



Islamabad POST

Friday, March 18, 2022

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

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Emmanuel Macron unveils election manifesto in Paris

Detailed News On Page-07

Indonesian envoy meets Pakistani Spice traders

Detailed News On Page-08

Rafael Nadal extends perfect start to 2022

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

PM saving Pak from imperialism

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said on Thursday that Prime Minister Imran Khan was trying to save Pakistan from imperialism. Addressing the Kamyab Jawan Green Youth Movement event here he said that international imperialism ruled India and some local stooges also supported the foreign masters. Fawad said that PML-N President Shehbaz has proposed that a national government minus PTI should be formed and this proposal was tantamount to install a government of robbers to protect thieves. - APP

Moonis Elahi reaches London

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Water Resources Moonis Elahi on Thursday has reached the United Kingdom on a "politically important" visit, sources at the Islamabad International Airport revealed. According to sources, Elahi has left for London on flight BA 260, adding that the minister will attend political meetings in London. The minister, while talking to media, said that he has come to London on a private visit. He also said that he would inform the media if any meetings take place, adding that he would return to Pakistan in three to four days. - APP

PM must resign immediately

ISLAMABAD: PPP Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar in his statement demanded that PM should resign after several PTI MNAs have come out in the open against the federal government. Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar said, "Today Imran Khan has lost the moral legitimacy to run government and the country. Clearly, the Imran Khan has no majority in the House." Senator said, "Imran Khan would be shocked to know names of federal ministers who are in contact with the opposition parties."

12 MPs 'hiding' in Sindh House

PTI's own men rock the boat



ISLAMABAD: Ahead of the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan, around 24 members of the PTI are currently staying at the Sindh House. PTI's disgruntled member of the National Assembly Raja Riaz claimed on Wednesday that if Prime Minister Imran Khan assures all MNAs that no action will be taken against those who decided to vote against him on the day of the no-confidence motion, they are ready to go back to the Parliament Lodges. Speaking to a news channel, PTI MNAs Malik Nawab Sher Waseer and Riaz

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Govt orders strict monitoring of MNAs

ISLAMABAD: In a bid to thwart the Opposition's no-trust move, the PTI political committee meeting, headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday, decided that Islamabad's Sindh House will not be allowed to turn into a horse-trading

Continued on Page 06

'No-trust move our democratic right'

The majority party will be offered to bring its prime minister after the no-confidence motion passed, Gillani says

ISLAMABAD: Former prime minister Yousaf Raza Gillani on Thursday said that the no-trust motion is a democratic practice. "We don't want confrontation, the government is moving towards collision, not us," Addressing a press conference here, PPP leader said. "In the no-trust motion, opposition has to show 172 members in support of its move," he said. "If I had been prime minister, I didn't linger on the matter this much and show my members without delay," Gillani said. "The government lacking support of required 172 votes and it is the reason of

Continued on Page 06

Zardari, Bilawal chair meeting

ISLAMABAD: President Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Pakistan People's Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari chaired an important meeting of the core committee of the Pakistan Peoples Party. Consultations on important decisions related to national politics, including no-confidence motion, were held in the meeting. The meeting was attended by Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani, Raja Pervez Ashraf, Sherry Rehman,

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Commander of the National Guard of Bahrain H.H. General Sheikh Mohammad Bin Isa Al Kalifa called on Prime Minister Imran Khan. - DNA

PM Imran felicitates President of Korea

Expresses desire for a close working relationship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan congratulated the newly elected President of Republic of Korea Yoon Suk-yeol and expressed desire for a close working relationship with him. "I congratulate H.E Mr. Yoon Suk-yeol on his election as the President of the Republic of Korea," he said in a tweet. The prime minister said he looked forward to working with the new Korean president. "I look forward to working with him to further strengthen bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Republic of Korea," he said.

PM, Asad Umar move IHC against notice

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan and Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Asad Umar have challenged the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) notice served to them for partaking in the March 11 Lower Dir rally. The petition has been accepted, with IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah set to hear it shortly despite objections from the court's registrar office. On the same day of the jalsa, the ECP had issued a notice to the prime minister and others, including KP Governor Shah Farman, Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, and federal ministers Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Parvez Khattak, Murad Saeed, Asad Umar, provincial cabinet members Shafiullah, Anwar Zeb and Liaqat Ali. - APP

Sheikh Rashid for Governor Rule in Sindh

Interior Ministry hold emergency meeting; likely to send a summary to the prime minister



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Amid high political temperature in the country, Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed said on Thursday that he has suggested Prime

Continued on Page 06

Govt confirms contact with Opp. MNAs

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Asad Umar Thursday confirmed that the PTI-government is in contact with the members of the Opposition, however, he denied sharing names of those members. Addressing a press conference in the federal capital, flanked by

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Austrian FM lauds Pak role in Afghan peace

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of Austria Alexander Schallenberg on Thursday said Pakistan had taken effective steps in eradicating terrorism and restoring peace in Afghanistan. Addressing a joint press conference along with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Austrian foreign minister said Pakistan had made an immense contribution towards ensuring peace and stability in the region. FM Schallenberg, who arrived in Islamabad Wednesday on a four-day visit, held a meeting with FM Qureshi where the two sides discussed a whole range of bilateral matters as well as regional and global issues. FM Schallenberg thanked the government of Pakistan for ensuring



the smooth repatriation of its stranded nationals from Afghanistan and pointed out that the world could witness a big refugee influx from the conflict-hit country. He said Austria was keen to explore the South Asian trade markets and added that his visit would open up a new era of his country's relations with Pakistan. He mentioned that during his

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PAF College Sargodha celebrates founders' day - Page 06

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OIC efforts to safeguard Muslim rights lauded - Page 08

Ukraine warns of new 'Wall' in Europe

Germany has tried to use trade, business and energy links to integrate a peaceful Russia into the West

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has told German MPs that a new type of Berlin Wall is being built, dividing Europe between freedom and oppression. He thanked Germany for its support during Russia's invasion. But it was uncomfortable listening for many MPs as he criticised German energy policy and business interests for contributing to that wall of division. Over the past week, Mr Zelensky has given a master class in how to pitch his message to allies. On Wednesday, he addressed US Congress, referring to Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 terror attacks. On Tuesday he asked Canada's parliament to envisage bombs and missiles falling on Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton. Last week, his address to the House of Commons in London was partly a homage

to Winston Churchill's wartime speeches. His emotive speech to the German parliament, the Bundestag, was equally tailored to appeal to his audience with well-chosen historical parallels. Some of his audience grew up in communist East Germany behind the Berlin Wall. During the Cold War, Germany's dogged negotiation and engagement with Moscow contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification. Since then Germany has tried to use trade, business and energy links to integrate a peaceful Russia into the West. But Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine three weeks ago has destroyed many of those aspirations. The general political consensus in Germany now is that this may have been the wrong approach with Mr Putin's increasingly authoritarian and kleptocratic government. President Zelensky expressed outrage that some

Scholz and Stoltenberg rule out military intervention

BERLIN: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg met with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Thursday, as the war in Ukraine entered its fourth week. The meeting came just after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the German Bundestag via video link. Scholz opened his remarks alongside Stoltenberg by praising Zelenskyy for his "impressive military" in Ukraine. "One thing must also be made clear: NATO will not intervene militarily in this war," Scholz said. Scholz's view matched statements repeated by Stoltenberg on Thursday that the military alliance's involvement in Ukraine would increase the likelihood of the war spreading. In Berlin, the NATO chief said the alliance's job is to de-escalate the conflict. "NATO has a responsibility to prevent this conflict from escalating further," Stoltenberg said. "That would be even more dangerous and cause more suffering, deaths and destruction." Ukraine has repeatedly called for help from Europe and NATO. In particular, Kyiv has called for a no-fly zone. Lithuania's parliament unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the no-fly zone over Ukraine, joining countries including Estonia and Slovenia in the appeal. - News Desk

German businesses were still operating in Russia. The controversial, now cancelled, Russian-German gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 was "cement for that new wall" dividing Europe, he said. Germany's continued reluctance to allow Ukraine into the European Union was "another brick" in that new wall. "Dear Mr Scholz, tear down this wall," he demanded of the German chancellor, repeating US President Ronald Reagan's historic demand to the Soviets in 1987 as he stood beside the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. Three weeks into their devastating invasion, Russian forces also stood accused of bombing a theatre sheltering many civilians and marked with the word "children". Kyiv emerged from a 35-hour curfew to its own fresh destruction, as Russian troops strive to encircle the Ukrainian capital as part of their slow-moving offensive.

Heavy fines imposed on profiteering vendors in Gujrat

DC further said that Ramadan Bazaars will be made functional in the last week of the month of Shaban

YOOSUF BHUTTA

GUJRAT: A fine of Rs. 544,500 was imposed on vendors during the crackdown while cases were registered against 9 accused for profiteering and hoarding. Price Magistrates under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Khurram Shehzad checked shops, markets and bazaars in the district. The accused involved in serious violations were handed over to the police on the spot. On the other hand, Assistant Commissioners in all the three tehsils continued checking the marriage halls. Assistant Commissioners checked 95 places to review the implementation of One-Dish law and abiding of closing times.

Meanwhile, action was taken against 25 marriage halls. The individual should not be allowed to engage in profiteering and hoarding.

Ten Ramadan Bazaars to be set up in Gujrat

As per the directions of Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar, 10 Ramadan bazaars will be set up in the district to provide cheap and quality food items to the citizens during Ramadan. This was stated by Deputy Commissioner Dr. Khurram Shehzad here on Tuesday in a special meeting. He said that out of ten, six will be in Gujrat tehsil, three in Kharian tehsil and one in Sarai Alamgir tehsil. Instructions have been issued to finalize the arrangements for the establishment of said bazaars before Ramadan, he said.

The Deputy Commissioner further said that Ramadan Bazaars will be made functional in the last week of the month of Shaban. He said that Ramadan Bazaars will be set up in Tehsil Gujrat at Old Vegetable Market Shah Jehangir Road, Model Bazaar opposite General Bus Stand, Railway Road, Zahoor Elahi Stadium, Kunjah and Jalapur Jattan, GT Road Kharian in Tehsil Kharian, GT Road Lala Musa and a bazaar will be set up on GT Road at Dinga, Sarai Alamgir. DC Dr. Khurram Shehzad directed the officers that timely arrangements should be made for efficient supply chain in Ramadan bazaars. Officers and employees of relevant departments should be on duty to monitor the markets, Ishall also inspect these markets regularly, he added.



SWABI: NRSB Pakistan officials inaugurating three mini grids in Swabi to cater to the energy needs of the people of the area. – DNA

Fazal Shakoor Khan meets ombudsperson

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mr Fazal Shakoor Khan Thursday held a detailed meeting with Ms Rukhshanda Naaz newly elected Ombudsperson on women harassment in his office. The provincial minister congratulated Rukhshanda Naz on taking oath as Provincial Ombudsperson and expressed his best wishes. He said that this is an important duty and fulfilling its responsibilities with utmost seriousness and sincerity is essential for the present. During the meeting various issues were discussed in detail under which several important steps will be taken initially for the Ombudsperson Secretariat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to run mutual affairs and development. Under which first an ombudsperson complex will be set up in Peshawar for which suitable land will be acquired. Law Minister Fazal Shakoor Khan has said that sub and regional offices of the Provincial Ombudsperson Secretariat will be set up to facilitate the delivery of justice to the common man at his doorstep. Provincial Ombudsperson Rukhshanda Naz informed the law minister that after the implementation of "KP Enforcement of Women's Rights to Prop-

erty Act 2019", the powers to investigate and deal with complaints have also been given to the Ombudsperson Secretariat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The number of cases against harassment of women in the workplace under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Protection of Women (Amendment) Act, 2018 has also been increased. The matter of creation of vacancies and related human resources for speedy disposal of these cases will be finalized soon with the Finance Department so that there is no hindrance in the delivery of justice. Fazal Shakoor Khan said that most of the complainants belong to very poor families who have very few resources to lodge a complaint and follow up and come to the Peshawar office for hearing the case. To this end, sub-regional and

regional offices of the Ombudsperson Secretariat will be set up to enhance the confidence of the people in the administration of the state by providing justice to them.

Provincial Law Minister Fazal Shakoor Khan directed the Provincial Ombudsperson to organize various seminars on Women Property Act in the newly merged districts so that the women of these districts could be made aware of it and women's rights could be protected from being violated.

He said that awareness teams should be sent to all the districts of the province including the newly merged districts so that the people are fully aware of this act and women can be protected from inheritance deprivation under the Act.



