



Islamabad POST

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Israel must be held accountable for war crimes in Jerusalem

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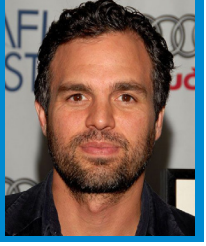
Australian envoy extends Eid greetings

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Avengers star wants Israel to be sanctioned

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Briefs

PTI govt stand by overseas Pakistanis

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Hussain Wednesday said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government would always stand by overseas Pakistanis, especially the labour class. In a tweet, he said he was surprised at the letter written by some 'former Babus' to the prime minister. Fawad said the attitudes needed to be changed. The treatment given to ordinary people by our bureaucracy was absolutely not enviable, he said adding this was a common complaint and Pakistan embassies were not exempt from it. The minister acknowledged that embassies, like any other department, had very good officers but stories could be written about how Pakistanis were treated in the past.

PM, Erdogan slam Israeli aggression

The leaders also agreed that the two Foreign Ministers would be working closely together to raise the Palestinian issue at international level



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan received a telephone call from President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The two leaders exchanged views on Israel's heinous attack during Ramadan on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the worshippers inside as well as on Gaza violating all norms of humanity and international law. They vowed to work together especially at the United Nations in jointly mobilizing the international community to help stop these attacks. The leaders also agreed that the two

Foreign Ministers would be working closely together to raise the Palestinian issue at international level. The regional security situation also came under discussion between the two leaders. Appreciating Turkey's role, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of a responsible withdrawal and added that Pakistan would continue to extend all possible support to the efforts for a political solution for durable peace and stability in Afghanistan. Both leaders discussed further strengthening of bilateral relations and agreed that the momentum of high-level exchanges between Pakistan and Turkey would continue. The two leaders also exchanged greetings on Eid-ul-Fitr. Earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians facing Israeli oppression and tyranny. In a post on social-networking website Twitter, the premier said Pakistan stands with the Palestine.

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser receiving Ambassador of China Nong Rong. - DNA

Eid to be celebrated today

ISLAMABAD: Ruet-e-Hilal Committee announced on Wednesday that the Shaban crescent has been sighted. First of Shaban and Eid ul Fitr will be celebrated throughout the country today (Thursday). The committee announced that it has received credible moon sighting reports from various areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other localities. - DNA

Pak-China vow to further expand ties

NA Speaker says that Pakistan is proud of its lasting friendship with China

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Pertaining to the expansion of Pak-China relations, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Nong Rong, on Wednesday said that Beijing wants to further expand cooperation with Pakistan. He said this during his meeting with National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser. Matters pertaining to bilateral relations, important regional and global issues and other issues of

mutual interest came under discussion during the meeting. Nong Rong said that China values its ideal friendship with Pakistan and friendship with Pakistan is of key importance in our foreign policy. Speaking on the occasion, NA Speaker Asad Qaiser said that Pakistan is proud of its lasting friendship with China and the unique friendly relations between Pakistan and China are an example to the world. He said the relations between

the two friendly countries are based on mutual respect, trust, interests and strategic partnership. Referring to CPEC, Asad Qaiser said that the initiative of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and One Belt One Road (OBOR) are projects of development and prosperity of the entire region and the parliament will continue to play its role in making such projects as sign of mutual success and prosperity.

Bilawal slams PM's polices

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Wednesday said that by making false allegations of money laundering and corruption, Prime Minister Imran Khan has brought the country to the brink of being blacklisted. In a statement issued on Wednesday, he lambasted the PTI government's poor economic planning and said that it was a matter of shame that Pakistan along with the backward countries like Cambodia, Ghana and Zimbabwe could not get out of the grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Bilawal said that the PPP had devised an effective strategy to get out of the grey list.

OIC condemns Israeli actions in Palestine

NEWS DESK

Pakistan urges Muslim countries to show unity

STAFF REPORT

NEW YORK: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), at a meeting in New York, has unanimously endorsed Pakistan's proposal for issuing a joint statement deploring the Israeli actions against Palestinians. The meeting also approved a proposal from the ambassadors of Turkey and Saudi Arabia for mobilising international support to convene a special session of the

MULTAN: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday said that Pakistan is concerned about the recent violence in Palestine, adding that Muslims countries needed to unite in order to raise awareness about the issue. Speaking to the media in Multan about Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to Saudi Arabia, he said: "The premier met with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's secretary general and contended that there was a need to unite the Muslim Ummah on the issue using this platform."

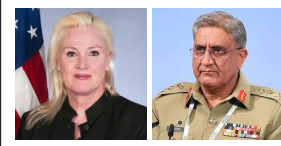
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ISLAMABAD: Hamad Obaid Alzaabi, the UAE Ambassador to Pakistan, gives Eid clothing to hundreds of orphan children in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as part of the humanitarian efforts to provide charitable support and Eid clothing to orphanages on the occasion of Eid Al Fitr. - DNA

Army Chief for greater US-Pakistan cooperation



STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa, has said that Pakistan has sincerely supported the peace process in Afghanistan and hoped that Pakistan-US cooperation would continue in the future as well. He said this during his meeting with Mrs Angela Aggeler, US Charge d' Affaires to Pakistan. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, overall regional security situation, bilateral cooperation in various fields, fight against COVID-19 and recent developments in Afghan Peace Process were discussed. COAS said that Pakistan has sincerely supported the peace process and a prosperous, stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in the best interest of region in general and Pakistan in particular. The US dignitary acknowledged and appreciated Pakistan's continuous efforts and support for peace and stability in the region and pledged to further enhance bilateral relations between both countries.

