



Islamabad POST

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Spanish envoy praises Spain, Pak efforts to protect environment

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US must halt Olympics interference

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Tunisian leader warns of social explosion

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Briefs

JUI chief condemns police action

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman condemned police action against Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) workers in Karachi. According to details, Maulana Fazlur Rehman telephoned MQM-P leader Amir Khan to express his condolence on the death of an MQM-P worker who was wounded and later died when police resorted to tear gas shelling and baton-charge to disperse MQM-P protesters.

Maryam questions PTI funding

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Vice-president Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) Maryam Nawaz slammed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) government on matters pertaining to party funding. Taking it to the micro-blogging social-media networking site Twitter, the PML-N leader stated that the money which is collected in the name of Shaukat Khanum Hospital funds goes in party fund. Maryam Nawaz further went on to mention that the money of party fund is going into personal account and the public's money is going into the pockets of PTI.

Historic reforms introduced

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Farrukh Habib said on Thursday that Prime Minister Imran Khan has introduced historic reforms in judicial system to provide speedy and equitable justice. In his tweet, Minister of State Farrukh Habib said that removal of obstacles in the way of speedy justice within the criminal law would provide speedy justice to the victims of murder, abuse and other serious cases.

Reforms will revolutionize judiciary: PM

The prime minister says for the first time, the government was making changes in the law made in British rule

SHUJAAT HAMZA / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday termed effective dispensation of justice as the State's responsibility said the government's reforms in the civil and criminal procedure code would ensure speedy justice. Addressing here at an event on Criminal Law and Justice Reforms, the prime minister said the massive amendments would help bring revolution in the criminal judicial system and simplify procedure for common man in way to justice. The prime minister said for the first time, the government was making changes in the law made in British rule to bring improvement to dispensation of justice. He said no government in the past ever thought about reforming the century-old laws in order to maintain status quo and accommodate the elite. He said the civil law reforms were a step towards ensuring rule of law in line with Islam's first socio-welfare State of Medina. He quoted a hadith of Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) emphasizing that

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PM takes notice of Police brutality

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Following an incident of police brutality in Karachi, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday took notice of the violence used by the Sindh police against MQM-P leaders and workers. "I have taken note of the violence used by Sindh police against MQM's peaceful protest against Sindh's LG law, [and] have called for a report from Interior Ministry, Sindh CS [and] Sindh IG," he wrote on Twitter. Assuring the party leadership of action against the violence, the premier further said: "Will take necessary action against those responsible after receiving these reports."

PM Khan's China visit crucial for CPEC: FM

'PM will express solidarity with China as several countries boycotted the Olympics'

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Thursday said besides attending the Beijing Olympic ceremony as a solidarity gesture, the visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to China would encompass discussions on advancing joint ventures and pacing up progress on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In a statement ahead of PM Imran Khan's visit from February 3 to 5, the foreign minister said Pakistan and China stood with each other in difficult times and the main purpose of the visit was to express solidarity with China as several

Continued on Page 06

FM Qureshi visits Air Headquarters

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force during his visit to Air Headquarters, Islamabad. Matters pertaining to evolving

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, calls on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan addressing at launching ceremony of Criminal Law and Justice Reforms. - DNA

Curbs on schools to stay: NCOC

Classes for students (fully vaccinated) over the age of 12 years will continue

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) decided on Thursday to extend curbs on schools in cities with over 10 per cent positivity rate of Covid-19 cases till mid-February. The country's nerve centre for Covid response decided that schools in cities having an infection rate of over 10pc will allow classes for students aged below 12 years with 50 per cent attendance (staggered days). However, classes for students (fully vaccinated) over the age of 12 years will continue with full attendance. The NCOC had imposed the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) on January 19, which were to be reviewed on January 27 (today) in light of the COVID-19 situation in the country.

'Cant provide EVMs for Capital LG polls'

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) has excused from providing Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs) for the local body elections in Islamabad. It may be recalled that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had requested to provide the machines manufactured by the Ministry of Science and Technology. ECP had shown concern over the purchase of EVMs from private companies. ECP had demanded 3900 EVMs from the Ministry for the local body elections in Islamabad.

Ten soldiers martyred in terrorist attack

3 Terrorists have been apprehended in follow up clearance operation

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Ten Pak Army soldiers have been martyred in an attack on a check post in Balochistan. According to an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release, terrorists ambushed on Security Forces Check post in Kech, Balochistan on night 25/26 Jan. During intense exchange of fire, 1 terrorist was killed and several injured. While repulsing terrorists fire raid, 10 soldiers embraced shahadat. 3 Terrorists have been apprehended in follow up clearance operation, still in progress to hunt down perpetrators of the incident. Armed Forces are determined to eliminate terrorists from our soil no matter what the cost, the statement added. Last month, Two Pakistan Army soldiers had embraced martyrdom in an attack on a security check post in District Kech in Balochistan. During the exchange of fire, Lance Naik Manzar Abbas, a resident of District Khushab and Sepoy Abdul Fath, a resident of Khuzdar were martyred defending the check post.

COAS visits Multan Garrison

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Multan Garrison. COAS attended ongoing session of Southern Command War Games; aimed at reviewing and validating operational plans and manoeuvres against the threat and emerging battle field challenges. COAS appreciated the professional acumen and efforts of the participants and emphasized upon the importance of mental and physical preparedness to win over the challenges of future wars. Earlier on arrival, COAS was received by Commander Southern Command, Lieutenant General Muhammad Chiragh Haider. - DNA

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United States, China call for defusing Ukraine crisis

Meanwhile, Russia finds no optimism in written responses presented by the US and NATO

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: Top diplomats of the US and China discussed the rising tensions between Ukraine and Russia, emphasizing the need for steps to defuse the increasingly volatile situation. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored in his conversation with China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi the "global security and economic risks posed by further Russian aggression against Ukraine," the US State Department said in a brief statement. "De-escalation and diplomacy are the responsible way forward," Blinken added. The two also discussed "how to advance work together" following the

West threatens to axe Russia pipeline over Ukraine

BERLIN: Germany and the US have warned they could target a key Russian gas pipeline if the country invades Ukraine. A US state department spokesman said the Nord Stream 2 pipeline "will not move forward" if Russia were to attack. The controversial energy project is designed to double gas flow and runs from Russia

virtual meeting between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in November last year. Earlier, the written responses presented by the United States and NATO to Russia's security demands fail to address Moscow's concerns over the eastward expansion of the military alliance, Russia's Foreign Minister said Thursday as fears of a possible invasion of Ukraine remain high. "There is no positive reaction on the main issue in this document," Sergey Lavrov told journalists in Moscow. "The main issue is our clear position on the inadmissibility of further expansion of NATO to the East and the deployment of strike weapons that could threaten the territory of the Russian Federation."

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Briefs

Emergency operation centre established

KAMRAN GUJJAR

JHELUM: The district emergency operation centre has been established in the district Kacheri in collaboration with the Provincial Disaster Management Authority and district administration Jhelum. The purpose of setting up emergency operation centre is to deal effectively with natural disasters and emergencies, at district level.

Emergency operation centre is equipped with modern equipment that will work 24 hours, due to monitoring by satellite of emergency operations, direct monitoring of any emergency in Jhelum district will be possible. Disaster alerts and warranty regarding natural disasters, tragedies and accidents can be issued. Citizens of Jhelum district can contact emergency helpline 0544920256 in any emergency.

Dr Faisal visits Mufti Mehmood Memorial Hospital

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health, Dr Faisal Sultan on Thursday visited D I Khan where he inspected the health care facilities being provided to the patients at Mufti Mehmood Teaching Hospital.

Dr Sultan also visited the vaccination counter and inspected the stock for anti-polio and anti-corona vaccines. The hospital administration gave a detailed briefing to the Special Assistant on performance and issues being faced by the hospital.

On the occasion he said, reforms in the health sector were underway on the directives of Prime Minister Imran Khan. He said eradication of polio from the country was among the prime priorities and the government was taking cogent steps to achieve this goal. During his visit to Sehat Card Counter, the Special Assistant to the PM on Health said introduction of Sehat Card was the historical initiative of the incumbent government. He said the Sehat Card was a revolutionary step forward in the health sector. — APP

Dist admin imposes smart lockdown

ABBOTTABAD: Owing to the increasing number of coronavirus during the 5th wave in various areas of Abbottabad city, the district administration have sealed seven more localities in the district and imposed a smart lockdown there for five days.

On the directives of DC Abbottabad, Assistant Commissioner and Additional AC sealed the localities after the same was recommended by the health department to prevent the local transmission of COVID-19.

According to the district administration notification, the Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) Abbottabad staff under the supervision of AC and AAC Abbottabad sealed the house of Naveed Afzal Golra Hosue Damn-e-Koh Mirpur, House No. CB-37/2 Javed Shaheed Road Mandian Abbottabad, House No. CB 3 Akbar Street Colony Mandian Abbottabad, House of Shafiq ur Rehman Bilal Town. — APP

Court Notice

In the court of Nasir Zadi Mehwish Civil Judge Jhelum, Suit for disposition through partition case title Zulfiqar Khan etc vs Shaikat Khan etc. against Rubina Begum w/o Nazir Khan r/o Kayani Street Mangla Road tehsil Dina district Jhelum.

As there is not possible to call the defendants through summons in the instant Suit so through proclamation in newspaper, you are directed to appear in the court on 21.02.2022 at 9:00am, otherwise ex-parte proceedings will be initiated.



KARACHI: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov met with Hunaid Lakhani, the Chairman and Founding Chancellor of Iqra University and Dr. Wasim Qazi, the Vice-Chancellor of the University. — DNA

Collaborated efforts imperative to continue welfare scheme

Employers who are paying less contribution are just focusing on temporary relief as at the end of day they have to pay their contribution at an enhanced rate which would add sudden and excessive burden on their financial resources

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: Employers, employees and Government must make sincere and collaborated efforts to continue welfare scheme "Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution" (EOBI) on sustained basis as its funds would start depleting from 2031 and may wipe out in 2037 if immediate and futuristic measures were not taken, said Mr. Shakeel Ahmed Mangnejo Chairman EOBI.

Addressing the business community in the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), he said that this scheme was launched for the sustenance of the old and registered workers. "Employer's contribution was 5% while 1% was deducted from the employee's salary for it", he said and added that Government was also contributing but in mid-1990, government stopped paying its share. He said that EOBI was collecting contributions at the minimum salary of Rs. 8000 which has now jumped to Rs. 25,000 in Sindh and Rs. 20,000 in the remaining three provinces. He said that Employers Federation of Pakistan (EFP) had agreed in principle to pay a contribution at minimum salary of Rs. 13,000 but some employers challenged

this decision and got a stay order from the court and are still paying their contribution at the minimum salary of Rs. 8,000 only. He stressed uniform contribution rates across the country and said that FCCI should play their role in convincing local employers to pay their contribution as per this decision for the best interest of their workers. Similarly, the Government should also consider paying its due share towards this fund as it is also a beneficiary of this welfare scheme.

He said that employers who are paying less contribution are just focusing on temporary relief as at the end of day they have to pay their contribution at an enhanced rate which would add sudden and excessive burden on their financial resources. He said that new EOBI law was under consideration which would offer a self-assessment scheme with multiple benefits for the employers while expat workers could also join this scheme by paying their due contribution. He hinted at giving relief in audit to the small power looms, sizing and foundry units and assured that the EOBI officials would not insist on provision of PR-02 form for the previous years. Similarly, officials of EOBI, Labor and Social Security would conduct one time inspection in a year which would save employers from unnecessary

hassle due to repeated and separate visits by these departments. Responding to a question, he said that EOBI is collecting a total contribution of Rs. 31 billion while we are paying a pension of up to Rs. 40 billion. He said that currently EOBI is paying pension to 6,97,000 workers while more than 9 lac cases are still in the pipeline. He said that the total assets of EOBI are around Rs. 500 billion which has been invested in Government securities. He said that as per new laws we could not make further investment in national savings however we have forwarded a case to the economic coordination committee to give special permission to EOBI to make further investment in national savings for the safety and security of the money meant for the poor segment of the society. About Faisalabad region, Mr. Shakeel Ahmed Mangnejo said that we are getting Rs. 1.9 billion as contribution while paying a pension of Rs. 2.5 billion and this imbalance must be corrected for sustained distribution of pension to the EOBI workers of this region. About the representation of FCCI in the Board of Trustees (BOT), he said that there are many chambers in the country and they have to maintain a balance in the numbers of employees and employers, hence FCCI should present a viable proposal which could be discussed

and processed at the highest level.

Earlier Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh President FCCI said that Faisalabad is the third largest industrial, commercial and business conglomerate of Pakistan. "It is the second largest city in revenue generation and job creation", he said and added that textile is the iconic representation of this city while after the colonization of M3 and Allama Iqbal Industrial Estates, it would emerge as the largest hub of industry. He said that this city alone was contributing 46% share in total textile export of Pakistan while in overall exports, its share is about 22%. He said that it has a unique privilege to fulfill 80% of the clothing needs of the country.