VU, PSEB joining hands for "sustainable growth"



DNA

LAHORE: A memorandum of understanding between the Virtual University of Pakistan and the Pakistan software export board was signed at the Lahore Expo Center here in Lahore today. Mr. Syed Junaid Imam Member (IT) Ministry of IT & Telecom attended the ceremony as chief guest, while Mr. Badar Khushnood Chairman Pakistan Software Houses Association for IT and ITES attended the event as a guest of honor. Prof. Dr. Arshad Saleem Bhatti Rector Virtual University of Pakistan and Mr. Osman Nasir Managing Director PSEB signed the MoU. While speaking on the occasion Dr. Arshad Saleem Bhatti congratulated both organizations on this historic MoU. He said

that the Pakistan software export board and the Virtual University of Pakistan being sister departments working under the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication decided to work on different ventures for the betterment of the IT industry and Academia. Mr. Osman Nasir while briefing said that, PSEB will train the ICT graduates/students, professionals, and teachers also under the PSEB training and certification program. VU's examination center will be used across Pakistan for these certifications, moreover, mobile Certification / Training Center on Wheels for Metropolitan Cities, and/or far-flung underprivileged/remote areas of the Country with Satellite Connectivity on the Go will be launched in near future. PSEB in collaboration with VU will establish IT Parks or STPs in future where ever it is feasible.

FDA approves regulations of Faisalabad Master Plan

BUREAU REPORT

FAISALABAD: Faisalabad Development Authority Board of Governors (BOG) has approved the regulations of proposed Faisalabad Master Plan. This approval has been given during the meeting of BOG held here at FDA complex committee room. FDA Chairman Ch Latif Nazir presided over the meeting in which Vice Chairperson FDA Firdous Rai, Director General FDA Dr Faisal Azim, Additional Director General Rizwan Nazir, WASA managing director Jabbar Anwar, Additional Commissioner Coordination Tariq Mehmood, Additional Deputy Commissioner General Qaisar Abas Rind, Technical members Majid Husain, Javed Sharif, Syed Sultan Azim and other members participated. FDA Chairman Ch Latif Nazir welcomed the participants of the meeting and thanked them on their better response. FDA Director General Dr Faisal Azim and Additional Director General Rizwan Nazir briefed the meeting about the different sections and contents of draft of proposed Faisalabad Master Plan regulations. It was informed that the regulations draft has been formulated to set the terms and conditions, security committee and to define the different terms of contents and points, land use, enforcement of master plan, way of amendment and other necessary requirements. The meeting unanimously gave approval of draft of proposed Faisalabad Master Plan regulations after detail discussion.

Excise, taxation dept directed to timely achieve revenue target

PESHAWAR: A meeting to review performance and progress on revenue recovery by the Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was held here on Thursday. The meeting was chaired by Director General Excise Taxation and Narcotics Control Mahmood Aslam. Director Revenue, Director Registration, Director Pe-

shawar Region and other officers, excise spokesman attended the meeting. The department's spokesman said that the meeting reviewed revenue recovery and performance for 8 months starting July-February of FY 22-2021. The director general said that progress and performance reports of Regional Directors and District Excise and Taxation Officer would be reviewed and recommendations would be presented to top officials. Mahmood Aslam

Wazir has called for expanding the scope of intelligence based operations against drugs, especially to purge educational institutions of scourge of drugs. He also directed for facilitating tax payers, car owners and the public by extending them urgent help. The meeting was also briefed about matters pertaining to illegal vehicles seized and further legal process in this regard. The department was directed to expedite work on ongoing reforms to enhance efficiency. The meeting also directed to expand the scope of the tax net instead of imposing additional burden on taxpayers. The department was told that prompt measures should be taken for addressing complaints received through the Pakistan Citizen Portal. – APP

KP Speaker inaugurates Chinar Sports Festival

PESHAWAR: Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani Thursday inaugurated three-day Chinar Sports Festival at Abbottabad. Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad, Tariq Salam, Assistant Commissioner, Hassan Ehsan, Regional Sports Officer, Ahmad Zaman, students, locals also attended the inauguration ceremony. Addressing the ceremony, Speaker KP urged people to promote regional games as these are part of culture and traditions. He said that government is giving special focus to sports following vision of Prime Minister, Imran Khan. He also praised government for organizing mega sports events for youths and initiating sports scholarships for students. – APP

Peshawar Int'l Property Exhibition on March 25-27



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Peshawar International Property Exhibition and Convention is being held on March 25-26-27 with the joint participation of AH Group of Pakistan Association of Exhibition Industry. AH Group Chairman Yasir Mehsud in an interview said that the three-day In-

ternational Property Exhibition will be attended by renowned builders, developers, Allied Construction Bank projects and various business communities from across the tourism industry from across the country. With regard to property, construction, builders, developers, real estate agents and companies associated with the real estate sector will be

able to display their products. This is a great opportunity for the people of Pakistan to invest. This exhibition will play an important role in terms of investment in Pakistan. Expo is very important and such programs will be held in future also. Addressing the event, Khurshid Barlas said that the government is also giving priority to real estate. Buyers and sellers will be seated in one place through the expo for the convenience of both. Major construction companies across the country will showcase their business and residential projects. The main purpose of holding the expo is to promote construction and business activities so that the country can move on the path of development.



KARACHI: Saeed Ghani provincial minister talking to media. – DNA

PEC to open new opportunities

BUREAU REPORT

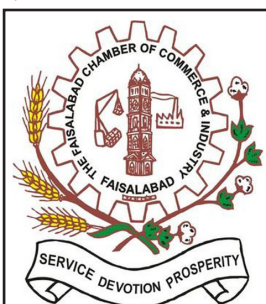
FAISALABAD: Pakistan Economic Conference (PEC) will open new avenues of business opportunities in diverse, hi-tech and value-added sectors along with textile, said Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh, President FCCI. Addressing a Press Conference, he said that for the first time in the history of Pakistan, a hi-fi conference is being arranged to synchronize local businesses with global initiatives. He said that textile is the iconic representation of Faisalabad but we want to go beyond this segment as there are unlimited opportunities of growth in other sectors which are still lying untapped. He said that the Government has already announced textile and SME policies in addition to giving a lucrative industrial package.

FCCI membership renewal campaign gaining momentum

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: Membership Renewal Campaign of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) is gaining momentum and two additional counters have been created for the facilitation of the members, said Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh President FCCI. He was addressing the FCCI Adhoc Standing Committee on Renewal of Membership for the year 2022-23. The meeting was also attended by Mian Javed Iqbal, Engineer Rizwan Ashraf, Chaudhary Muhammad Nawaz, Rana Sikandar Azam, Chaudhary Talat Mahmood and Mian Tanveer Ahmad etc. Mian Javed Iqbal appreciated the performance of the Adhoc committee and hoped that the ambitious target of 90% would be achieved

due to the keen interest of the FCCI office bearers, executive and concerned standing committee. He underlined the importance of the FCCI in resolving the issues of the business community and said that different sectors have their own associations but the role of these trade bodies is limited to the local level. "FCCI is imperative to resolve their issues relating to policy making at Federal and Provincial level", he added. Mian Javed Iqbal said that the real strength of the FCCI is its members and we must convince maximum businessmen to get the membership of FCCI in addition to enhancing their close liaison with their associations.



He urged the members of the Adhoc committee to use its influence to achieve the hundred percent target of renewal in addition to convincing the business community to get membership of the FCCI.

President FCCI Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh said that maximum facilities have been provided to the individuals visiting FCCI for the renewal of their membership. He said that these membership counters would work uninterrupted from 9AM to 5PM. Chairs have also been placed to arranging cold potable water and tea for the visitors. He further said that messages are regularly being dispatched to the

members through WhatsApp, emails and telephone requesting them to renew their membership positively before March 31, 2022. He said that he himself writes welcome letters to the new members in addition to informing them about the facilities offered by the FCCI to its valued members. He said that various desks of different departments have also been established in FCCI to facilitate the members. "Among these include Police Khidmat Markaz, FTO (Federal Tax Ombudsman) and NPO etc.", he said and added that a publicity campaign has also been launched about the ongoing renewal campaign. The participants of the meeting also pinpointed their sector specific issues and said that the notices regarding Point of Sale have become a constant irritant for the FCCI members and the President must take notice of this perturbing situation.

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

MARCH

March 01/ Bosnia	National Day
March 03/ Bulgaria	National Day
March 06/ Ghana	Independence Day
March 12/ Mauritius	National Day
March 17/ Ireland	St. Patrick's Day
March 20/ Tunisia	Independence Day
March 21/ Namibia	National Day
March 25/ Greece	National Day
March 26/ Bangladesh	National Day
March 27/ Myanmar	Armed Forces Day



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Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.....9270601-20
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MH.....5611116
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RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
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Shifa International.4603666



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Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Defense Minister Zubaida Jalal awarding degree to a student during Iqra University convocation. – DNA

Austrian companies keen to start endeavors in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Austrian companies led by Ms. Carmen Goby, Vice President, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry and showed keen interest to establish long-term business partnerships in Pakistan in hydropower, renewable energy, infrastructure, production of turbines, water treatment and other sectors. The representatives of Andritz Hydro, Geppert Hydropower, Global Hydro, Gugler Water Turbines, ILF Consulting Engineers and Lonsinger Maschinenbau were in the delegation. Speaking at the occasion, Ms. Carmen Goby, Vice President, Austrian Feder-

al Economic Chamber said that the Austrian delegation has come to Pakistan to explore opportunities of joint ventures & investment in order to intensify the economic cooperation with Pakistan. She said that the delegation visit was a part of the visit of the Austrian

Minister of Foreign Affairs to Pakistan in the framework of refocusing Austria. Richard Bandera, Austrian Trade Commissioner to Pakistan said that this was the first delegation from Europe to Pakistan after Covid-19 to explore long-lasting partnerships in Pakistan.

He said that Austrian energy companies have already contributed to reducing loadshedding in Pakistan and they wanted to play a more effective role towards the economic development of Pakistan by setting up partnerships here. He said that South Asia was emerg-

ing as a promising region and Austria was taking keen interest in it for business relations. He also invited an ICCI delegation to visit Austria to further strengthen business cooperation with Austrian counterparts. Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Cham-

ber of Commerce and Industry welcomed the Austrian delegation and said that Pakistan and Austria have good potential to enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields including higher education, hydropower, renewable energy, oil & gas, information technology, tourism and many other fields. He said that Austria was an advanced economy and Pakistan could benefit a lot by developing strong economic relations with it. He said that the current level of bilateral trade between the two countries was not reflective of their actual potential and both sides should make strong efforts to improve it. He assured that ICCI would cooperate in connecting Austrian companies with right partners in Pakistan.



MoITT launches projects to provide broadband services to 2.5 mln people

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) through USF has launched seven more projects worth over Rs 8 billion to provide Broadband services to over 2.5 million people in the un-served and under-served areas of the four provinces, including Rs 3.5 billion projects for Balochistan. The projects were approved at the 81st meeting of the Board of Directors of the Universal Service Fund (USF), since then, the number of projects for providing optical fiber cable and broadband services from 2018 to date has reached a record 56 and the total cost (subsidy) has exceeded Rs 52 billion, said a news release. The meeting was chaired by Secretary IT and Telecom and Chairman USF Board Dr Muhammad So-

hail Rajput while Chairman PTA Major General (Retd) Amir Azeem Bajwa, Member Telecom Muhammad Umar Malik, CEO Telenor Irfan Wahab Khan, Imran Akhtar Shah, Kokab Iqbal, Sibte Hassan Gardezi and other officials were present. Chief Executive Officer USF Haaris Mahmood Chaudhry gave a detailed briefing to the Board about the projects. Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Syed Amin-Ul-Haque, while congratulating the USF Board on the launch of the projects, said that whatever the political situation, the MoITT and its subsidiaries, especially the Universal service fund, continued to perform. He said that the completion of all the projects started during the tenure of the present government was being ensured within the stipulated time while for all the projects under the rules only the lowest

bidding telecom operators were selected. Earlier addressing the meeting, Secretary IT and Chairman USF Board Dr. Muhammad Sohail Rajput said that the provision of broadband services to the residents of the un-served and under-served areas of the country is as much needed as for the big cities. He said that while the implementation of projects for the four provinces has been ensured under the rules and regulations, the projects worth Rs 3.57 billion have been approved in principle, giving special importance to the deprived Balochistan. Dr. Sohail Rajput further said that although the wide area of Balochistan and the provision of broadband services to the spread population is costlier than any other area, the Board under the direction of Federal Minister for IT Syed Amin-Ul-Haque always included in our priorities.

