exports of Pakistan, but Pakistani exporters are hoping to boost exports this year. Exports of mango as a tropical fruit to Pakistan typically begin in late May, at the same time as the harvest season begins. Pakistan earned more than \$94 million from the export of this tropical fruit between 2014 and 2016, and according to official statistics from the Pakistani agricultural sector, the country between 2014 and 2015 exported mangoes worth \$45 million abroad.



RAWALPINDI: President RCPI Mohammad Nasir Mirza along with Chairman Rawat Industrial Estate Najam Rehan and Vice President Shahraiz Ashraf Malik had a meeting with Mirza Aizaz Baig, Superintendent Engineer (SE) IESCO, Cantt regarding The Rawat Industrial Estate matters. — DNA

Baku, Kazakhstan mull cooperation

DNA

BAKU: Azerbaijan's and Kazakhstan's state-owned railway companies have discussed cooperation in cargo transportation during a meeting held in Baku on May 26. During the meeting, Azerbaijan Railways Chairman Javid Gurbanov briefed the participants on the transport and logistics capabilities of Azerbaijan. An agreement was reached during the meeting to digitize the document flow along the route to increase the volume of cargo. Noting the active role of Azerbaijan in the development of international transport corridors, Gurbanov stated that the strengthening of these routes will increase the transit potential of participating countries. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of relations between the railway agencies of the two countries, and spoke about the results of joint activities in the field of cargo transportation, and the steps to be taken. It was said that there is positive dynamics of volumes in the segment of transit freight transportation via

the railroads of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. It should be noted that cargo transportation through the territories of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan is carried out mainly from China and Kazakhstan, Georgia, Turkey, Europe and vice versa. During the first four months of 2021, transit container shipments through Azerbaijan's territory increased by 49 percent compared to the same period in 2020. The increase was mainly due to China's import and export operations, which increased by 2.8 times compared to the same period last year, amounting to 4,300 TEUs. Furthermore, it was noted that the feeder line on the route Aktau Port-Baku (Alyat) Port-Baku Port, commissioned in 2019, is developing regularly. Thus, more than 5,000 TEU were transported in January-April 2021, which is by 11 percent more than during the same period of last year. The discussion also touched upon the digitization of document flow in order to increase the volume of multimodal cargo transportations along the Trans-Caspian international transport route.

Israeli court delays ruling on expulsion of families in Silwan

FOREIGN DESK

JERUSALEM: An Israeli court has postponed its decision on an appeal lodged by Palestinian families facing forced displacement from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem's Silwan district. The appeal was against an Israeli court verdict in 2020, which okayed the expulsion of seven Palestinian families in order for Jewish settlers to move into the predominantly Arab district — part of the Israeli policy to build settler homes in occupied East Jerusalem, which is seen by Palestinians as their future capital. "This policy of forcible expulsion has been going on for decades to push out the Palestinians in neighbourhoods in occupied East Jerusalem [to make way for] settlers..." reported media outside the Israeli magistrate court in Salahadin Street in East Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians had gathered to protest. Heavily armed Israeli forces were also present in front of the court. At least one Palestinian, Qutaiba Odeh, was arrested at the protest. Odeh, a father of three who lives in the al-Bustan area in Silwan,

has a demolishing order on his house.

"The Israel magistrate court decided to expel us for the interest of the settlers who are supported by Ateret Cohanim, a settlement organisation whose main job is to replace Palestinians with Jews," Kayed al-Rajabi, head of one of the affected families, told media. "We were displaced from our houses in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1965 and now they want to displace us again." Al-Rajabi said the settlers claim his neighbourhood was

owned by Yemeni Jews. "If that's true and they want to take their houses back, then we also want to get our houses in the Old City back," he said. More than 700,000 Palestinians were driven out or expelled from their homes by Jewish militias in 1948, when Israel was declared as an independent state. Thousands of Palestinians were further displaced in the Six-Day War in 1967 when Israel captured East Jerusalem. Silwan, home to about 33,000 Palestinians, is located

outside the walls of the Old City and barely 5km (2.4 miles) from Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem, where protests against planned expulsions led to Israeli violence against Palestinians and the 11-day war on Gaza. Since the 1980s, Israel has been moving Jewish settlers to the neighbourhood, and currently several hundred settlers live there in heavily protected settlement compounds, at the expense of Palestinian families who were forcibly displaced.



