



# Islamabad POST

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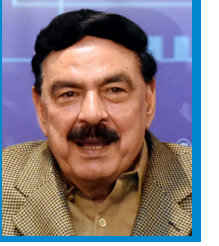
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**Azerbaijan ready for peace talks**

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**Briefs**

**PM writes to MNAs**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman and Prime Minister Imran Khan Tuesday directed his party's Members of the National Assembly to abstain from the voting on no confidence motion moved by the opposition against him. The prime minister, also the parliamentary leader of the PTI in the National Assembly wrote a letter to the PTI legislators asking them to strictly follow the directions as "every/any violation of these directions shall be treated as express defection in terms of Article 63-A."

**No rift within PML-Q**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Q u a i d (P M L - Q) President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain said that their family and party were on the same page and all political decisions were taken with consultation, so the rumours that were being spread were wrong. "All decisions in the party or at home are made with my consultation and consent. I do not believe in explanation. I would like to say that I am considered the head of the family," Chaudhry Shujaat said in a statement. The PML-Q president further said, "I have been told that there are differences in our family."

**Pak to attend China-US-Russia moot**

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan will attend the extended meeting of the China-US-Russia Consultation Mechanism to be held on the sidelines of the third foreign ministers meeting of Afghanistan neighboring countries, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Wang Wenbin said on Tuesday. The third meeting of the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries will be held in Tunxi, Central China's Anhui Province on March 30-31.

## PM ready to show 'threat letter' to CJ

Planning Minister says this threatening letter is a reality and he has himself read it multiple times

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Planning Minister Asad Umar has said Prime Minister Imran Khan is ready to share with the Chief Justice of Pakistan the letter he talked about at a public gathering in Islamabad, encompassing threats to his government. Addressing a joint news conference, along with Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, in Islamabad on Tuesday, he said this threatening letter is a reality and he has himself read it multiple times. He said the decision to share it with the Chief Justice is aimed at doing away with the misgivings surrounding the letter.

Denying to disclose the source of the letter, Asad Umar said it was received well before filing of the no-confidence motion by the opposition. He said there is a clear mention of the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan in the letter. He said it has categorically been stated in the letter that failure of the no-confidence motion will have serious consequences.

He said content of the letter is directly linked with the foreign policy of Pakistan. He said there is no doubt in it that the no-confidence motion and foreign hand are interlinked. Talking about the elements behind the letter, the Planning Minister said former Prime

**Party Position in National Assembly**

Government and allies	Opposition parties
PTI: 155	PML-N: 84
MQM-P: 07	PPP-P: 56
PML-Q: 04	MMA: 14
BAP: 01	BNP-M: 04
GDA: 03	BAP: 04
AML: 01	JWP: 01
	PML-Q: 01
	ANP: 01
	Independent: 04
<b>Total: 171</b>	<b>Total: 169</b>

Minister Nawaz Sharif is directly involved in this conspiracy, while senior leadership of Pakistan Democratic Movement is also aware of the matter.

Asad Umar expressed the belief that members of the National Assembly, irrespective of their political affiliations, will think twice before supporting any move to undermine Pakistan's independence and sovereignty. Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said Imran Khan is a courageous leader and he always takes along the masses.

## 'Next Punjab CM to be from Opp'

Govt ally Aslam Bhootani also joins the opp ranks



ISLAMABAD: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari flanked by Asif Zardari and others addressing a press conference. Aslam Bhuttani announced to support opposition. -DNA

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: PPP Co-Chairperson Asif Ali Zardari on Tuesday claimed the next Punjab Chief Minister will also be from the opposition ranks as they have the required numbers (for electing a new CM) and not the ruling party. He was addressing a press conference alongside government ally Aslam Bhootani who announced to join the opposition ranks in a joint press conference with leading opposition figures in Islamabad. Aslam Bhootani is an elected independent MNA from NA-272 (Lesbela-cum-Gwadar) who got 68,804 votes in 2018 general elections. Earlier, BAP Parliamentary Leader Khalid Magasi had said that his party would support the Opposition's no-confidence motion.

"We want the country to be handled anew [...] we want the issues to be resolved," the BAP leader, whose party has four MNAs, said while addressing a press conference alongside Opposition's bigwigs - PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif, PDM chief Fazlur Rehman, Asif Ali Zardari, and PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Monday.

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ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Syed Fakhar Imam Federal Minister for National Food Security, Leader of the House in the Senate, Senator Waseem Shahzad, MNA Kanwal Shuzab, SAPM Ayub Afridi and others cutting cake on the occasion of the 62nd Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito. - DNA

## Ukraine war: Pak calls for dialogue



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan Tuesday reiterated Pakistan's principled position in support of immediate cessation of hostilities and resolution of Russian-Ukraine conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. The prime minister received a telephone call from President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskii. Discussing the latest situation in Ukraine, the prime minister expressed deep regret that the military conflict was continuing, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

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## 'MQM may support Imran Khan'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Speaker Punjab Assembly Ch. Pervez Elahi has claimed that MQM in principle has decided to support Imran Khan in a no-trust move. During a private talk he disclosed that Imran Khan has decided to accept all demands of MQM including freeing of their detained workers and reopening of their offices.

Pervez Elahi further said he proposed to the prime minister that he should accept all demands of MQM since we need them. He said once MQM announces support, Imran Khan will be secured.

## 'Japan, Pakistan ties to be further strengthened'

The Ambassador of Japan hosts a reception to celebrate the 62nd Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Japan WADA Mitsuhiro has said as this year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Pakistan, our relationship will be strengthened together with all the Pakistani friends including "Derena Dost / Long-time Friends". He added, the Embassy underscores sincere efforts from both sides in order to further strengthen this friendship. The ambassador said, in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, the Embassy could not host the reception for the last year which is usually an annual feature to mark the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

The ambassador expressed these views during a reception he hosted to celebrate the 62nd Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito. The reception was attended by the Ministers such as (the chief guest) Syed Fakhar Imam, Fed-

eral Minister for National Food Security & Research, Mr. Farrukh Habib, Minister of State for Information & Broadcasting, Parliamentarians, senior government officials, members of the diplomatic community and other dignitaries from the public and private sector.

Ambassador WADA together with the distinguished guests cut a cake to mark the His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday, which is on February 23rd.

Since his accession to the throne on 1st May 2019 as the 126th Emperor of Japan, His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito stands as the symbol of Japan and the unity of the people. His Majesty and the Imperial Family also facilitate the good relations with foreign countries including Pakistan.

It may be mentioned here that Pakistan and Japan enjoy excellent relations in all fields. Japan has always supported Pakistan in times of calamities etc. On the technical side, Japan's support has been phenomenal. Besides Japan offers scholarships to and job opportunities to Pakistanis.

**Inside...**

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Opposition's ploy of no trust set to prove a fiasco - Page 03

UNEP acknowledges Billion Tree Tsunami project: PM Imran - Page 04

Palestinians fight for survival amid Israel's war on Gaza's water - Page 05

China-Pakistan traditional friendship unbreakable - Page 06

Pakistan eyes China to boost potato industry - Page 07

Russia to scale down operations near Kyiv - Page 08

## Efforts underway for settling conflict in Afghanistan

In the light of visible rifts in Taliban's two main groups, the western world is now insisting on an inclusive government with moderate policies

**Analysis**

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Though the US on the grounds of Girls Education suspended its talks with Taliban through its Doha Qatar based political office, the fact is this, that Emirate Islami Afghanistan is under tremendous pressure of western world for making its government 1) inclusive, 2) avoiding political victimization of rivals, 3) allowing Girls Schooling and 4) respecting HR in according to UN charters. And for getting the same objectives, western world is giving preference to a govern-

ment with Mullah Abdul Ghani Biradar as its head. Couple of days back, a report went viral from Qandahar in which Taliban supreme leader Mullah Bait Ullah Akhund in principle agreed with the proposal of reshuffling the cabinet, established after August 15th 2021 last. However, so far no formal decree was issued in this respect.