CDA staff's holidays suspended for OIC meeting

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority's (CDA) environment department staff will be available from March 19 to 23 to ensure arrangements for OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting. The staff's holidays has been suspended to perform various tasks on the arrival of guests for 48th OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting to be held from March 22-23, said its spokesman on Thursday. The workers will work in different shifts under the supervision of officers concerned. Special teams were in the field to give city a festive look on the arrival of guests, an official of the authority told APP. Similarly, he said teams has been constituted to ensure cleanliness and sanitation across the city especially at the venue and on the route. OIC is the second major international organization after the United Nations with 57 members from Islamic countries. – APP

Government launches Kamyab Jawan Green Youth Movement

ISLAMABAD: The government launched today (Thursday) Kamyab Jawan Green Youth Movement (GYM) under the Prime Minister's Youth Program "Green and Clean, Pakistan". Planning Minister Asad Umar, Special Assistant on Youth Affairs Usman Dar, Special Assistant on Climate Change and Minister of State for Climate Change Zartaj Gul inaugurated the program in an event in Islamabad on Thursday. The Program will be supported by British Council under its Pakistan Youth Leadership Initiative program. Under this initiative, program will be executed through 137 public universities and Green Youth Movement Clubs. Green Clubs will be developed in all public sectors Higher Education Institutions engaging 2.5 million youth. Addressing the event, the Planning Minister said that the government under the leadership of Imran Khan has taken several commendable initiatives to tackle the issue of climate change as Pakistan falls on the list of ten climate-hit affected countries. He said three dams are being constructed to meet the water crises and climate issue. Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said Prime Minister Imran Khan is the hope of Pakistan's youth who will overcome no-confidence move. He said opposition will not succeed in its conspiracies. He said PTI will hold an historic public gathering at D-Chowk on 27th of this month. He said the future of our youth can never be handed over to corrupt people. Special Assistant on Youth Affairs Usman Dar, in his remarks said that under Kamyab Jawan Program 42 billion rupees have so far been disbursed among youth under different initiatives while 25000 businesses have been established. He said under GYM, over 65000 jobs will be created transparently. Special Assistant on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam said that due to prudent climate-base policies, Pakistan has become Green Champion. – DNA

Abacus Consulting wins the LCCI's IT Award

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Abacus Consulting, a leading technology, consulting and outsourcing firm has been awarded the LCCI President's IT Award for its contribution to the IT landscape of Pakistan. Held at Aiwan-e-Sadr, Islamabad, Abacus was lauded for playing a pivotal role in the technology landscape of Pakistan and its contribution to the economy. The award was presented by His Excellency, Dr. Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan to Fatima Asad-Said, CEO of Abacus Consulting. 'I'm extremely grateful to His Excellency, Dr. Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan and the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industries for this recognition. This award is a testament to our innovation in providing top of the line technology solutions for our Clients worldwide,' said Fatima Asad-Said at the occasion. She attributed the award to the Abacus team, adding 'Our commitment to deliver world-class solutions and creating value to our Clients and Partners is truly driven by our People, without whom none of this would be possible.' For over three decades, Abacus Consulting has been one of Pakistan's leading technology

companies with a wide portfolio of business transformation offerings including Enterprise Systems, Digital Transformation Solutions, International / Public Sector Development, Business Process Outsourcing, Cloud &

Emerging Technologies, Human Capital Solutions and Strategy & Financial Consulting. Over the years, Abacus has evolved through a focus on building deep partnerships with global leaders and sustained investment in widen-

ing its global footprint. As a strategic partner to some of the world's leading technology firms like SAP, Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud, Microsoft, UiPath and more, Abacus is a leading ICT exporter of Pakistan. Previously, Abacus also won the prestigious 'SAP's Partner of the Year MENA' award for five years in a row (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) for its excellence and market leadership in SAP platforms. Speaking on the occasion, President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi said that promotion of information technology is vital for the development of the country and remains a top priority for the government. Underscoring the need for the training of IT graduates and youth to boost their skills to meet the country's IT requirements, Dr. Arif Alvi said that the IT sector of the country has the potential to boost IT exports up to \$5 billion by 2023. 'Information technology and digital communication have always been vital but the importance of these has multiplied during the COVID-19 era,' He added. LCCI President Mian Nauman Kabir, commended the government's recent initiatives in support of the ICT sector and applauded the high growth of 40-45% surpassing other sectors.



Indian missile launch could have triggered crises: Sherry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairperson Sherry Rehman termed the launch of an Indian missile into Pakistan a potential trigger point for multiple crises, while expressing concerns over the matter during the committee's meeting on Wednesday. Rehman, who is also a parliamentary leader of PPP in the Senate, reviewed the Indian projectile crash in Pakistani territory and Prime Minister Imran Khan's Moscow tour follow-up in the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs session held at the Parliament House. During the meeting, Rehman expressed intention to call officials of the Air Defence Command and Strategic Plans Division in the next meeting of the committee and sought an in-camera briefing on the matter. "Indian missile crash was an extremely dangerous indicator of multiple crises that could have been precipitated," the Senator said. She said an escalation of hostilities between two powerful, nuclearised countries must be avoided at all costs, especially in the absence of a framework for scaling down. "There is no current example in the world of such a risk-laden environment where two nuclear powers who have had four wars between them are also direct neighbours." She said it is because of our turbulent history that the severity of this so-called "mistake" cannot go unnoticed by Pakistan and the international community. "It is of paramount importance to note that this 'technical glitch' did not occur in disputed territory, rather 500km from Islamabad in Mian Channu," she said.

Ehsaas Cash payments commencing from March 24

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection, Dr. Sania Nishitar Thursday announced that Ehsaas Emergency Cash payments to internally displaced families returning to Tirah valley will begin next week from March 24. "Each of the 15,699 returning families will be paid one off assistance of Rs. 20,000 under Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme. All payments will be mobilized through the biometric payment system of Ehsaas. Arrangements are being made to run smooth cash transfer operations", Dr. Sania said. Earlier this month, Dr. Sania made a visit to Tirah valley to ascertain the extent of assistance needed by returning families. During the visit, she sat with affected families and interacted with them to listen to their problems. Towards the end of her visit, Dr. Sania had also announced the Ehsaas Emergency Cash package for 15,699 families, after the Prime Minister's approval. The visit was facilitated by the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps North Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. – APP

ECC approves Rs 24.26bln fertilizer subsidy

ISLAMABAD: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the cabinet here on Thursday approved Rs 24.26 billion subsidy on fertilizer for Kharif Crops 2022 and also enhanced Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Wheat Crop 2021-22 from Rs.1,950/40 Kg to Rs 2,200/40 Kg. The meeting was chaired by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Shaukat Tarin while among others it was attended by Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research (NFS&R), Syed Fakhar Imam, Minister of Energy Hammad Azhar, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Commerce and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, Governor SBP, Federal Secretaries and other senior officers. – APP

Briefs

Country back to-normal life after pandemic

ISLAMABAD: Director General Health Dr Hassan Urooj Thursday said that country was making a "rapid recovery" and all indicators returned toward normal life after long-time of coronavirus restrictions where number of daily cases stayed below 1%. Talking to PTV news, he lauded the efforts of National Command and Operation Center's team for putting up a robust response to the pandemic and ensuring co-ordinated actions across the country. He also praised the community's adherence to safety protocols and vaccine uptake, saying this has helped the country to overcome the pandemic.

He further advised that countries across the world should continue their policies to review the coronavirus, adding, collective efforts helped the detection of cases, making various COVID-19 vaccines available, and increasing vaccination awareness which in turn contributed to the decrease in the number of cases. "There is hope that nation will continue maintaining social distancing and wearing masks as much as possible," he added. Replying a question, he said that hopefully currently no any other variant would be effective as the whole world is vaccinated its population against the virus. In Pakistan all the schools, colleges, government offices, and transport have been allowed to operate at full capacity, whereas the ban on indoor dining and wedding halls has also been lifted, he mentioned. - APP

Govt confident to defeat opposition, says Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Member National Assembly (MNA) Sadaqat Ali Abbasi Thursday said that the government was fully confident to defeat opposition's no-confidence move as it enjoyed support of its allies. Talking to a private news channel, he said that government would hold 'historic public gathering' here at D-Chowk before the vote on no-confidence motion against the prime minister. Replying to a question, he said that PM Imran Khan had always worked in the best national interests, sensitized the world over Islamophobia and strengthened the national economy. He said that prime minister was continuously making efforts to alert the world about the sensitivity and implications of the issue. However, there is need to appreciate the efforts of PM Imran Khan for highlighting the issue of Islamophobia at all international forums instead of doing propaganda against his government. - APP

IRSA releases 82960 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Thursday released 82960 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 85928 cases. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1072.20 feet, which was 22.02 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded a 34168 and 32000 cusecs respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa and Sukkur was recorded as 23296, 21563 and 19445 cases respectively. Similarly, from the Kabul River, a total of 9000 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 21060 cusecs released from the Chenab River at Marala. - APP

ANF arrests 16 including 3 women

RAWALPINDI: Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Punjab in its operations conducted in different areas managed to recover over 51-kg charras besides netting 16 accused including three women. According to ANF Headquarters spokesman, ANF conducted an operation at Sargodha Mor Mianwali and recovered 36-kg charras from a Toyota Corolla car and arrested five accused including three women. - APP

Single national curriculum to end division: Shafqat

The minister congratulated the position holders as well as their parents and teachers, besides lauding the FBISE for introducing reforms in education as well as examination system



KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mahmood Thursday said that the single national curriculum (SNC) would not only do away with the division within the nation but also provide a level playing field to the students. The minister, addressing the distribution ceremony of awards and prizes among the position holders of Federal Board of Intermediate

and Secondary Education here, said the SNC had already been enforced from class 1-5. For class 6 to 8, it would be introduced this year and in the upcoming year for classes 9 and 10. He said contrary to the international practice, the country had three education systems in form of English medium, Urdu medium and religious seminaries. However, the SNC would end this discrimination as it had been the main target of the incumbent government. He said the ministry was

also striving to overcome the difficulties being faced during the SNC's implementation. The minister congratulated the position holders as well as their parents and teachers, besides lauding the FBISE for introducing reforms in education as well as examination system. He said having around 2,652 educational institutions linked with it including the Pakistan international schools across the world, the FBISE was in the process to do away

with the rote learning by introducing examination pattern based on the students learning outcome. Moreover, he said the government had also established first National Skills University where 600 students were getting skill trainings in multiple fields. He also urged the Higher Education Commission to review the universities' curriculum to conform it with the market needs. Earlier, the education minister along with Secretary Education Naheed Durrani

distributed awards among the toppers of secondary schools certificate (SSC) and higher secondary school certificates (HSSC) of 2020 and 2021 sessions. The first position holders were given gold medals while those on second and third slots got silver and bronze medals respectively besides a laptop, certificate and cash prizes given to all the toppers. In his remarks FBISE Chairman Qasim Alam apprised the audience of the ongoing educational and

examinations reforms being enforced by the Board across the country. He said the Board had introduced biannual exams replacing the supplementary examination besides carrying out the GIS mapping of all examination centers. He said the students would be given three sets of model and papers and their solved copies. Moreover, a pilot project the computer-based examination would be executed this year besides introducing e-marking of the papers.



ISLAMABAD: Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg planting a sapling at Foreign office. Shah Mahmood Qureshi is also present at the occasion. - DNA

ISPR releases Shad Rahe Pak national song

RAWALPINDI: The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Thursday released the national song Shad Rahe Pakistan (May Pakistan remain happy) as part of the Pakistan Day celebrations. Shad Rahe Pakistan is a unique song composed in connection with 23rd March which is a prayer in the name of this sacred land which is becoming the voice of the heart of every Pakistani declaring that Pakistan was happy, is happy and may remain happy, said an ISPR news release. "This song is a manifestation of good wishes like glorious past, determined present and prosperous future", it said. The composition of this song was done by leading Pakistani composer Shuja Haider who has written this song. The melodious voices of Yashal Shahid and Shuja Haider have made this song even more beautiful. The lyrics of the song say, "May the crescent and the star shine like this forever
May your name shine on the horizon like this
Our heart and soul sacrificed on the country, May this Pakistan be happy
Above all, let his name may Pakistan be happy
Yours and mine identity is one, happy Pakistan
This echoing voice roars happy Pakistan". - APP

PM Khan urges expatriates to make safe investment

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan Thursday said that there were massive investment opportunities available for overseas Pakistanis to make safe investments in Central Business District (CBD) and Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) projects. The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review progress on the projects, said record revenue of Rs. 57.88 billion had been generated during two auctions of commercial plots in CBD. Appreciating the efforts of CBD team, the prime minister said the government had targeted dead capital, lying unutilized throughout the country and had converted it into sustainable revenue generating initiatives. He viewed that unplanned and unmanaged urban sprawl would affect food security where green areas were being converted to housing and commercial areas. He said that government was adopting environment friendly approach for new urban projects to cater for residential and commercial requirements as well as preserving green areas. The prime minister directed the Punjab government to take legal action against illegal housing societies, selling land in flood plains thereby risking the lives and investments of the general public. Earlier, the meeting was briefed about progress of CBD and RUDA projects including Lahore's first Downtown auctions, captive power plant construction, ChaharBagh, RakhJhok National Park, RUDA Technology Park, 10,000 apartments District, dedicated for overseas Pakistanis, waste water treatment plant and other amenities. Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, Information Minister of State Farukh Habib, SAPM Dr. Shehbaz Gill, Chairman Naya Pakistan Housing & Development Authority Lt. Gen. (R) Anwar Ali Haider and senior officers attended the meeting. - DNA

Various competitions to be held at F-9 Park

ISLAMABAD: Families and youth are invited to take part in multiple competitions to be held here on March 18 in connection with the Pakistan Day. The Directorate of Sports, Culture and Tourism Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) has organized special events to celebrate Pakistan Day at the cricket ground in Fatima Jinnah Park. Focal Person MCI Dr M Abdullah Tabassum told APP, "The activities have been planned to commemorate 82nd Pakistan Day. We are conducting these functions on March 18 due to the OIC conference on March 22 and the full dress rehearsals being conducted these days for the Pakistan Day parade." The celebrations will kick off with human flag formation by kids at 9:30 a.m. - APP

Shaukat Tarin holds meeting with PSA delegation



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Mr. Shaukat Tarin held a meeting with a delegation of Pakistan Stockbrokers Association led by its Vice Chairman Mr. Zahid Latif Khan at Finance Division, today. The delegation apprised the Finance Minister of certain issues and challenges impeding the growth of Capital

market in Pakistan and sought support of government to resolve their issues. They requested for providing tax incentives on Capital gain and investment in stock exchange. Finance Minister Mr. Shaukat Tarin said that government is encouraging investment and enlisting of entities in the stock exchange. He further assured the delegation his support to resolve their issues and for growth of Capital market in Pakistan.