Sino-Pak co-op mainstream of the past 70 years

DNA

BEIJING: Former Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Zhou Gang said that friendly cooperation has been the mainstream of the past 70 years, which is of great significance for the two countries. He told China Economic Net (CEN) that he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China in 1962 and successively served as Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, and India from 1988 to 2001. Recalling his working experience in Pakistan from 1991 to 1995, Zhou was particularly excited, saying that he will never forget the profound friendship between China and Pakistan.

The Sino-Pak friendship, which derives from close contact between the people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. The friendship between local people and the Chinese still moved Zhou to date. On April 25, 1992, Ambassador Zhou Gang went north along the Karakoram Highway on a visit to Gilgit. Since the highway, also called the "China-Pakistan Friendship Highway", was built with the help of China in the 1960s and 1970s, the residents along the road always give Chinese people warm and friendly reception. "On our way back to the embassy the next day, we had a short rest on a hillside, where a group of children saw us and pointed in our direction. When they walked near

and found the Chinese national flag flying on our car, they immediately cheered and shouted in Chinese: 'Chairman Mao! Zhou Enlai!' Zhou recalled. Despite these children may have never walked out of the mountainous area or received school education, they knew great Chinese leader Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. The seeds of Pakistan-China friendship had been deeply planted in their young hearts, Zhou said with his eyes reddening. "It was getting dark as we continued on our way. Unfortunately, we encountered a landslide which hindered our way forward. At this moment, a Pakistani sergeant came and gave a salute to us suddenly, saying 'your excellency, this road was built for us by Chi-

nese friends. Whenever you take this road, you are welcome. This road is always open to you!" The fallen earth and stones were quickly cleared up that night. Zhou held his hands tightly, saying in Urdu "brother, thank you very much!" Although the diplomatic work looks glamorous, it is also full of challenges. During his tenure as Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Zhou Gang experienced three incidents of kidnapping Chinese citizens, among which one happened in October 1992, leaving him a deep impression. On October 19 six Chinese experts working in Shandak Gold-Copper Mine in Baluchistan were on their way to Karachi to purchase living supplies. However, they were un-

expectedly hijacked by a group of long-waiting armed personnel in a corner. After being taken into a car, they were sent to Afghanistan. Upon learning of the incident, Zhou promptly reported it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, who directed that every possible means be made to rescue the Chinese compatriots as soon as possible. Zhou made an urgent appointment with important Pakistani officials. When Zhou met with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the PM expressed his unease and regret over the abduction of Chinese experts, saying that he fully understood the feelings of his Chinese friends, and would do everything possible to rescue Chinese friends!

Briefs

China lauds PM Imran's remarks

DNA



BEIJING: Prime Minister Imran Khan's positive remarks about the able leadership of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang are commendable, Chinese Foreign Ministry's Spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on Wednesday.

"We have taken note of the positive remarks by the PM Imran Khan and we commend that," Zhao Lijian said during his regular briefing held here. Prime Minister Imran Khan had deeply appreciated Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang for their able leadership in a recently held meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Nong Rong. The prime minister also conveyed his warm greetings to Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. While commenting on top priority accorded by PM Imran Khan's government to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he said that the CPEC, as an important pilot project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) made major progress in the areas such as infrastructure, energy, ports and industrial parks since its launch.

Govt. to re-file CRP against Faez Isa case

ISLAMABAD: The spokesperson of Ministry of Law and Justice on Wednesday said that the federation would re-file Curative Review Petition (CRP) against Justice Qazi Faez Isa case verdict in due course of time after addressing the office objections raised by the Supreme Court Registrar Office.