Besides, proposing the cabinet with Abdul GHani Biradar, the Taliban leadership also agreed with inducting 15 non-Taliban persons in the cabinet. Most of these non-Taliban are likely to be technocrats and highly respectable persons. Some of them have served the previous governments of both President Hamid

Karzai and Dr. Ashraf Ghani. But, Taliban fearing severe reaction from Pakistan as with installation of proposed government under the command of Mullah Abdul Ghani Biradar, the Haqqani's are likely to lose their influence. The Haqqanis are enjoying lion's share in Taliban's civil administration and security forces. Almost entire South Eastern and Eastern zone of Afghanistan is under the command of Haqqanis-who are much more loyal to Pakistan secret agencies, looking after affairs of Afghanistan since a long. Whereas the Taliban's Qandahari group has already established its influence over

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## Notices to businessmen Traders threaten protest against FBR officials

They demanded taking immediate notice by Federal government and the notices of FBR be withdrawn without delay otherwise they would be constrained to stage a agitation till the meeting of their demand

### BUREAU REPORT

FAISALABAD: Traders have announced agitation if the FBR does not withdraw the unjustified notices to shopkeepers of construction materials. Chairman Anjuman Tajran City Regt and president Timber and Iron Market Hajiabad Mirza Ashraf Mughal presided over a meeting in which the

Traders expressed grave concern over the FBR harassment and said the cruel attitude of FBR should be stopped otherwise they would come out on the roads against the maltreatment of FBR. The meeting was attended by Mirza Ghulam Abbas, Sh Intiaz, Sh khurram Shehzad, Haji Saleem, Mirza Babar, Waqar Ahmed, Haji Aslam Noorani, Mirza Khalid, Waheed Khan, Ak-

bar Khan, Jamal Khan, Sarfaraz Mughal, Haji Imran, Mirza Saleem and others. The participants of the meeting said that only manufacturers, Mill owners, brand items, shopping malls, marts etc are included in government Point of sale and these tax rules are not applicable on sale of cement, iron, wood and other building materials but the FBR staff teasing the traders of building materials

shopkeepers. They said that these shopkeepers could not continue their business in this irritating and cruel environment and business is badly affected by the FBR staff maltreatment. They demanded taking immediate notice by Federal government and the notices of FBR be withdrawn without delay otherwise they would be constrained to stage a agitation till the meeting of their demand.

## Campaign for second phase of LG polls ends midnight

DNA

PESHAWAR: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Tuesday directed all political parties to end their election campaigns for the second phase of the local government elections in 18 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by midnight 12am. The ECP's spokesman said as per rules the campaign must end at midnight (March 29) and no candidate or party leader will address gatherings or corner meetings or take out processions in their respective constituencies after the deadline. He said that legal action would be taken against those political leaders and parties which violate the rules. As many as 8,057,974 registered vot-

ers including 4,489,771 male and 3,567,703 female would exercise right of franchise for 65 tehsils, 1,830 village and neighbourhood councils during the second phase of local bodies elections in 18 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on March 31, 2022. According to the Provincial Election Commission, a total of 6,176 polling stations including 1,246 for male, 1,164 for female and 3,766 combined would be established for facilitation of voters. Similarly, 16,509 polling booths including 9,218 for male and 7,291 for female would also be set up to facilitate young and female voters. Out of these polling stations, 1,646 were declared most sensitive and 2,326 sensitive where elaborate security arrangements are being made. Elections for seats of may-

or and chairman of tehsil and city's councils besides different categories of members in tehsils, village and neighbourhood councils would be held in Abbottabad, Mansehra, Battagram, Torghar, Upper and Lower Kohistan, Kolai-Palals, Swat, Malakand, Shangla, Lower and Upper Dir, Upper and Lower Chitral, Kurram, Orakzai, and North and South Waziristan districts on March 31. The Election Commission has started a series of awareness workshops with the assistance of press clubs and media to mobilize voters for LG elections. In this connection, awareness workshops were held at South Waziristan, Peshawar, Buner, Chitral, Malakand, Swat, Kurram and Bajaur tribal districts.

## Brother killed brother over property dispute in Gujrat

YOOSUF BHUTTA

GUJRAT: A brother shot and killed his brother in a property dispute here in village ChanuBhoja on Sunday. It is reported that one Shakir Naseem was shot dead by his real brother Muhammad Tasleem over a property dispute. Police have registered a case against the accused Tasleem and Muhammad Saleem, father of the slain for abetment on the report of widow Mrs. KanwalShehzadi.

**Goods worth millions of rupees looted**  
Gujrat: Goods worth millions of rupees were looted in Mohalla Fatupura in Gujrat city. It is reported that two unknown dacoits forcibly entered the house of one Khair Muhammad in Mohalla Fatupura. The dacoits looted money, jewels and other valuables worth millions of rupees and ran away. B-division Police have registered a case.



FAISALABAD: Faisalabad Development Authority Director General Dr Faisal Azim presides over a meeting to review the pace of operation against illegal housing schemes. – DNA

## DG FDA directs action against illegal housing schemes

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

Faisalabad: Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) Director General Dr Faisal Azim stressed upon drastic measures against the illegal housing schemes in the jurisdiction of FDA and said that this operation should be result oriented to discourage the negative trend of illegal housing schemes establishment. He said that necessary machinery, legal and administrative support work be provided to the operational team to achieve the

desired result to curb the unlawful practice in this regard. He was presiding over a meeting to review the pace of operation against the illegal housing schemes. He directed for making all the process organised by concerned sections and said that geo tagging of the land use areas through goal system be done to ensure the follow action. He said that merit and rules should be kept in view and indiscriminate action against all illegal housing schemes be ensured by making transparency in all respect.

He said that criminal case be registered against the defaulter developers involved in heinous violation. He also instructed for checking the ban on register of plots with revenue department and provision of utility services by WAPDA, SNGPL, WASA and other departments. He nominated the FDA ADG to supervise the departmental actions against illegal housing schemes and said that performance of staff be monitored regularly. Director General made it clear for general public that there are three stages of departmental pro-

cedure for according final approval of any housing schemes but some developers are involved to sale the plots at the early stage which is illegal. The citizens should check the legal status of housing scheme before purchasing the plot to avoid any fraud. The meeting was attended by Additional Director General Rizwan Nazir, Chief Engineer Mehr Ayub, Director Adm Yasar Ijaz Chatta, Director Town planning Reheel Zafar, Assistant Director Abdullah Noor, State Officer Intiaz Ali Goraya and others.

## Closing session of SEASPARK-2022 held

KARACHI: The closing session of Pakistan Navy's Major Maritime Exercise SEASPARK-2022 held here. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi graced the session as chief guest, said a news release on Tuesday. The exercise was conducted in North Arabian Sea to validate operational plans designed under realities of ever-evolving geo-strategic environment. During the session, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) presented overview of the exercise. Subsequently, conduct of the exercise was discussed threadbare to draw pertinent lessons. Chief of the

Naval Staff in his concluding remarks highlighted the regional environment that continues to be infested with massive competition of interest, political instabilities and simmering conflict. Naval Chief stressed the evolving character of war under the Grey Hybrid scenarios that possess complexity in understanding enemy's behavior and determining response possibilities. Admiral also underscored the Hindutva driven ideologies as Pakistan's arch rival that continues to impinge upon strategic stability in the region. Chief of the Naval Staff asserted that Pakistan Navy is vigilant to

offset enemy's quantitative leverages through superior professionalism, innovative tactics, perseverance and above all faith in Allah SWT. He reiterated the resolve that Pakistan Navy stands fully prepared to ensure seaward defence and safeguard national maritime interest at all costs. Exercise SEASPARK-22 was aimed to assess the combat readiness and operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy and validate war plans duly aligned with National Security Policy and military strategies while synergizing Naval Operations with Land and Air operations in conflict situations. – APP

## Provincial ministers meet Buzdar

LAHORE: Provincial Ministers and Members of Provincial Assembly met Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar in his office here on Tuesday and discussed the political situation. Usman Buzdar said he was a loyalist to the prime minister who had diligently worked for the public welfare and burnt the midnight oil to come up to the expectations of party leader and assured merit-based governance, says a news release. Those who met included Hashim Jawan Bakht, Muhammad Sibtain Khan, Mian Aslam Khan, Taimur Bhatti, Hanif Pitafi, Samiullah Ch., Amer Nawaz Chaudhry, Javed Akhtar Lund, Mamoon Tarar, Ghazian Abbasi and others. – APP