Govt to give around Rs30bln subsidy on POL products

The meeting was informed that ECC had approved a budget of Rs20 billion with a quick mechanism to pay PDC to OMCs and refineries through OGRA and PSO within seven days after each fortnight

ISLAMABAD: The Senate's Standing Committee on Petroleum was informed on Thursday that the government would give around Rs30 billion subsidies on petroleum products in the coming fortnights to protect the common man from impacts of the increased fuel prices in the international market. "Expected PDC (Price Differential Claim) for March 1-15 is Rs883 million, however, in subsequent fortnights, it is expected to be around Rs30 billion, depending upon international oil prices," officials of Petroleum Division briefed the committee meeting, chaired by Muhammad Abdul Qadir. They said prompt payment of PDCs to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) was needed to keep their confidence intact

and avert any shortages in the market, adding "Energy supply chain might face some issues if the confidence is lacking." The committee was apprised that the prime minister had announced a relief package reducing the consumer price of Motor Spirit (MS - Petrol) and High-Speed Diesel (HSD) by Rs10 per litre each on February 28, and the PDCs would be adjusted accordingly. Chairman Abdul Qadir feared that there could be a diesel shortage in the market as some OMCs had curtailed the supply to their designated fuel stations, asking the quarters concerned to take practical measures to ensure smooth supply of petroleum products across the country. The officials said the fuel im-

porting OMCs could need assistance with extended LC (Letter of Credit) limits on account of increasing prices in the international market. "OMCs/Refineries may need higher working capital limits on account of the price differential." The officials viewed that the supply of petroleum products in the international market was getting limited due to several reasons including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, adding the demand for HSD was going to increase with the start of harvest season in the country. Currently, they said the country had 26-day diesel stock to meet the energy needs of the consumers. The meeting was informed that the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) had approved a

budget of Rs20 billion with a quick mechanism to pay PDC to OMCs and refineries through the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) and Pakistan State Oil (PSO) within seven days after each fortnight. The PSO has issued an urgent tender for diesel along with a normal tender and awarded two additional cargoes from the spot market for smooth supply of fuel across the country. "These are in addition to three planned cargoes through its long-term G2G supplier - Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), thus making a total of five cargoes or 275,000 MT in March 2022." The OGRA authorities told the body that OMCs were required to ensure dispensing petroleum products at retail outlets/petrole-

um pumps under the prescribed specifications, for which respective OMCs carried out on-spot quality checks through their mobile teams. To cross-check the same, they said, random inspections were carried out through the Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan, adding the institute had recently prepared a Mobile Quality Van that would also be employed for on-spot quality testing. Among others, the meeting was attended by Senators Fida Muhammad, Mohsin Aziz, Aon Abbas, Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti, Saadia Abbasi, Atta ur Rehman Shammami Afridi, and Syed Muhammad Sabir Shah, besides officials of the Petroleum Division and its attached departments. - APP

Railways transport 25,054 tons per day

ISLAMABAD: The freight sector has shown considerable improvement through transporting 25,054 tons per day from Karachi during the year 2020-21 as compared to the 23,051 tons per day during 2019-20 due to the consistent efforts of Pakistan Railways. The official said that competitive freight rates to attract more traffic have been introduced while high capacity trucks have been inducted in the current fleet for swift movement/unloading of coal, an official told APP. He said the outsourcing of freight trains has also been initiated under Pakistan Railways Freight Transportation Company (PRFTC) to earn more revenue for the department. - APP

Buddhists heritage attracting devotees

ISLAMABAD: The Buddhists heritage in Pakistan is attracting a large number of people from across the country including devotees from Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Germany, Canada and United States. The devotees attracted by the exhibition of artworks and trips to key Buddhist heritage sites in the Gandhara region of Pakistan as the country promoting the value of Pakistan's ancient cultural and religious heritage for peace and tourism. It also brought together diverse religious faith leaders including Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs to establish a dialogue. A delegation of ten Buddhist women leaders from Malaysia visited Pakistan specifically to participate in the conference activities and post-conference trips to Gandharan Buddhist sites. As a holy land for millions of Buddhist devotees, Pakistan houses the Buddhist heritage sites, art and iconography of unmatched significance for devotees, scholars and travelers. The site's visit provided them a platform to explore the Gandharan Buddhist history, philosophy, art, and architecture. The outstanding beauty of Buddhist art of Gandhara has attracted a lot including archaeological museums in Taxila, Peshawar, Mardan and Swat. - APP

Opposition using unconstitutional tactics: Gill

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, for Political Communications Dr. Shahbaz Gill on Thursday said the incompetent opposition wants to come into power by using unconstitutional tactics. Responding to PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal's statement, he said the disqualified Nawaz Sharif and his allies were engaged in bad politics and using unconstitutional tactics to save their politics. Gill said the money which they (Nawaz & allies) had looted from the country was being used in horse trading. "The incompetent opposition have themselves accepted the heinous act of horse trading but no matter how hard they try, they will fail," Gill said. - APP

Mobile phone imports increase

ISLAMABAD: The import of mobile phones into the country has witnessed an increase of 7.63 percent during the first eight months of fiscal year (2021-22) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. Pakistan imported mobile phones worth US \$1411.619 million during July-February (2021-22) as compared to the imports of US \$1311.493 million during July-February (2020-21), showing growth of 7.63 percent, according to the PBS. Meanwhile, on year-to-year basis, the import of mobile phones however decreased by 19.69 percent during the month of February 2022 when compared to the same month of last year. The import of mobiles into the country during February 2022 were recorded at \$141.207 million against the exports of \$175.821 million in February 2021. On month-on-month basis, the imports of mobile phones also witnessed decline of 21.45 percent during February 2022, as compared to the imports of US \$179.765 million during January 2022, according to the data. - APP

Direct flights between Pakistan and Azerbaijan

THE Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) operated its first ever direct flight from Lahore to Baku on March 16, 2022 thus building a direct linkage with brotherly country Azerbaijan. Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Khazar Farhadov and Chairman PIA Arshad Malik also traveled to Baku with the inaugural flight. The PIA flight was accorded a rousing welcome upon its arrival. Officials of Pakistan embassy including our Ambassador Bilal Hayee as well as officials of the Azerbaijan aviation department were there to welcome and greet the passengers of the flight. With the start of direct flights from Lahore and Karachi to Baku a long standing dream has finally come true.

The direct flight is a result of years of toil and steadfastness on both sides. Here one has to recognize role of the previous Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Ali Alizada who had spared no efforts in materializing this dream. The flight was scheduled to start during his tenure however due to Covid pandemic and certain procedural hiccups the operations got delayed. But, as it goes better late than never, so finally a direct contact is established and people can now reach from Lahore to Baku in just three and half hours. Pakistan and Azerbaijan enjoy excellent brotherly relations. Both countries hold common views on various regional as well as multilateral issues. Pakistan extended its fullest diplomatic and moral support to Azerbaijan during its war with Armenia. As a result of the 44-day Patriotic War Azerbaijani valiant armed forces were able to re-gain possession of its territories, which were under the illegal occupation of Armenia for decades. The reconstruction work in the newly-liberated areas has already kick started and Azerbaijan has invited Pakistan as well to be part of these rehabilitation activities.

Similarly Azerbaijan fully supports Pakistani stand on Kashmir and wants the conflict to be resolved as per the UN resolutions. Azerbaijan supports Pakistani view point at all international forums when it comes to resolution of the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan is greatly indebted to Azerbaijani leadership for this goodwill gesture.

The direct flights would surely further cement tourism relations between the two countries. Azerbaijan has a lot to offer to the tourists and so is the case with Pakistan. The way the newly-liberated areas are being developed and reconstructed, it is expected that flow of international tourists to these areas particularly is likely to increase manifold. Let us hope that initiation of direct flights between the two countries shall further strengthen and diversify bilateral relations.

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China Covid-19 outbreak

CHINA has posted a steep jump in daily Covid-19 infections with new cases more than doubling from a day earlier to a two-year high as a virus outbreak expanded rapidly in the north-east. A total of 3,507 domestically transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms were reported on Monday across more than a dozen provinces and municipalities, the National Health Commission said, up from 1,337 a day earlier.

Since the coronavirus first emerged in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, China had successfully suppressed large-scale outbreaks through its strict "zero-Covid" strategy, which involved hard lockdowns that confined huge sections of the population to their homes. While the country's case load is still tiny by global standards, health experts said the rate of increase in daily cases over the next few weeks would be a crucial factor in determining whether its tough containment approach was still effective against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant. Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Thursday the country will "stick with" its zero-Covid strategy, state TV reported, as the world's most populous nation battles its largest outbreak since the early days of the pandemic. More than 2,400 cases were reported Thursday, according to the National Health Commission.

Speaking at a meeting of China's top leaders, Xi said the country should "continue to put people and life at the forefront, stick with scientific accuracy and dynamic-zero, and curb the spread of the epidemic as soon as possible," according to state broadcaster CCTV. Beijing must "raise the level of scientifically accurate prevention and control and continuously optimise disease control measures", the report quoted Xi as saying.

Xi also urged tighter virus controls at ports of entry and stressed the need to "swiftly control local clustered outbreaks".

A Covid-19 forecasting system run by Lanzhou University in China's north-west predicted that the current round of infections would eventually be brought under control in early April after an accumulated total of about 35,000 cases. The university said in its latest assessment published on Monday that while the outbreak was the most serious on the mainland since Wuhan in 2020, China could bring it under control as long as stringent curbs remained in place.

At least 11 cities and counties nationwide have been locked down because of the latest surge, including the southern tech hub of Shenzhen, home to 17 million people.

China-Iran new Partnership and Regional Dynamics

Dr. M Akram Zaheer



The most significant difference between China's intercontinental development mega-projects and their counterparts, such as the EU, was that China did not impose any political conditions on the cooperating countries

ON March 27, 2021, Iran and China signed the 25-year Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, the drafting of which sparked much controversy after its release to the press in July 2020. The agreement is for oil production, transportation and security, rail, road and port infrastructure development activities in Iran, which are also important for the China Belt and Road Initiative. The cooperation may lead to strategic areas such as defense, military and information technology. Although the figures for cooperation in these areas have not been formally shared, China is reported to have invested \$280 billion in energy sector and \$120 billion in its

infrastructure development activities and total \$400 billion. In return for these investments, Iran will sell oil to China on a regular basis at a relatively low price.

There are many perspectives of the Sino-Iranian deal such as a political move against the nuclear deal which has been a bone of contention between Washington and the Tehran. While Washington's reluctance to return to the Iran nuclear deal is bringing Iran closer to China and the deal may be a "game changer" for Iran. On the other hand, the deal could not be a "game changer" for Iran but may not be a "part of the strategy. This is because the issue is primarily global and transcends Iran's bilateral relations with both countries, is linked to the global animosity between the United States and China, and runs rampant at the regional level.

In this context, to fully examine the impact of the agreement on bilateral relations, the dynamics of the global power transfer between China and the United States, the expansion of its transition plan, and multilateral policy. Considering it the most important player in shaping the economic and political structure of the world system in the multi-polar environment of post-Soviet international politics, the United States began to see China as China's growing global rival. In the mid-2000s, its aggressive modernization policy began to bear fruit. Indeed, more and more estimates indicate that the transition of global power between the United States and China will take place by 2050, with a rapid increase in China's productive capacity as well as its energy consumption, gross national product and military. Expenses will also be considered. On the other hand, these indications are not sufficient to end the transfer of global power, as the real transition begins when the emerging state demonstrates its ability to establish an alternative system to the principles, laws and institutions of the existing international system. In this context, with its

principles, laws and institutions, the current international system, influenced by the economic and political structure of Europe and the United States, reflects liberal political / economic values, aimed at strengthening power between states and states. It provided various economic and political benefits to actors who already existed or would be integrated into the system.