Australian envoy extend greetings on Eid

'Unity and compassion are the spirit of Eid and are essential to getting through this pandemic'

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: On the occasion of Eid ul Fitr, the Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Dr Geoffrey Shaw said: "I send my warmest wishes to Muslims here in Pakistan, back home in Australia and right around the world, who are celebrating the festival of Eid ul-Fitr. The end of the holy month of Ramadan is a joyous time as families and friends join together in celebration. In Australia, we take pride in being an open and ethnically, culturally and religiously, diverse democracy. For the more than 600,000 Muslims in Australia, who make a valued contribution to our society, Eid is a truly special time. Unity and compassion



are the spirit of Eid and are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster and to building a better future for everyone. This Eid, let's unite in our efforts to keep all of our loved ones and communities safe. On behalf of Australia - let me wish you a happy Eid celebration. Earlier last month, Australian High Commissioner Dr Geoffrey Shaw on Tuesday conveyed his warmest wishes to the people of Pakistan on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

Observing SOPs is key to contain COVID-19

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has expressed the confidence that people in Pakistan can manage to overcome COVID-19 pandemic by following standard operating procedures to contain its further spread. In a series of tweets, the President said these SOPs include wearing of masks, social distancing and hand washing. He said statistics show that we have not overcome COVID yet, but it seems we can manage it. The President said we have done well and Pakistan is on the mend. He further said that he watches COVID statistics of Pakistan very closely and what is happening in region.

Covid-19 cases continue to drop

ZUBAIR AHMED

ISLAMABAD: The national tally on Wednesday of total active COVID-19 cases recorded 76,536 with 2,869 more people tested positive for the deadly virus and 5,200 people recovered from the disease during the last 24 hours. One hundred and four corona patients have died during past 24 hours, 89 of whom were under treatment in hospital and 15 out of the hospital in their respective quarantines or homes, according to the latest update issued by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCCOC). During the past 24 hours, most of the deaths have occurred in the Punjab followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Out of the total 104 deaths occurred in the last 24 hours 49 of them had died who were under treatment on ventilators. The National Covid positivity ratio during past 24 hours was recorded 7.42 percent.

Israel must be held accountable for war crimes

PNC indicates that the Israeli occupation air force bombed civilian targets in Gaza

FOREIGN DESK

RAMALLAH: Palestine National Council (PNC) said that Israel's military aggression against Palestinian civilians in Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied West Bank cities, including the occupied city of Jerusalem, is a crime to be added to its criminal record against the Palestinian people. In a statement issued this evening PNC indicated that the Israeli occupation air force bombed civilian targets in Gaza. PNC pointed out that these crimes violate the

text of Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying power from destroying any movable or immovable private property, and according to Rome Statute, launching deliberate attacks against the civilian population is a war crime for which Israel must be pursued and held accountable. International humanitarian law provided general and special protection for civilians and civil objects, which is clearly evident in both the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and Additional Protocols I and II to the Ge-

56 killed as Israeli air strikes intensify

WEB DESK

GAZA: Israeli airstrikes have now killed 56 people including 14 children in Gaza, according to the enclave's health authority, as the first soldier has been killed in another day of escalating violence. Sergeant Omer Tabib "was killed as a result of anti-tank missile fire" fired by Hamas on Wednesday morning, the Israeli military said. The 21 year old is the first Israeli soldier to die in the current fighting. The announcement of Tabib's death came shortly after Hamas confirmed that its Gaza City commander, Bassem Issa, was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Wednesday. Meanwhile, the Israeli prime minister has declared an emergency in the town of Lod, following what police called "wide-scale riots" by supporters of the Palestinians.

neva Conventions of 1977 and The Hague Convention relating to the Protection of Cultural Objects in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954, PNC continued, this law prohibited all forms of assault against these objects and civilians. He added that at these times, Israel is deliberately destroying public and private property in Gaza Strip, in flagrant violation of Article 47 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates that the destruction and usurpation of property in a manner not justified by military necessities, and on a large scale is considered

a serious violation, and therefore a war crime, PNC added, Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the occupying power from destroying any movable or immovable private property. PNC called on the United Nations to bind Israel, the occupying power, to the rules and provisions of these agreements, which are binding on states and their armed forces, and include the right of victims of human rights violations to redress, including justice and reparation.

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Holiday Notice

Offices of Daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed for three days i.e Thursday, Friday and Saturday on account of Eid-ul-Fitr. Islamabad POST wishes its readers Eid Mubarak..

- Editor

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Make NAB self accountability effective! - Page 05

Azerbaijan holds Khari Bulbul music festival at Shusha - Page 06

China targets Muslim women in Push to suppress births - Page 07

Taliban seize district on outskirts of Afghan capital - Page 08

Briefs

Eid prayer at 7.30 a.m. in Faisal Mosque

ISLAMABAD: The Eid-ul-Fitr prayer would be offered at 7.30 a.m. in Faisal Mosque, said Dawah Academy of International Islamic University Islamabad. Prof Dr Muhammad Tahir Hakeem from the Faculty of Shariah and Law will deliver Khutaba-e-Eid-ul-Fitr, said a press release on Wednesday. All necessary measures have been taken by the management of Faisal Mosque to strictly follow standard operating procedures issued by the government to prevent Covid-19's third surge. — APP

3 booked for molesting boy in Hazro

ATTOCK: The Hazro Police booked three persons for allegedly molesting 12 years old boy in village Marria on Wednesday. The victim's father said that his son was going home from his tailoring shop when three persons of the same village named Hassan Iqbal, Rajab Shah and Aqeel Ayub took him to Hassan house where they sexually assaulting him. Later they allow him to go with dire consequences that if he revealed the incident. However, after reaching home the boy revealed his ordeal to his father who took him to police station. After medical examination which has confirmed the assault, police registered a case against the nominated accused and launched hunt to arrest them. — APP

Police conducts search operation

RAWALPINDI: Police have conducted search operation in Ghariabad area of Airport Police Station and its surroundings, informed police spokesman here on Wednesday. Dolphin force, Elite force, Ladies Police and other law enforcement agencies participated in the search operation. Police have searched 116 houses, questioned 39 tenants and 270 suspects were investigated. SP Pothohar said that the search operation was aimed at rooting out criminals and to ensure the implementation of National Action Plan. — APP

Shopkeepers held amid lockdown

RAWALPINDI: As many as 12 shopkeepers were reportedly arrested in the jurisdictions of New Town police station of Rawalpindi here on Sunday for violation of preventive measures against coronavirus and directives of Punjab government to keep control on COVID-19 pandemic, informed police spokesman. Regional Police Officer Imran Ahmar paid a visit to review the situation while conducted raids in the area of Commercial Market in the limits of New Town police station and held 12 shopkeepers for opening their businesses and registered cases against them while shops were also sealed on the violation. RPO Imran Ahmar said that police is committed to ensure implementation on directives of Punjab government against Coronavirus lockdown. — APP