## SME competitive strategy for Sindh

DNA

KARACHI: The Sindh Provincial Working Group for the Development of Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) held a meeting on Tuesday in Karachi, presided by Chief Secretary Sindh Syed Mumtaz Ali Shah. The Provincial Working Group reviewed strategic recommendations and approved a technical paper setting the strategic orientation for the Sindh SME Development Strategy. The strategic orientations for SME development in Sindh are based on a thorough analysis of SME performance using results of a SME Competitiveness Survey, quantitative analyses, bilateral meetings with key institutions. The Strategic orientation for the SME strategy are also derived from consultations held in November 2021 in Karachi and Hyderabad with more than 200 public and private stakeholders from agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors of Sindh. The Provincial working group approved the vision for the SME Development strategy to promote "a prosperous Sindh powered by progressive and globally competitive SMEs". This vision is, driven by three strategic objectives: to upscale SMEs, encourage digital transformation and skill upgradation; to strengthen and expand a well-coordinated SME business support network; and to increase inclusive and sustainable business practices. The provincial working group also approved six thematic areas for detailed action planning: Technology and Innovation, Digitalization, Access to Finance, Entrepreneurial and Business Skills, Institutional and Business Development Services, and Inclusive and Responsible Business. Senior Officer Export Strategy at ITC, Charles Roberge said "Any strategy is as good as its implementation, and for this I am glad the working group has come together to focus on planning for results."



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi in a group photograph along with Tri-Services Officers at the closing session of Exercise Seaspark 2022. – DNA

## AGP concludes arguments in Article 63 (A) hearing

Chief Justice Bandial said that the court is not legislature, it could only interpret the constitution. "Affidavits were demanded from the candidates after agreement over the matter by the parties," CJP said

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Attorney General Khalid Jawed Khan resumed his arguments over presidential reference seeking the Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 63 (A) of the Constitution. The five-member bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial heard the arguments of the attorney general with regard to the questions asked in the presidential reference. "Defection from the party could not be termed a routine political activity," AGP Khalid Jawed while resuming his contentions said. "The constitution describes tenure of the assembly but not its members, the membership ends with dissolution of the assembly thus members term of office attached with the assembly," AGP said. "Disqualification till the assembly completes its term could not meet the objective of the Article 63 (A) and only life time disqualification could meet the intention of this Article,"

AGP argued. "The question arises, if a defecting member after declaration can contest election or not," he further argued. "The disqualification period of a deviant member could be five-year or for life term, or until the end of the assembly's term," top state lawyer argued. The period of ineligibility of a defecting member who becomes neutral and votes against the party, has not been fixed," AGP said. "Disqualification will be life time while the member indulges in criminal activities, while over misconduct ineligibility will be five years." The Attorney General divided the period of disqualification of a defector in four categories (i) The deserting member face no consequences (ii) defecting member becomes disqualified till the tenure of the assembly (iii) Defection brings ineligibility for five years (iv) Life time disqualification. "A turnout should not be allowed to contest the next election," AGP suggested. "Theft could not be declared a noble deed, a thief is a thief and could not be no-

ble thief," Khalid Jawed argued. "If the difference of opinion is deviation," Justice Jamal Mandokhel questioned. "The difference of opinion not means deviation. Raza Rabbani expressed his difference of opinion over the military court's issue," AGP said. "Article 63 (A) talks about cancellation of membership not disqualification," Justice Mandokhel said. "The matter comes to an end when there is no disqualification. If the election commission will inquire about defection or not," he said. "No proof is required in Article 63 (A), the party's head will give declaration of disqualification," Justice Ijazul Ahsan remarked. "Defection from party is not a mistake, it is deliberate," Justice Ahsan observed. "It will require several somersaults to determine life term disqualification," Chief Justice Bandial observed. "Nothing is said about lifetime disqualification in Article 63, while Article 63 (P) suggests temporary disqualification, however a false affidavit brings lifetime ineligibility,"

Justice Munib Akhtar observed. "There are separate court decisions over enforcement of Article 62 (i) (F)," Justice Akhtar remarked. "The party's head is bound to issue show cause notice and getting the point of view of the member," Justice Jamal Khan said. "It will be bad to punish an innocent than acquittal of 100 sinners. There might be 100 thieves but one may be honest among them," Justice Jamal observed. "Why the sword being dangled over an honest person over his opinion against the party's policy," Justice Mandokhel questioned. "Why the honest person not resigning from the seat before defection," AGP questioned. "A member could not be forced to step down from seat," Justice Jamal remarked. "You are trying for three days for a stricter law. There is no stricter punishment than the death sentence still people murdered," Justice Mandokhel remarked. "Why people defect and which powers make them defect," Justice Mandokhel questioned.

## Admin notifies prices of daily use items

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: The District Administration has notified the prices of essential items for wholesale, retail and Ramzan Bazars. The prices were fixed in the meeting of District Price Control Committee, in which the officers, traders and representatives of buyers were present. According to the notification the Sugar would be sold at 80 rupees per kg in Ramzan Bazars and the bag of 10 kg flour would sold at 450 rupees. The price of White gram (Mota) in wholesale is 220, in retail 225 and in ramzan bazars would be sold at 223. Likewise white gram (bareek) prices 206, 210 and 208 rupees respectively. Gram black (Mota) 131, 135 and 133 rupees and gram black (bareek) would be sold at 127, 130 and 128 rupees. Gram pulse (moti) price at wholesale, retail and ramzan bazars is 144, 148 and 146 and gram pulse (bareek) price would be 132, 138 and 136, pulse moong unwashed prices 111, 116 and Rs 114. It is further informed that pulse Maash would be sold at 253, 260 and 258 and unwashed pulse maash is Rs. 239, 242 and 240. Pulse Masoor 192, 197 and 195 and basin would be sold at 148 rupees per Kg in ramzan bazars and wholesale and retail price would be 145 and 150 respectively. The mutton price would be 990 and beef price Rs. 490 in tehsil city bazars and in other tehsil it would be sold 940 and 440. The prices of fruits and vegetables would be fixed on daily basis. DC Ali Shahzad said that the prices would be implemented letter and spirit.

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Armed Forces Days

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

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## Opposition's ploy of no trust set to prove a fiasco

The minister said that Article 63A case was pending in the Supreme Court and dissident members intensified contacts for return

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Farrukh Habib said on Tuesday that the opposition had failed and its ploy of no confidence motion was set to prove a flop. Talking to the media persons outside the Supreme Court he said that "Opposition has failed, their game has flopped, external forces want to destabilize Pakistan".

The minister said that the puppets of foreign masters were not going to get anything out of the ongoing situation. The Opposition offered PML-Q chief ministership but Chaudhries of Gujrat preferred to

work with PTI, he said, adding that today another surprise would jolt the opposition. Farruk said that threats were made for non-compliance on March 7 one day before a no-confidence motion was filed which was the proof that both were linked. He said that absconder Nawaz Sharif met with many anti-Pakistan people including Mohibullah. About the 'Amr Bil Ma'ru'f rally of Prime Minister Imran Khan he said it was a historic meeting as motorways, highways and all Islamabad roads were packed with PTI workers. Criticizing PML-N leader Rana Sana Ullah, he said from the same constituency from which he (Rana



had been a minister twice, he could not win in the 2018 election from even one polling station. The minister said that the Article 63A case was pending in the Supreme Court and dissident members intensified contacts for return. He opined that the vote of a

he said the people who had readied "sherwanis" were about to lose as no confidence motion was doomed. Taunting the opposition, he said Shehbaz Sharif was to drag Zardari on the streets of Larkana, while the PPP leaders were not supposed to greet Nawaz Sharif and Fazlur Rehman was to unite the world of Islam, but nothing happened. "We have taken allies with the external conspiracy, our negotiations with other allies in the final stages", said Farrukh Habib. The number of members of the opposition on the day of the no-confidence vote would also be a surprise, Farrukh Habib remarked. Farrukh Habib said that the opposition's long march

which started from Lahore also ended in a fiasco. He asked where Fazlur Rehman was when 400 drone strikes took place in Pakistan that were authorised by Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari. To a question he said that Prime Minister Imran Khan represented the sentiments of the Muslim Ummah and courageously fought the case against Islamophobia. There was already an electoral alliance with the PML-Q, and the PTI did not offer the chief ministership of Punjab to anyone outside the alliance, Farruk said in reply to a question. He said that Usman Bazzar was a courageous soldier of Imran Khan who had stood by him.