However, China, despite being a cohesive player in the institutions of the current international system, has a very different approach to modernity: an alternative approach to modernity implemented through a strong and interventionist state capability, and which prioritizes development. At the political level, the process of liberal-democratic socio-political system envisioned through the liberal methods of modernity.

With the Belt and Road Initiative, which was launched in 2013, we can see that this alternative Chinese vision of modernity is slowly being introduced in foreign countries. In fact, in more than 70 mostly backward or developing countries, and especially in the Turkic countries of Central Asia, the subcontinent, Pakistan and Eastern Europe, China already has major projects aimed at boosting development, trade and investment. Is sponsoring and enforcing.

The most significant difference between China's intercontinental development mega-projects and their counterparts, such as the European Union (EU), was that China did not impose any political conditions on the cooperating countries. In this regard, China emphasizes the principles of "national sovereignty", "win-win-oriented cooperation" and "multilateral international system" in every agreement reached with each country, making it clear that it do not like to enter into any political or military alliance that ended in a patron-client relationship, that he was merely forming a strategic association with them that focused solely on trade and investment.

Space will soon become part of superpowers' war strategies

Nidhal Guessoum

For the last few years, however, space has increasingly become a focus of military interest by the big powers. In December 2019, the Trump administration created the US Space Force, separating it from the US Air Force; it now regularly conducts "Space Flag" training/simulation exercises, where missile-satellite attack scenarios are tested

LAST November, unrelated to the Ukraine situation, Russia blew up one of its old communications satellites. The month before, China tested a new hypersonic anti-satellite missile. In March 2019, India destroyed a "low Earth orbit" satellite from the ground, becoming the fourth country to do so. Indeed, the US, Russia and China have been destroying satellites (so far only their own) from the Earth's surface for some time. For the last few years, however, space has increasingly become a focus of military interest by the big powers. In December 2019, the Trump administration created the US Space Force, separating it from the US Air Force; it now regularly conducts "Space Flag" training/simulation exercises, where missile-satellite attack scenarios are tested. And in July 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron instructed his government to create a "space high command" to "protect French satellites" from various kinds of attack.

It is widely believed that, in the near future, some of the first facilities to be targeted, destroyed or incapacitated will be satellites, both remote sensing (those that take close-up, high-resolution images of ground areas) and communication (those that transfer information between fixed installations or mobile devices).

Attacks can be of various kinds. One is destruction by missiles such as the above. Another is "jamming," whereby the satellite's electronics and signals are jumbled or corrupted, thus rendering the satellite useless. A similar attack is "spoofing," which takes place on the ground, where one station sends out a fake signal to trick a target into believing it has received the satellite signal it was seeking and expecting. And another type of attack is the blinding with lasers of remote sensing (or imaging, i.e., spying) satellites passing overhead, preventing them from taking photos of areas that are of strategic importance (a military base, a site of military exercises or operations, etc.).

All these types of attack (electronic or laser) are being tested successfully and quite frequently. Gen. David Thomp-

son, the vice chief of space operations at the US Space Force, last November told the Washington Post that China and Russia are targeting US government satellites on a daily basis, mostly using jamming and cyberattacks. And if that were not worrisome enough, intelligence agencies assert that other countries, including North Korea and Iran, are now developing such capabilities. The attacks described above are conducted from the ground. However, conducting operations from space is also possible and some such exercises have been performed. In particular, the US Space Force has recorded cases of "rendezvous and proximity" operations, whereby one satellite approaches another, takes pictures of its various components and moves away. In 2014, the US launched three satellites into high (geosynchronous) orbit to keep "watch" on other satellites.

More aggressive moves, such as spraying a satellite's camera or its solar panels, thus either immediately blinding it or cutting its energy source, can be done, though they have not been observed so far. Finally, what may seem like a science-fiction scenario but is definitely real is that space-to-ground attacks are currently being developed. These see a dense cylinder dropped from low orbit, reaching 5,000 km per hour and becoming the equivalent of a small nuclear warhead, with the aim of penetrating facilities deep underground.

Even before such scary scenarios are played out, the destruction of satellites is beginning to raise concerns due to the large amount of debris generated and the subsequent effects on other satellites and the International Space Station and its astronauts. There are currently about 100 million pieces of metal, plastic and other materials from past rockets and satellite parts - so-called "space debris" - orbiting the Earth. About 1 million of them are large enough (more than 5 cm wide) to be trackable (via radars) from the ground. With roughly 7,000 satellites currently orbiting Earth at various altitudes, half of them active and the rest out of service, one can calculate the probability that one of them will get hit by such a piece of debris and be punctured, which would be very serious. Indeed, when Russia destroyed its old satellite last November, the astronauts aboard the ISS were instructed to take precautionary measures in case one of the pieces hit one of the station's essential parts.

The same month, a research paper calculated that if/when the number of satellites in orbit reaches 65,000 (not an exaggerated assumption, considering that dozens of satellites are regularly launched nowadays), every destroyed satellite would almost certainly result in another satellite being hit by a debris piece larger than 3 mm.

The problem is that international treaties and conventions on space usage do not provide clear rulings on such activities. There is a prohibition on the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in space, but no decrees on ground-to-space military activity or "interference" acts.

The UN and other international bodies need to urgently discuss these developments and come up with clear rules on what should be prohibited. Space is for humanity to use peacefully, not for superpowers' follies.

—Courtesy: Arab News

The Gulf crisis has lessons for Putin. Not all may work in his favour

James Dorsey

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is "perhaps even a bigger moment than the fall of the Berlin Wall," Mr. Balakrishnan said

THE Ukraine crisis may constitute a more impactful, historic watershed than the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall in the mind of Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is "perhaps even a bigger moment than the fall of the Berlin Wall," Mr. Balakrishnan said. "We believe we are at an inflection point," he added. "Little Singapore is standing up for principles and expressing a hope for the rules of engagement for this new era."

In a break with diplomatic tradition, Singapore joined Western nations in sanctioning Russia, the first Southeast Asian nation to do so in the absence of a United Nations Security Council resolution.

Mr. Balakrishnan may well be right even if the Berlin wall sparked the end of communism as an ideology rather than a power-driven political system, while Ukraine is likely to take Russia out of the race for global power in an emerging bi- or multipolar world order. Despite the characterisation of the Ukraine crisis as one that pits democracy against autocracy and the fact

that the vast majority of nations that have taken action against Russia happen to be democracies, the stakes in the crisis are really about adherence to international law irrespective of a country's political system. That is evident in the diddling of countries like China, India, and the United Arab Emirates that have tried to straddle a middle ground. So have Israel and Turkey, exploiting their attempts to mediate an end to the Ukraine crisis.

China has struggled to uphold its long-standing principle of rejection of the interference in the affairs of others with its close partnership with Russia that was further cemented during a visit to Beijing in early February by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed told Mr. Putin in a March 1 phone call, on the back of Emirati interference in multiple countries, including Libya and Yemen, that "Russia has a right to ensure national security." Mr. Bin Zayed was referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Short of the war, the destruction, and the massive loss of life, Ukraine is in many ways similar to the Gulf crisis in which the UAE, together with Saudi Arabia, led a 3.5-year-long economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar that, like the Russian invasion, was designed to hollow out the sovereignty of a neighbouring state. Russia's invasion constitutes the third time in a decade after the 2017-2021 Gulf crisis and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea that autocratic states have sought to ignore international law and brutally impose their will on a neighbour.

In that sense, Mr. Balakrishnan's equation of the invasion with the Berlin wall hits the nail on the head. It also suggests that failure to act immediately to stop violations of international law opens the door to ever more egregious trespassings, including massive violations of human rights.

The analogies between the Ukraine and Gulf crises are most evident in the demands put forward in both incidents. Islamists, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were asked to relocate to Istanbul and London while Al Jazeera toned down its more critical coverage of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Virtually absent in this week's Al Jazeera newscasts was any reporting of the execution of 81 people in the kingdom, many of them Shiite activists. However, the Al Jazeera English website did report the executions. They are believed to have prompted Iran's suspension of Iraqi-sponsored talks with Saudi Arabia designed to reduce tensions between the two regional rivals.

The failure of the Saudi-UAE-led boycott may have shown the limits of their power, but ending it without the ability to claim success did not threaten the survival of the two countries' rulers. However, finding a face-saving solution to the Ukraine crisis that ultimately does not endanger the position of Mr. Putin could prove a lot more complicated.

The international community and Qatar were willing to give Mr. Bin Zayed and his Saudi counterpart, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a pass. That luxury is unlikely to be accorded to Mr. Putin.

Briefs

PTI's own men rock...

FROM PAGE 01

said that around 24 PTI members have been staying in the Sindh House right now. He further said that many other ministers are ready to come here, however, PML-N is unable to accommodate all the members. Riaz, who is a member of the Jahangir Tareen Group, told journalist Hamid Mir that the disgruntled members would vote for the no-confidence motion against PM Imran Khan in "accordance with their conscience." Waseer also said he would not contest the next general elections on a PTI ticket.

While Riaz claimed that 24 members are staying in the Sindh House, Hamid Mir said that according to his counting, "20 PTI MNAs are present in Sindh House." The senior journalist said that several disgruntled leaders are avoiding the camera; however, he said that all of them have confirmed that the reason for staying at the Sindh House is out of fear.

Govt orders strict...

FROM PAGE 01

hub, well-informed sources said. Sindh House is in the news after a federal minister accused the PPP of using the building for its nefarious designs.

On March 14, Federal Minister Ali Zaidi had claimed that the PPP has deployed additional SSU commandos at the building "to protect the bags of looted wealth #ZardariMafia brought to try & bribe our MNAs!" Following up on his statement, the PTI minister also wrote a letter to Secretary Establishment demanding an immediate inquiry on SSU Sindh DIG Maqsood Memon. Sources privy to the matter said that the meeting decided to strictly monitor the lawmakers and Sindh House to ensure that no one falls prey to horse-trading.

Sh Rashid for Governor...

FROM PAGE 01

Minister Imran Khan to impose Governor rule in Sindh. Talking to media outside the Prime Minister House after meeting PM Khan, Sh Rashid said he has advised PM Khan to impose governor rule in Sindh (to counter the no-confidence motion in the centre).

"I have advised PM Imran Khan to impose governor rule for the way the money has been used indiscriminately to buy the conscience of the people," the Interior Minister said. He said he has conveyed his message to PM Khan and had left the meeting. Sh Rashid's statement came after the exposure of the PTI MNAs presence in Sindh House and a hint given by Federal Information Minister Fawad Chaudhary that government may take strong action over the alleged horse-trading being conducted in Sindh House.

No-trust move our...

FROM PAGE 01

their delay," he said. "The majority party will be offered to bring its prime minister after the no-confidence motion passed." Gillani said. "All PDM parties will devise their line of action after the no-trust move succeed," he further said. Gillani alleged that the police had raided the Parliament Lodges and manhandled our MNAs. "The members and workers returned back within a night. After the incident the members had asked for staying in Sindh House," he said. "We have lawfully kept our members at Sindh House," he said.

Zardari, Bilawal...

FROM PAGE 01

Nayyer Bukhari, Farhatullah Babar, Raza Rabbani, Naveed Qamar, Syed Murad Ali Shah, Khurshid Shah, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Shazia Marri, Rukhsana Bangash, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Chaudhry Manzoor and others. All PPP provincial presidents attended the Core committee meeting via video link.

PAF College Sargodha celebrates founders' day

A large number of serving and retired defence personnel, senior bureaucrats, teachers and parents of the students were present on the occasion

SPORTS DESK

SARGODHA: Founders' Day was held at Pakistan Air Force College, Sargodha. Air Marshal Syed Noman Ali, Vice Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, was the Chief Guest at the occasion. Air Vice Marshal (Retd) Imran Khalid, Principal PAF College, Sargodha presented the annual report. The students of the college presented an impressive Gymnastics and Martial Arts display along with a well-synchronized PT show. The College also put up an attractive Aero modeling Display in which Pre-Cadets manoeuvred radio-controlled aircraft models in the air. In his address the Chief Guest said, "This is a matter of immense pleasure for me to be here among you on the auspicious occasion of Founders' Day at PAF College, Sargodha. It is indeed, heart-warming to see a full-fledged academic year coming to a natural accomplishment in the COVID-19 affected times with its one or the other variant." While praising the



endeavors of the students, the Chief Guest further said, "You have put up a delightful show today. It reflects your keen interest in sports and passionate involvement

ment in co-curricular activities besides acquiring academic excellence." He also congratulated the parents on the success of their children and commended the faculty members for their excellent

instructional skills. On conclusion of the event, Vice Chief of the Air Staff gave away prizes to the winning houses and

individuals. The Academic Colour for overall excellence in academics were received by M Bukhari (Munir House), Mati ur Rehman (Rafiqi House), S M Ali Shah (Yunus House), M Aneeq (Rafiqi House), M Farhan (Munir House), M Fahad Akram (Alam House), Shaheer Ahmed (Munir House), Sameed Rao (Alam House), M Abaidullah (Munir House), Asif Khan (Alauddin House), Samiullah (Alam House), Afan Amir (Rafiqi House), Yasir Noor (Iqbal House) and Ahmad Ali (Munir House). Athletics Trophy was received by Alam House. Chigwell Shield for sports was also won by Alam House. General Service Training Cup for co-curricular activities was won by Munir House, while Chief of the Air Staff trophy for academics was awarded to Munir House. Munir House lifted the coveted Quaid-e-Azam Shield for being overall Champion House of the Year.