About FCCI, he said that it has 8,000 members which have been segregated into corporate and associate classes. "Similarly, representatives of 113 different trades are also enrolled with FCCI", he said and added that standing committees have been constituted for each trade to identify its sector specific problems with their viable solutions. He termed workers as a national asset and said that employers are personally looking after their workers by extending them additional facilities from their own resources instead of leaving them only on the mercy of EOBI.

CM KPK condemns attack at oil well in Karak

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mahmood Khan on Thursday strongly condemned terrorist attack at oil well of the private exploration company in Gurguri area of district Karak.

In a statement, Chief Minister expressed grief and sorrow over the killing of a security guard in the attack and conveyed his heartfelt sympathy and condolence to the family of martyred.

He also directed police to take timely steps to ensure safe recovery of the abducted supervisor of the company. — APP

FDA upgrads 90 daily wagger employees

BUREAU REPORT

FAISALABAD: Under the policy and directions of Punjab Government, the 90 daily wagger employees of Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) have been given the status of workman. These employees would have entitled some financial benefits and other official privileges. The matter of daily wages employees had been taken up before the 115th meeting of FDA governing body for seeking approval after discussion but the meeting formed the review committee under the convenership of MPA Adil Parvez Gujjar for examining the cases of daily wagger employees serving from years. The meeting of review committee was held here with MPA Adil Parvez Gujjar in the chair. The other members of committee MPA Mian Waris Aziz, Vice Chairman WASA Sh.Shahid Javed, Majid Hu-



FAISALABAD: The snap of Faisalabad Development Authority Chairman Ch Latif Nazar with the employees having status of workman. — DNA

sain Advocate and Director Adm Yasir Ijaz Chatta participated in the meeting. The bio-data of daily wagger employees were reviewed besides interviewed them during the meeting. After detailed discussion and keeping in view the terms

and conditions, it was decided to give the status of workman to the 90 daily wagger employees which would be entitled to draw wages of weekly and gazetted holidays as well besides getting health cover and some other government benefits.

The committee also recommended to release the salary of last seven months which was stuck up due to the departmental process of giving them the status of workman. The members of committee congratulated the employees.

Faisalabad Traders apprise Chairman FBR of issues faced

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Super Market Association, Faisalabad visited FBR (HQs), Islamabad today and held a detailed meeting with Chairman FBR/Secretary Revenue Division Dr. Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmed and Mr. Farrukh Habib, Minister of State for Information & Broadcasting, both in Chair.

Various issues related to Point of Sales were discussed during the meeting. The President, Super Market Association, Faisalabad Mr. Shahid Mumtaz Bajwa informed the participants that all its 40 members had been integrated with FBR POS System, which was appreciated by the Chairman FBR.

On the issue of input adjustment from un-registered wholesalers/distributors, the Association was

informed by FBR that in Finance Supplementary Act, 2022, they had been declared as Tier-1 Retailers. Hence, their issue of input tax adjustment would soon be resolved under the relevant provisions of law. The Chairman, FBR desired that the Dispute Committee of FBR and the Traders in Faisalabad would be activated for an amicable settlement of genuine/legal issues of Faisalabad traders. During the meeting, the

Chairman FBR reiterated that government believed in collecting the rightful taxes by following the due process of law and FBR was taking all out measures to ensure facilitation of Traders community for an accelerated economic growth.

He further stated that he had already passed on necessary directions to Field Formations to work closely with trade bodies in order to ensure tax compliance in a transparent manner.

The delegation thanked Chairman FBR for listening to the grievances of traders and the desired assurance of speedy resolution of their problems.

The participants from FBR also included Mr. Qaisar Iqbal, Member (IR Operations), Dr. Nasser Janjua, Chief POS, Mr. Amir Amin Bhatti, Chief IR-Operations and Mr. Muhammad Anwar Chaudhry, Chief Sales Tax Operations. The delegation from Super Market Association, Faisalabad included Mr. Shahid Mumtaz Bajwa, President Super Market Association, Mr. Safdar Ali, Vice President, Mr. Muhammad Ashfaq, Vice President, Mr. Muhammad Saeed Ahmad, General Secretary, Mr. Rashid Sharif, Information Secretary and Mr. Muhammad Aslam, Member of the Association.

US Envoy visits SSU's headquarters

KARACHI: Consul General of United States of America (USA) Mark Stroh visited different sections of Special Security Unit (SSU) Headquarters and applauded professional standards maintained in the unit.

The Consul General was briefed by the DIG Security & Emergency Services Division Maqsood Ahmed about the various sections of SSU and measures taken to setup country's first Special Weapons and Tactics (S.W.A.T) team in SSU to challenge any emergency situation, said a spokesperson of the DIG Security and Emergency Services Division. Mark Stroh expressed joy to see the progress of police commandos in the field of counter terrorism and lauded the role of Security Division in conducting successful international events in Karachi.

The Consul General also witnessed a mock exercise conducted by S.W.A.T Commandos of SSU.

He was presented an honorary shield by DIG Maqsood Ahmed. — APP

KP decides to launch Digital Literacy Programme

PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to launch Digital Literacy Programme and during next three years will impart training to 2,41,600 students of Grade 6 to Grade 12.

The programme is framed for 38 schools of the merged districts and 1170 high and higher secondary schools of the remaining districts.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, the Provincial Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education, Shahram Khan Tarakai said that beside up-gradation of the IT Labs of the selected schools an incubation centre would also be set up at each divisional headquarters. In these incubation centres 10 selected teams from schools would be represented by two members in each team.

These teams would be provided six months training. The during training the under training students would be paid a stipend of Rs.15,000/- per month. An annual competition would also be arranged among these trained students. The winner and runner-up teams would be awarded cash prizes of Rs.20,000,000/- and Rs 1,00,00,000/- respectively.

In initial phase, the programme would be launched in the selected schools of 10 districts including Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Kohat and Dir Lower and later it would be expanded to more districts.

A Project Management Unit (PMU) has also been established for the programme and the selection of trainers is also completed, who will train IT teachers through the office of the concerned District Education Office and will also monitor the training process. There will be at least four classes of digital literacy every week. — APP

SERVICES



Namaz Timings

Fajr.....	05:45 am
Zohr.....	12:12 pm
Asr.....	03:35 pm
Maghrib.....	05:10 pm
Isha.....	06:40 pm



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G-5, G-6, G-7, G-8.....	9203883
G-9, G-10, G-11, G-12, H-8.....	9266316
Wapda Islamabad.....	9217579
Wapda Rawalpindi.....	111-309-309

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....	9209224
Potohar Town.....	9209224
Rawal Town.....	5773343

Wasa Water Tank

Rawalpindi.....	0331-5022125
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ICCI, Iqra University discuss collaboration for fashion show

Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry appreciated the proposal of Iqra University for organizing a fashion show in collaboration with ICCI and assured his cooperation to make it successful

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Islam, Vice President, Iqra University, Islamabad along with his team visited Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) and showed interest to collaborate with ICCI for organizing a fashion show to display the products designed by students while ICCI members of relevant sector could also show their products in the show. He said that the purpose of organizing fashion show is to showcase the quality of textiles products designed by students, especially for females to provide them better exposure so that they could be absorbed in the local fashion industry. He said that the students were designing many good quality products that needed to be highlighted at a larger scale for their market development. Muhammad Islam said that



the close collaboration between Iqra University and ICCI for this initiative would provide students a good platform to show their talent for fashion industry and intro-

duce latest fashion trends. He said that such events would provide skilled manpower to the fashion industry and help in its better growth besides improving exports

of fashion products. He said that ICCI should cooperate in providing internships to Iqra students in local industry to provide them practical experience of theoretical knowl-

edge. He also exchanged views on many other initiatives that could be undertaken by his university in collaboration with ICCI. Speaking at the occasion,

Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry appreciated the proposal of Iqra University for organizing a fashion show in collaboration with ICCI and assured his cooperation to make it successful. He said that the event would also be helpful in promoting industry-academia linkages and would be a win-win situation for both sides. He said that the fashion industry was a growing sector in Pakistan and universities should focus on producing more educated and skilled human resources for this industry for its better growth that would also help in promoting exports of fashion products. He further said that Iqra University should sign an MoU with ICCI to provide discount in admission and tuition fee to the students of ICCI members, which was well-received by the Vice President of Iqra University.

G-14 allottees stage protest outside housing authority office

The protestors appealed to the Prime Minister to immediately suspend the existing DG Authority for poor performance



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The G-14 Allottee Association has appealed to the Prime Minister to immediately suspend the existing DG Authority for poor performance and appoint a technical officer. Report should be submitted in the Islamabad High Court so that the case of Jhangi Syedan can be decided and development work can be expedited. Land should be handed over from the occupation mafia immediately. These changes will strengthen the Prime Minister's vision of 5 million houses. According to a statement issued by the victims on Tuesday, G14, which consists of about 5,000 plots, was launched in 2004 for homeless retired federal employees. Despite the passage of 17 years, the authority still lacks performance. Due to bribery and collusion with the occupation

mafia, they are deprived of acquisition of allotment plots while development works are almost non-existent.

The contractor, who has been working on the site since 2012, has allegedly taken overpayments along with the bribe-taking staff of the authority and is now working very slowly due to lack of interest and malice on the part of the authorities. The Islamabad High Court has clearly directed the authority to expedite the development by evacuating the illegal occupants. The present DG Authority has failed to comply due to its incompetence. Some illegal occupants of Jhangi Syedan have taken a stay order from the Islamabad High Court, on which the court asked them to submit a report to the court within two weeks on June 16, but no action was taken. The Senate committee even met on September 5 and the authority promised to submit a report to the court within a week, which is

yet to be submitted. The staff of the authority is receiving their salaries and other benefits which are many times more than the government employees from the allotment fund while the development work is almost non-existent. The security situation of the authority is such that illegal development works are being constructed on the authority's plot in G-14/1 under the rural program, which is a waste of government funds. We have been informing the Federal Minister and other officials about the failures of the Authority but no progress has been seen so far. Local MNA Federal Minister Asad Umar has been representing this constituency for 8 years, but this issue has been deliberately ignored. It is unfortunate that he and some of his associates are supporting the illegal occupation group. Remember that federal employees are the stronghold of voters in Islamabad.

Punjab Talent Hunt Jhelum concludes

In the folk dance competitions, Jhula Lal group won the first position while Lajpal group and Awami group won the second and third prizes respectively

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The district level competitions of district Jhelum have been concluded. Director Punjab Arts Council Waqar Ahmad said that Punjab Talent Hunt 2022 competition was going on successfully with in which new talent is emerging at district level. He said this while addressing at the end of district level competitions of Punjab Talent Hunt 2022. These competitions were held in Jhelum in which more than 400 young artists participated and performed in their respective fields. Waqar Ahmad said that this time in Punjab Talent Hunt there is more enthusiasm among the young generation than expectations. Competitions in music, painting, handicrafts, fiction, drama and folk dance came to an end. Three judges were appointed for each competition. Ali Haider, Mohammad Maysar and Dua Zahra won first, second and third positions respectively in the music competition held at Government Graduate College Tahliawan. Majida Shabbir came first in the painting competition while Tabassum came second and Maha Gul came third. In the short story writing competition, Mubashir Nawaz was awarded first prize, while Mohammad Omar and Mohammad Faizan came second and third respectively. In the handicraft competition, Maryam Zubair came first, while Mohammad Omar came second and Ameer Hamza came third. In the folk dance competitions, Jhula Lal group won the first position while Lajpal group and Awami group won the second and third prizes respectively.

IIUI takes action against 26 students

DNA

ISLAMABAD: International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIU) has taken action against 26 students who were involved in disturbing peace at campus. Out of these students, 22 students have been expelled forever, 3 students expelled for one semester and 1 student has been expelled for 2 semesters. According to the spokesman IIUI, Nasir Farid, the Students Discipline Committee had issued show cause notices to the involved students and they were given 72 hours to reply. After that, the committee, in the light of evidence, decided to take action against these 26 students. The spokesman told that every student has the prerogative to file an appeal to the university President against the decision of the Students Discipline Committee. He added that the committee, in the light of the evidence, has also issued show cause notices to 6 more students. The spokesperson said that International Islamic University has said that university will show no tolerance to indiscipline and such unlawful activities. The administration has said that it would not hesitate to take any action against the elements that are on the agenda to defame the image of IIUI.

Output of LCVs increase 68.66% in 5 months

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The production of Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) has witnessed 68.66 percent increase during the first five months of the financial year 2021-22 against the output of the same period of last fiscal year. As many as 11,734 LCVs were manufactured during July-November (2021-22) as compared to the production of 6,957 LCVs during July-November (2020-21), showing an increase of 68.66 percent, according to official data by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). During the period under review, the production of trucks also rose from 1,326 units to 2,355 units, showing an increase of 77.60 percent while the production of tractors increased by 15.72 percent, going up from 19,041 units to 22,034 units. The production of jeeps and cars increased to 90,937 units during the period under review from 53,779 units during last year.