## Training on 'selling on Amazon from Pakistan'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) will organize a day training programme on "selling on Amazon from Pakistan" for profitable business growth on March 30. The session will be organized by SMEDA under National Business Development Programme (NBDP) for SMEs, to extend non-financial advisory services to small and medium businesses, according to sources in the authority. The training programme will provide information about introduction to Amazon, how invest in Amazon, how start Amazon in Pakistan, freelancing and Amazon virtual assistant, introduction to private label, categories in Amazon, inclusion of Pakistan in Amazon seller list welcomed, how to create seller account, benefits of Amazon business, comparison of Amazon with other portals. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Zafar Bakhtawari chairman Pakistan Cultural Forum is congratulating while shaking hand with Ch. Pervaiz Elahi for being nominated as Chief Minister Punjab at his residence on Tuesday. Major (R) Latasob Satti MPA Kotli Sattian is also present. - DNA

## 1,000 students participate in CUI's VISIOSPARK-2022 event

ISLAMABAD: Around 1,000 students from 30 renowned universities and institutes of the country participated in the VISIOSPARK-2022, a mega annual event organized by COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI), Wah Campus. A recently held daylong event was the 18th national level episode of the Visio-Spark to provide future information technology (IT) and Electrical Engineering (EE) professionals an opportunity to exhibit their skills and

get them familiar with the latest trends of the fast-developing sector, a news release said on Tuesday. During the annual activity, arranged in collaboration with Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) and Intag Computers Rawalpindi, students actively participated and showed their prowess in different competitions including Software Project, Quiz, On Spot Programming, Code Debug, Mobile App development, Web development, Poster design,

Logo design, E gaming, Engineering Project, Microwiz, Speed Wiring, ROBO RACE, Circuit Troubleshooting and MATLAB Guru. Chief Industry Development Officer of PSEB Syed Muhammad Ayub Shah, who was the chief guest, highlighted the growing IT professionals demand around the globe and advised the students to prepare themselves accordingly. He also distributed shields, certificates and cash awards among winners of different competitions. - APP

## Balochistan govt's ecotourism resorts in final stages

ISLAMABAD: The construction work on the ecotourism resorts was in full swing with allied facilities in the coastal areas of Balochistan to cater the needs of local and foreign tourists visiting its beautiful coastal lines. The construction work on the establishment of tourist resorts in Kund Malir, Gadani, Aurmara, Jiwani, Gwadar and Kalimat was in the final stages as 90 percent development work had been done, sources in the Balochistan government told APP. In a bid to unlock the potential of tourism sectors of Balochistan, the government had decided to develop its coastal areas to facilitate tourists and travelers, the source said. They said the government was striving to provide basic and residential facilities at the sites, sound infrastructure, best transport system and safe environment to the visitors of the area. The nine tourist resorts at the coastal belt would be established at Kund Malir, Aurmara, Gwadar, Jiwani and others costing Rs 1,602 million with aim to develop its coastal area to attract more tourists. - APP

## IGP lauds police performance

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Muhammad Ahsan Younas on Tuesday lauded performance of Islamabad Police, Rangers, frontier constabulary, Punjab and KP police for maintaining law and order during public gatherings of various political parties. "Due to extra ordinary security arrangements, no untoward incident took place in the capital and its suburbs despite huge public gatherings," he said in a statement issued here. The capital police chief along with other senior police officers as well as Chief Commissioner Islamabad Amir Ahmed Ali remained present on roads and monitored the duty of cops. They also boosted up the moral of the subordinates. He and other officers reviewed the security arrangements in the Jalsa Grounds where police have installed walk through gates for body search of the participants. There was a close coordination between police and district administration. - APP

## COMSTECH to hold orientation for Palestinian nationals

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH (the Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation of IOC) will organize a virtual orientation session on "Scholarships and Research Fellowships for Palestinian Nationals" on March 30 (Wednesday). According to an official of the COMSTECH, the orientation session is being arranged to raise awareness among the Palestinian nationals about this special program offering scholarships, research fellowships, technicians training and workshop participation grants for them. The virtual session can be attended by Palestinian nationals only. This program is a collaborative effort of the member institutions of COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence (CCoE), Association of Private Sector Universities of Pakistan (APSUS) and COMSTECH. These scholarships and fellowships can be availed in the fields of Natural Sciences or Applied Sciences or Engineering and Technology, Computer Sciences, Software Engineering and Health sciences. Selected candidates will study at Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) of Pakistan, and IOC member states. The duration of fellowship program between 6-12 months and full-length degree program wherever applicable while duration can be extended with mutual agreement of host institution and COMSTECH secretariat. These scholarships and research fellowships will support undergraduate studentship, graduate studentship, research fellowships and workshop participation for the students, Scientists, Engineers and technicians of the State of Palestine, the official conveyed. The Palestinian nationals can register with COMSTECH to attend this meeting through the web link: <https://forms.gle/PQhtEdzjzPdKx2KZA> and can contact through email ids: [khazima@comstech.org](mailto:khazima@comstech.org); [mah.yamin@comstech.org](mailto:mah.yamin@comstech.org) for further information. - DNA

## ICCI shows concerns over growing risks for economy

Muhammad Shakeel Munir said that the political stability was one of the key requirements for creating a favourable environment for business and economic activities as it facilitated investments to stimulate economic growth and jobs creation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has shown great concerns over the growing risks for economy as according to a report of Ministry of Finance, the escalation of geopolitical tensions and domestic political conditions could hamper the positive outlook for Pakistan's economy and may also aggravate the macroeconomic imbalances. He stressed upon all the stakehold-

ers to take stock of this precarious situation and work for promoting political stability in the country which played a fundamental role in setting the pace and direction of the economic development. He said this while addressing a reception hosted by Muhammad Naveed Malik, former Senior Vice President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Jams-haid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President, Muhammad Faheem Khan Vice President ICCI, Muhammad Ejaz Abbasi, Baser Daud, Ashfaq Hussain Chatha, Malik Najeeb, Chaudhry Tahir, Imran



Minhas, Shazia Rizwan, Nageena Khaleeqe, Safena Shah, Faheem Iqbal, Umar Sadiq, Rizwan Afsar and others were present at

the occasion. Muhammad Shakeel Munir said that the political stability was one of the key requirements for creating a favourable environment for business and economic activities as it facilitated investments to stimulate economic growth and jobs creation. He emphasized that all stakeholders should put their heads together and play a role to restore political stability in Pakistan that would improve the confidence of the business community and investors in the economic outlook of the country. Jams-haid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President and Muhammad

Faheem Khan Vice President ICCI said that the economy of Pakistan was already facing great challenges of escalating oil, gas and commodity prices in the international market due to Ukraine crisis, which have a direct impact on business class and the general public. They said that growing political instability would slow down the pace of business activities and further affect the growth of the economy. They stressed that restoring political stability should be the top priority of all stakeholders to promote a conducive business environment and revive the economy.

## Fish, meat valuing \$583.067 million exported

ISLAMABAD: Over 100,129 metric tons of fish, fish preparation, 50,414 metric tons of meat and meat products exported during first 08 months of current financial year as compared the exports of the corresponding period of last year. During the period from July-February, 2021-22, the exports of fish and fish products grew by 6.48%, whereas the exports of meat and meat preparations went up by 2.76% respectively, according to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

During the period under review about 458,501 metric tons of fish and fish preparations worth \$362.202 million exported as against the exports of 736,542 metric tons valuing \$339.848 million of same period last year, it added. Meanwhile, in last 08 months of current financial year country earned \$220.865 million by exporting about 50,414 metric tons of meat and meat products as compared the earning of \$214.935 million of same period last year, it added.

On month on month basis, the exports of above mentioned commodities also recorded 16.55% and 10.56% growth respectively in February, 2022 as against the same month of last year, the data revealed.