A large number of serving and retired defence personnel, senior bureaucrats, teachers and parents of the students were present on the occasion.

Pakistan Cricket Board reveals squad for ODI, T20I

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has revealed ODI and T20I squad for Pak vs Aus series, starting from March 29 in Rawalpindi. Asif Afridi got a maiden call-up for white-ball series whereas Mohammad Harris earned second chance as the home New Zealand tour couldn't happen. The two cricketers showed their strength in domestic season. Selectors have picked up 20 players for the ODIs, which are being played as part of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League; they have chosen 17 players for the only T20I, leaving out Abdullah Shafique, Imam-Ul-Haq and Saud Shakeel.

ODI Squad

Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Abdullah Shafique, Asif Afridi, Asif Ali, Fakhar Zaman, Haider Ali, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imam-Ul-Haq, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Harris (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Wasim Jr, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shah Nawaz Dahani, Usman Qadir.

T20I squad

Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan (vice-captain), Asif Afridi, Asif Ali, Fakhar Zaman, Haider Ali, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Harris (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Wasim Jr, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shah Nawaz Dahani, Usman Qadir.

People will remember Rizwan for years: Akhtar

Akhtar also opined that the interest of cricket develops and new cricketers are born after watching the kind of innings Babar played

DNA

LAHORE: Former speedster Shoaib Akhtar has lavished praise on Pakistan's wicketkeeper batter Mohammad Rizwan for his brilliant performances across formats since cementing his place in the national side. The 29-year-old smacked a crucial 104* off 177 balls in the second Test against Australia, leading Pakistan to an epic draw with skipper Babar Azam, who himself created history for scoring 196, the highest-ever by a captain in the fourth innings of a Test.

"Rizwan plays like there is no pressure on him. He has been doing wonders for the last few years and he has emerged as a core member of the side," Akhtar said on his YouTube channel. "Late Shane Warne used to say to me, it is not about how many wickets you

have taken, it is the way you played the game, people will remember you for how you played the game. The way Rizwan is playing, people will remember for years to come, he is very limited but it is all about intention. Almighty Allah is bestowing him with all the respect he deserves," he added. Akhtar also opined that the interest of cricket develops and new cricketers are born after watching the kind of innings Babar played while criticising the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and team management over not making pitches suited for the pacers. "Gallant effort by Babar Azam, he is the superhero after which children want to start playing cricket, very sad he couldn't score 200 but it doesn't matter. Cricketers will emerge due to Babar's effort; youngsters will look to become Babar Azam," he maintained. "Similarly, if you make fast pitches

where batters will get a blow, blood running from the nose, youngsters will look to become a pacer. No one will follow a pacer after watching his bowling in these dead pitches," he added. Akhtar also suggested PCB Chairman Ramiz Raja to think like a chairman and not as a cricketer after his defending remarks on the pitches for the first two Tests at Rawalpindi and Karachi. "You will have to endure the criticism over these dead pitches; what are you trying to prove. When a captain is a batsman and management go with a defensive mindset, you will see these type of pitches; deciding pitch must be made for the final Test. [Ramiz] please think as a chairman, change your mindset, produce better wickets which are result-oriented," he added. The 46-year-old concluded by praising PCB and security agencies for hosting Australia successfully.

Rafael Nadal extends perfect start to 2022

WEB DESK

INDIAN WELLS: Rafael Nadal battled past big-hitting American Reilly Opelka 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) on Wednesday to push his 2022 record to 18-0 and reach the quarter-finals of the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters.

The 35-year-old Spaniard, who won a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January and lifted the trophy in Acapulco last month, stayed on track for a fourth title in the California desert.

But he had all he could handle from the 2.11m tall American, including a raft of serves that topped the 140 mph mark and had Nadal's back against the wall - literally.

"I manage it so-so," he said of Opelka's serve, which the Spaniard stood as far back in the court as possible to receive. "I don't

know if the cameras can follow me like 10 meters behind the baseline." Opelka saved the only break point of a tense first set. A patient Nadal worked the rallies in the tiebreaker and after he gained a 4-3 lead Opelka produced three straight errors to surrender the set.

Impervious on his own serve in the opening set, Nadal gave Opelka a break chance with a double fault in the fifth game of the second and the American pounced on it. Unable to take advantage of a break point in the next game, Nadal saved three more break points in the seventh game before breaking back to knot it at 4-4. Nadal roared ahead in the second set tiebreaker, and after Opelka saved two match points with thundering serves the Spaniard finished it off with a winner. Nadal became just the second player to start a season 18-0 since the ATP Tour launched in 1990. Novak Djokovic has done it twice, starting 41-0 in 2011 and 26-0 in 2020.

The Spaniard will face Australian Nick Kyrgios, who advanced on a walkover when Jannik Sinner withdrew due to illness, on Thursday.

Federer's conqueror swaps racquet for Kalashnikov

KYIV: In 2013 he achieved one of the great shocks in tennis history, knocking defending champion Roger Federer out of Wimbledon. Today, the Ukrainian player Sergiy Stakhovskiy is a volunteer fighter on a military patrol in Kyiv, which he vows to defend "to the end" against Russian forces.

Now 36, he looks much the same as the journeyman player ranked 116 in the world who lay stretched out in his tennis whites on the hallowed London turf after toppling Federer in the second round nine years ago. But his outfit now could not be more different as he patrols Maidan Square, symbol of Ukraine's "fight for democracy", armed with a Kalashnikov, a pistol in his belt and his 1.93 metre (6 ft 4 in) frame dressed in khaki camouflage. "I cannot say that I feel comfortable around a rifle. I am not sure how I am going to react to shooting at somebody," he tells AFP. "I wish I would never have to be preoccupied with these things."

It's been just over two weeks since he returned to Ukraine and signed up for the territorial brigade, the volunteers tasked with helping the army against the Russian invasion launched on February 24. - Agencies



Austrian FM lauds Pak...

FROM PAGE 01

meeting with FM Qureshi, several areas of importance including trade, climate change, and green energy came under discussion. With the Russian war in Ukraine, he said a new world order was in the making, adding that the situation could lead to a crisis.

The Austrian FM said Pakistan was hosting the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which was an important step.

He said Austria had always played an effective role in promoting basic rights and freedom and mentioned that the United Nations Charter had a clear manifestation of tolerance towards other religions. Foreign Minister Qureshi said Pakistan attached great importance to its relations with Austria and considered it an important country of the European Union.

He mentioned the excellent investment opportunities available for Austrian companies in Pakistan in the fields of renewable energy, tourism, housing, agriculture, and information technology. He said the special economic zones under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also offered attractive incentives and tax concessions for Austrian investors. He hoped that Austria would continue to support Pakistan in the fourth biennial review of GSP + status this year.

FM Qureshi said Pakistan believed that constructive diplomatic and political engagement of the international community with Afghanistan would ensure lasting peace and stability. The foreign minister mentioned that Pakistan provided all possible assistance for the evacuation of diplomats, representatives of international organizations, NGOs and media persons from Afghanistan.

He emphasized joint and coordinated efforts to prevent human tragedy in Afghanistan. He expressed confidence that the visit of the Austrian foreign minister to Pakistan would impart further impetus to the multifaceted Pakistan-Austria relationship. Qureshi said he apprised his Austrian counterpart on serious human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. To a question on the current Ukraine situation, he said Pakistan was watching the developments with concern.

He said Pakistan had emphasized the importance of continuous efforts for the elimination of hostilities, establishment, and maintenance of humanitarian corridors, provision of humanitarian aid, and diplomatic efforts. He said the Ukraine conflict was "not a European war" and stressed that the visit of Austrian FM was of business and geopolitical nature.

Govt confirms...

FROM PAGE 01

federal ministers Hammad Azhar and Fawad Chaudhry, Umar said that the PTI leaders would not use tactics used by the Opposition for convincing their members to support Prime Minister Imran Khan regarding the no-confidence motion. Reacting to the Sindh House controversy, Umar said Imran Khan will continue to stand by his principles as he is a public leader and his politics is for the sake of the nation and not for himself.

"PM Khan neither blackmails anyone nor does he get blackmailed like other political leaders," he said, adding that all actions and decisions of PTI will be taken according to the Constitution of Pakistan.

Pandemic exposes global injustices

NEWS DESK

ISTANBUL: The coronavirus pandemic has once again exposed the injustices and flaws in the global system, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday.

"We hope that inequalities in the global system, particularly in health and security, can be eliminated as soon as possible," Erdogan said in a video message to a high-level WHO European Region meeting on health and migration.

"For a more peaceful, more stable, and fairer world, it's clear we need to learn from our mistakes," he added. "It's impossible to achieve sustainable development goals and universal health coverage in a world that ignores the health of refugees and migrants," he stressed, adding that he values the WHO's efforts to develop a new action plan on migration and health in the European region.

"I hope this meeting, which is taking place in an environment where 3 million people have

been added to the 85 million refugees in only three weeks, will pave the way for fresh ideas and new solution proposals," Erdogan said.

Noting that the pandemic has had a "more devastating impact" on vulnerable groups, particularly refugees and irregular migrants, he said: "Refugees' access to basic healthcare services, which is severely limited in many countries, has unfortunately been hampered in this process." Erdogan underlined that Turkey has never hesitated to "share all means at its disposal with those in need while providing high-quality healthcare services to its citizens."

"During the darkest days of the pandemic, we provided medical equipment and critical material support to 160 countries and 12 international organizations that requested assistance from us," he said. Turkey has provided 3.1 million inpatient treatment services to its "Syrian brothers and sisters," as well as 96.7 million outpatient services through its healthcare facilities, he said.

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Briefs

Uzbek, Kazakh Presidents discussed regional co-op



TASHKENT: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev had a telephone conversation with the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, reports "Dunyo" IA correspondent. According to the press service of the President of Uzbekistan, the leaders of the two countries discussed the current issues of the bilateral agenda and regional cooperation in Central Asia. The main attention was paid to the continuation of close cooperation and effective coordination of efforts to minimize the negative consequences of crisis phenomena in the global economy. The importance of creating favorable conditions for ensuring the dynamics of growth in bilateral trade, accelerating the implementation of major cooperation projects in industry, energy, agriculture, food and textile industries, transport and logistics, as well as active joint activities within the framework of the cultural-humanitarian exchange program was emphasized. Following the telephone conversation, the heads of state exchanged warm congratulations on the upcoming spring holiday of Navruz, sincerely wishing the two fraternal peoples peace, prosperity and well-being. - APP

Macron to unveil election manifesto

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron, who is riding high in the polls, is to reveal his manifesto on Thursday at his first major campaign event for the election next month. The 44-year-old delayed declaring his bid for a second term until the last possible moment and is now under pressure to engage with voters and rivals ahead of the poll on April 10. Thursday's event, which will include a lengthy press conference, is "an important exercise to show that he is addressing the questions and criticism of him, and that he's therefore really entering the campaign", a minister told AFP on condition of anonymity. Rivals across the political spectrum, who have struggled to make an impact in recent weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have been calling on Macron to declare his candidacy since the turn of the year. "The president wants to be re-elected without ever really having been a candidate, without a campaign, without a debate, without a competition of ideas," the head of the Senate, Gerard Larcher, complained on Tuesday. - APP

Lebanon gears up for parliamentary election

BEIRUT: Lebanon is gearing up for parliamentary elections on May 15 following the closure of candidate registration for the vote this week. The polls will be the first since the Arab country was rocked by popular protests in 2019 on the back of economic deterioration and energy shortages. So far, 1043 candidates have submitted their applications to run for parliamentary seats with women making up 15% of the candidates with 155 hopefuls. Candidates will run for 128 seat in the parliament in accordance with the 1989 Taif Agreement, which states that parliamentary elections in Lebanon be held every four years with seats distributed among the various sects. Sunni and Shia Muslims will take 28 seats each, 8 for Druze, 34 for Maronites, 14 for Orthodox Christians and 8 for Catholics. Five seats are allocated for Armenians, two for Alawites, and one seat for minorities within the Christian community. Candidates in the upcoming elections have the right to withdraw their application within 15 days after the closure of registration. - APP

Experts call for Pak-China co-op in mulberry production

Mulberries are one of the most popular fruits in Pakistan. Mulberry trees, fast-growing and small to medium-sized, are being cultivated in rural areas of Pakistan.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Experts from Pakistan and China called for Sino-Pak cooperation in production of mulberry seeds, says a report carried by China Economic Net (CEN). Pakistan is importing silk worth 67 billion rupees. If we produce more silk in our country, it will provide employment to six hundred thousand people, most of whom will be of rural women, according to Muhammad Farooq Bhatti, Deputy Director, Sericulture Punjab, Forest Department. But lack of Mulberry trees has been restricting Pakistan to fully tap its potential. "In the 1990s, the area of mulberry trees shrank, leading to a decline of the

sericulture industry, now we are trying to bring it back", Muhammad Farooq Bhatti told CEN in an interview. Mulberries are one of the most popular fruits in Pakistan. Mulberry trees, fast-growing and small to medium-sized, are being cultivated in rural areas of Pakistan. Apart from wide presence in Punjab, they can also be found in KPK, Abbottabad, and GB. Thanks to the hot climate, the growth period of mulberry trees in Pakistan is about 10 months, which means its leaves can be harvested several times within one year.