IGP listens public complaints

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Muhammad Ahsan Younas listened public complaints during a khuli kutcheri (Open Court) on Thursday. He directed the officers concerned to resolve issues on priority and report him. The IGP directed all zonal officers to intensify crackdown against land grabbers. "No one would be allowed to grab property of any citizen" he added. Islamabad police chief said it was our prime responsibility to provide protection to the lives and property of the citizens and resolve their problems on purely merit basis. He said citizens at 'Open Court' should behave in a respectful manner to build their trust on police force. He said positive image of policemen should be ensured by adopting unbiased approach towards public. The IGP hoped that the interaction during 'open kutcheries' would help promote friendly policing. Last month, former CPO Rawalpindi Ahsan Younis (PSP), belonging to 28th CTP, had been appointed Inspector General of the Federal Capital Police after the sudden removal of Inspector General of Police Islamabad, Qazi Jamil-ur-Rehman. "Muhammad Ahsan Younas, a BS-20, officer of PSP, is transferred and posted as Inspector General, ICT.

اب بیماریوں کو کریں کلین بولڈ

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قومی صحت کارڈ

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VALID THRU 07/25

Briefs

Rupee stable against dollar

ISLAMABAD: The exchange rate of Pakistan rupee strengthens by 01 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading on Thursday and closed at Rs 176.97 against the previous day's closing of Rs 176.98.

According to Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of dollar in the open market recorded at Rs 177.5 and Rs 179 respectively. Similarly, the price of euro depreciated by Rs 1.62 and closed at Rs 198.20 against the previous day's closing at Rs 199.82.

The Japanese Yen lost one paisa to close at Rs 1.54, whereas a decrease of Rs 1.68 was witnessed in the exchange rate of British Pound, which was traded at Rs 237.32 as compared to its last closing at Rs 239.00. The exchange rates of Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal decreased by 01 paisa to close at Rs 48.17 and Rs 47.178 respectively. — APP

NCOC team, AC ICT check vaccination status at I/8, H/8 sector

ISLAMABAD: The NCOC team and Assistant Commissioner Industrial Area Islamabad on Thursday visited various commercial areas of I/8 and H/8 sector to check the obligatory vaccine regime and compliance of coronavirus SOPs/NPIs. The teams visited banks, hotels, restaurants, shops, bakeries and cash & carries in I/8 sector to ensure strict enforcement of obligatory vaccination campaign. The NCOC team and ICT administration inspected vaccination status of the banks staff, workers at restaurants, hotels and cash & carries as well. The Assistant Commissioner concerned sealed several shops, and restaurants and imposed heavy fines on violators, and unvaccinated individuals. — APP

Chal Mere Putt 2 strives to score big in cinemas

ISLAMABAD: Since the opening Punjabi Film 'Chal Mere Putt 2' has scored smashing numbers becoming a super-hit film in Pakistan till now, despite late release and rising concern of Covid variants.

According to a box-office tracking portal in Pakistan called Entertainment Pakistan (EPK), despite the tough circumstances 'Chal Mere Putt 2' has consolidated its spot through the recent weeks and is expected to earn business around PKR 4.5 million each week. Overall this film has surpassed PKR 40 million mark in Pakistan till now. Film has even performed better than the new Hollywood release 'The Matrix Resurrection' and has chances to score big in upcoming weeks. Starring Zafr Khan, Itikhar Thakur, Nasir Chinyoti, Akram Udas, Agha Majid and Ruby Anum from Pakistani Punjabi theatre, 'ChalMera Putt 2' has a rating of 9/10 on IMDB Charts. — APP

Tanzara Gallery organizes exhibition

ISLAMABAD: Tanzara Art Gallery Thursday organized an exhibition titled 'Being and Becoming' by ZaamArif, an American-Pakistani contemporary artist residing and working in Houston, Texas aiming to showcasing the hidden talent of forthcoming artist.

Noshi Qadir, Tanzara Gallery official said the works in Zaams first solo exhibition titled 'Being and Becoming' at Tanzara were far more than a series of portraits. Each work was a deep exploration of the ontological existence of the human by the societal systems. He confronts it with a penetrating interpretation of human nature, transforming it into a visceral reality. The 21 oil and canvas paintings on display, explore much of the same ground. — APP



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi handing over the prize to the winner of "National Idea Bank" competition. — DNA

President for bridging science-legislators gap

The president said the development in this hi-tech era did not require any huge investment rather small startups could outshine the giants

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi Thursday called for bridging gap between science and legislators, the promotion of virtual education and positive use of social media tools to jump the bandwagon of technologically developed nations. "There is a gap between science and politicians. There is a gap between the decision makers and the beneficiaries of those decisions. There is a gap between the social media users and decisions makers on the matter," the president said. Addressing the Pakistan Innovate Conference and National Idea Bank Grand Finale, the president urged the universities to multiply

the number of their enrolment to feed the local as well as the international market. Referring to the available modern tools like Zoom and others, the president said in modern era, the massive knowledge and data existed in clouds accessible to all even beyond human consumption. Even he said the digital information tools were also challenging the formal educational structures as currently, everyone could get education while being at home. Even 80% dentistry could be learnt virtually, he added. The president said the development in this hi-tech era did not require any huge investment rather

small startups could outshine the giants.

He said though Pakistan had lagged behind the race of technology, however, the country could join the league by nurturing ideas coming through the National Ideas Bank. Citing Pakistan's youth bulge, the president said many countries wanted to absorb tech graduates from the market which necessitated the universities to increase the number of their students. He said by 2030, the world would need around 80 million cyber security experts for it being a subject of modern day warfare. He said in the past, Pakistan had lost

around 95% expert minds like doctors and engineers to other countries in absence of the institutions to absorb them.

President Alvi earlier distributed cash prizes and shields among 18 toppers of the competition who were shortlisted from 21,000 aspirants in six categories including education, e-commerce, agriculture, natural resources, and construction. He said the technology had also made it easier for the people to sell their products as the whole international market was accessible to them. He said in modern world everything involved artificial intelligence, and asked the youngsters not to be

shy of modifying the existing ideas. Referring to Pakistan's success story of handling the COVID-19, the president said the country maintained balance between lives and livelihood on the basis of data analysis and compassion towards the needy. Calling fake news a threat to the society, the president urged the youth to ignore fake social media messages to help build a mature society. Appreciating the efforts of the National Idea Bank, the president said no one could deter a nation from progress if it foresaw the future trends and needs. Chief Architect of National Idea Bank Dr Azam Arastu

appreciated President Alvi for taking the initiative of the Ideas Bank as the first phase had reached completion. He also thanked Sir Syed University for being host of the competition which was judged by 300 judges from Pakistan, US, UK, Canada and the Middle East. Chancellor of Sir Syed University Javed Anwar in the next phase, the venture capitalists would be convinced to fund the ideas for their execution as well as marketing. He said in 2021, venture capitalists had invested around \$315 million in Pakistan as the country was rich with immense opportunities and potential. — APP

One dacoit killed in exchange of firing with police

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A dacoit Faiz Mohammad Khan was killed while another Sardar Khan received injuries in the exchange of firing between police and dacoits in the G-13 area of Golra Police Station. According to a spokesperson, the gang was involved in domestic robberies and other recent incidents in Karachi Company and G-10 areas. The accused Sardar Khan and Faiz Ahmed were arrested dozens of times by the police in various cases including car theft, firing on police personnel, terrorism, and embezzlement.

The gang of two was wanted in dozens of domestic robberies and car thefts in different parts of the federal capital. The vehicle recovered from the possession of robbers was used in recent domestic robberies and other incidents. Weapons, tracker deactivating jammers, virtual immobilizers, and other devices were found in the vehicle.

Output of LCVs increase 68.66% in five months

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The production of Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) has witnessed 68.66 percent increase during the first five months of the financial year 2021-22 against the output of the same period of last fiscal year. As many as 11,734 LCVs were manufactured during July-November (2021-22) as compared to the production of 6,957 LCVs during July-November (2020-21), showing an increase of 68.66 percent, according to official data by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

During the period under review, the production of trucks also rose from 1,326 units to 2,355 units, showing an increase of 77.60 percent while the production of tractors increased by 15.72 percent, going up from 19,041 units to 22,034 units. The production of jeeps and cars increased to 90,937 units during the period under review from 53,779 units during last year.

However, the production of buses witnessed a decrease of 12.45 percent as it went down from 233 units last year to 204 units whereas the production of motorcycles also dipped from 1,033,648 units to 999,648 units, showing decrease of 3.32 percent. Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the production of LCVs surge by 22.78 percent, from 2,028 units in November 2020 to 2,490 units in November 2021. The production of trucks increased by 45.62 percent, going up from 274 units to 399 units while the production of tractors also rose to 4,607 units from 3,607 units. The manufacturing of jeeps and cars surge to 17,651 units from 12,235 units, showing growth of 44.27 percent. However, the production of buses witnessed decline of 39.73 percent from 233 units to 204 units whereas the production of motorcycles also decreased by 4.63 percent from 226,418 units to 215,946 units during the period under review.

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Thursday released 40017 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 50082 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in the Indus River at Tarbela Dam was 1449.09 feet, which was 57.09 feet higher than its dead level 1392 feet.

IRSA releases 40017 cusecs water

Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 15700 and 14000 cusecs respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1139.50 feet, which was 89.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1050 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded 8480 and 115 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa and Sukkur was recorded as 28191, 24263 and 17780 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from the Kabul River a total of 7400 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 18502 cusecs released from the Chenab River at Marala. — APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kyrgyz Republic to Pakistan Ulanbek Totuiev met with the member of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Farah Azeem Shah. — DNA

COMSTECH-LRBT Team departs for Niger for training of Doctors

DNA

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH and LRBT in collaboration with Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and coordination of Pakistani mission in Niger has scheduled to arrange eye camps for cataract surgeries and training workshops in Niamey, Niger during January 31 to February 07, 2022, said Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator

General COMSTECH in a press conference. He said, a seven-member team of experienced ophthalmologists from Layton Rahmatulla Benevolent Trust (LRBT), Pakistan, has been selected for the task. The team during its visit, will conduct more than 400 cataract surgeries, examination of post-operation patients and workshop for training of local doctors on cataract surgery with phacoemulsification using

the operation theater and other facilities available at tertiary hospital of Niamey. Apart from clinics, Pakistani team will also launch public awareness campaign about eye health and will visit local schools as well. All the consumables and medicines for these eye camps will be transported from Pakistan. Prof. Choudhary said that a COMSTECH and LRBT team visited Niamey during third week of November last

year and conducted 25 cataract surgeries, serviced and repaired all the faulty equipment and made it available for screening and cataract surgeries. He said that the Niger authorities are satisfied with the performance of COMSTECH-LRBT team and requesting for regular visits of the ophthalmologists to conduct eye surgeries. These visits are part of COMSTECH program of health and higher education for Africa.

Punctuality of passenger trains improves

ISLAMABAD: The punctuality ratio of Pakistan Railways passenger trains improved by 83 percent in first six months of financial year 2021-2022 due to untiring efforts of the management. "With the punctuality of trains and concrete measures taken by the government, over 20 million passengers have been added in the system, which is an ample proof of department's achievement," an official in the Ministry of Railways told media.

He said the punctuality of passenger trains, was 71 percent in 2017-18, 70 percent in 2018-19 and only 40 percent in tenures of the previous governments which was now improving day-by-day on the directives of Minister for Railways Azam Khan Swati. "The quality of food served in the passenger trains had been improved considerably as it had been officially supervised by the authorities that passengers should get pure and quality food on the trains," he added. To a question, he said in pursuance to the policy of the Federal Government, Pakistan Railways had outsourced some of its trains under Public Private Policy (PPP).

According to policy decision given by Railways Board, Ministry of Railways, the bids more than the Railways earning would be accepted, he added. He said it was quite evident that the decision had been made to minimize the loss of Pakistan Railways by bridging the gap between earning and expenditure. Hence under this policy, Pakistan Railways had introduced outsourcing of commercial management of passenger and freight trains, luggage/brake vans, dining cars etc. He said Pakistan Railways was getting fixed amount per annum from these activities through Private Sector without any complicity. The official said a number of steps had been initiated by the incumbent government to rationalize and improve the affairs of Pakistan Railways including the hiring of a new Chief finance Officer (CFO) from private sector to ensure strict financial discipline in Pakistan Railways. — APP

Gov't can opt Plan B to execute ML-1 project

Ministry official said the government to govt framework agreement between Pakistan and China had also been signed so, "as soon as the loan agreement is signed, we will float tenders for the project within 50 days"

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Special Initiatives was informed on Thursday that the government was hopeful for successful outcome of its engagement with the Chinese authorities for early conclusion of the financial negotiations on construction of Main Line (ML-1) railway project under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

"We are 100 percent hopeful that the negotiations with China would yield positive results and work on the project would start soon, but in any case if the talks remain unsuccessful, the government will go to other countries to materialize the project plan," an official of the Planning Ministry Mr Imran, who looks after the railways matters told the committee. Plan B, he

said, to engage Russia or any other country to bring the investment for the multi-billion dollar project was also under consideration, he added. The meeting held here presided over by the Committee Chairman Junaid Akbar was informed that the government was fully prepared to float the tender for the project as it had completed all the initial requirements including preliminary design and the feasibility reports.