During the month of February, 2022 about 14,300 metric tons of fish and fish products worth \$35.901 million exported as compared the exports of 14,098 metric tons valuing \$30.803 million of same month last year, it added. On the other hand about 6,650 metric tons of meat and meat products valuing \$28.908 million also exported during the month under review as compared the exports of \$26.147 million of same month last year. - APP

## IHC seeks comments in HEC case

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Tuesday instructed the respondents to submit their comments in case against the appointment of member Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr. Atta ur Rehman. Justice Aamer Farooq of IHC heard the case filed through the lawyer Barrister Umar Ijaz Gilani. Chairman HEC Dr. Tariq Banori also appeared in person before the court. The petitioner's lawyer said that the post of chairman HEC had been made non-functional through a notification dated February 8, issued by executive director HEC. He prayed the court to turn down the said notification. Chairman HEC said that he had been stopped from working through the above mentioned notification. The federation requested the court to grant more time for submission of its comments in the case. At this, hearing of the case was adjourned till April 4. - APP

## Gold prices decline by Rs900 to Rs130,450

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold witnessed a decrease of Rs 900 and was sold at Rs 130,450 on Tuesday against its sale at Rs 131,350 in the local market the previous day. The price of 10 gram 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs771 to Rs 111,840 from Rs112,611 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went down to Rs 102,520 from Rs 103,227, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported. The price of per tola silver went down by Rs10 and was traded at Rs1500 whereas that of ten gram silver declined by Rs8.58 and was sold at Rs1286. The price of gold in international market decreased by \$32 and was traded at US\$1900 against its sale at US\$ 1932, the association reported.

## Briefs

## MoHR to open Model Girls Child Welfare Centre

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Human Rights (MoHR) Dr. Sharieen M. Mazari has said that MoHR would open soon a Model Girls Child Welfare Centre in federal capital. Talking to media, she said that the center would work under the supervision of MoHR for the physical, mental and social development of children. The minister said that the purpose of the separate building for girl children was to protect the orphan children. The girls child protection center will provide education, and opportunities for mental and physical growth as well as avenues of socialization for children. The child protection center would rescue children from roads, streets and other vulnerable places, she added. She also said: The MoHR has already been working on child protection. The Zainab Alert Law 2020 was enacted to address hazardous employment as under the Children Employment Act 1991.

## PEC team calls on President, IIUI

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The visitation team of Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) called on H.E. Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi, President International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) at his office. It was headed by Engr. Prof. Dr. M. Tufail, Pro Vice Chancellor NED University Karachi. During the meeting, topics of mutual interests including programs offered at faculty of engineering and technology were discussed. Earlier, the PEC re-accreditation team visited the labs, infrastructure and facilities available at university for students of BS Electrical Engineering and BS Mechanical Engineering programs. The team PEC lauded the efforts of the university in the line of PEC guidelines. On the occasion, the President, IIUI apprised the team of the vision, mission, strategic plan and activities of the university. The President, IIUI also appreciated the efforts of the Faculty. The meeting was also attended by Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed, Vice President (R&E), IIUI and Prof. Dr. Nadeem Ahmed Sheikh, Dean, Faculty of Engineering & Technology.

## Wapda's new projects to provide 35000 jobs

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) has initiated 10 new projects which would provide about 35,000 job opportunities during the construction. The project would also be enhanced hydel generation capacity to cross 18,000 MW with an addition of 9,000 MW, a Wapda source said. Wapda has initiated 10 projects aimed to enhance the gross water storage capacity in the country from 13 million acre-feet (MAF) to more than 24 million MAF which would be also sufficient to irrigate another 1.6 million acres of land. The Wapda projects include five dams, three hydropower projects, one canal, and one water supply scheme that were under construction which would be completed in a phased manner from 2023 to 2029. Diamer Bhasha Dam, Mohmand Dam, Dasu Hydropower Project, Nai Gaj Dam, Kachhi Canal Extension, Sindh Barrage, and KIV Project were among the projects, said official sources. The per capita water availability in Pakistan had come down from 5650 cubic meters to an alarming level of 908 cubic meters per annum, pushing us to the stage of a water-scarce country. In order to tackle the impending water scarcity, we need to have more water storage besides practicing good water conservation and management strategies, he said.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of National Food Security Syed Fakhar Imam taking interest in books displayed on the occasion of the Independence Day and National Day of Bangladesh. – DNA

# UNEP acknowledges Billion Tree Tsunami project: PM

“Large scale restoration initiatives such as The Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Project are central to Pakistan’s efforts to support the UN Decade and to increase ecosystem restoration,” said Dechen Tsering

DNA

ISLAMABAD, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday lauded his team for successfully carrying out the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami as the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) acknowledged Pakistan’s lead role in ecosystem restoration. “Proud of my team,” the prime minister said in a tweet, quoting UNEP as saying that “We are at a point in history where we need to act, and Pakistan is leading on this important effort.” The prime minister also shared an article published on the website of Stockholm+50 – an international meeting convened by the United Nations General Assembly, the preparatory meeting of which was held on March 28 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The article mentioned Pakistan’s contribution towards the up-gradation of the environment. “Large scale restoration initiatives such as The Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Project are central to Pakistan’s efforts to support the UN Decade and to increase ecosystem restoration,” said Dechen Tsering, UNEP’s Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. “We are at a point in history where we need to act, and Pakistan is leading on this important effort.” The UNEP’s Inclusive Wealth Report for Pakistan, a first-of-its-kind accounting of the country’s natural, human and produced capital, said “it was promising to see the steps that the country’s government is taking to turn things around, particularly with its restoration projects.” The article highlighted

that almost one year into the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, Pakistan was showing what is possible by pushing forward on its Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Project. The ambitious project – which aims to revive forest and wildlife resources in Pakistan and bring a host of other benefits – planted 1.42 billion trees between 2019 and December 2021, covering 1.36 million acres across almost 10,000 sites. Pakistan, which hosted World Environment Day in 2021, is particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. Research by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) before the project began found that only around five percent of the country has forest cover, against a global average of 31 percent, making it one of the six countries most susceptible to climate change. According to a UN Development Programme (UNDP) report, Pakistan is particularly susceptible to increased variability of monsoons, receding Himalayan glaciers, and extreme events including floods and droughts. The knock-on effect of these will be an increase in food and water insecurity. The government has committed to increasing its Protected Areas to 15 percent by 2023. In 2018 they stood at 12 percent; by mid-2021 they stood at 13.9 percent.

Environmental problems in Pakistan are exacerbated by its large population. It is the fifth most populous country in the world, which puts increasing strain on the environment. Additionally, according to the World Bank, over 24 percent of Pakistan’s population lives in poverty, which puts them at greater risk of impacts of climate change. This is largely because they have a higher dependency on natural resources and are less able to cope with climatic variability. “The Ten Billion Tree Tsunami is not only helping restore ailing ecosystems and improve natural capital; it is also supporting livelihoods. The project is expected to create jobs for almost 85,000 daily wagers. In addition, Pakistan’s protected areas initiative will create almost 7,000 long-term jobs,” the article concluded.

## DOAM committed to preserve Gandhara heritage

ISLAMABAD: The Directorate of Archeology and Museums (DOAM) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government are committed to restoring and preserving the rich heritage of the Gandhara civilization’s famous art and Buddhist cultural specimens to transform the province’s tourist center. Talking to APP, an official of DOAM Raza Mehmood said, “Peshawar Museum is notable for its collection of Buddhist artwork dating from the ancient Gandhara region.” He said the museum initially had only one exhibition hall, but two more were added, the museum was further expanded with the construction of a new block with two galleries, two halls for the museum’s collection in storage, offices for the provincial directorate of archaeology. The historic exhibition hall was also renovated at that time. He said Peshawar Museum has one of the largest and most extensive collections of Gandhara art of the Buddhist period and is considered to be one of the biggest collections of Buddhist objects in the world. – APP

## NBF Book Museum attracts book lovers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Book Foundation’s (NBF) Book Museum is attracting large numbers of people from across the country, promoting a culture of reading that has been praised by thousands of book lovers. Talking to media, a senior official of NBF Daud Mirza said, “The efforts to promote book reading culture to get the knowledge of the history of the country among youth providing the platform and ease to avail the opportunity.” He said as NBF has taken various initiatives to launch a series of innovative projects to promote book reading culture. These initiatives included the formation of Village Book Clubs, City Book Clubs, Children’s Book Clubs, Prisoners’ Free Minds Book Clubs, Senior Citizens Book Clubs, Travelers’ Book Clubs (Books on Wheels), Flying Book Clubs, and Hospital Book Clubs. NBF has come up with another novel idea to appoint book-loving celebrities of the country as Book Ambassadors to play their role in promoting book-reading habits, he said.