"Against the order of the majority in the Review Petitions of Justice Qazi Faez Isa and others dated 26.04.2021, the Federation of Pakistan on 25.05.2021 preferred a Curative Review Petition on which certain objections were raised by the Office of the Supreme Court. After addressing the office's objections the matter shall be re-filed in due course of time, in accordance with law," reads the press release issued by the law ministry. The Registrar of the Supreme Court of Pakistan had returned a review petition filed by the government against the Supreme Court's judgment on the review petitions in the Justice Qazi Faez Isa case. The office had returned the application with the objection that a review could not be conducted twice into one case. — APP

Rashid in Karachi to review situation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Following the directions of Prime Minister Imran Khan, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has left for Karachi to review law and order situation and work out a strategy on the situation with law enforcement agencies. The prime minister had directed Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed to visit Karachi and devise a strategy with law-enforcement agencies over law and order situation in Sindh. The minister will preside over an emergency meeting at the Rangers Headquarters regarding law and order situation of the province. The minister will meet Chief Minister Sindh tomorrow (May 27) at 10 am and Governor Sindh at 1 pm. The law and order situation in Sindh and various security affairs related to province and Federal government will be reviewed during the meetings.

Vaccine registration for 19 years and above starts today

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar on Wednesday has announced that the coronavirus vaccination registration for citizens of 19 years and above will open from May 27 (today).

In a post on social-networking website Twitter, the minister said that in Wednesday's National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) meeting we decided to open up vaccination registration for all 19 years and above.

"This registration will start from Thursday. So now registration will be open for the entire national population which is approved by health experts for COVID-19 vaccination,"

he said. On the other hand, The national tally on Wednesday of total active COVID-19 cases recorded 60,268 with 2,724 more people tested positive for the deadly virus and 4,686 people recovered from the disease during the last 24 hours.

Sixty-five corona patients have died during past 24 hours, 58 of whom were under treatment in hospital and seven out of the hospital in their respective quarantines or homes, according to the latest update issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC).

During the past 24 hours, most of the deaths have occurred in the Punjab followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Out of the total 65 deaths occurred in the last 24 hours 23 of them had died who were under treat-

ment on ventilators. There were 4,242 Covid infected patients under treatment in critical care in various Covid dedicated healthcare facilities in past 24 hours. The National Covid positivity ratio during past 24 hours was recorded 4.61 percent.

It may be mentioned here that the Covid positivity ratio was the percentage of actual positive cases appearing in every 100 tests performed to identify infected individuals.

According to John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the percent positive will be high if the number of positive tests is too high, or if the number of total tests is too low. A higher percent positive suggests higher transmission and that there are likely more people with coronavirus in the communi-

ty who haven't been tested yet. The maximum ventilators were occupied in four major areas including Lahore 44 percent, Multan 69 percent, Bahawalpur 38 percent and Faisalabad 36 percent.

The maximum Oxygen beds (alternate oxygen providing facility other than ventilator administered as per medical requirement of COVID patient) was also occupied in four major areas of Gujranwala 45 percent, Swabi 44 percent, Peshawar 38 percent and Multan 57 percent. Around 517 ventilators were occupied elsewhere in the country while no COVID affected person was on ventilator in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Balochistan. Some 59,076 tests were conducted across the country on Tuesday, including

18,132 in Sindh, 25,245 in Punjab, 7,859 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 4,961 in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), 1,410 in Balochistan, 459 in GB, and 1,010 in AJK. Around 827,843 people have recovered from the disease so far across Pakistan making it a significant count with over 90 percent recovery ratio of the affected patients.

Since the pandemic outbreak, a total of 908,576 cases were detected that also included the perished, recovered and under treatment COVID-19 patients so far, including AJK 18,940, Balochistan 24,733, GB 5,516, ICT 80,662, KP 130,644, Punjab 336,315 and Sindh 311,766.

About 20,465 deaths were recorded in country since the eruption of the conta-

gion. Around 4,942 have perished in Sindh among six of them died in hospital on Tuesday. 9,875 in Punjab had died with 36 deaths occurred in past 24 hours. 30 of them in the hospital and six out of hospital.

3,990 in KP where 19 of them died in hospital and one out of hospital on Tuesday, 748 in ICT among two of them died in the hospital on Tuesday, 271 in Balochistan among one of them perished in hospital on Tuesday, 107 in GB and 532 in AJK succumbed to the deadly virus.

A total of 12,943,620 corona tests have been conducted so far, while 639 hospitals are equipped with COVID facilities. Some 4,654 corona patients were admitted in hospitals across the country.

Experts laud Pak decision to stay out of US operations

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani security experts have hailed Islamabad's decision to avoid supporting US counterterrorism operations in neighboring Afghanistan.