The ministry official said the government to government framework agreement between Pakistan and China had also been signed so, "as soon as the loan agreement is signed, we will float the tenders for the project within 50 days". Member of the Committee MNA Agha Rafiullah, expressing dissatisfaction over the progress of mega CPEC pro-

ject ML-1, said that so far there was zero progress on the project and urged to speed up the process so that physical work could be started as soon as possible. The ML-1 project which was included among the early harvest projects of the CPEC, faced inordinate delay due to some technical differences between the two sides. The meeting was informed that cost of original PC-1 of ML-1 project agreed during the previous government was US\$9.172 billion, but the incumbent government negotiated and managed to slash the project cost by 25% to \$6.8 billion.

It was further informed that the Chinese side was demanding that the project financing should be made totally in the Chinese currency RMB, however the financing committee from Pakistan side

which had met for around five times with the Chinese side so far, had proposed a mix of RMB and USD. Similarly the Chinese side had demanded that the total tenor (length of time until a loan is due) of the loan should be 15-20 years while the financing committee had proposed 25 years' tenor.

With regard to loan share, the financing committee had agreed to the Chinese demand of 85%. The Chinese side is also demanding that 1% interest rate on the loan was too low while the financing committee had proposed to keep the rate less than other CPEC projects (average 2.38%). The meeting was informed that under the project, the 1872 kilometers' long railway track from Karachi to Peshawar would be up-graded and doubled and the new track would be laid to improve

the speed limit of the passenger trains up to 160 kms per hour. Discussing on the comparison of cost of road projects executed under National Highway Authority (NHA) between the period 2013-18 and 2018-21, member of the committee from PML-N Shaza Fatima questioned that since the projects Lahore-Sialkot motorway (completed during previous government's tenure) and the Kharian-Sialkot motorway (to be completed under current government) were being executed by the same contractor FWO, so how was it possible that the per kilometer cost was around one billion rupees less in the later project. She said that in his every speech, the communication minister was claiming that his government managed to slash the per kilometer cost. — APP

Victory for environmentalists

ENVIRONMENTALISTS and labour rights activists celebrated a victory with the recent Lahore High Court (LHC) decision to declare the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) Act 2020 unconstitutional, which has, for now, put an end to the development of the ambitious and controversial Ravi River-front Urban Development Project. While the LHC has not yet released the judgement to the public, it is clear that there were several different angles to this controversy. It is ironic that this Project has been set aside, partly for environmental reasons, when its supposedly "green" policies were a major incentive behind the government pledging \$7 billion dollars to the endeavour. According to the government, the project, which extended for 46 kilometres and include housing, commercial areas, hospitals and schools, was a green initiative meant to improve Lahore's alarming environmental damage, that would be achieved by creating an urban centre on the outskirts of the provincial capital, that could ease pressure on overpopulated Lahore and support its urbanization.

However, while this may seem reasonable, from a practical perspective, these high-end, extremely expensive projects end up being counter-productive, especially when passed without their due diligence. For all its boasts of being a solution to Lahore's environment crises, the LHC, upon further inspection, found that the environmental impact assessment prepared by RUDA does not conform with Punjab's environmental protection regulations. The project, at this stage, seems too similar to other such commercial housing projects, which end up benefiting the upper classes, and not the vast majority that belong to lower-income groups, which are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

In order for the government to exercise the legal concept of "eminent domain"—the right to claim private property for public use—the court has recognised strict legal tests, which this project apparently does not pass. It is an important limit to set—if excessive powers of unrestricted eminent domain were granted to RUDA, it would have inculcated a precedent that could lead to land owned by farmers and labourers to be used by private developers for commercial purposes.

The case now rests with the Supreme Court, to which RUDA will in all likelihood go for appeal. It is good for the country and for the field of real estate that mega-projects must go through several regulations and approvals, since a poorly thought project can cause lasting damage to the country's environment.

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Banking problems

A new report issued by the Banking Mohtasib of Pakistan (BMP) exposed the banking sector to be operating rather inefficiently. With an increase of 46 percent in consumer complaints in 2021, the authorities must seriously reflect on where the system is lacking and how to improve performance. We are installing the latest technology, creating awareness about the importance of consumer service and ringing an alarm over the problem of fraud yet, there seems to be little progress.

While releasing the extensive data on various banks across Pakistan, the BMP highlighted at least 33,196 new complaints that were filed last year, 4167 of which were carried forward from the year before. These are not ordinary numbers and the fact that thousands were left unresolved previously is also concerning. It is reflective of the inability of the banking sector to not only cater to the needs of its customers but to deliver on the promises it makes in regards to providing financial help and security.

Just recently, countless banks—both from the private and public sector—were subject to a cyber-attack that resulted in sensitive customer information being leaked. Countless people were left financially insecure and were made susceptible to risks of theft and fraud. Many banks claimed that protective barriers were installed but clearly, they were not effective enough to prevent a cyberattack. Not only is this a problem in and of itself, but the attack further led to delays in transactions and left a gap in the provision of services for a considerably long time. This is unacceptable for a sector that is just as integral for the economy as it is for the life of an average customer.

There is an immediate need to get to the root of the matter and uncover why the banking sector is plagued with such serious issues. Some mode of accountability is needed for those who commit fraud and a better customer service must be emphasised upon.

The Middle East rush to bury hatchets: Is it sustainable? (1)

James Dorsey

Saudi Arabia granted visas to three Iranian diplomats to represent the Islamic Republic at the Jeddah-based, 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation

IT'S not for lack of trying. Gulf states and Egypt have ended their debilitating 3.5-year-long economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar. The UAE has moved at lightning speed to establish formal ties with Israel and repair relations with Iran and Turkey. Saudi Arabia is moving in the same direction, albeit in a more plodding manner. Meanwhile, Turkey is also seeking to repair its long-strained relations with Egypt and Israel. Recently, Saudi Arabia granted visas to three Iranian diplomats to represent the Islamic Republic at the Jeddah-based, 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In 2016, Saudi Arabia broke off diplomatic relations with Iran after its embassy in Tehran was attacked in protest against the execution of Saudi Shia activist and cleric Nimr al. Nimr. The recent granting of visas is expected to be followed by visits by officials to the two countries' shuttered embassies. Despite this, Ali Shihabi, an analyst with close ties to the Saudi leadership, said: "I understand that no real progress has been made, so there's no need to read too much into this. It was a goodwill Saudi gesture, particularly since the OIC is a multilateral organisation and they will (be) accredited to OIC, not Saudi."

Lock of confidence

An equally, if not more critical driver, is uncertainty and fear about the United States' future commitment to Middle East security, with no obvious replacement for the region's long-standing guarantor. The uncertainty is compounded by a fundamentally unchanged regional insistence on the need for a foreign security underwriter. The Gulf states lack confidence in their own capabilities and fear that a strong military could threaten the survival of dynastic regimes, giving countries like Turkey and Iran a strategic advantage.

If history is any indicator, Gulf uncertainty about US intentions may be exaggerated. A review of the last 50 years suggests that the Middle East has been there before, and nothing much has changed.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan brings to mind the American withdrawal from Vietnam, after which South-east Asia and the Middle East fretted about the

possibility of the United States walking away from its commitments. Similarly, the toppling in 1979 of the Shah of Iran, an icon of regional US power, caused heartburn in autocratic Gulf regimes - much like the popular Arab revolts in 2011, which toppled US allies such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as Washington kept its distance.

To be sure, that was then, and this is now. When America was defeated in Vietnam, and the Shah was overthrown, the Cold War had long settled in as a fact of life, unlike today's US-China rivalry, which has yet to find its moorings and guardrails.

Like the United States, neither China nor Russia wants to see a nuclear arms race in the region. "The only player who can be effective and bring about progress in the Vienna debates is the only player we do not hear his position on the Iranian issue, and that is China... China's influence on Iran's policy is probably the biggest influence a foreign power has over Iran. At no point in history did China (have the opportunity to) make such a contribution to world stability as it has today in Vienna," said Efraim Levy, the former head of Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service. He was referring to talks in Vienna to revive the 2015 international agreement that curbed the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme.

Inevitable arms race

Nevertheless, Beijing's efforts to moderate Iran's tougher negotiating stance since hardline President Ebrahim Raisi took office have not stopped it from enabling a ballistic arms race in the Middle East, in what Chinese scholars have described as a calibrated effort to maintain a regional balance of power. Iran has rejected US, Saudi, and Israeli demands to expand talks in Vienna to include ballistic missiles. US intelligence believes that recent satellite images show Saudi Arabia manufacturing ballistic missiles at a site constructed with the help of China.

Iran described the test-firing of 16 ballistic missiles of different classes during a military exercise in late December as a message to Israel. It was a response to Israeli threats to strike at Iranian nuclear facilities if the Vienna talks fail or produce a result that Israel deems sufficiently unsatisfactory to justify unilateral action. "Sixteen missiles aimed and annihilated the chosen target. In this exercise, part of the hundreds of Iranian missiles capable of destroying a country that dared to attack Iran were deployed," said armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has left no doubt that the Kingdom would develop a nuclear weapons capability if Iran did the same. Media reports last year suggested that Saudi Arabia had constructed, with the help of China, a facility for extracting uranium

yellowcake from uranium. Saudi Arabia denied the reports, but insisted that mining its uranium reserves was part of its economic diversification strategy. The Saudi energy ministry said it cooperated with China in unspecified aspects of uranium exploration.

To advance its pre-pandemic goal of constructing 16 nuclear reactors by 2030, Saudi Arabia established the King Abdullah Atomic and Renewable Energy City, which is devoted to research and application of nuclear technology. Concern about Saudi intentions has been fuelled by Riyadh's hesitancy in agreeing to US safeguards that would require it to sign the Additional Protocol of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), even though it has not ruled it out, among other things.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has insisted that it is unacceptable that nuclear-armed countries are preventing his nation from developing nuclear weapons. The odds are stacked against avoiding a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. To do so would require agreement on a regional nuclear-free zone. For that to happen, Israel would have to acknowledge its possession of nuclear weapons, something it has refused to do. While some Israelis have suggested that the reality of a nuclear Iran could persuade Israel to change course, there is no indication that the government is seriously considering doing so. A nuclear-free zone would also demand a restructuring of security arrangements in the Middle East to include a security pact that would include all parties, as well as an arms control regime. So far, that looks more like wishful thinking than anything parties would be willing to contemplate genuinely.

More likely, countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey will continue developing their domestic defence industries briskly. Moreover, any revival of the Iran nuclear accord would likely lift the ban on Iran's acquisition of conventional weapons, which in turn would accelerate the arms race as the Islamic Republic rushes to modernise and upgrade its military capabilities, which harsh sanctions have long hampered.

Analysts and policymakers have so far focused on Gulf states' efforts to diversify their sources for arms acquisition, but largely overlooked their endeavour to expand the number of countries with bases in the region. So far, that has been limited to French, British, and Turkish bases, and a Chinese facility in Djibouti.

Some analysts suggest that a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran could alter the dynamic of a Middle East in which Israel has diplomatic relations with the Gulf and other Arab states. These analysts argue that Israel may see the détente as a

threat to its emerging role as an anti-Iranian bulwark that would allow it to expand military and intelligence operations in countries from which it was either barred or limited in the deployment of its capabilities. "While (former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu used the notion of 'containing Iran' as a primary justification for the Abraham Accords, the simultaneous warming of ties between Iran and Gulf states will ultimately dilute Israel's role, undermining its argument that Iran is a rogue state and regional destabiliser," said scholars Mahjoub Zweiri and Lakshmi Venugopal Menon.

Walking a tightrope

The UAE has sought to counter the potential threat of Iran disrupting the Emirates' rapprochement with Israel by pledging that it would not allow the Jewish state to build security-related installations on its territory. The Emirati pledge, in a suggestion that some elements of Middle East détente may be more sustainable than others, did not stop UAE air force commander General Ibrahim Nasser al-Alawi from visiting Israel, or the Emirati navy from participating in a joint naval exercise with Israeli, Bahraini, and US vessels. Similarly, speaking at a conference in November 2021, Major General Amikam Norkin, the commander of the Israeli Air Force, suggested, in reference to the UAE and Bahrain, the possibility of cooperation in anti-drone and ballistic missile defence. Israel could "become a key player and asset for the countries that are under threat of Iranian drones, along with developing needed strategic depth in the continuing campaign against Iran," Major-General Norkin said. He appeared to be proposing the deployment of Israeli detection systems in the Gulf that would also work against ballistic missiles.