"I will say it is a fruit tree with no part going waste", Mr. Malik Mohsin Abbas, Principal Scientist at the Horticulture Research Institute, Ayub Agriculture Research Institute, told CEN. Its leaves can be used as feed for silkworms, which provide silk for the textile sector; its branches are used to make different types of baskets that can be seen in almost every rural house of Pakistan. Its fruit is edible and can be processed into mulberry juice, powder, jam, vinegar, and tea. Fundamental to high-quality leaves and fruits are improved seeds. "Research on mulberry is very limited in Pakistan,



but it has more potential", Farooq Bhatti said. "The techniques of seed cultivation can be commonly used. Most of our techniques can also be applied in Pakistan as long as local climate fits", analysed Mr. Lin Tianbao, Director of Research Centre of Mulberry Breeding and Cultivation at the Sericultural Research Institute, Zhejiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, China. Several improved mulberry varieties selected and bred by the research institute has proved to increase mulberry leaf output by around 30%. Up to now, two new series, namely, Nongsang and Qiangsang, have covered over 70% of China's grafted mulberry fields. They were also provided to farmers, contrib-

uting to the country's fight against poverty. The research center has had success story to tell regarding international cooperation in mulberry breeding and planting. Its mulberry saplings have been exported to Uzbekistan. By providing technical support such as breed selection and planting guidance to the Chinese companies cooperating with Uzbek government, the research center has provided a replicable model to follow. "This can also be applied in Pakistan as long as water resources suffice. For areas with inadequate water, we can grow seedlings in China when they are vulnerable and then graft them to Pakistan", said Mr. Lin Tianbao.

China keen to develop Rawalpindi's projects

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation led by Chang Chun, CEO of China State Construction Engineering Corporation Ltd (CSCEC) called on Chairman Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Tariq Mehmood Murtaza at the RDA office. According to Gwadar Pro's report, the delegation showed keen interest to cooperate in development of Mega projects of RDA like Ring Road Rawalpindi and Nullah Lai Expressway, etc. On the occasion, the Chairman RDA said that the long-standing ties between the two countries are based on solid foundation and with the passage of time, this friendship

will certainly strengthen as China had given relief assistance to Pakistan in different construction projects like New Airport Islamabad, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and recently given significant relief to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. On the occasion, it was informed that concrete steps would be taken to provide modern construction facilities through public-private partnership. The officials also agreed to work with mutual cooperation and consensus to implement the project. Wang Weiwei, Manager of Marketing Department, China State Construction Engineering Corporation Ltd and Brig (R) Nusratullah, former Member CDA, were also present on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Board of Investment, Muhammad Azfar Ahsan presenting souvenir to the Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Shaukat Fayaz Ahmed Tarin during the seminar on "Pakistan Petrochemical Symposium". - DNA

Pakistan welcomes the debut of Chinese PV Inverter

ISLAMABAD: The 9th International Expo and Conference on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency was held at here at Jinnah Convention Center, and President ArifAlvi participated in it through video. Hopewind, as a Chinese leading new energy innovation company, presented residential and C&I PV power generation solutions and PV inverters, which were favored by on-site visitors and local companies, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro on Thursday. In recent years, Pakistan's power sector and government have called for low-carbon emission reduction. Adjust local energy structure and develop re-

newable energy. Pakistan has a vast land, abundant sunshine, and unique natural conditions, which provide huge potential for solar power generation, and also provide feasible solutions for local people's electricity needs. The exhibition was organized by Renewable & Alternative Energy Association of Pakistan (REAP), new energy companies from all over the world gathered together to launch this clean energy exchange feast for Pakistan with innovative technologies and renewable energy solutions. A Hopewind manager told Gwadar Pro in an interview that in this exhibition, Hopewind's commercial

small-power and commercial high-power PV inverters attracted many customers. The Governor of Balochistan, Syed Zahir Ahmed Agha, accompanied by the staff of the exhibition hall, also visited Hopewind's booth. Those presented PV inverters are with the characteristics of intelligence, high efficiency, safety and reliability, which are suitable for various large-current components, meet the multiple application needs of distributed PV in Pakistan, and provide a strong impetus to the development of local solar power generation. According to the Power Generation Capacity Expansion Plan issued by the National Electric

Power Regulatory Authority, Pakistan (NEPRA), in 2019, Pakistan's installed photovoltaic capacity has reached 1.3GW. It is estimated that by 2030, Pakistan's photovoltaic installed capacity will reach 12.8GW, and by 2047 this figure will reach 26.9GW, providing a broad market space for the development of the PV inverter industry. "The development of solar and wind power generation will enhance Pakistan's security of electricity supply and put Pakistan at the forefront of the global energy transition," emphasized Najy Benhassine, the Country Director for Pakistan for the South Asia region at the World Bank.

Russian-European Mars mission suspended over Ukraine war

Getting the Rosalind Franklin rover, named after an English chemist and DNA pioneer, into space without Russian help will likely require huge revisions - and the window to launch only comes around every two years

PARIS: A Russian-European mission to land a rover on Mars has been suspended due to sanctions over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and its "tragic consequences", the European Space Agency said Thursday. "We deeply deplore the human casualties and tragic consequences of the aggression towards Ukraine," the agency said as it confirmed the suspension of the ExoMars mission. The mission had been planned to launch in September using a Russian launcher and lander to put the rover on Mars to drill into the soil, searching for signs of life. However, Russian space agency Roscosmos responded to EU sanctions over the invasion by suspending launches and withdrawing more than 100 of its workers from Europe's spaceport in French Guiana's Kourou. The ESA's ruling council said in a statement Thursday that its director general would now "carry out a fast-track industrial study to better define the available options for a way forward to implement the ExoMars rover mission". ExoMars had originally been planned to launch in 2020, but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was set to be launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan by a Russian Soyuz rocket, then taken down to the Martian soil by Russia's Kazachok lander. Getting the Rosalind Franklin rover, named after an English chemist and DNA pioneer, into space without Russian help will likely require huge revisions - and the window to launch only comes around every two years. All other ESA missions using Russia's Soyuz rocket have been suspended, the agency said. They are two satellites for Europe's Galileo GPS system, the Euclid space telescope mission and the European-Japanese EarthCARE observation satellite. The ESA statement added that "the International Space Station programme continues to operate nominally". Over the weekend, Russian space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin again warned again that Western sanctions on Russia could cause the ISS to crash. - Agencies

Germany reports record daily covid cases

BERLIN: Germany on Thursday reported a record number of daily coronavirus cases with nearly 300,000 new infections. The Robert Koch Institute (RKI), the country's disease control agency, confirmed 294,931 new COVID-19 cases, the highest rate registered since the pandemic began in early 2020. Health authorities reported 278 coronavirus-related fatalities on Thursday, up from 259 deaths on the same day last week. Experts are warning that upward trend in new cases could signify the country might be heading towards a new wave of the virus. The relaxation of anti-coronavirus measures last month and the spread of the highly contagious omicron sub-variant BA.2 were the main factors driving the spike in cases. The new subtype, which is more transmissible than the initial omicron strain BA.1, now accounts for more than 48% of sequenced coronavirus cases in the country, according to the RKI. Despite the surge in infections, the majority of new cases have been mild so far, not requiring hospitalization. On Wednesday, 2,168 coronavirus patients were admitted to hospitals, while nearly 2,300 patients with COVID-19 were receiving treatment in intensive care units, where more than 2,800 beds were free. According to experts, Germany's high vaccination coverage among the elderly has been effective in preventing COVID-related hospitalization despite the fresh surge in infections. - APP

Russian government website hit by cyber attack

MOSCOW: The official website of Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations was hit by a cyber attack amid the country's war with Ukraine, according to a report late Wednesday by Russian state-owned news agency TASS. The hotline number on the main page of the site was changed to a Ukrainian one, said the report. Maintenance is underway on the website, while the hotline number has been replaced with Russian-based phone numbers. The websites of all regional and central departments of the ministry have also become inoperable, according to TASS. The Russia-Ukraine war, which started on Feb. 24, has drawn international condemnation, led to financial restrictions on Moscow and spurred an exodus of global firms from Russia. At least 726 civilians have been killed and 1,174 injured in Ukraine since the beginning of the war, according to the UN, while noting that conditions on the ground make it difficult to verify the true number. More than 3 million people have also fled to neighboring countries, said the UN refugee agency. - APP

South Korea records highest cases, deaths

SEOUL: South Korea on Thursday reported a record high of daily COVID-19 cases, surpassing 620,000 infections in the last 24 hours. A total of 621,328 new infections and 429 deaths were recorded over the past day, raising the caseload above 8.25 million, including 11,481 fatalities, according to Health Ministry data. The new daily cases and fatalities were both the highest single-day figures since the start of the pandemic in 2020. A day earlier, the East Asian country recorded 400,741 cases. Infections have surged exponentially since the first case of the highly contagious omicron variant was detected in South Korea last December. Over the past seven days, authorities have reported more than 2.71 million infections and 1,835 fatalities. But the number of critically ill patients currently in hospitals with severe symptoms reduced to 1,159 from 1,244 a day earlier, according to the Health Ministry. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Kim Jong-yeol had directed authorities to prepare their next strategy as the current measures - including a six-person cap on private gatherings and a curfew from 11 p.m. for businesses - are due to end this Sunday. - APP

Baku hails int'l support for post-war reconstruction

The mission visited Azerbaijan's liberated Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil regions and familiarized themselves with the reconstruction work. During the visit, the experts were shown the monuments destroyed during the occupation and were informed about the future development plan

NEWS DESK

BAKU: Presidential aide Hikmat Hajiyev has hailed the international community's support to the Azerbaijan government's post-war reconstruction efforts. He made the remarks on his official Twitter page on March 16. "We had a fruitful discussion with EU, UN and World Bank joint 'Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment' team. Support of the international community to efforts of the Azerbaijan government post-conflict reconstruction agenda is important," the presidential aide wrote. Hajiyev said that field missions were conducted in liberated Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil regions.

A mission consisting of experts from the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank earlier visited Azerbaijan to assess the needs of restoration and reconstruc-



tion in liberated territories. The mission visited Azerbaijan's liberated Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Jabrayil regions and familiarized themselves with the reconstruction work. During the visit, the experts were shown the monuments destroyed during the occupation and were informed about the future development plan. As a part of their visit, the delegation met with the leadership of the Inter-

departmental Center of the Coordination Headquarters established for the centralized settlement of issues in Azerbaijan's liberated territories and the heads of working groups operating under the Center.

Currently, the work is underway to restore Azerbaijan's liberated lands. Azerbaijan will rebuild its recently liberated areas in four stages. The initial stage includes the solution of the issues of governance and security, infrastructure, while the subsequent stages include the solution of the issues of social services activities, reconstruction, and development of the economy. In 2021, Azerbaijan allocated \$1.5 billion for the reconstruction of liberated territories, followed by AZN 2.2 billion (\$1.2 billion) in 2022. These funds will be used primarily to restore infrastructure (electricity, gas, water, communications, roads, education, health, and so on) as well as cultural and historical monuments.

Baku, Ankara discuss situation in Ukraine

BAKU: Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu have discussed regional issues, the ministry reported on March 16. In a telephone conversation, the ministers exchanged views on the current situation in the region, including issues surrounding Ukraine, the report added. The parties also discussed other issues of mutual interest. On June 15, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations, during Erdogan's first official visit to Shusha, eight months after Azerbaijan's victory in the war with Armenia in 2020. The document focuses on defence cooperation, promoting regional stability and prosperity, and establishing new transportation routes. Azerbaijan and Turkey cooperate in various fields of economy and have jointly completed giant energy and infrastructure projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, and TANAP. Eleven agreements were signed between the two countries within the Azerbaijani-Turkish business forum held in Ankara on February 18. - Agencies

Briefs

Rupee dips against dollar

DNA

KARACHI: The downtrend in the local currency persisted on Thursday and the rupee fell to a fresh all-time low at Rs180.07 against the US dollar in the inter-bank market owing to expectations of an unsustainable current account deficit. According to data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the local currency shed Rs0.63 or 0.35% against the greenback to settle at Rs180.07.