## Third Int'l conference on Space continues in full swing

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The 3rd International Conference on Space (ICS-22) on “Role of Space Technology and Applications in Socio-Economic Development” continued in full swing for the second day with national and international speakers deliberating upon the latest developments in space technology and applications. The conference is being arranged by Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), in cooperation with Asia Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO), Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) and Inter Islamic Network on Space Sciences and Technology (ISNET).

More than 56 papers were presented on the second day on the various faculties of space sciences and research. The papers presented by local and international participants were under the premise set by the 5 themes of the international space conference (Space Science, Space Technology, Space Applications, Space Education and Outreach, Space Law, Policy and Regulations). A plenary session on “Emerging Technologies in Space Applications” and “Special Session on ISNET’s Outstanding Award Program on SDGs through Space Science and Technology” were also held. In the special session, results of ISNET’s first outstanding award program on SDGs were announced and talks were given by Mr. Adnan H. Aliani,

Director Strategy and Programme Management Division and Officer-in-Charge Sub regional Office for South and South-West Asia at UNESCAP, Mr. Mazhar Hussain Director of Economic and Social Research Department at Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRI), Dr. Laurent Durieux Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Goals Engagement at Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Secretariat and Ms Barira Hanif from SGDs Coordinator at NUST. After the poster review session, Workshops on “Applications of Remote Sensing Data and Hazard Modeling”, “Microgravity and Space Farming” and “Space Technology: Navigation Error Analysis Tool (NEAT)” concluded the activities of the conference.

## Exports to maintain upward trend in March: Ministry

ISLAMABAD: The exports from the country during the month of March 2022 are expected to continue their upward trend, backed by the export-oriented policies that have been implemented in the recent past, finance ministry said in a report. The trade data for the month of March would be released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) during first week of next month (April 2022). According to Monthly Economic Update and Outlook, March 2022 released by the Finance Ministry, the stabilizing of the Real Effective Exchange will also help exports in keeping the rising trend.

On the other hand, the imports would probably return to a level that is more in line with domestic economic activity and the levels of international commodity prices, it added. As a result, the trade balance may less deteriorate in March 2022 as well. However, according to the report, the geopolitical risks still persist. The government measures designed to stimulate exports and discourage unnecessary imports are expected to contribute to constrain current account deficit. The remittances are also expected to revert to normal levels during the month of March as in January and February,

the inflows declined to lower levels mainly due to negative seasonality. Taking these factors into account, as well as its other components, the current account deficit is expected to stay well below the unsustainable levels observed during the period from Aug 2021 up to Jan 2022. According to the report, the country’s overall economic performance continued to be strong and was still on a trajectory compatible with an economic growth target of around 5 percent in the current fiscal year. Its cyclical position has returned to a more neutral stance and if this trend con-

tinues in the next months, economic growth would be driven primarily by the expansion of manufacturing capacity. However, the intensity of internal and external risks has still not been exactly realized which may adversely affect domestic economic activities. It further said the inflation and the current account deficit were still under pressure and the government was taking measures to limit as much as possible further increases in the cost of living in the coming months. The recent geopolitical tensions, in particular the Ukraine crisis, is the most important external risk factor, it added. – APP

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## Turkey wants an end to Russia-Ukraine war

**T**URKISH President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Russian and Ukrainian delegations to "put an end to this tragedy" as he hosted talks in Istanbul. The face-to-face talks at the Dolmabahce palace in Istanbul are aimed at trying to end a war that has killed an estimated 20,000 people and forced more than 10 million from their homes. It is the first time that the two countries' delegations, who arrived in Turkey on Monday, met after several rounds of talks by videoconference. "The two parties have legitimate concerns, it's possible to reach a solution acceptable to the international community," Erdogan said. "It's up to the two parties to put an end to this tragedy," he insisted, adding that the "extension of the conflict is in no one's interest." Turkey on March 10 hosted the first meeting between Ukrainian and Russian foreign ministers since the invasion of Ukraine last month in the southern Turkish city of Antalya. Ukrainian forces recaptured the town of Irpin on the outskirts of Kyiv from invading Russian troops. "We have good news today – Irpin has been liberated," said the town's mayor, Oleksandr Markushyn.

A senior US defense official said the Ukrainians were "continuing to try to take back ground," and the eastern town of Trostyanets, south of Sumy, was also back in their hands. Ukrainian officials played down the chances of a breakthrough during the Turkey talks but the fact that they were taking place at all was a sign of shifts behind the scenes as Russia's invasion has stalled and sanctions have hit home. However, neither side has budged over Russia's territorial demands, including Crimea, which Moscow seized and annexed in 2014, and the eastern territory of Donbas, which Moscow demands that Kyiv cede to separatists. "I don't think there will be any breakthrough on the main issues," Ukrainian Interior Ministry adviser Vadym Denysenko said.

There was no sign of respite for civilians in besieged Ukrainian cities, especially the devastated port of Mariupol, whose mayor said 160,000 people were still trapped inside and Russia was blocking attempts to evacuate them. Russia's military said last week it would concentrate on expanding territory held by the separatists in Donbas, but Ukraine said it saw no sign Russia had given up a plan to surround the capital. Kyiv's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said 100 people had been killed, including four children, and 82 multistory buildings had been leveled, but the city would not give up. "We have destroyed the myth of the invincible Russian army," Klitschko said. Let us hope that the recent round of talks brings good news and hostilities are stopped so that further bloodshed could be avoided.



## Change of guards in the Punjab province

**T**HE opposition parties in the Punjab Assembly had submitted the no trust motion against incumbent Chief Minister Usman Buzdar. 126 members signed the motion. A 20 percent of the total members of the Assembly can submit a no-trust motion, which means the opposition needed only 74 members to submit this motion. It was an expected move. But the very next day Usman Buzdar was asked to step down to pave the way for Ch. Pervez Elahi, the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly. In his meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan, Ch. Pervez Elahi was approved for the chief minister slot. Thus, Pervez Elahi is set to become the Chief Minister of Punjab provided everything goes well. There are still certain hiccups in the way of Ch. Pervez Elahi that need to be overcome before he starts enjoying the chief ministership.

There are Tareen and Aleem Khan groups who from the face of it appear to be on the side of Ch. Pervez Elahi. However, their support will come with certain conditions and demands. Both of them would ask for a greater share in the Punjab cabinet. Even they can demand the speakership of the Punjab Assembly. For PML Q it was indeed a miracle to grab chief minister slot with only seven seats in the assembly. The PTL, in the beginning, was not ready accede to this demand of PML Q but after no trust move submitted by the opposition parties; Imran Khan and company had to accept Pervez Elahi as the new chief minister. Since PML Q has only a few seats in the Punjab Assembly therefore position of the Chief Minister will always remain vulnerable. And perhaps PML Q too has a clear understanding of this fact. It thinks if it is able to hold the fort for next one and half years, it can strengthen its foothold in Punjab politics by giving incentives to masses. The chief minister Punjab Usman Buzdar, from the outset, was in trouble as nobody even from his own party had accepted him as the chief minister. There was a consensus within the party as well that as long as he remains the chief minister, the party would remain in the dock. Many party people believed, with a weak chief minister it was simply impossible to deliver the goods. Probably that was the reason that the Jehangir Tareen group openly decided to go against Usman Buzdar. Tareen group mutiny encouraged the opposition parties to gird up their loins against Buzdar and things came to such a pass that removal of the chief minister became inevitable.

## Palestinians fight for survival amid Israel's war on Gaza's water

Ramzy Baroud



The consequences of this terrifying statistic are well known to Palestinians and, in fact, to the international community too. Last October, Mohammed Shehada of the Euro-Med Monitor told the 48th UN HR Council...