Defiance and dissent

A burgeoning arms race and concerns that a failure by the United States, Europe, China, Russia, and Iran to agree in Vienna could significantly heighten regional tensions and provoke a military conflagration are just two of the powder kegs that could make Middle Eastern détente falter. In a review of 2021, Middle East scholar Ross Harrison noted that wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen have created "security dilemmas and conflict traps that made the hurdles to getting to cooperation insuperable, even for actors who might be predisposed to cooperate... Transitioning from where Syria is today to a more stable, inclusive, and de-militarised country free of outside actors seems years, if not decades, away." Mr. Harrison noted that two decades after ripping itself apart, Lebanon risked slipping back into civil war.

(To be continued)

Why quality must trump quantity in higher education

Ishtiaq Ahmed



The HEC was unable to ensure compliance of its quality standards even by existing universities, where faculties, departments and institutes multiplied, alongside postgraduate programs

THE reckless expansion of public and private universities along with their affiliated colleges and sub-campuses, and the consequent prevalence of their non-productive and non-accredited academic units and programs, has seriously compromised the quality of higher education in the country. The consistent erosion of quality standards in teaching, research and relevance of degrees is rooted in the Higher Education Commission's preference for numbers in its founding decade. By 2002, when the HEC was established, there were

42 universities, including 10 in the private sector, but the quality of education was reasonably maintained. With almost 1,200 percent increase in government funding in the initial three years, the HEC began compromising quality by sponsoring the mushrooming growth of university in the name of access. The same pattern persisted in the award of largely wasteful foreign scholarships and research grants. Scores of unproductive research centres were set up. The faculty also began producing useless publications for self-promotion or supervising unauthorised postgraduate research for monetary gains. The HEC was unable to ensure compliance of its quality standards even by existing universities, where faculties, departments and institutes multiplied, alongside postgraduate programs. This multiplication drive put considerable demands on meagre resources. In many cases, the professional bodies refused to accredit new departments and degrees programs. Public sector universities in Punjab opened several official sub-campuses and Private-Public Partnership sub-campuses without HEC permission. Numerous college affiliations were granted without vetting faculty and infrastructure requirements. The private sector replicated this trend more aggressively, by opening new faculties, departments, programs and sub-campuses in violation of HEC rules, regulations and quality parameters.

By 2018, the number of universities and degree awarding institutions reached 186. It is true that once in a while the HEC or judiciary held the violators to account - for example, by discontinuing unauthorised postgraduate programs and closing down unlawful PPP sub-campuses at public sector universities. However, tangible effort to replace quantity with quality began only in 2019 when the HEC made its institu-

tional evaluation process more stringent, slashed wasteful expenditure on foreign scholarships and research grants, and implemented revised criteria for research publications.

More importantly, the HEC led by Dr Tariq Banuri initiated a wide-ranging academic restructuring program, while steering a successful transition to online education amid the global pandemic. Consequently, new policies for undergraduate and PhD programs were unveiled and the outmoded bachelor's and master's program was replaced with an Associate Degree Program, in consultation with the vice chancellors of public and private sector universities. Their salient features are worth mentioning.

The Undergraduate Policy spells out the learning objectives of undergraduate education based on competencies such as knowledge, skills, and professional and inter-personal attributes. The learning objectives are divided into three broad domains: general competency (breadth: general education); disciplinary competency (depth: knowledge of discipline/Major); and practical competency (understanding of professional and social environment). General education includes STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) subjects as well as key disciplines of social sciences, arts and humanities. The policy seeks to raise the quality of education by creating a common understanding of what needs to be taught, ensuring that universities recognize the broad range of competencies to be imparted, encouraging students to think creatively about their choice of profession, and emphasizing practical learning.

The Undergraduate Policy also incorporates the Associate Degree Program for the initial two years. It is designed in such a way that its credits overlap

with those of the BS program, enabling the students to move from AD to BS and vice versa. With the afore-mentioned three competencies, the AD Program aims to equip the graduates with the basic skills of employment in a variety of professions. Together, the two programs provide the human capital required for skilful employment within two to four years of student enrolment at a university.

Of late, predatory business interests have colluded with parliamentarians to bypass the provincial HEC and Higher Education Department and obtain charters for private universities through the private member bills. Since June 2021, the Punjab Assembly has passed 14 such bills and made them into law. More are on the way. The same trend is visible in amending the existing private University Acts, to increase their faculties, departments and degree programs. While newly established public sector universities remain dysfunctional due to resource crunch, the existing ones are well on their way to expand further at the expense of quality. What kind of university graduates the renewed focus on numbers, without any regulatory control by the HEC or provincial bodies, will produce is anybody's guess?

Thankfully, the honourable Islamabad High Court has finally decided to reinstate Dr Banuri as HEC chairman, rekindling the hope that pioneering reforms of the higher education sector under his leadership will see the light of the day. He needs more time for the purpose, which will be clear when the honourable court issues its detailed judgement. Without these reforms, the ugly numbers game, or the undue focus on access and quantity at the expense of quality and relevance of higher education, will produce an unbearable national cost.

Briefs

Japan beat
China in WC
qualifier

NEWS DESK

SAITAMA: Japan beat China 2-0 on Thursday to continue their resurgence in World Cup qualifying with their fourth straight win. Yuya Osako buried a first-half penalty to put the four-time Asian champions in control in Saitama, north of Tokyo, before Junya Ito doubled their lead after the break. The win meant Japan stayed second in Group B behind leaders Saudi Arabia, who they host at the same stadium next Tuesday.

But Australia remained one point behind Japan in the battle for the two automatic qualifying places for Qatar, after a comfortable 4-0 home win over Vietnam.

Japan took a 13th-minute lead after China defender Wang Shenchao slid in to block Junya Ito's cross but hit the ball with his arm.

Osako made no mistake from the penalty spot despite China goalkeeper Yan Junling diving the right way. The hosts pressed home their advantage in the 61st minute when Ito rose to head home substitute Yuta Nakayama's cross.

Ukrainian
soldier kills 5
in Dnipro

KIEV: A young conscript allegedly opened fired on fellow Ukrainian soldiers in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, killing five people and injuring five others on Thursday, police and the interior ministry said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has ordered a probe into the incident. He called the mass shooting "terrible" and offered condolences to the victims' families and friends. He was captured Thursday morning after going on the run in the town of Pidhorodne some 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) north of the mass shooting. The conscript allegedly took an AK47 and ammunition from the armory before shooting at colleagues just before 4 a.m. local time (0200 GMT). Twenty-two soldiers were on guard duty at the time of the incident. Two soldiers were able to flee and contact police and an ambulance. What is known about the shootings? Ukraine's Interior Ministry wrote on Telegram that the shootings occurred "on the territory of the Yuzhny Machine-Building Plant Yuzhmash." — APP

West
threatens...

FROM PAGE 01

direct to Germany under the Baltic Sea. It circumvents Ukraine, which relies on existing pipelines for income and is under threat from Russian forces. Tens of thousands of Russian troops have massed on Ukraine's borders in recent weeks, prompting fears of an invasion - despite repeated Russian denials of any plan to attack.

On Wednesday the US rejected Russia's key demand to bar Ukraine from joining the Nato military alliance, while offering Moscow a "serious diplomatic path forward". President Vladimir Putin is currently assessing the proposals, his spokesman said on Thursday. The 1,225km (760-mile) pipeline took five years to build and cost some \$11bn (£8bn). But as yet it has not started operating, as regulators said in November it does not comply with German law and suspended its approval.

Speaking to broadcaster NPR, US state department spokesman Ned Price said his country would work with Germany to ensure the project did not go ahead if Russia invaded. "I want to be very clear: if Russia invades Ukraine one way or another, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward," he said, but added that he was "not going to get into the specifics" of how it would be stopped. Germany's foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, later told the German parliament that Western allies are "working on a strong package of sanctions" covering aspects "including Nord Stream 2", promising serious consequences for Russia if it were to attack.

It came after the German ambassador to the US Emily Haber tweeted that "nothing will be off the table, including Nord Stream 2" if Russia violated "Ukraine's sovereignty". — News Desk



KARACHI: Players of Multan Sultans celebrating after taking a wicket in a PSL-7 opener against Karachi Kings. — DNA

Barty to face Collins in
Australian Open final

SPORTS DESK

MELBOURNE: Ash Barty was the crowd favorite at Melbourne Park long before she ended a 42-year drought by reaching the Australian Open final. Danielle Collins said it'll be "spectacular" to take on the women's No. 1-ranked player in the final of her home Grand Slam event on Saturday. The 28-year-old American got a little taste of what to expect in her first Grand Slam final as she left the court on Thursday following her 6-4, 6-1 semifinal win over seventh-seeded Iga Swiatek. Barty beat Madison Keys 6-1, 6-3 in 62 minutes in the first of the semifinals, and Collins wrapped up the night by beating 2020 French Open champion Swiatek in 78 minutes. Predictably, there were boos after Collins finished her on-court TV interview. Not too loud or long, but an indication of things to come nonetheless. Barty won her first major title on clay at

Roland Garros in 2019 and her second on grass at Wimbledon last year. Now that she's become the first Australian woman into the final here since Wendy Turnbull in 1980, Barty has a good chance to claim her first on a hard court. She's only too aware, though, that no Australian woman since Chris O'Neil in 1978 has won the singles title here. "As an Aussie, we're exceptionally spoiled we get to play in our own backyard," the 25-year-old Barty said. "Now we have a chance to play for a title. It's unreal." Barty lost to eventual champion Sofia Kenin in 2020 the last time she reached the Australian Open semifinals. She said she's learned from that kind of pressure as much as winning other Grand Slams. "Absolutely embrace it," she said of the home expectations. "You have to. It's fun. It's brilliant to be playing in the business end of your home Slam. I'm not gonna lie about that - it's amazing." Keys is just the latest in a line of rivals to explain how she had few an-

swers to Barty's slice backhand and wide variety of services.

Barty hit 20 winners to only eight for Keys, who was playing in the Australian Open semifinals for the first time since 2015. She lost that year to eventual champion Serena Williams, who was the last No. 1 seed to win the women's title at Melbourne Park.

Barty converted four of her six break-point opportunities and saved the only two break points she faced on her serve against the 2017 U.S. Open champion runner-up. In six matches so far at the tournament, she has dropped one service game. The 27th-seeded Collins relies on a power game and imposes a relentless energy on every contest.

Her forehand cross-court winner to set up her first match points was typical of her semifinal form. She hit 27 winners and had only 13 unforced errors. She opened each set with a break of serve and raced to 4-0 leads both times. Collins delayed her professional career by playing in the U.S. college system, and said it gave her a good grounding in handling what she calls "adverse" crowds. Playing in empty stadiums during the COVID-19 pandemic has given her an appreciation of crowds, whether the fans support her, are against her or are neutral.

"That's something that I really thrive in, whether I have a full crowd going for me or whether I have the opposite," she said. "I really just love the energy. I'm just really excited to go out there and compete. I realize that there is going to be a lot of people supporting Ash. It's all in good spirit."

Kazakh president
says situation
stabilized

FOREIGN DESK

NUR-SULTAN: The situation in Kazakhstan has fully stabilized while law and order have been restored after the unrest of early January, the country's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said in a statement on Thursday.

Tokayev held a Security Council meeting where he said "the situation in the country has been fully stabilized and law and order have been restored," according to the presidential press service. "All measures are being taken to increase the protection of individuals, society, and the state," he was quoted as saying. Tokayev also ordered immediate measures to strengthen national security.

The president said the government must draw lessons from the events that took place, and that the modernized national security system must be prepared to deal with any challenges. "We need to take measures so criminals and terrorists don't overrun our cities anymore, disrupt the peaceful lives of people and their families or threaten the government," he said. "That's what the reorganization of the security system seeks to achieve." Protests erupted in several Kazakh cities in early January, with attacks on police and the military. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev described the events as an attempted coup. The situation was stabilized by January 7 while the emergency situation lasted in some regions until January 19. As a result of the events, 225 people were killed and more than 4,500 injured.

Powell century
powers WI to
win over England

LONDON: A blistering 107 from Rowan Powell and Nicholas Pooran's half-century helped West Indies secure a 20-run victory over England in Bridgetown on Wednesday and take a 2-1 lead in the five-match Twenty20 International series. After losing the second match by one run, the hosts posed a challenging 224-5 in 20 overs with Powell's 53-ball knock including 10 sixes and four boundaries.

He combined well with Pooran, who scored 70 from 43 balls, as the pair put on 122 runs for the third wicket after England won the toss and opted to field. England, who were without injured skipper Eoin Morgan and handed debuts to three players, managed 204-9 in 20 overs, including a battling 73 by Tom Banton and 57 by Phil Salt lower down the order in his first T20 international game. West Indies paceman Romario Shepherd took 3-59 while skipper Kieron Pollard claimed two wickets to seal the win. "Kudos to Rowan. He came in and took his chance," Pollard said. "We had a good discussion about our batting and what we wanted to do. It was a complete game, I'm happy for the guys."