COVID-19 claims 3 lives with 55 new infections

RAWALPINDI: As many as 55 more COVID-19 positive cases were reported during the last 24 hours, raising the tally of confirmed cases to 25,041 in the district while three lost their battle of life against the deadly virus. The total infected cases included 23,128 from Rawalpindi and 1913 from other districts. District Health Authority informed Wednesday that among the new cases, 12 reported from Rawal Town, 18 from Potohar town, 11 from Rawalpindi Cantt. — APP

Business community slams Israeli aggression

Zulfiqar said seeing footage of Israeli airstrikes kill men, women and children in Gaza, I send my solidarity, my love and my prayers to the Palestinian people

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Vice President and former FPCCI Regional Chairman, Fehmida Jamali said Israeli violations in Jerusalem, and the government's tolerance of Jewish extremists hostile to Palestinians and Arabs, is what led to the ignition of the situation in this dangerous way. In a statement issued here on Wednesday, she said Israeli government must finally understand that it will not be able to suppress the Palestinian people's legitimate rights and demands by using in-

discriminate and disproportionate power. President, Pakistan Business Forum Sahibzada Usman Zulfiqar declared total rejection and condemnation of these oppressive Israeli practices. Zulfiqar said seeing footage of Israeli airstrikes kill men, women and children in Gaza, I send my solidarity, my love and my prayers to the Palestinian people Chairman Businessmen Panel (Federal), Riaz Khat-tak said the actions have caused concern in the Muslim world as the site is one of the most religious in Islam. We strongly condemn the attacks carried out by the



occupation forces at Al-Aqsa mosque transgressing the safety and security of the worshippers, the statement said. Vice President, Pakistan Business Forum Ahmad Jawad said the indiscriminate use of force by Israeli forces against defenceless Palestinians, causing

death and injuries, defies all humanitarian norms and human rights laws. Pakistan calls upon the international community to put an end to the blatant use of force and flagrant violation of human rights of the Palestinian people. He called on the international community to act immediately to stop the violence, saying continuing "Israeli provocations" were an affront to Muslims on the eve of the Eid holiday at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Days of heavy bombardment on the Gaza Strip intensified on Wednesday, with Israeli fighter jets bombing sites belonging to

Palestinian armed groups, as well as police buildings and apartment blocks. Since the offensive began late on Monday, Gaza's health ministry says at least 53 people have been killed, including 14 children. More than 300 others have been wounded. The Israeli army said about 1,500 rockets have been fired from Gaza towards various locations in Israel, killing at least six Israelis. The escalation is the most intense since the seven-week 2014 Israeli war on Gaza. Here's what led to the most recent flare-up in violence. Anger has been growing over the forced expulsion

of Palestinian families from the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, who have been facing multiple court cases filed against them by several pro-settler organisations since 1972. These organisations claim that land the families live on was originally under Jewish ownership, but Palestinians see this as an extension of an official Israeli policy to displace as many Palestinians from Jerusalem in order to retain a majority Jewish identity in the city. The United Nations has warned the planned expulsions could amount to "war crimes".

SHO suspended for illegal confinement

DNA

ATTOCK: SHO Jand police station has been suspended for keeping two persons under illegal confinement and demanding Rs 2 lac as bribe. Taking action on the orders of the Additional District Judge, DPO Attock Khalid Hamdanim has ordered an inquiry against the suspended SHO Ahmed Khan Niazi. It is worth mentioning here that Bibi Noor Fatima of Jand had informed the court that her husband Syed Shah Raza and her grand son Syed Salman Shah had been kept in illegal confinement by SHO Jand and was now demanding Rs 2 lac as bribe to release them. The learned judge took action and summoned the SHO, who denied the allegations and stated that he had kept no one under illegal confinement but latter both person were recovered from the police station.

Female teachers faces denial of due right

ISLAMABAD: 12 female teachers of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Colleges facing denial of their due Higher Time Scale (HTS) for the last over eight years are running from pillar to post to get their due right. According to an official source, Ms.Sadia Rehman lecturer of Federal Government Home Economics College F-7/2, Ms. Mansoor Abbas Ms.Ruqqaya Sheikh, Ms.Zarqa Jahanzeb, Ms.Nourin Nisa, Ms.Rizwana Habib Kiyani, Ms.Shahida Nasreen, Ms.Aliya Bibi and Ms.Sobia Mazhar Assistant Professors of Islamabad College for Girls F-6/2 were granted HTS in 2014 with effect from January 2013 subject to provision of ACR but their case could not be actualized after the expiry of eight years due to bureaucratic errors. The required ACRs were provided but no revised notification was issued. Later on, the teachers filed representations with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) and requested many times for the issuing of revised HTS notification. Instead of revising the notification of 2014, and granting them the benefit of HTS from 2013 FDE issued a new notification and the teachers were astonished to see that they had once again been granted HTS with effect from March, 2021 instead of 2013. It seems illogical that they have been granted HTS of the same grade twice. The exercise to revise the notification seems to be muddled in confusion over eligibility date. Meanwhile, Mansoor Abbas and Zarqa got regular promotion as Associate Professor (BPS-19) in 2019 and missed the HTS of BPS-19. Later on, they got HTS of BPS-20 in 2020. Ruqqaya, Rizwana, Shahida got regular promotion as Associate Professor (BPS-19) in March 2021 and they did not get the HTS of both BPS-19 and BPS-20. — APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Palestine Ahmed Rabei in a meeting with Pakistan Civil Society office bearers Nadim Khan, Zafar Bakhtawari, Afzal Butt, Shakeel Anjum, Ch Yasin and Kashif Ch. They expressed their solidarity with Palestinian brothers.—DNA

SCO unveils special offer to celebrate Eid-Ul-Fitr

ISLAMABAD: Special Communications Organization (SCO), the leading telecommunication company in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB), announced the launch of its latest offer on the occasion of Eid-Ul-Fitr. The new offer includes 2000 minutes of local voice calls, 2000 MB Data and 2000 SMS in just Rs 10 per day. SCO is enthusiastic about celebrating Eid with customers and their families through its unmatched offer. The organization spares no efforts to provide customers with a fast and simple way to enjoy a superior telecommunication experience during special occasions through appealing and flexible packages that meet their needs. — APP