**W**HENEVER a family member announced, excitedly but also panicked, that "the water is back," my whole family would start running in all directions to fill every tank, container or bottle that could possibly be filled. Quite often, the water would last for just a few minutes, leaving us with a collective sense of defeat, worrying about our survival. This was life under Israeli military occupation in Gaza. The tactic of holding Palestinians hostage to Israel's water charity was so widespread during the First Intifada that denying water supplies to refugee camps, villages, towns or even whole regions was the first measure taken to subdue the rebellious population. This was often followed by military raids, mass arrests and deadly violence. But the process almost always began with cutting Palestinians off from their water supplies.

Israel's water war on the Palestinians has changed since those early days, especially as the climate change crisis has accelerated Israel's need to prepare for grim future possibilities. Of course, this largely happens at the expense of the occupied Palestinians. In the West Bank, the Israeli government continues to usurp Pal-

estinian water resources from the region's main aquifers – the Mountain Aquifer and the Coastal Aquifer. Frustratingly, Israel's main water company, Mekorot, sells stolen Palestinian water to Palestinian villages and towns, especially in the northern West Bank, at exorbitant prices.

Israel also continues to use water as a form of collective punishment in the West Bank, while often denying Palestinians, especially those in Area C, the right to dig new wells to circumvent its water monopoly. According to Amnesty International, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank each consume, on average, 73 liters of water a day. Israeli citizens, meanwhile, consume approximately 240 liters of water a day. And, even worse, illegal Israeli settlers consume more than 300 liters per day. The Palestinians' share of the water is not only far below the average consumed by Israelis, but is even below the recommended daily minimum of 100 liters as designated by the World Health Organization.

As difficult as the situation for West Bank Palestinians is, in Gaza a humanitarian catastrophe is already taking place. On the occasion of World Water Day on March 22, Gaza's Water and Environmental Quality Authority warned of a "massive crisis" should the Strip's water supplies continue to deplete at the current rate. Spokesman Mazen Al-Banna told reporters that 98 percent of Gaza's water supplies are not fit for human consumption.

The consequences of this terrifying statistic are well known to Palestinians and, in fact, to the international community too. Last October, Mohammed Shehada of the Euro-Med Monitor told the 48th UN Human Rights Council session that about a quarter of all diseases in Gaza are caused by water pollution and that an estimated 12 percent of deaths among Gaza's children are "linked to intestinal infections related to contaminated water."

But how did Gaza get to this point? On May 25 last year, four days after the end of the latest Israeli war on Gaza, the charity Oxfam announced that 400,000 people in besieged Gaza had no access to regular water supplies. The reason being that Israeli military campaigns always begin with the targeting of Palestinian electricity grids, water services and other vital public facilities. According to Oxfam, "11 days of bombardment... severely impacted the three main desalination plants in Gaza city."

It is important to keep in mind that the water crisis in Gaza has been ongoing for years and every aspect of this protracted crisis is linked to Israel. With damaged or failing infrastruc-

ture, much of Gaza's water has dangerously high levels of salinity or is extremely polluted, including by sewage. Even before Israel redeployed its forces out of Gaza in 2005 to impose a siege on the Strip's population from land, sea and air, Gaza had a water crisis. Its coastal aquifer was entirely controlled by the Israeli military administration, which diverted clean water to the few thousand settlers, while occasionally allocating highly saline water to the then-1.5 million Palestinian people, as long as they did not protest or resist the occupation in any way.

Approaching 17 years later, Gaza's population has grown to 2.1 million and its already struggling aquifer is in far worse shape. UNICEF has reported that water from Gaza's aquifer is depleting due to "over-extraction (because) people have no other choice." The organization added: "Worse, pollution and an influx of seawater mean that only 4 percent of the aquifer water is fit to drink. The rest must be purified and desalinated to make it drinkable." In other words, Gaza's problem is not a lack of access to freshwater reserves, but a lack of technology and fuel that would allow its inhabitants to make their water nominally drinkable. Even that would not be a long-term solution.

Israel is doing its utmost to destroy any chance of recovery from this ongoing crisis. Moreover, it seems that Tel Aviv is only invested in making the situation worse to jeopardize the Palestinians' hopes of survival. For example, last year, Israel was accused of deliberately flooding thousands of dunums of Palestinian land in Gaza when it vented its southern dams, which Israel uses to collect rainwater. This almost yearly ritual continues to devastate Gaza's ever-shrinking farming areas, which are the backbone of Palestinian survival under Israel's hermetic siege. The international community generally only pays attention to Gaza during times of war; even then, the attention is mostly negative, with Palestinians accused of provoking Israel's supposedly defensive military actions. The truth is that, even when Israel's military campaigns end, Tel Aviv continues to wage war on the Strip's inhabitants.

Though militarily powerful, Israel claims it is facing an "existential threat" in the Middle East. In reality, it is the Palestinians' existence that is in real jeopardy. When almost all of Gaza's water is not fit for human consumption because of a deliberate Israeli strategy, one can understand why Palestinians continue to fight back as if their lives depend on it – because they do.

– Courtesy: Arab News

## Mariupol: Stranded under siege

Stephen Cornish

Every conflict is unique but MSF has learned firsthand that one-off safe passage is not enough. While it may be helpful for those willing or able to leave...

**A**S the Russia-Ukraine war enters its fourth week, the majority of the population of Mariupol remain trapped in the besieged city, under near-constant bombardment, cut off from electricity, heating and phone coverage, and with food, water and medications fast running out. Earth-shattering shelling and aerial bombardments have directly damaged countless apartment buildings and blown out the windows in many more.

Safety is almost impossible to find, as it appears civilians may be being targeted deliberately. Since the bombardment of Mariupol began on February 24, Ukrainian officials estimate that 2,500 people have been killed and many more

wounded. With night-time temperatures below zero and heating systems no longer functioning, the temperature inside people's flats and in their basements is now the same as outside – freezing. The Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) team in the city and their families have also been sheltering for hours on end in the office basement, the fear palpable in their voices when we're able to contact them.

In the few hours a day when the bombing stops, the struggle to survive overcomes the fear and those who can, emerge from underground to try to find what little food, medicine and care remains in the city, to cut firewood, and collect water from streams, springs or melted snow. MSF teams have made a few trips out to assess the situation, to donate the remaining medical supplies they have and to offer help and care to those in need. There are many vulnerable people unable or unwilling to leave their homes. The situation is especially dire for the elderly and those with disabilities who are dependent on others for help and care, including to find food, water and wood to make fires. The reports we received from our trapped staff are hard to listen to.

For weeks, almost no one has been able to get into, or out of, the city, and that includes aid workers and others trying to bring in basic supplies. The siege has effectively entrapped the population. They have been denied the right to flee to safety and are cut off from access to basic necessities needed for survival.

After Deraa, Darayya, Raqqa, Kabul, Sarajevo and so many other conflicts, it is now Mariupol's turn. Several attempts to create a safe passage for those trapped inside Mariupol fell through before authorities reported that thousands of people (including some MSF staff and their families) were able to leave the city under shelling through a one-off safe passage on March 14. Every conflict is unique but MSF has learned firsthand that one-off safe passage is not enough. While it may be helpful for those willing or able to leave, provided that so-called humanitarian corridors are not targeted of course, what happens to civilians unable or unwilling to leave is a major concern.

Regardless of temporary truces, international law requires all belligerents to make every effort to spare all civilians at all times. MSF and other humanitarian organisations are ready to provide much-needed supplies and support to Mariupol but we urgently need assurances from all parties that our teams will be permitted safe passage. So while we are busy assisting in other areas of Ukraine, with Mariupol, we are left feeling helpless, watching the catastrophic destruction and tragic loss of lives while repeatedly calling for the safety of civilians and respect of international humanitarian law. But once again, we call on all parties with the power to make this happen, to ensure it does while there are still people to save in Mariupol.

– Courtesy: Al Jazeera

## What Iraq and Libya teach us about Ukraine

Ramzy Baroud

In contrast, very little has been done to offer platforms for diplomatic, non-violent solutions. A handful of countries in the Middle East...