"The challenge is coming back again, we want to replicate that performance." England stand-in skipper Moeen Ali said the side had missed Morgan's influence but looked forward to the final two matches on Saturday and Sunday. — APP

Tunisian opposition leader
warns of social explosion

TUNIS: The speaker of Tunisia's suspended parliament, who also heads the main opposition party, warned on Thursday of a social situation that "threatens to explode" six months after what he calls a coup by the president.

Rached Ghannouchi, head of the moderate Islamist Ennahda, said President Kais Saied's suspension of parliament, assumption of executive powers and move to rewrite the constitution had isolated Tunisia.

Ghannouchi was speaking in an online meeting of some parliament members, the first since Saied froze the chamber in July and a more assertive sign of defiance against the president. Members from Ennahda, Heart of Tunisia and Karima parties, as well as at least one independent parliamentarian, attended. Several other parties boycotted the meeting.

"The coup led to stifling international isolation... price inflation and a social situation that threatens to explode," Ghannouchi said.



The meeting was to mark the anniversary of the 2014 democratic constitution, which Saied says he will replace through a process that has started with an online consultation.

Tunisia faces a looming public finances crisis after years of stagnation but pain-

ful reforms needed to secure international assistance risk sparking social unrest. Unemployment is running at about 18%, up from 15% in 2019, but is far worse in Tunisia's impoverished interior, where it exceeds 30% in some cities.

Anger over economic conditions has frequently boiled over into street protests or clashes between demonstrators and police during the decade since Tunisia's revolution.

Meanwhile, Saied has failed to attract bilateral help from foreign states, with donors demanding a more inclusive approach to both political change and economic reforms needed to win aid. Saied has said there is no going back to the suspended parliament and said last month that he expected an election in December to replace the chamber.

The government he appointed in September has announced a public finance law that includes some of the reforms sought by donors, but which has been criticised by opposition parties. — APP

China demands US halt Olympics 'interference'

The boycott does not prevent U.S. athletes from taking part in the Games, which are being held under strict anti-pandemic rules

AGENCIES

BEIJING: China is demanding the U.S. end "interference" in the Beijing Winter Olympics, which begin next week, in an apparent reference to a diplomatic boycott imposed by Washington and some of its allies.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi made the demand in a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday Beijing time, according to the Foreign Ministry. The U.S. has said it will not send dignitaries to the Games, which open Feb. 4, in a protest over China's detention of more than 1 million Uyghur Muslims in the northwestern region of Xinjiang,

along with crackdowns on human rights elsewhere in the country. The boycott does not prevent U.S. athletes from taking part in the Games, which are being held under strict anti-pandemic rules. China has also protested what it says are calls within the State Department to withdraw staff and their dependents from the embassy and consulates around China over the tightening restrictions.

According to a news release posted on the ministry's website Thursday, Wang also called for an end to U.S. support for self-governing Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory. China's growing assertiveness directed at the U.S. has extended



as far as relations with Central American nations and as close as Beijing's maritime claims in the South and East China Seas. At a monthly briefing Thursday, Chinese Defense Ministry spokes-

person Wu Qian responded to a question about U.S. military movements in the Asia-Pacific region by saying China's armed forces were "fully prepared to deal with any foreign provocations or emergency situations" that arise during the Olympics. The U.S. says it doesn't recognize most of China's claims in the strategically crucial South China Sea and routinely sails warships and flies planes near Chinese-held islands.

Foreign Minister Wang also complained that the administration of President Joe Biden has maintained tough political and economic policies enacted earlier despite its expressed wishes for a less confrontational relationship. "The U.S. continuously puts for-

ward wrong words and actions toward China, causing new conflicts in relations between the two countries," Wang was quoted as saying.

A brief statement from the State Department said that Blinken and Wang exchanged views on how to manage strategic risk, health security and climate change. It did not mention the Olympics or Taiwan. Blinken underscored the economic and security risks posed by Russian aggression against Ukraine, the statement said.

The phone call follows the appointment of veteran diplomat Nicholas Burns as the new U.S. ambassador to China, a position that has remained empty for more than a year.

Reforms will
revolutionize
judiciary: PM

FROM PAGE 01

many earlier nations were destroyed where there was separate laws for the powerful and the weak.

Imran Khan said ensuring rule of law would encourage foreign investors and the overseas Pakistanis to invest their money in Pakistan. Federal Law Minister Barrister Farogh Naseem said criminal procedure code needed a change as per requirements and mentioned that over 700 amendments had completely overhauled the existing legal system. He mentioned that formation of a statute of an independent prosecution service, forensic laboratory and prison rules were significant reforms.

He said law was made for mandatory dispensation of budget to police station to meet the expenses of investigation, besides deputing sub-inspector at police stations with preferably bachelor degree. He said the trial judge would be made answerable before the High Court for not finalizing the case in nine months. The court can freeze any documents including identity card, bank accounts etc of an absconder, he added.

He urged the lawyers to support the reform of electronic recording of witness, whether in any language, to ensure accuracy and expedition of cases.

In cases of personal offences including murder or rape, the maker of the video will not be made mandatory to appear before law to render witness as proof of incident, he said. He emphasized implementation of civil law reforms with an effective role of judiciary, benches and prosecutors and investigators. Parliamentary Secretary Maleeka Bokhari said over 700 amendments made in the criminal procedure code was a milestone of the government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and would ensure prompt delivery of justice.

PM Khan's
China visit...

FROM PAGE 01

countries boycotted the Beijing Olympics. Besides Olympics, he said, discussions would take place in line with the consultations of the special task force on boosting Pak-China trade volume and economic stability. The foreign minister mentioned that the task force headed by the prime minister met several times, conducted sessions with stakeholders and formulated a policy guideline on exploiting trade potential between the two countries. During his stay in Beijing, he said, the prime minister will meet the Chinese president and the premier.

He said economic diplomacy was the focus of Pakistan's foreign policy to ensure prosperity of the common man.

To achieve this goal, he said, investment and bilateral trade with other countries particularly China has special significance, he added. On hosting 48th meeting of OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) Council of Foreign Ministers on March 22-23, he said the meeting of OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir had also been added to the schedule to discuss the situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

FM Qureshi
visits...

FROM PAGE 01

geopolitical/ geostrategic environment and Regional Security were discussed during the meeting.

In the realm of forthcoming visit of HE Prime Minister of Pakistan and Foreign Minister to China, Chief of the Air Staff shared the *PAF Modernization Program* through smart inductions and collaboration in the domain of cutting edge niche technologies with Pakistan's time tested friend China. Mutual collaboration between the two neighbouring countries in other domains also came under discussion.

Foreign Minister lauded the matchless professionalism of PAF while assuring full support of the Government to modernize PAF as a Next Generation Air Force. He duly acknowledged PAF's role in providing an impeccable defence of the country while living up to the Qaid's vision of being an Air Force *Second to None.*

Briefs

Putin accepts
Erdogan's
invitation
to visit

FOREIGN DESK

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has accepted the invitation of his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan to visit Turkey, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov announced on Thursday.

The meeting will be held when the pandemic situation and the schedules of the two leaders allow for it, Peskov told reporters at a daily briefing in Moscow.

"President Putin gratefully accepted this invitation. And they agreed that as soon as a) the epidemiological situation and b) the schedules allow, he will definitely take advantage of this invitation," Peskov said.

Peskov noted that due to the pandemic there has been "a certain pause" in holding meetings of the intergovernmental commission and the High-Level Cooperation Council, which is headed by the two presidents.

The topic was discussed several times in recent presidential contacts, and Erdogan said he was ready to host all these events in Turkey, Peskov said. Erdogan and Putin periodically speak by phone and have had a number of mutual visits in recent years.

Jordan kills
27 smugglers
on Syria
border

AMMAN: The Jordanian army said on Thursday that troops killed 27 drug smugglers trying to enter the country from neighboring Syria. The operation, the largest of its kind since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, was carried out simultaneously at several points on the Jordan-Syria border, according to an army statement.

Jordanian forces thwarted several attempts to smuggle drugs from Syria, seizing large quantities of narcotics, it added. The military said it applied the "newly established rules of engagement against smugglers who were supported by other armed groups." "At least 27 smugglers were killed and several more injured in the operations, while the rest of them fled back into Syria," the army said.

Jordan has enhanced border vigilance and directed troops to toughen rules of engagement with smugglers due to an increasing number of such incidents over the past year. Two Jordanian military personnel, including an officer, were killed in clashes with smugglers earlier this month. - APP

UK PM
authorized
Afghan animal
evacuation

LONDON: New emails released by the British parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee suggest that Prime Minister Boris Johnson personally intervened to assist an animal charity, to the alleged detriment of British nationals and Afghan civilians, despite his previous public rejection of the accusation. One of the emails, dated Aug. 25, 2021, was from an official working for Foreign Office Minister Lord Goldsmith to the Foreign Office's special cases team regarding an unnamed animal charity.

"Equivalent charity Nowzad, run by an ex-Royal Marine, has received a lot of publicity and the PM has just authorised their staff and animals to be evacuated, (animal charity - name redacted) are hoping to be treated in the same capacity," it said.

It is the passing mention of Nowzad that has led to accusations that the prime minister lied.

Last year, Raphael Marshall, a whistle-blower from the Foreign Office, gave written evidence to parliament that the department received an "instruction" from Johnson to use "considerable capacity" to help evacuate animals in the care of Nowzad.

"There was a direct trade-off between transporting Nowzad's animals and evacuating British nationals and Afghan evacuees, including Afghans who had served with British soldiers," said Marshall. - Agencies

We will carry out all reforms in Uzbekistan

Based on the provisions of the new strategy, a draft state program "Year of Ensuring Human Interests and Development of the Mahalla" was also developed

NEWS DESK

TASHKENT: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev chaired a videoconference to discuss the New Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022-2026 and its implementation this year. Today, our 35 million multinational people live with the great goal of achieving a standard of living corresponding to developed countries, building a just, free and prosperous society. Therefore, during the presidential elections last year, Shavkat Mirziyoyev put forward the ideas "In the name of the honor and dignity of man" and "The state for the people." In order to implement them, based on the opinions and proposals of the population, the Development Strategy for 2022-2026 has been developed. This policy document determines what will be the development trends of our country in the near and medium term, sets priorities in this direction. Particular attention is paid to ensuring the continuity and continuity of reforms on the basis of the principle "From Action Strategy to Development Strategy". Based on the provisions of the new strategy, a draft state program "Year of Ensuring Human Interests and Development of the Mahalla" was also developed. During the open discussion of this project, more than 17 thousand proposals were received from the public. They were classified and summarized, the draft program was supplemented with more than 300 initiatives.

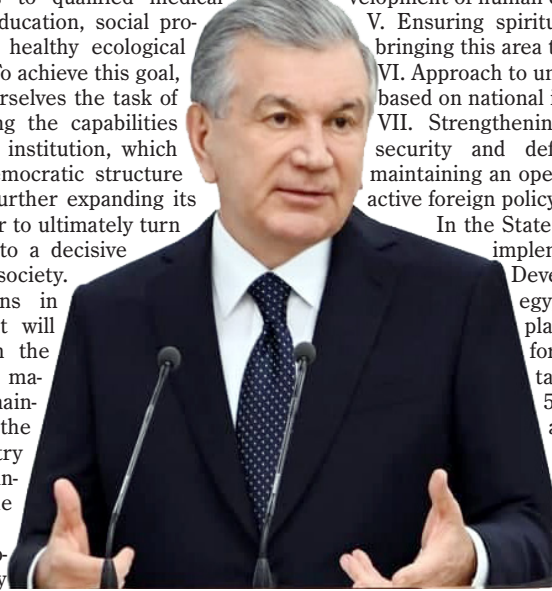
The head of our state thanked our people for such activity, trust and participation in reforms.

"The concept of honor and dignity of a person is not some kind of abstract, pompous concept for us. When we talk about this, we mean, first of all, ensuring a peaceful and secure life for every citizen, his fundamental rights and freedoms. By human dignity, we mean the creation of decent living conditions and modern infrastructure for every citizen, access to qualified medical care, quality education, social protection, and a healthy ecological environment. To achieve this goal, we have set ourselves the task of effectively using the capabilities of the mahalla institution, which is a unique democratic structure in the world, further expanding its powers in order to ultimately turn the mahalla into a decisive link in our society. If peace reigns in the mahalla, it will be peaceful in the country. If the mahalla is well-maintained, then the whole country will be well-maintained," the President said. The development strategy

consists of 7 priority areas and 100 goals. This: I. Building a people's state by ensuring the interests of man and the further development of a free civil society; II. The transformation of the principles of justice and the rule of law into the main and necessary condition for the development of the country; III. Development of the national economy, ensuring high rates of its growth; IV. Implementation of fair social policy, development of human capital. V. Ensuring spiritual development, bringing this area to a new stage; VI. Approach to universal problems based on national interests; VII. Strengthening the country's security and defense capability, maintaining an open, pragmatic and active foreign policy.