CTP issued traffic plan for Eid ul Fitr

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Police Rawalpindi on Wednesday issued Eid-ul-Fitr Plan to maintain traffic flow and to ensure government Standard Operating Procedure SOPs during lockdown. Chief Traffic Officer Rawalpindi Rai Mazhar Iqbal said that during lockdown and Eid-ul-Fitr, 623 traffic police personnel including 07 DSPs, 30 inspectors, 436 traffic wardens and 160 traffic assistants would perform their duties. CTO said that tourists places will be shut down to implement government orders to contain corona virus, he added. prevent the entry of tourists on all the inbound and outbound routes of Murree, 13 special pickets have been set up with additional personnel of the traffic police where the district police along with the traffic police will also be present 24 hours. Special pickets have been set up at various places in Rawalpindi city to check one wheeling or car skating on Chand Raat and Eid holidays. Special squads have also been formed which will be take action against violations. — APP

People of twin cities following SOPs to contain spread of virus

ISLAMABAD: The residents of twin cities showed responsible behavior by following Covid-19 SOPs to save themselves and their loved ones during the Eid ul Fitr holidays. According to a survey conducted by APP on Wednesday, it was observed that the markets were closed and only those people were in the markets who needed some essentials including grocery or medicine in an emergency. "We were abiding by the SOPs as per requirements against the COVID-19 for the safety during the Eid ul Fitr holidays", said a resident of

Sector G/7 Muhammad Bilal while talking to APP. He said on one side the government is fulfilling its responsibility by applying effective measures for the safety of citizens against the threat of COVID-19 while on the other side its responsibility of citizens to follow the SOPs set by the government for containing the Coronavirus. Similarly, another resident of Sector G-11 Zaib bibi appreciated the government lockdown policy for the protection of citizens during the Eid holidays. She also mentioned that at this stage negligence of peo-

ple in the shape of mass gathering at markets, especially on chand raat was a great risk for every citizen. She urged the people of twin cities to follow SOPs set against the COVID-19 at every cost otherwise the result would be the loss of lives. An official of the district administration also confirmed that people were adhering to the SOPs set by the National Command and Operation Centre and good result in Islamabad and Rawalpindi against COVID-19. The official requested the people for further cooperate

for following SOPs against COVID-19 during Eid Holidays and Inshallaha further good result surely waiting for us. "We are thankful to business community, who stands against the COVID-19 by closing the shops during the Eid Holidays which were to much important for saving the people from threat of COVID-19 virus," he said. It is pertinent to mention here that according to the National Command and Operation Centre the Pakistan reported the lowest number of COVID number of cases since March 16. — APP

Exporters should not be subjected to indirect tax

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that there is no rationale in collecting money that is refunded and showing it as revenue amounts to deceiving oneself

ISLAMABAD: Former President ICCI Shahid Rasheed Butt on Wednesday said the export sector should not be subjected to indirect taxation so that they can pay full attention to boosting exports. Refund system is wasting time and resources of the exporters which is hindering them from competing with rival countries like India and Bangladesh in the international market, he said. The

tax received from exporters is shown as income which is not easy to get back therefore the system of refunds must be abolished for good, he added. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that there is no rationale in collecting money that is refunded and showing it as revenue amounts to deceiving oneself. The countries that developed their economies and

reduced poverty facilitated exports and improved their image but here a faulty refund system has been introduced which has become a problem for investors. He noted that the refund system remained out of order for five months during 2019 resulting in closure of 20 per cent small export companies while others have to cut staff and production in order to survive.

Big export companies avoided closure by securing bank loans while the exports picked up after the computer system was fixed but the issue of delayed refunds was not resolved. He noted that application for a refund by exporters are blocked if any of the vendors have not paid sales tax while it take months even if everything is according to the requirement of the FBR. — APP

CDA's anti-encroachment operation continues during lockdown

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Agency (CDA) administration is also conducting operations against encroachments and illegal constructions in Lockdown. According to the details, following the instructions of the Chairman CDA, the CDA administration has also continued the operation against encroachments and illegal constructions in Lockdown in Islamabad. In this regard, illegally constructed rooms in H-9

have been demolished, a factory for making blocks and a hotel in Taramri Chowk have been demolished and more than ten kanals of land have been handed over. In addition, a newly constructed house in G-7 katchi abadi has also been demolished. The CDA administration has warned that re-occupation of valuable government lands should be avoided, and in case of violation, repossession should be relinquished as well as legal action would be taken.

DC Attock, AC Fatehjang made OSDs

MUNIR FAISAL

ATTOCK: Deputy Commissioner Attock Ali Anan Qamar and Assistant Commissioner Fatehjang Azeem Shoukat Awan on Tuesday were officers on special duty (OSDs) and ordered to report to Services and General Administration Department Lahore. Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue Attock Shehryar Arif Khan was given the additional charge of DC Attock. The two officers were reportedly made OSDs in connection with an inquiry regarding the Rawalpindi Ring Road Project where alterations were carried out without approval only benefit some influential property dealers and land lords.

Pak climber Sirbaz Khan summits Mount Everest

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani mountaineer, Sirbaz Khan achieved yet another milestone when on Wednesday he scaled Mount Everest (8848m), the tallest peak in the world. Earlier, on Tuesday Shehroze Kashif (19) became the youngest Pakistani to summit Everest and hoist the country's flag there. "Today at 6:05 am, Sirbaz Khan successfully climbed Mount Everest," Secretary Alpine Club of Pakistan, Karrar Haidri told APP while sharing a photo of Sirbaz standing atop the Everest with Pakistan flag in his hands. "This is his seventh feat to climb above 8000m mountains. In the last 26 days, he has summited two 8000m peaks," he added. According to Secretary ACP, Sirbaz is on the mission to become the first Pakistani to climb



world's all 14 above 8000m peaks. "It is wonderful that our mountaineers are making history, exhibiting great strength and courage," he reckoned. Last month, Sirbaz along with Muhammad Abdul Joshi, another Pakistan mountaineer climbed the 8,091-metre Annapurna peak in Nepal, becoming the first Pakistani duo to achieve the feat. "He [Sirbaz] has achieved half of his target now. Hopefully, we will soon see him climbing the rest of the highest peaks too," Haidri added. The 32-year-old Sirbaz, who hails from Aliabad, Hunza, began his climbing career in 2016. Prior to Mount Everest and Annapurna, he has ascended K2, Nanga Parbat, Broad Peak, Lhotse, and Manaslu. — APP