The decision came after a Pentagon official claimed that Pakistan had allowed the US to use its airspace and ground routes as part of its Afghanistan campaign. But Pakistan's foreign office denied the claims, which will force the US to rethink its Afghan approach as its troops prepare to leave the war-torn country by Sept. 11 this year.

Experts said that the decision will avoid a repeat of "costly mistakes."

Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, Pakistan foreign office spokesperson, said in a statement on Monday: "There was no US military or air base in Pakistan, nor was any such proposal envisaged," adding that any speculation on the topic was "baseless, irresponsible and should be avoided." Since 2001, Pakistan and the US have had a framework of cooperation for Air Lines of Communication and Ground Lines of Communication, but "no new agreement has been made in this regard," the statement added. The decision is a "step in the right direction," experts said.

China urges Somalian parties to solve crisis

NEW YORK: A Chinese envoy on Tuesday called on political parties in Somalia to strive to break the deadlock over delayed elections.

Situation is at a critical juncture, and the political stalemate over postponed elections still continues, said Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations.

"To break the current political stalemate serves the common interests of parties and people in Somalia."

"We encourage parties in Somalia to put the interests of the country first, strengthen unity and cooperation, make necessary compromises, rebuild political trust, swiftly agree on electoral arrangements, restore Somalia's political stability so as to provide favorable conditions for the security transition and national reconstruction."

Somalia has long been in a deep humanitarian crisis. Lagging development, COVID-19, droughts and a locust plague have further compounded the plight of Somalis. The international community should provide more assistance in areas such as the fight against COVID-19, post-pandemic reconstruction, debt relief, food security, and poverty reduction, he said. — APP

Pak urges better protection of civilians

DNA

NEW YORK: Pakistan has called for reinforcing the concept of protection of civilians and accountability in all situations of armed conflict, including in Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, saying there should be no impunity for violators of international law.

"The goal of protection of civilians is best served by preventing the outbreak of an armed conflict in the first place," Ambassador Munir Akram said in a statement submitted to the United Nations Security Council which held an open debate on Tuesday on keeping civilians free from harm in an armed conflict situation. In this regard, the Pakistani envoy urged the 15-member Council, the world body's power centre, to address the root causes of emerging and long-standing conflicts, including Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, and promote just and peaceful solutions. He said India's illegal actions since August 5, 2019 to impose what its leaders have called a "final solution" for occupied Kashmir constitute grave violations of Security Council resolutions and international law.

Sanjrani for enhancing Pakistan-Malaysia trade

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan-Malaysia ties have turned into a strategic cooperation. The linkages between the two countries are getting stronger over time. The common vision of Islamabad and Kuala Lumpur on issues facing Muslim Ummah is of great significance, said Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani while exchanging views with Malaysian Envoy, Ikrum Mohammad Ibrahim, who paid a farewell call on him here at Parliament House, on Wednesday. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional situation, trade, and economic cooperation between the two countries

came under discussion.

The Chairman observed that there is ample scope of cooperation between Malaysia and Pakistan, particularly in the economic sector. He said that like Pakistan, Malaysia is also a rapidly developing country and both countries can benefit from each other experiences. There is a greater need for the enhanced exchange of the parliamentary delegations and people-to-people contact, he further added. "Pakistan highly regards relations with Malaysia. Bilateral relations between the fraternal countries are steeped in historical, cultural, religious, and social similarities. Pakistan wants to further enhance the cooperation at the multi-faceted level."



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani in a meeting with Malaysian High Commissioner Ikrum Mohammad Ibrahim. — DNA

PM, Egyptian President discuss Palestine issue

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan held a telephone conversation with the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency Abdel Fattah el-Sisi today.

The Prime Minister appreciated the important role played by Egypt and its leadership for cessation of hostilities in Palestine. Condemning strongly the Israeli aggression against innocent Palestinians, especially women and children, and the sacrilege of Al-Aqsa Mosque during the holy month of Ramadan, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of the early and just resolution of the Palestine issue. He termed the current situation in Gaza as Palestinians living in "open prison".