In the State Program for the implementation of the Development Strategy, 398 events are planned this year, for the implementation of which 55 trillion soums and 11.7 billion dollars will be allocated. At the meeting, the head of our state stressed that all efforts

and allocated funds should reach each mahalla and serve to improve the well-being of families. The President elaborated on each of the seven priorities and outlined the most important aspects. In particular, the need was emphasized for turning the mahalla into a supporting link in public administration and control, improving the system of dialogue with the people, and implementing regional programs taking into account public opinion. It was noted that by further expanding the opportunities for women to receive education and work, unemployment among them can be halved. Speaking about the second direction, the head of state pointed out that one of the main tasks is to become one of the countries with a high "rule of law index". To this end, a new system will be created to guarantee the rights of citizens and entrepreneurs through the reliable protection of property and the expansion of the powers of administrative courts. Traffic management will be fully digitalized to create safer conditions on the roads, a sharp reduction in road traffic accidents and deaths, and control and accountability in the field of driver education will be strengthened. The head of our state touched upon the importance of the accelerated development of the national economy. - It's no secret that today the most important, if you like, paramount task is to preserve peace and stability in society, strengthen our independence, ensure the territorial integrity of our country, the inviolability of our borders.



Ambassador Sajjad visits school of beauty in Minsk



DNA

MINSK: Ambassador Sajjad Haider Khan visited National School of Beauty and met with the Director General Ms. Bozhena Eremich. The meeting was also attended

by Mr. Dmitry Vrublevsky and Ms. Elena Kulmachevskaya. The Ambassador briefed the school management about the Fashion Design institutions and the emerging fashion industry in Pakistan. He particularly mentioned about the con-

tributions of Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design, Lahore, graduate of which are currently setting new standards of cloth/costume designing within the country. The parties discussed the possibilities of cooperation between the National

School of Beauty and Pakistani fashion designers. The Belarusian National School of Beauty was established in 1996 and has been effectively promoting fashion scene in the country through training the youth and holding contests and fashion shows.

Karabakh culture highlighted in book

NEWS DESK

BAKU: Icharisheher Historical-Architectural Reserve has presented a book "Karabakh. From our historical and Cultural heritage." The book, published in Azerbaijani and English, aims at restoration of Karabakh cultural heritage. The new publication provides insight into Karabakh's rich history and culture, including carpet weaving art, pottery, traditional costumes, art and much more. Extensive information is provided about the talented Karabakh musicians, artists, architects, who contributed to Azerbaijan's cultural heritage. In addition, the book discusses the formation of Karabakh's prominent poets, writers and thinkers. The new publication also highlights the chronicles of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War when Azerbaijan Armed Forces liberated Azerbaijan's territories previously occupied by Armenia for almost thirty years. The 44 days of war ended with the Russian brokered peace deal signed on November 10 by the Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian leaders. The peace agreement ended the 30-year-old conflict between Baku and Yerevan over Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region that along with the seven adjacent districts came under the occupation of Armenian armed forces in the war in the early 1990s.

EU launches WTO action against China over Lithuania

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Thursday stepped up its dispute with China as it took an economic spat over exports from member state Lithuania to the world trade's governing body and accused Beijing of seeking to undermine the 27-nation bloc's single market. EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis insisted the European Union was owed more respect and said Beijing should stop coercing member states with heavy-handed trade tactics like blocking imports based on political grounds. "Our relationship requires mutual respect," Dombrovskis said as he announced the EU action at the World Trade Organization. Lithuania broke with diplomatic custom by agreeing that the Taiwanese office in Vilnius would bear the name Taiwan instead of Chinese Taipei, a term used by other countries to avoid offending

Beijing. China considers Taiwan part of its territory with no right to diplomatic recognition. Beijing expelled the Lithuanian ambassador and withdrew its own ambassador. Last month, Lithuania closed its own embassy in the Chinese capital. Tensions have mounted, and Lithuania, together with the EU, accuse Beijing of holding up goods at China's borders. "Let me be clear these measures are a threat to the integrity of the EU single market so it affects the entire EU trade and EU supply chains, and they have a negative effect on EU industry," Dombrovskis said. Even if Lithuania only has a population of 2.8 million, Dombrovskis said not reacting to Beijing's action could spread throughout the whole bloc of 450 million people. "China is putting pressure on international companies to abandon the use

of Lithuanian components in their production. Otherwise, they may face import restrictions," said Dombrovskis. Because of it, such an economic move against one member state, made it a trade attack on all. "The EU is determined to act as one and act against measures in breach of WTO rules," Dombrovskis said. Lithuania was thankful to have such EU support. "This step is a clear message to China that the EU will not tolerate politically motivated actions of economic coercion," Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said. The European Commission manages trade on behalf of the 27 EU member countries. It says it has built up evidence of Chinese restrictions. They include a refusal to clear Lithuanian goods through customs, the rejection of import applications from Lithuania, and pressuring European companies. - Agencies

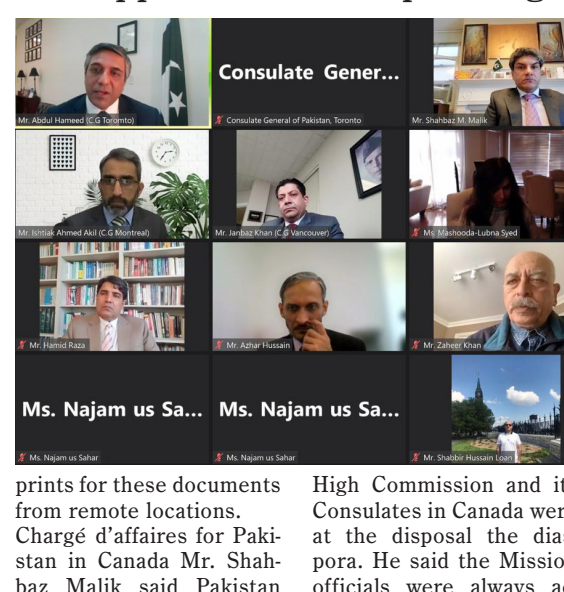
Pak Consulate in Toronto to have NADRA facility soon

Consul General of Pakistan Montreal Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed Akil said they were all set to operate a dedicated facilitation centre in the Consulate to provide the community members technical help and facilitation in completing their online applications and uploading documents on the NADRA system

DNA

OTTAWA: The Government of Pakistan has decided to restore National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) facility in the Consulate General of Pakistan Toronto for the convenience of compatriots seeking NADRA services. This was disclosed during an online public forum-cum-ekatchehry organised by the Pakistan High Commission in Canada and hosted by Consul General of Pakistan Toronto. The event was attended by Chargé d'affaires for Pakistan in Canada Mr. Shahbaz Malik, Consul General

of Pakistan Montreal Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed Akil, Deputy Consul General of Pakistan Vancouver Mr. Ghulam Hussain and members of the Pakistani diaspora in Canada. Answering various questions of the community, Consul General of Pakistan Toronto Mr. Abdul Hameed who moderated the event, said the decision to re-establish NADRA facility in Toronto had been taken in view of difficulties faced by community members in accessing NADRA services, including new National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP), passports and uploading their finger-



prints for these documents from remote locations. Chargé d'affaires for Pakistan in Canada Mr. Shahbaz Malik said Pakistan High Commission and its Consulates in Canada were all set to operate a dedicated facilitation centre in the Consulate to provide the community members technical help and facilitation in completing their online applications and uploading documents on the NADRA system. To a question, Deputy Consul General of Pakistan Vancouver Mr. Ghulam Hussain said the Consulate had conveyed the concerns of Pakistani expatriates living in western Canada in travelling long distances to visit the Consulate in Vancouver just because accessing the NADRA system from home did not help sometime due to limited number of attempts allowed for upload of documents and fingerprints for NICOPs and other services.

NEW DELHI: India's COVID-19 tally rose to 40,371,500 on Thursday, as 286,384 new cases were registered during the past 24 hours across the country, showed the Health Ministry's latest data. Besides, as many as 573 deaths due to the pandemic since Wednesday morning took the total death toll to 491,700. There are still 2,202,472 active COVID-19 cases in India despite a fall of 20,546 active cases during the past 24 hours. A total of 37,677,328 people have been successfully cured and discharged from hospitals so far, out of which 306,357 were discharged during the past 24 hours.

Canada to send more troops to Ukraine

TRENTON: Canada will send more troops to Ukraine along with defensive weapons to help thwart a Russian invasion of the country, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Wednesday. Canada will also provide cybersecurity support and share intelligence information "so that Ukraine can defend its sovereignty, security and territorial integrity," Trudeau said following a virtual Cabinet retreat where the main topic was the situation in Ukraine. There are already 200 Canadian troops in Ukraine to provide training as Canada and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies attempt to deter a Russian invasion that could spark war in Eastern Europe. "We continue to call on Russia to de-escalate and engage in meaningful dialogue until a diplomatic solution is reached," Trudeau said. Russian President Vladimir Putin has deployed around 100,000 troops along his country's shared border with Ukraine and demanded that Ukraine not be allowed to join NATO. Canada will also send US\$40 million worth of aid, in addition to a loan of US\$95 million already announced for Ukraine. The US and the UK announced earlier that they are sending lethal weapons to Ukraine but Trudeau said Canada is concentrating on defensive rather than offensive weapons. The Canadian initiative follows an announcement that the US sent a reply to Russia saying it will not exclude Ukraine from membership in NATO. In addition, the US said it will not meet another Russian demand to remove American weapons and troops from nearby countries. The Canadian announcement also comes after it ordered the family members of its Ukraine embassy staff to leave and issued a warning against unnecessary travel to the beleaguered country earlier this week. - APP

Russia detains US citizen over charges of drug smuggling

MOSCOW: A US citizen was arrested in Moscow on Thursday on charges of drugs smuggling, the Russian Interior Ministry said. Mark Fogel, a former employee of the US Embassy in Moscow and currently working as a schoolteacher, was allegedly going to sell marijuana and hashish oil to his students, the ministry said. The investigation opened a criminal case on account of smuggling and illegal acquisition, storage, transportation, manufacture and processing of drugs. Since the suspect could have escaped, the Khimki city court put him under arrest, the ministry claimed. After the criminal case was opened, police searched the suspect's apartment but his wife "got rid of the evidence." "As can be seen on the surveillance camera recordings, the woman takes out a package from the house and throws it into the trash can. Later, she picks it up, puts it in a bag, and takes it outside the residential complex," the statement said. According to the ministry, Fogel and his wife arrived in Moscow from New York last summer. They were detained while passing the "green corridor" at the Sheremetyevo airport because the service dogs reacted. During a search, marijuana and hashish oil were found in their luggage. APP

India reports 286,384 new Covid cases

WEB DESK

NEW DELHI: India's COVID-19 tally rose to 40,371,500 on Thursday, as 286,384 new cases were registered during the past 24 hours across the country, showed the Health Ministry's latest data. Besides, as many as 573 deaths due to the pandemic since Wednesday morning took the total death toll to 491,700. There are still 2,202,472 active COVID-19 cases in India despite a fall of 20,546 active cases during the past 24 hours. A total of 37,677,328 people have been successfully cured and discharged from hospitals so far, out of which 306,357 were discharged during the past 24 hours.

Briefs

'Pak admires Japanese assistance in water sector'

DNA

LAHORE: Federal Minister for Water Resources Moonis Elahi on Wednesday said that Pakistan was indebted to the Japanese government for its technical assistance in the water sector as the their expertise in water management and flood control had been instrumental in fighting natural calamities. During a meeting with Japanese Ambassador Wada Mitsuhiro here, he said Pakistan would soon attain the ability to overcome challenges in effective water management and flood control with the help of financial and technical support from Japan. Training of the Pakistani water experts, provision of state of the art weather forecasting system and water sanitation projects in different cities under the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) were a testimony of Pak-Japan friendship. The Minister thanked the Japanese Ambassador for developing country's water system on modern lines under JICA and expressed the hope that Japan government would continue to support Pakistan in modernization of water resources in future. The Japanese envoy said that he would play his due role in enhancing the assistance in the coming years.