Violence escalating

As expected, tensions between Israel and Palestine are bubbling over once again in the aftermath of the raid of mosque Al-Aqsa. Allegedly, militant groups fired rockets into Israel which prompted it to embark upon a campaign of destructive air strikes in Gaza. One can only imagine the kind of devastation this will cause in addition to the damage already done by Israel's genocidal policies towards the Palestinians. Being a witness to the dire consequences of a disputed territory conflict—i.e. Kashmir—Pakistan must elicit further support against the barbaric approach being taken by the Israeli government. After witnessing the death of hundreds of innocent people and children, Hamas issued an ultimatum to Israel's forces that demanded them to withdraw from the area. Only after the time elapsed were the rockets fired in protest against the recent unprovoked act of aggression. The Palestinian population has been fighting, suffering and sacrificing for their rights for decades but no progress has been made to secure their interests. Instead, subjugation continues. It is about time that the international community exerts an overwhelming amount of pressure onto the Israeli forces to back down and denounce their violent ways. Eviction judgements, unwarranted hostilities and sheer hatred must be brought to an end. Too many people have laid down their lives over the course of years and we are nowhere near achieving a peaceful resolution on the matter. Global actors must follow in the steps of the members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that have condemned Israel's brutal display of force. But more than condemnation, actively looking to halt Israel's genocidal designs must also be worked upon. Pakistan has always promised its support, whatever kind needed, to the people of Palestine and it will continue to do so. Our authorities have always strived to secure the rights of the people of Kashmir and the same promise is made to all those—particularly the Palestinians—living in oppressive conditions. The focus now should be on inspiring collective action against this injustice.

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A world beyond rote learning

MUHAMMAD OMAR IFTIKHAR

Our educational system compels students to memorize text line-by-line and reproduce it as replies to the questions asked during an examination. This method of study has been observed and followed for decades. Instead of broadening the students' mental horizon, the education system or the methods of pedagogy are re-fraining the students to explore their minds. Rote learning, therefore, is an easy way out from the challenge of securing grades or at least passing the examinations. At the university level, students are asked to share concepts and principles and rote learning is reduced. However, students in the primary classes and especially in the eleventh and twelfth standard seem to have no other option but to rote learn. This practice explains a lot about our age-old educational system. The textbook boards of provinces seem to be revising the same content but not adding value to it. Instead of adding content that has been there for ages, the concerned authorities should add content that resonates with the changing times. One can pursue the higher authorities to empower faculty to teach about life, society, and science in a way never taught before. Students must learn the society they live in and not rote learn the dates of events that happened centuries ago. The learning they receive must enable them to step into the future and not keep pondering over history. While a holistic learning approach is necessary that blends the past with the future, the idea is to equip the students to become thinkers, leaders, readers, and doers. The syllabus must be changed or if this too much to ask for, the teaching methodology and the paper pattern must be altered. Students need to express themselves to earn grades and not earn them based on reproducing the same information present in textbooks.

Make NAB self accountability effective!

Attiya Munawar



There is no doubt that justice-based accountability leads to the strength of any democratic country and its institutions. A Justice-based accountability system not only brings qualified and reputable people to the forefront of politics, but also encourages people to enter the public service sector, but most of our accountability institutions and accountability processes have been used for their own purposes

NAB is the foremost institution of accountability in Pakistan, there are good and bad people in every institution, qualified people bring good name to the institution, while incompetent people bring disrepute to the whole institution, but despite all this, institutions are expected to perform well. The general reputation of the NAB is that of a good institution, its chairman Javed Iqbalis a retired Supreme Court adjudicator who speaks of impartial accountability and strives for it. While the NAB makes huge recoveries from corrupt people, it also treats the victims. Propaganda against the NAB is also carried out by those who come under strict accountability, which does not affect the performance and commitment of the NAB but when the NAB is questioned by the Supreme Court and it is said that the officers sitting in the NAB are committing big frauds, then the role and performance of the NAB begin to be questioned. There is no doubt that justice-based accountability leads to the strength of any democratic country and its institutions. A Justice-based accountability system not only brings qualified and reputable people to the forefront of politics, but also encourages people to enter the public service sector, but most of our accountability institutions and accountability processes have been used for their own purposes. While the justice institutions have been dancing to the tune of the administration and giving decisions as they see fit, the people who run the accountability body have also been found to be involved in immoral activities. In the light of this

situation, the esteemed courts have to remark that NAB officers are committing big frauds and the chairman NAB has remained silent. Whenever the performance of the NAB is questioned, the Chairman NAB has never remained silent, always defending the institution to the fullest, and where the performance is clear, any shortcomings in the institution are also rectified. However, if the esteemed court has pointed out the involvement of NAB officers in major frauds, then it is a matter of concern for the NAB, as the role of its people should be most transparent in the country. If its own people are found involved in corruption and irregularities, then the accountability process will become meaningless. If the perpetrators of dereliction of duty are identified by the esteemed judiciary or complaints are received from the general public, then the Chairman NAB should take immediate departmental action against such people instead of remaining silent. Concerning the NAB, there is already a general perception among the people that the NAB does not prosecute the accused even after making cases against corrupt elements, keeping the accused in custody for years, and conducting investigations, the accused cannot be convicted by the courts. The reason for this is also considered to be corruption in the institution. Despite the decision of Chairman NAB to rid the corrupt elements of the institution, two NAB officers were sacked three years ago after being found guilty of taking bribes. The accused have filed a petition in the High Court against their dismissal on

which the court had directed the NAB to complete the inquiry within three months, but the NAB officers, sympathizing with their petty brothers, did not feel the need to complete the inquiry against these corrupt officers for three years. In this context, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court seems to be right in saying that the scam was deliberate so that the case would be spoiled and the culprits could be saved from punishment. Undoubtedly, like other institutions, there are some black sheep in NAB who are deliberately part of the irregularities. Such people involved in irregularities in the institution do not deserve any concessions. Such people also cause mistrust between the two institutions. Following the remarks of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, it has become imperative for the Chairman to devise a new strategy to root out corruption from the NAB. Instead of monitoring the performance of the NAB, steps should be taken to rectify the culture of the NAB and reorganize the institution, so that the looted wealth can be recovered, corrupt elements can be held accountable and corruption can be discouraged, and the institution of NAB is made more effective in its self-accountability process. At the same time, attention must be paid to bring the cases under investigation to a logical conclusion, so that negative perceptions about the national institution are eliminated and accountability is possible without discrimination. The NAB should be expected to take immediate steps to maintain its confidence in the Supreme Court and the people.