During the day the local unit traded between the range of 179.8 and 181.2 in the interbank market. Currency dealers indicated that the demand for the greenback was high despite declining oil prices on the international market.

China to 'stick with' zero-Covid strategy, President Xi says

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping said on Thursday the country will "stick with" its zero-Covid strategy, state TV reported, as the world's most populous nation battles its largest outbreak since the early days of the pandemic.

The country where the virus emerged in late 2019 has largely kept subsequent outbreaks under control thanks to a combination of strict border controls, lengthy quarantines and targeted lockdowns, and has not reported any coronavirus-related deaths for over a year. But the highly transmissible Omicron variant is posing a stern challenge to that strategy, prompting authorities to close off cities including the southern tech hub of Shenzhen, home to 17.5 million people.

The world's second-largest economy has gone from reporting under 100 daily infections just three weeks ago to more than 1,000 per day for over a week. More than 2,400 cases were reported Thursday, according to the National Health Commission. Speaking at a meeting of China's top leaders, Xi said the country should "continue to put people and life at the forefront, stick with scientific accuracy and dynamic-zero, and curb the spread of the epidemic as soon as possible," according to state broadcaster CCTV. Beijing must "raise the level of scientifically accurate prevention and control and continuously optimise disease control measures", the report quoted Xi as saying. He called to "strengthen technological key areas like vaccination, rapid testing and drug research" to make virus curbs more "targeted", CCTV said. Xi also urged tighter virus controls at ports of entry and stressed the need to "swiftly control local clustered outbreaks". Tens of millions of people are currently under stay at home orders across China to try and stamp out the latest outbreak. - APP

IHC accepts Gilani's request for early hearing of his appeal

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday accepted the plea of PPP's leader Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani for early hearing of his appeal against Senate Chairman elections and fixed the Intra Court Appeal for March 28. A division bench comprising Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri announced the decision. Gilani's Lawyer Farook H. Naek furnished arguments in the matter. Senator Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani had challenged rejection of his seven votes in Senate chairman elections. Earlier, a single member bench had dismissed his plea and he had moved an ICA against the verdict.

OIC efforts to safeguard Muslim rights lauded

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, in his welcome remarks said that Pakistan's commitment to OIC has been integral part of Pakistan's foreign policy and the country is deeply attached to Muslim voices all over the globe

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) organized a roundtable on "OIC through the Decades: Challenges and Opportunities Ahead", in collaboration with the Middle East Monitor (MEMO). The roundtable was moderated by Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA. Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry gave the welcome remarks. Speakers on the occasion included Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Dr. Daud Abdullah, Director Middle East Monitor (MEMO) UK, Professor Dayto Dr. Kohtou Moustapha Sano, Secretary General International Islamic Fiqah Academy Jeddah, Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the OIC, Mr. Mustapha El Khalfi, Moroccan Politician (Justice and Development Party), H.E. Hamid Abbas Lafta, Ambassador of Iraq to Pakistan, Mr. Khalid Pashtoon, Former Member of Afghanistan's Parliament, H. E. Mr. Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Pakistan, Mr. Farrukh Iqbal Khan, DG ED&OIC MOFA, Dr. Veysel Kurt, Associate Prof. Veysel Kurt, Istanbul Medeniyet University and Mr. Bahlo Javed, Research Fellow for Center for



Strategic Studies, MoFA, Kabul. While giving her remarks, Ms. Amina Khan, stated that more than a half a century ago, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was established as the collective voice of the Muslim world. Its objective has always been to ensure and safeguard Muslim economic and political interests and lessen all challenges faced by the Muslim Ummah. She further said that as momentous changes have swept across the Muslim world over the past decade, the OIC has emerged as an important voice defending the dignity and rights of its members. Palestine and Kashmir are the two critical issues of the Islamic World. Over

the years, Pakistan has been closely engaged in supporting cooperation amongst member states and advocating for equitable solutions for various issues faced by the Muslim community. Pakistan has presently been very proactive in pursuing a crusade against Islamophobia, and as a result of Pakistan's efforts, the UNGA has declared March 15 as the international day to combat Islamophobia, she opined. Ms. Khan also said that Pakistan also hosted the 17th extraordinary session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers on the situation in Afghanistan during which Pakistan proposed a framework to help solve the ongoing humanitarian crisis, which included the crea-

tion of a structure to channel humanitarian as well as financial support to Afghanistan in this time of need.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, in his welcome remarks said that Pakistan's commitment to OIC has been integral part of Pakistan's foreign policy and the country is deeply attached to Muslim voices all over the globe. Therefore, during the decolonization movement, Pakistan was very active and for the Palestine cause, Pakistan has always stood very firm. Talking about the Arab Spring, he went on to say that Pakistan was respectful and has a very abiding commitment to the Muslim world and has treated it as of highest value. Pakistan's commitment to the Palestinian cause is evident from the fact that it has not recognized Israel. Pakistan's full commitments to the causes of the Islamic world are evident by its efforts to combat Islamophobia he opined. Dr. Daud Abdullah, said that he mentioned the attempts by Israel to change the demography of Jerusalem. He shed light on the challenges faced by the OIC and that the OIC will have to conduct itself to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. He further said that it is heartening that the OIC is the second largest organization after the UN and it is a matter of pride for the Muslim world that we have an organization which brings together the Muslims from around the globe.

British Council rewards MD SLS College



DNA

ISLAMABAD: SLS College achieved another milestone at the British Council's IELTS Partners Conference in Islamabad, where Managing Director SLS College Jhelum Sarfraz Malik was honoured for his outstanding performance and the highest volume contributor of IELTS candidates. This award of excellence was presented by Syed Osman Iqbal Zaidi, British Council's Exams Director for Pakistan to MD SLS. On this particular occasion MD SLS, in a speech to conference attendees, appreciated and complimented the British Council team for their efforts in facilitating a partner portal for UKVI IELTS registration and immediately resolving other concerns with IELTS test booking. Under the banner of IELTS-Partner Mate, a special conference for British Council partners was held (2021-2022).

UN votes to secure formal presence in Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council adopted a resolution Thursday to secure a formal presence in Afghanistan, whose Taliban government remains unrecognized by the international community. The resolution, without using the word Taliban, spells out a new one-year mandate for the UN political mission in Afghanistan, calling it "crucial" to peace. The vote was 14 in favor, with one abstention, by Russia. The resolution includes several strands of cooperation, on the humanitarian, political and human rights fronts, including those of women, children and journalists. "This new mandate for UNAMA (the UN mission to Afghanistan) is crucial not only to respond to the immediate humanitarian and economic crisis, but also to reach our overarching goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan," Norwegian UN ambassador Mona Juul, whose country drafted the resolution, told AFP after the vote. - APP

Pak, China agree to execute ML-1 project on priority

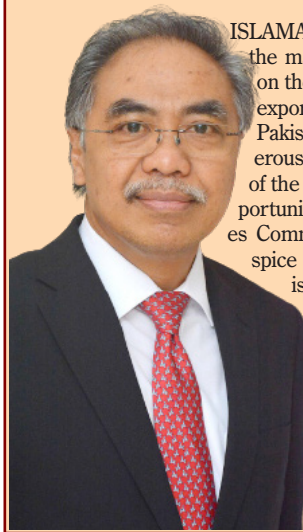
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China agreed on Thursday to execute the much awaited mega ML-1 railway up-gradation project under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on priority basis. The agreement was reached at a virtual held meeting between CPEC Authority and National Development and Reforms Commission (NDRC) of China to follow up on the decisions taken during the recent visit of the Prime Minister to China.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on CPEC Affairs Khalid Mansoor and Director General NDRC co-chaired the meeting. The Ambassador of Pakistan in China also participated. The meeting decided that Pakistan Railways would immediately contact the National Railway Administration (NEA), to work out further details of the project. The NDRC Director General said that the relevant Chinese institutions were already taking the necessary actions to implement the understandings reached during the visit. He said that the Chinese side attaches the utmost importance to the ML-1 project and several internal meetings between the National Railway Administration and other relevant institutions have been held to work out the modalities & prepare for execution of the first Phase of the project. SAPM CPEC Affairs stated that Prime Minister's meeting with the Chinese leadership had been extremely fruitful and the relevant institutions of the two countries were fully geared to take the necessary steps to translate the understandings reached at the highest level into actual actions on the ground at the earliest. The meeting also discussed projects in the power sector including the 300 MW Power Project in Gwadar and the 1320 MW Tarbela Coal Block-1 Power project. It was noted that all actions relating to these projects had been completed on Pakistan side. It was decided that the Chinese side would expedite the next steps relating to these projects. - APP



NEWSHERA: The COAS General Qamar Bajwa pinning badges of rank on the shoulders of Major General Usman Haq to formally install him as Colonel Commandant of Army Service Corps. - DNA

Indonesian envoy meets Pakistani Spice traders



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Adam M. Tugio held a meeting with the major spice importers in Faisalabad to receive feedback on the execution of business matching with Indonesian spice exporters. Ambassador Tugio stated that during his year in Pakistan, he learned that the Pakistani people are very generous in their use of spices, and that Indonesia produces half of the world's spices, creating a huge potential and a great opportunity for the establishment of an Indonesia-Pakistan Spices Communication Forum. With the support of the Pakistani spice importers and Indonesian spice exporters, the forum is projected to act as a channel for increasing exports of Indonesian spice products to Pakistan, and for more competitive and sustainable supply of Indonesian spices. Ambassador Tugio went on to discuss his planned endeavour to publish a book titled "Indonesia Spice Up Pakistan," which will detail the numerous spices used by Pakistani people in their favourite dishes and where they are purchased from. Mr. Ammar Fazil as one of the major spice importers in Pakistan appreciated the efforts of the Indonesian Embassy. - DNA

Army Chief Gen Bajwa visits ASC Centre Nowshera

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa Thursday visited Army Service Corps (ASC) Centre, Nowshera and appreciated contributions and logistic support of ASC both during peacetime and operation. Upon arrival, COAS laid floral wreath at Yadgar-e-Shuhada and offered Fatheh for Martyrs, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) media release. The COAS pinned badges of rank on the shoulders of Major General Usman Haq to formally install him as Colonel Commandant of Army Service Corps. Large number of serving and retired officers attended the ceremony. - DNA

Pakistan confident of getting 7th IMF review passed easily

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan hopes to get a positive response from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the seventh review, after addressing the Fund's concerns regarding the prime minister's relief package in detail. "We thoroughly briefed the IMF mission over their concerns regarding PM's Relief Package on petrol, diesel and electricity prices and tax amnesty for industrial sector," Tarin said while speaking about the government's meeting with the IMF. He said that the IMF team will return with its final assessment (Friday) today to hold virtual talks. The minister claimed that there was no difference of opinion between the two sides on macroeconomic figures till December 2021 and the pending seventh review was "almost done". When asked about the IMF's demand to remove exemptions and raise the rate under the Personal Income Tax (PIT), Tarin said nothing regarding PIT came under discussion as it would

be a part of the next review's agenda under the IMF programme because taxation measures would be taken for the next budget 2022-23. Reacting to Tarin's claims, officials said it would be quite difficult to strike a staff-level agreement with the IMF at a time when the political dust is yet to settle. They said a political crisis in the country is looming over the ongoing staff-level review talks and a decision on the next loan tranche is likely after an outcome on the non-confidence move due later this month. Pakistani authorities have so far explained to the IMF that the amnesty is more of an industrial package, which entails five-year tax holidays on projects with investment by Pakistani expatriates in Pakistan. Pakistan will have to convince the IMF for breaching the commitment of raising the petroleum levy by Rs4/month until it reaches Rs30/litre. This has become impossible due to the unprecedented rise in world oil prices and it is hoped the IMF will view it with leniency. The ongoing discussions will focus on energy price re-

form, which seeks to bring electricity and gas prices in line with cost recovery along with the formulas placed in the amended NEPRA and OGRA Acts. This would require raising the base electricity tariff and taking major steps to eliminate growth in circular debt in the power sector. Pakistan and IMF will have to evolve consensus on a revised macroeconomic and fiscal framework for estimating budget deficit and current account deficit. The government had envisaged the budget deficit at 6.3% of the GDP, which was likely to touch the mark of 7% of GDP for the outgoing fiscal year. Although the size of the country's economy increased manifold in the aftermath of rebasing of national accounts from 2005-6 to 2015-16 so it escalated to Rs55.5 trillion from earlier estimates of Rs48 trillion. The size of GDP is estimated to go up to Rs63.8 trillion for the current fiscal year 2021-22; however, the budget deficit is all set to escalate further and likely to touch Rs4.4 trillion highest ever in an absolute figure in the country's history during any fiscal year.

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