Czechs to donate 4,000 artillery shells to Ukraine

PRAGUE: The Czech defence ministry said Wednesday it would donate four thousand artillery shells to Ukraine in the coming days as the country faces the threat of invasion by neighbouring Russia. "The gift worth 36.6 million Czech crowns (1.5 million euros, \$1.7 million) was approved by the government today," defence ministry spokesman Jakub Fajnor told AFP. The gift comprises 4,006 shells with a calibre of 152 millimetres, the defence ministry said on its website. "The shells will be shipped to Ukraine in the coming days but I cannot say exactly when," Fajnor said. Kyiv and the West have accused Russia of massing tens of thousands of troops on the Ukrainian border in preparation for a possible invasion. Defence Minister Jana Cernochova said the gift was "a gesture of solidarity". "We have been developing cooperation with Ukraine in the long run and we support its transition to democracy," she added. The 152-millimetre calibre is not compatible with new cannons obtained by the Czech army, which have a calibre of 155 millimetres, the ministry said. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999. "Boosting Ukraine's ability to defend itself is in the interest of the Czech Republic, because it will reduce the risk of an armed conflict in eastern Europe," the ministry added. Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said Tuesday he would visit Ukraine together with his Austrian and Slovak counterparts on February 7-8 in another display of solidarity. - APP

1,285 fresh Covid cases reported in capital

DNA

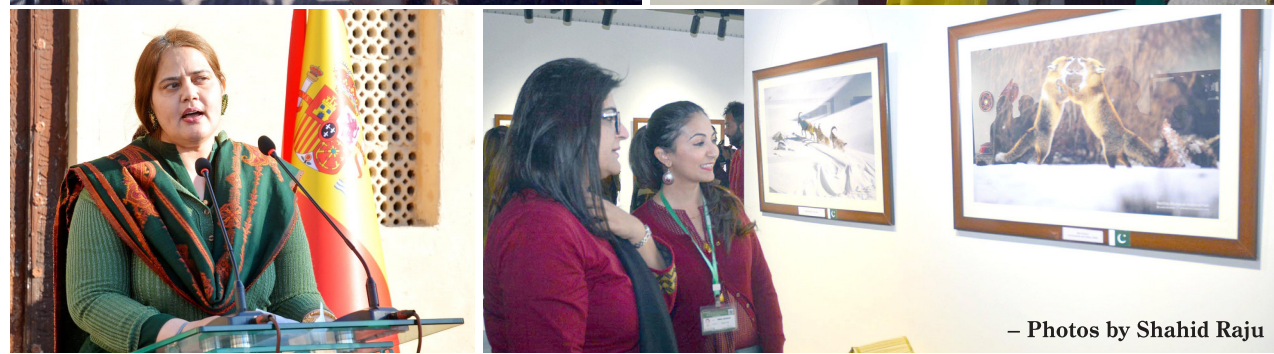
ISLAMABAD: Health officials on Thursday said that 1,285 new Coronavirus cases were reported in the federal capital during the last 24 hours. According to an official of the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC), as many as 685 cases were reported on Wednesday while 1,836 cases were reported on Tuesday. He said so far 122,098 cases were reported from the federal capital and 979 deaths were reported from Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) while 109,760 patients had been recovered completely. Meanwhile, the government has waived off the booster shots fee for those visiting abroad, and now they can get free booster while showing their documents. This booster was already free for the general public. On the direction of the Ministry of National Health Services, the district administration of Islamabad had continued surveillance of different areas of the capital to reduce transmission of the infection in the selected streets and other sectors. They also started taking action on a violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to the coronavirus while visiting marriage halls, markets, and petrol pumps by its inspection teams. The administration had been asked to take action on the violation of SOPs at shops, workshops, and restaurants. The inspection teams had been directed to issue notices to marriage halls besides imposing fines on owners of different shops in case of violation of SOPs.

Exhibition 'Colors of Spain & Pakistan' at Lok Virsa

Dr Israr praised the initiative; Ambassador Duran says, Spain has sixteen national parks and 50% of animals that you can find in Europe are found in Spain. 70 animals' species are endangered but Spanish govt has devised a long-term policy to protect them and their environment

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Israr, Additional Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs has praised the Spanish embassy for taking the initiative and providing the all and sundry a chance of having first hand information about various aspects of the Spanish culture and especially hitherto the hidden treasures of Spain by holding this wonderful exhibition. Dr. Israr expressed these views while speaking at exhibition titled Colors of Spain & Pakistan organized jointly by the Spanish embassy and Lok Virsa. The exhibition will continue till Sunday. Ambassador of Spain Manuel Duran and Dr Zubia Deputy Director of Lok Virsa also spoke on the occasion. Talking about the exhibition, Dr. Israr said he was impressed with the exhibition when it was first held at the Pakistan Monument jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Spanish embassy. "I commend the policy of the Spanish government to save the endangered species", he added. Dr. Israr said keeping in view the proximity of relations between the two countries the trade volume was still limited, which needs to be improved. Since we have changed our focus from geo politics to geo economics, I would urge friends from Spain embassy that we should be working on this angle to further promote and strengthen our economic relations. He added, we are trying to woo famous Spanish business chains to come to Pakistan and explore business opportunities here. He said some concerns



- Photos by Shahid Raju

from Faisalabad were already in contact with these chains. Ambassador of Spain Manuel Duran in his speech said Spain and Pakistan enjoy excellent bilateral diplomatic relations. Another example of that is the recent visit on September 10th to Islamabad of Mr. José Manuel Albares, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi also visited Spain recently. The visit proved a turning point in the bilateral relations of Spain and Pakistan, he added. Ambassador Duran said both Spain and Pakistan share views on environmental issues as well adding both countries wish to join hands to overcome environmental degradation. He said both countries enjoy excellent bilateral and multilateral relations, which have helped us especially improve and strengthen people to people contacts. The ambassador told that the exhibition will continue till Sunday so people have a chance to come and enjoy the photographs. He said a total of 40 photographs have been displayed out of which 20 have been brought all the way from Spain. They depict the variety and richness of Spanish natural heritage. Spain, he said, has sixteen national parks and 50 percent of animals that you can find in Europe are found in Spain. 70 animals' species are endangered but the Spanish government has devised a long-term policy to protect them and their environment.

EU watchdog approves Pfizer Covid pill

WEB DESK

THE HAGUE: The EU's drug watchdog approved Pfizer's coronavirus pill on Thursday, making it the first oral antiviral treatment for the disease to be authorised in Europe. Studies showed the drug called Paxlovid reduces hospitalisation death in patients at risk of severe Covid, and may also be effective against the Omicron variant. Pills are seen as a potentially huge step in ending the pandemic as they can be taken at home, rather than in hospital. "Paxlovid is the first antiviral medicine to be given by mouth that is recommended in the EU for treating Covid-19," the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said in a statement. The United States, Canada and Israel are among a handful of countries to have already given the green light to the Pfizer treatment. The European Commission must now formally authorise the drug but that is a rubber-stamp procedure that usually takes hours or days. "Paxlovid is the first oral antiviral for home use in our portfolio, and has the potential to make a real difference for persons at high risk of progression to severe Covid," EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said in a statement. "We have also seen the promising evidence regarding Paxlovid's effectiveness against Omicron and other variants." The Pfizer treatment is a combination of a new molecule, PF-07321332, and HIV antiviral ritonavir, that are taken as separate tablets. The EMA said it "recommended authorising Paxlovid for treating Covid-19 in adults who do not require supplemental oxygen and who are at increased risk of the disease becoming severe".

Pakistan, Singapore committed to strengthen cooperation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Singapore held Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC) in virtual format. Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Additional Secretary (Asia-Pacific) and Ng Teek Hean, Deputy Secretary, Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, led their respective delegations. The entire gamut of bilateral relations - covering cooperation in political, economic, defence and security, academic, science and technology, technical training, environment, culture and tourism domains - came under discussion. Welcoming the steady progression in multi-dimensional bilateral relations over the years, based on mutual trust and understanding, the two sides renewed strong desire and resolve to consolidate and further enhance cooperation in diverse fields in line with

their shared objectives of peace and development. They noted the importance of regular interaction and dialogue under existing mechanisms and exchange of high-level visits to impart further momentum to the relationship. The Additional Secretary (AP) highlighted Pakistan's focus on geo-economics leveraging peace and security, development partnerships, and connectivity. He stressed the importance of translating the long-standing friendship and political goodwill between Pakistan and Singapore into mutually beneficial substantive economic relationship with focus on trade and investment, connectivity and development cooperation given that the two countries were gateways to their respective regions. He also thanked the Government of Singapore for the generous donations by Temasek Foundation to assist Pakistan's COVID-19 response in the early phase of

the pandemic. The Deputy Secretary said Singapore looked forward to expanding cooperation in existing and new fields of mutual interest, and enhancing bilateral exchanges especially high-level visits. The two sides also noted the complementarities and potential of trade in services. Singaporean companies were invited to explore emerging investment opportunities in Pakistan in sectors such as digital economy, Fintech and agro-food, besides CPEC-related SEZs. In the context of regional situation, the Additional Secretary (AP) shared Pakistan's perspective on Afghanistan, and the imperative of a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute for regional peace and stability. The two sides also exchanged views on ASEAN, and Pakistan's Full Dialogue Partnership. It was also agreed to continue close cooperation in the multilateral domain particularly at the United Nations.

NAB strongly believes in 100% development, zero corruption

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Justice Javed Iqbal, Chairman NAB has said that NAB strongly believes in 100% development and Zero corruption. NAB has great regard and respect for the business community which is playing an important role in the country's progress. He said that he had not only addressed business community at Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce Karachi (FPCCI), Chamber of Commerce Lahore and Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, Islama-



bad but held various meetings with a delegation of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce Karachi (FPCCI), delegation of Flour Mills Association, delegation of Cotton Ginners Association and delegation of Gwadar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. NAB has referred the cases of Income Tax, Sales Tax and Under Invoicing to FBR for appropriate action as per law. He said that NAB has established a special desk under the supervision of the Director at NAB Headquarters Islamabad to address the complaints of the business community.

US Navy ships visit Pakistan

DNA

KARACHI: United States (US) Navy Ships SQUALL (PC-7) & WHIRLWIND (PC-11) visited Karachi and conducted bilateral exercise with Pakistan Navy. Upon arrival at Karachi Port, US Navy Ships were received by senior officials of Pakistan Navy and US Embassy with traditional warmth and cordiality. The US ships visit includes bilateral exercise and professional exchanges through meetings and sessions at harbour. At sea the US and Pakistan Navy ships participated in Passage Exercise including participation of Surface, Air and Special Services elements. The aim of the exercise was to build synergy, strengthen naval relationships and enhance interoperability between the two navies. At the culmination of Passage Exercise, a joint patrolling was conducted by ships of both navies. US Navy Ships visit to Karachi and bilateral exercise is a testimony of PN resolve to work towards regional peace. It is expected that the visit will further promote the existing cooperation between the two countries in general and navies in particular.

Six migrants drown off Tunisia, 30 missing

ZARZIS: Six migrants drowned and 30 were missing Thursday off the coast of Tunisia after their boat sank during a bid to reach Europe, authorities and the Red Crescent said. Coast guard units rescued a further 34 passengers after the vessel sank off Zarzis near the Libyan border, Tunisian defence ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri told AFP. Survivors had said 70 people had been aboard, including Egyptians, Sudanese and a Moroccan, when the boat set off from Libya headed for European shores, he added. A search and rescue operation was underway for the remaining passengers, he said. The survivors were taken to a port in Ben Guerdane, according to Tunisian Red Crescent official Mongi Slim. Both Tunisia and Libya have served as launchpads for migrants making desperate bids to reach Europe, especially in the chaos in Libya that followed the toppling of Moamer Kadhafi in 2011. The Central Mediterranean route has become the world's deadliest migration trail, according to humanitarian groups. Departures surged rapidly in 2021, with almost 55,000 migrants reaching Italy in the first 10 months of the year compared with under 30,000 the previous year, according to Rome. - APP

One killed; another missing in attack on foreign Oil company site

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Some unknown militants attacked a compound of an international gas company just on the boundaries between Southern Karak and Hangu districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the mid night between Wednesday and Thursday. As a result one security guard was killed whereas another one was abducted. The police officials while confirming attack to media informed that the militants first made destabilised the solar power system and later on opened firing against dwellers of compound. High ups of police in both Hangu and Karak districts admitted that the attackers succeeded in escape. However

they claimed that efforts underway for the arrest of militants and recovery of abducted person. The District police officer of Hangu Ikram Ullah Khan told this scribe that the compound (well) was dysfunctional and guarded by only two security personnel, one was killed and other is missing. He added that police personnel from both the districts are engaged in search operation in the area for arresting the militants and also for early and safe recovery of abducted person. International firm MOL is working on oil gas projects in three Southern districts of both Karak, Kohat and Hangu of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from last several years. The company employees are getting threats from un-

known circles from time to time. The banned Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) through its statement claimed responsibility for the attack. Chief Minister Mehmud Khan also denounced the attack and directed police high ups to take early steps for the arrest of culprits and early recovery of missing person. MOL concerned, determined to continue its operations. The MOL Pakistan is aware of a security incident at one of its production wells in Tal block in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In its press release, the MOL states the armed attack on the wellhead has resulted into the loss of life of one security guard deputed at the location. Another security guard is reported missing. MOL Pakistan is in contact with the

local administration and the community elders since the incident has happened, to ascertain full facts. We are also in communication with the provincial and local governments as well as our Joint venture partners. Working along with all stakeholders, and every effort is being made for safe recovery of our missing personnel. For MOL Pakistan the safety and security of their staff is of utmost importance and it is taking all measures to mitigate the situation. We are committed to ensure full security and safety of the company's workforce in the area. MOL continues to operate its production facilities as usual. MOL Pakistan expresses its deep sorrow at the loss of a precious life and extends its sympathies to the deceased's family.