US-NATO troops' drawdown to provoke re-Talibanization

Munir Ahmed



The chosen policy is to bait re-talibanisation in order to roll back 20 years' worth of human sacrifice, capital and investment. And, then, who will take the lead in belling the Taliban cat? The US has washed its hands of the entire Afghan quagmire, including reconstruction and rehabilitation, despite experts warning of geopolitical chaos

THE unilateral decision to drawdown US and NATO troops from Afghanistan was not entirely anticipated by other parties and stakeholders to the decades-old conflict. Even more disconcerting is that this process began on May 1 when the US vacated Kandahar Airfield (KAF), the primary target of Taliban attacks since 2001; sparking clashes between Afghan forces and the Taliban that left 100 militants dead. That the military base was the first to be 'handed over' to the Afghan government was perhaps an exercise to test both Kabul and the Taliban. It appears that the latter lost this round. Since then, however, there has been no let-up in violence. Last week alone saw the targeted killing of well-known television journalist Newat Rawan, just a day after the Taliban warned the Afghan media against "biased reporting". This was followed by fresh carnage over the weekend when bombs were planted outside a girls' school in a Kabul suburb that is largely populated by the Shia Hazara community, leaving 68 dead and 165 injured. The Taliban denied involvement in the attack. The Hazara had also been routinely attacked by ISIS. Elsewhere, a bus was bombed in the country's southern Zabul province. Pakistan also suffered a spillover effect when four soldiers were killed and six wounded in Balochistan while fencing part of the border the border with Afghanistan. Thus, in the space of a single week all ene-

mies of peace have been let out of the bag. This should come as no surprise since the US and NATO were unable to defeat militants despite spending two decades on the Afghan battlefield. International forces only managed to dismantle some of their own strategic assets, including Bin Laden. The troop pullout is therefore viewed as an American plan to intentionally dent the region. This is reinforced by President Biden stressing that the region should take remedial responsibility for the conflicts in its backyard, including Afghanistan. All this despite the fact that the US and NATO created this regional discord for their own vested interests. Afghanistan has been caught in the cross-hairs for four decades. This war without end has consumed an enormous chunk of the world's resources. Untold lives have been lost and billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure have been damaged or destroyed. In addition, prolonged military offensives have gifted the world the worst ever global economic crunch and massive migration; thereby negatively impacting global poverty indexes. The biggest beneficiaries remain weapon manufacturers and their patrons while the Muslim world has suffered the most. This looks set to continue. Indeed, the carefully crafted fallout of the US exit from Afghanistan will be the loosening of the militant noose across the region with a view to undermining regional security, the peaceful infrastructural growth of BRI

(Belt and Road Initiative), as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The ever-expanding US-India strategic alliance against China, Iran and Russia is resulting in the development and strengthening of Cold War strategies. It remains unclear as to whether this would be sufficient to curtail the economic growth of China. Yet, seemingly, the chosen policy is to bait re-talibanisation in order to roll back 20 years' worth of human sacrifice, capital and investment. And, then, who will take the lead in belling the Taliban cat? The US has washed its hands of the entire Afghan quagmire, including reconstruction and rehabilitation, despite experts warning of geopolitical chaos. Certainly, economically weak Pakistan has more to lose in the event of increased militancy, particularly, along its border areas with Afghanistan. It is most unfortunate, both for this country and the whole region, that the US could not even secure the Doha peace talks and effectively lost the game to the Taliban – despite all facilitation and support from abandoned ally Pakistan. History has shown that the US can neither win wars on the battlefield nor at the negotiating table. It is time that the US learned this lesson. – The writer is a freelance journalist and broadcaster, Director Devcom-Pakistan, a policy advocacy and outreach think tank in Islamabad. He can be reached at devcom.pakistan@gmail.com and tweets @EmmayeSyed

Briefs

Sindh govt for holding Eid prayers at open places

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Sindh Minister for Information Syed Nasir Hussain Shah on Wednesday said that the Eid prayers should be held at open places and with complete adherence to SOPs to avoid COVID spread on the festive occasion. "Eid prayers should be held at open places and more and more open places should be utilized for the purpose," he said while briefing media on decisions taken during a meeting of the COVID task force. The minister said that he had visited parts of the city to review implementation on COVID SOPs. "There should be no hugging or handshake during Eid greeting and the public should greet each other while keeping a safe distance," Nasir Shah said. He further shared that the government has allowed restaurants to operate take-away services while adopting SOPs. "Strict action will be taken in case of violation," he warned. He said that they respect the business community and sympathize with them over the ongoing COVID-related curbs, however, they had to take strict decisions in order to safeguard public interests. Further commenting on the NAB letter seeking details of officers' appointment in urban Sindh, Nasir Shah said that the letter was unconstitutional and the government has rejected it.

PEMRA to regulate Youtubers, web channels

BUREAU REPORT

ISLAMABAD: In a bid to rein in Youtubers and web TV channels, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has prepared recommendations for including these channels in the broadcast media category. According to a private television channel report, PEMRA has already sent the working paper bearing these recommendations to its members for their approval. PEMRA has recommended making possession of licences mandatory for Youtubers and web TV channels' owners. The Authority has further recommended making it compulsory for the owners of these channels to pay a registration fee as well as other taxes. Similarly, it has been suggested that these channels be run under the PEMRA laws of 2015. Similarly, it has also been recommended to make these channels comply with a code of conduct just like mainstream TV channels. Furthermore, it has been suggested that initially these channels would be put in the broadcast media category followed by the making of special laws to deal with them. The members would either approve or reject these recommendations after deliberations at its next meeting.