In this regard, the Prime Minister called for total withdrawal of Israeli forces from Occupied Palestinian Territories including Jerusalem; restitution of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including their right to self determination and the right of return to Palestine and the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, as part of a two-state solution, with pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The Prime Minister also laid emphasis on the importance of solidarity among the Muslim Ummah, and adopting a collective approach especially through the OIC platform, for safeguarding the rights of Muslims, particularly those living under foreign occupation. Outlining the recent efforts made by Pakistan in amplifying the voice of the Palestinian people, he reaffirmed Pakistan's continued support for the just settlement of the Palestine issue. President Sisi invited the Prime Minister to visit Egypt, while the Prime Minister renewed his invitation to President Sisi to visit Pakistan. It was agreed to continue with the momentum of high-level exchanges to further strengthen bilateral political and economic ties between the two countries.

Blinken in Jordan on Mideast tour to shore up Gaza truce

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi - whom he praised for helping bring an end to the intense violence "relatively quickly"

AMMAN: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken landed in Jordan Wednesday on the last leg of a Mideast tour that aims to shore up an Egypt-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza.

After meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi - whom he praised for helping bring an end to the intense violence "relatively quickly" - he flew to Jordan, where half of the 10 million-strong population is of Palestinian origin. Blinken will meet King Abdullah II, following two-days of regional talks - including with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders - to throw Washington's support behind the truce that ended 11 days of heavy Israeli bombing of Gaza and rocket fire from the enclave into Israel.

Following talks with Palestinian president Mahmud



Abbas at his headquarters in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Blinken vowed to rebuild US relations with the Palestinians by reopening a consulate in Jerusalem, as well as give millions in aid for the war-battered Gaza Strip. The announcements signalled a break with US policy under former president Donald Trump, who had shuttered the diplomatic mission for Palestinians

in 2019 and slashed aid to the Palestinian Authority. In the long term, Blinken evoked the "possibility of resuming the effort to achieve a two-state solution, which we continue to believe is the only way to truly assure Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state, and of course to give the Palestinians the state they're entitled to". After meeting Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he reiterated support for Israel's right to defend itself against rocket attacks by Gaza's Hamas rulers, adding that they must not benefit from the reconstruction aid.

Hamas political chief Yahya Sinwar vowed Wednesday not to take "a single cent" of the aid, insisting that "we have never taken a cent in the past". — APP

Pakistan-Azerbaijan partnership need of the hour

The Chairman Senate expressed these views at reception held in connection with national day of Azerbaijan

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani has underscored the need for a robust action plan to enhance trade and investment opportunities between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. The Chairman Senate expressed these views at reception held in connection with national day of Azerbaijan.

He also emphasized the need for making more efforts in order to boost the bilateral trade as it does not commensurate with close political ties between both the countries. Pakistan and Azerbaijan have great expertise to share and trade in the fields of energy, defense, agriculture, natural resources, science and culture, there is need to adopt a robust Action plan for enhancing trade and investment opportunities.



He further said that ties between the two countries are based on historical cultural bonds, mutual respect and trust. He also extended his good wishes to the leadership, government parliament and people of Azerbaijan on their National Day. He thanked the ambassador for presentation of the jubilee Medal of 100th Anniversary of diplo-

matic service of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He said that it signifies the sincerest wishes of Azerbaijan to take our diplomatic ties and friendship one step higher. He acknowledged the award and expressed gratitude to the leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He reiterated that Pakistan will continue to stand with Azerbaijan through its times of need, as Azer-

baijan has stood by Pakistan in its times of need, particularly with its support on the Kashmir issue. He expressed satisfaction that there is tremendous goodwill for each other at the leadership and official level which is also manifested in the people-to-people contact. The Chairman Senate said that Pakistan was one of the first coun-

tries to recognize the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The two countries have since exchanged great support on critical issues through the respective political leadership. "It is an honor and a privilege to be present here on the momentous occasion of the National Day of Azerbaijan" said Chairman Senate.

Chairman Senate observed that both Pakistan and Azerbaijan believe in peace and development therefore consider regional growth and prosperity a shared agenda. He said that regional connectivity is important for promoting socio-economic growth and both sides must prioritize linkages to boost trade and economic cooperation. He said that geographical location enhances significance of both the countries in the region and both can become hub of economic activity.