Fawad urges people to follow SOPs

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain Wednesday urged the people to cooperate with the government and follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) to stay safe from coronavirus pandemic. In a video message, he warned that if people would not comply with the SOPs, Pakistan could also face a situation similar to neighbouring India. He, therefore, asked the people to adopt 'stay home and stay safe' policy during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. He said instead of visiting the relatives on the occasion of Eid, they should use the means of internet and phone for communication with them as this was important for the safety of everyone. Fawad said the government had also imposed ban on intra-city transport to limit the mobility during Eid holidays.

Taliban seize district on outskirts of Afghan capital

KABUL: The Taliban have seized a district from Afghan government forces on the outskirts of Kabul, ahead of a three-day ceasefire agreed between the warring sides, officials said. Nerkh district is around 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the Afghan capital in neighbouring Wardak province, which has long been used by militants as a gateway to reach the city and launch deadly attacks. Violence has soared since May 1 when the US military began formally withdrawing its last remaining troops, even as peace efforts between the Taliban and the Afghan government have stalled. "Security and defence forces made a tactical retreat from the police headquarters of Nerkh district," Interior Ministry spokesman Tareq Arian told media.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said the insurgents had captured the area on Tuesday, adding its fighters had seized the police headquarters and an army base. The Defence Ministry on Wednesday said it would launch an offensive to win back the district, home to more than 60,000 people. "Commando reinforcements are on their way," Fawad Aman, a spokesman for the defence ministry said. Large swathes of Wardak and neighbouring Logar province have been controlled or contested for years by Taliban fighters and have served as a strategic staging ground for militants hoping to enter Kabul. The main highway that connects Kabul to southern Kandahar province – the former Taliban

255 Afghan civilians killed during Ramadan

KABUL: The Ministry of Interior Affairs has said that 15 suicide attacks and dozens of other attacks have been carried out "by the Taliban" since the start of Ramadan on April 13. The ministry said that 500 more civilians were wounded in the attacks during this period. The Interior Ministry said that the Taliban were responsible for 200 blasts and 15 suicide bombings during Ramadan. The Taliban has denied the government's claims that the group has a big hand in civilian deaths. The first day of Ramadan on April 13 witnessed clashes between Afghan security forces and the

Taliban, in which eight civilians were killed and 21 more were wounded, the Afghan Online Press reported Wednesday. "I thank all security forces. They prevented over 800 incidents and arrested over 800 terrorists who will be trailed and law will be implemented," President Ghani said on Tuesday. "An attempt was made to kill Halimi because he told the truth but there wasn't any mosque in Pakistan to raise their voice to condemn this massacre... From this, you will know the depth of the incident and will know where the plot is," Saleh said. – DNA

stronghold and the scene of intensive fighting in recent weeks – crosses through the district. Taliban fighters have been increasingly encircling major Afghan urban centres, spurring speculation the militants are waiting for the Americans to withdraw before launching all-out assaults on the country's cities. The capture of Nerkh comes after the Taliban and the Afghan government agreed to observe a three-day ceasefire to mark the Eid al-Fitr holiday starting on Thursday. Ceasefires in the past have widely held in what is largely thought to be an exercise by the Taliban leadership to prove they have firm control over the myriad factions across the country that make up the jihadist movement. Violence has intensified across the provinces, particularly in the south,

since the US missed a May 1 deadline agreed with the Taliban to withdraw the last of its troops. While the Taliban have avoided engaging American forces, attacks against government and civilian targets have not stopped. Thousands of residents in Helmand have been displaced because of clashes, which saw the US military called in to defend Afghan forces. In the latest violence to rock Kabul, more than 50 people were killed and scores wounded in a western district of the capital when three bombs exploded outside a girls' school on Saturday. It was the deadliest attack in more than a year and came as residents were out shopping ahead of Eid. The US military has so far completed between six and 12 percent of its final withdrawal, the Pentagon said Tuesday. – APP

KSA begins arrangements to hold Hajj 2021

DNA

MAKKAH: Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah Dr. Abdul Fattah Mashat has said the Kingdom doesn't intend to call off this year's Hajj pilgrimage. This he said in a meeting with Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, Special Assistant to the PM on Religious Harmony, in Makkah. The minister said the Kingdom has started making arrangements to hold this year's Hajj pilgrimage with COVID safety protocols. All possible steps are being taken to facilitate pilgrims, he said. He maintained that Covid-19 vaccination is mandatory for people intending to perform the annual Hajj pilgrimage this year. Maulana Ashrafi said the people and leadership of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are close to each other. The Saudi government's measures for pilgrims are laudable, he added.

New vaccine underway at Al Shifa

ISLAMABAD: Al-Shifa Trust President Major General (ret'd) Rehmat Khan on Wednesday said that last stage human trials of corona virus vaccine developed by Chinese multinational Anhui Zhiwei Longcom Biopharmaceutical Co Ltd are successfully underway at the Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, which would be available to public soon. Around 8000 volunteers were initially recruited for trials, and no serious underlying medical issues was reported during ongoing trials and it is effective in triggering immunity response, he said while speaking to a private news channel. He made it clear that the results from trials of Chinese Academy of Sciences' (CAS) Covid-19 vaccine candidate, ZF2001, showed that it was safe and triggered immune responses. A state-of-the-art Clinical Research Unit has already been established at Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital and trials will be completed soon, he added. He hoped that the vaccination process in Pakistan will be accelerated after the successful completion of the trials of new Chinese vaccine. – DNA



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed and Adviser to Prime Minister on Accountability, Barrister Shahzad Akbar addressing a Press Conference after attending meeting of the sub-committee of the Cabinet on ECL. – APP

Cabinet committee recommends to put Shehbaz' name on ECL

SHAHEEN HANIF

ISLAMABAD: A sub-committee of the federal cabinet on Wednesday decided to place Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shahbaz Sharif's name on the exit control list (ECL). A special meeting of three members of the cabinet was held Wednesday and all members of committee unanimously recommended putting Shehbaz Sharif's name on the ECL. However, the final decision will be made by the federal cabinet. Sharing the details in a media interaction, Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed said that the sub-committee meeting has decided to put Shahbaz Sharif's name on the no-fly list on the recommendation from National Accountability

Bureau (NAB). "A recommendation has been conveyed to the cabinet that will make a final decision in this regard," the interior minister said. He said that SAPM on accountability Shahzad Akbar informed him that Shahbaz's name was not placed on the blacklist. "We are not informed regarding any medical reasons cited by Shahbaz Sharif to travel abroad," he said adding that if Shahbaz files a review on the decision, the interior ministry is bound to take a decision on it within 90 days. "Shahbaz is a guarantor of Nawaz Sharif, who has fled the country," Sheikh Rasheed said adding that they have not received any application from PML-N leader to allow him to travel abroad.

63 passengers test positive at Pak airports

ZUBAIR AHMAD

ISLAMABAD: National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) have asked the foreign ministry to ensure that those traveling to Pakistan from abroad should have undergone tests from reputed laboratories as 63 passengers have tested positive for COVID-19 at nationwide airports. According to a letter written from the NCOC to the foreign ministry, passengers traveling from Gulf countries have been arriving with negative COVID reports, however, after undergoing rapid testing at the airports, as many as 63 of them have tested positive in the last five days. Those arriving from Gulf countries should be asked to undergo tests from reputed laboratories, the letter said while asking the foreign ministry to take measures in this

regard. It has been further conveyed that the national and foreign airlines should be bound to accept COVID test reports from designated labs. On May 01, National Command Operation Centre (NCOC) on Saturday devised new protocols for the inbound passengers, imposing a condition of COVID testing at Pakistan airports. Under the guidelines, the passengers will undergo rapid COVID testing at the Pakistani airports and would stay in quarantine for 10 days at their homes. In case of testing positive, the passengers will have to shift to a quarantine facility, where they would be re-tested for COVID 19 on the eight-day. The guidelines stated that the passenger would bear the expense of the isolation facility and in case of testing positive for the second time, the passenger would be shifted to a hospital.

Iran's Ahmadinejad submits name for presidential poll

"Millions of people across the country have invited me to stand for election, and even ordered me to come here to register, placing a heavy responsibility on my shoulders"

TEHRAN: Iranian ultra-conservative ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad put his name forward Wednesday as a candidate to succeed moderate President Hassan Rouhani in elections next month. "Millions of people across the country have invited me to stand for election, and even ordered me to come here to register, placing a heavy responsibility on my shoulders," Ahmadinejad said, speaking after he submitted his application to the interior ministry. The build-up to June 18 polls comes as Iran and world powers wrangle over reviving a 2015 nuclear accord, from which the US withdrew unilaterally in 2018, reimposing crippling sanctions. Hopefuls have until Saturday to register, and will then



be vetted by the conservative-dominated Guardian Council before a list of approved candidates is published by May 27, after which campaigning begins. But Iranian media considers Ahmadinejad's chance of being approved are close to zero. The 64-year-old said that if he is not approved, he will "not participate" in the election, either by backing a candidate

or voting. Ahmadinejad claimed, as he has often done in recent years, that the Iranian people have lost confidence in the country's authorities. He added that he considered the upcoming election "perhaps the last chance" to save the Islamic republic in the face of "very sensitive" challenges, both domestic and international. Ahmadinejad, president from 2005 to 2013, had to stand down at the end of two consecutive terms as per the constitution – like outgoing president Rouhani will in June. In 2009, Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election sparked protests that were severely put down, shaking the Islamic republic. On Wednesday he was cheered by several supporters as he submitted his name, chanting "we support you!" The populist ex-president had also put his name forward for the 2017 presidential election, against the advice of the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Unsurprisingly, his candidacy was rejected by the Guardian Council, an unelected body dominated by conservatives and responsible for overseeing the presidential polls. – APP

Court sends Mian Javed Ltif on 14-day remand

DNA

LAHORE: A Lahore court on Wednesday granted 14-day judicial remand of PML-N MIA Mian Javed Latif in a case registered against him for allegedly delivering anti-state remarks. Police produced him before the court on completion of his physical remand. The prosecution side informed the court that the PML-N leader's 14-day physical remand has completed. Javed Latif complained to the judge about "ill treatment" meted out to him during his being in police custody on the physical remand. His lawyers contended that the police didn't have any evidence to corroborate treason charges against their client. "Will court hand down capital punishment if section 302 (punishment for murder) is incorporated in an FIR," they questioned. The court sent the lawmaker to jail on 14-day remand and adjourned the hearing until May 26.

Islamabad to receive rain on Eid

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Meteorological Department has predicted rain in Islamabad, Lahore, and Peshawar on Eid this year. Gujranwala and Rawalpindi will receive rain with lightning and thunderstorms as well. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the downpour is forecast on Wednesday and Thursday. The Pakistan Disaster Management Authority has, on the other hand, predicted rain for the upcoming five days in Peshawar and neighbouring areas. – APP

Indian Covid-19 variant found in 44 countries: WHO

Doubts surround India's Covid-19 death toll

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said Wednesday that a variant of Covid-19 behind the acceleration of India's explosive outbreak has been found in dozens of countries all over the world. The UN health agency said the B.1.617 variant of Covid-19, first found in India in October, had been detected in more than 4,500 samples uploaded to an open-access database "from 44 countries in all six WHO regions". "And WHO has received reports of detections from five additional countries," it said in its weekly epidemiological update on the pandemic. Outside of India, it said that Britain had reported the largest number of Covid cases caused by the variant. Earlier this week, the WHO declared B.1.617 – which counts three so-called sub-lineages with slightly different mutations and characteristics – as a "variant of concern". It was therefore added to the list containing three other variants of Covid-19 – those first detected in Britain, Brazil and South Africa. The variants are seen as more dan-

gerous than the original version of the virus because they are either being more transmissible, deadly or able to get past some vaccine protections. The WHO explained Wednesday that B.1.617 was added to the list because it appears to be transmitting

bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims have also been seen floating down the holy Ganges river. The discrepancies appear particularly stark in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat. In Rajkot in the west of the state, the official death toll between April 1-23 was 154, yet the city's own health officials put it at 723. And in Bharuch, the official count for the same period was just 23 but there were 600 funerals. Gujarat's chief minister Vijay Rupani insisted that the state was following guidelines from the Indian Council of Medical Research. Those say only deaths directly caused by Covid-19 can be recorded as such, but not fatalities triggered by co-morbidities – when a patient had heart problems and dies of cardiac arrest, for instance. – APP

indicating "limited reduction in neutralisation by antibodies". It stressed, though, that "real-world impacts" on the effectiveness of vaccines against the variant for instance "may be limited". WHO said the spread of B.1.617, alongside other more transmittable