**M**UCH has been said and written about media bias and double standards in the West's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, when compared with other wars and military conflicts across the world, especially in the Middle East and the Global South. Less obvious is how such hypocrisy is a reflection of a much larger phenomenon which governs the West's relationship to conflict and conflict zones.

On March 19, Iraq commemorated the 19th anniversary of the US invasion which killed, according to modest estimates, over a million Iraqis. The consequences of that war were equally devastating as it destabilized the entire Middle East region, leading to various civil and proxy conflicts. The Arab world is reeling under that horrific experience to this day.

Also, on March 19, the eleventh anniversary of the NATO war on Libya was commemorated and followed, five days later, by the 23rd anniversary of the NATO war on Yugoslavia. Like every NATO-led war since the inception of the alliance in 1949, these conflicts resulted in widespread devastation and tragic death tolls.

None of these wars, starting with the NATO intervention in the Korean Peninsula in 1950, have stabilized any of those regions. Iraq is still as vulnerable to terrorism and outside military interventions. Libya is divided among various conflicting camps, and a return to civil conflict remains a possibility.

Yet, enthusiasm for war remains high, as if over seventy years of failed military interventions have not taught us any meaningful lessons. Daily, news headlines tell us that the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, Spain or some other western power have decided to ship a new kind of 'lethal weapons' to Ukraine. Billions of dollars have already been allocated by Western countries to contribute to the conflict in Ukraine.

In contrast, very little has been done to offer platforms for diplomatic, non-violent solutions. A handful of countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia have offered mediation or insisted on a diplomatic solution to the conflict, arguing, as China's foreign ministry reiterated on March 18, that "all sides need to jointly support Russia and Ukraine in having dialogue and negotiation that will produce results and lead to peace".

Though the violation of the sovereignty of any country is illegal under international law, and is a stark violation of the United Nations Charter, this does not mean

that the only solution to violence is counter-violence. This cannot be truer in the case of Russia and Ukraine, as a state of civil war has existed in Eastern Ukraine for eight years, killing scores and depriving whole communities from any sense of peace or security. Nato's weapons cannot possibly address the root causes of this communal struggle. On the contrary, they can only fuel it further. If more weapons were the answer, the conflict would have been resolved years ago. According to the BBC, the US has already allocated \$2.7bn to Ukraine over the last eight years, long before the current conflict. This massive arsenal included "anti-tank and anti-armour weapons ... US-made sniper (rifles), ammunition and accessories".

The speed with which additional military aid has poured into Ukraine following the Russian military operations on Feb. 24 is unprecedented in modern history. This raises not only political or legal questions, but moral questions as well – the eagerness to fund conflict and the lack of enthusiasm to help countries rebuild. After 21 years of US invasion of Afghanistan, resulting in a humanitarian and refugee crisis, Kabul is now largely left on its own. Last September, the UN refugee agency conflicted that "a major humanitarian crisis is looming in Afghanistan", yet nothing has been done to address this 'looming' crisis, which has greatly worsened since then.

Afghan refugees are rarely welcomed in Europe. The same is true for refugees coming from Iraq, Syria, Libya, Mali and other conflicts that directly or indirectly involved Nato. This hypocrisy is accentuated when we consider international initiatives that aim to support conflict refugees, or rebuild the economies of conflict-torn nations. Compare the lack of enthusiasm in supporting conflict-torn nations with the West's unparalleled euphoria in providing weapons to Ukraine. Sadly, it will not be long before the millions of Ukrainian refugees who have left their country in recent weeks become a burden on Europe, thus subjected to the same kind of mainstream criticism and far-right attacks.

While it is true that the West's attitude to Ukraine is different from its attitude to victims of western interventions, one has to be careful before supposing that the 'privileged' Ukrainians will ultimately be better off than the victims of conflict throughout the Middle East. As the crisis drags on, Ukraine will continue to suffer, either as a result of direct impact of the conflict or the collective trauma that will surely follow. Amassing of Nato weapons in Ukraine, as was the case of Libya, will likely backfire. In Libya, Nato's weapons fuelled the country's decade long civil conflict.

Ukraine needs peace and security, not perpetual conflict that is designed to serve the strategic interests of certain countries or military alliances. Though military invasions must be wholly rejected, whether in Iraq or Ukraine, turning Ukraine into another convenient zone of perpetual geopolitical struggle is not the answer.

– Courtesy: Gulf News

## Briefs

## Ukraine war: Pak calls for dialogue

FROM PAGE 01  
The prime minister underlined that non-partisan countries like Pakistan were in a position to play a helpful role in reinforcing efforts for cessation of hostilities and a diplomatic solution. He said that he had been persistently highlighting the adverse economic impact of the conflict on the developing countries, manifested in rising prices of oil and commodities. Prime minister Khan emphasized the importance of humanitarian relief for the civilians and underlined that Pakistan had dispatched two C-130 airplanes with humanitarian relief assistance for people in Ukraine. Recalling the recent OIC-Council of Foreign Ministers session in Islamabad, the prime minister informed that the foreign ministers of the Islamic countries expressed deep concern at the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation arising from the conflict in Ukraine. The foreign ministers called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and expressed willingness of OIC member states to support and facilitate the dialogue process, he added. The prime minister thanked for the support extended by Ukrainian authorities to evacuate Pakistani students and nationals as well as the embassy staff. He also appreciated the efforts made by other countries to facilitate diplomatic solution.

## 'Next Punjab CM to be from Opp'

FROM PAGE 01  
The setback came only a day after Special Assistant to PM (SAPM) on Reconciliation and Harmony in Balochistan and Jamhoori Watan Party leader Shah-zain Bugti announced to part ways with the government and join the Opposition. Bhootani said Zardari has obliged him on many occasions and as new elections are round the corners everyone has to see what is beneficial for him. Bilawal Bhutto thanked Bhootani for posing confidence in them and also congratulated him for becoming a part of the joint opposition. Zardari said it was a norm to keep contacting the political leaders. He said considering the situation in the country they wanted to take along all the parties. He said PML-Q was ready to work along with the opposition. "Ask them, they come to congratulate us in the night and go somewhere else in the morning," bemoans Zardari. Zardari said everyone should play a due role to save the country. He claimed that they were considering the betterment of the country and not focusing on getting into power. Zardari said soon good news will be announced regarding MQM. On a question that if someone was playing a double game with him, Zardari said it was a usual thing as it remains always so. Haideri demanded PM Imran Khan render his resignation. Sadiq said Imran and Pakistan cannot go ahead together and claimed that the number of votes against the government will surprise all. He alleged that Imran has damaged the country to an extent to which even the enemy of the country could not achieve.

## Noor, Asim in Int'l Squash C'ship final

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Noor Zaman would face his country mate Muhammad Asim Khan in the final of the DHA Islamabad International Squash Championship at Jacaranda Family Club (JFC) on Wednesday. Meanwhile in the 1st semifinal, World No 58 and top seed Asim Khan from Pakistan defeated World No 90 Israr Ahmad also from Pakistan with a game score of 8-11 (Retired Hurt). The match lasted for 11 minutes. Whereas, in the 2nd semifinal, World No 149 Noor Zaman from Pakistan defeated World No 86 Addeen Iddraie from Malaysia with a game score of 11-5, 11-9, 6-11, 11-6 in 34 minutes. - APP

## China-Pakistan traditional friendship unbreakable

The senior Chinese diplomat said China deeply felt the strong desire of South Asian countries to maintain the hard-won peace and tranquility in the region and accelerate post-pandemic economic recovery as well as their hope to strengthen strategic communication and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with China

DNA

BEIJING: China and Pakistan will carry forward their all-weather friendship, and their traditional friendship is unbreakable and rock solid, said Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The two countries also agreed to deepen all-China round cooperation, and China welcomes Pakistan's deeper participation in China's new development pattern' he told Chinese media after concluding his trips to Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Nepal. He mentioned that he has reached important new consensus with the Pakistani government and military leadership on deepening strategic cooperation between the two countries under the current international and regional circumstances. The two countries vowed to safeguard international equity and justice, as well as agreed to practice true multilateralism, firmly oppose acts of bullying by powers, and resist the resurgence of the Cold War mentality, he was quoted by CGTN

as saying. Wang said his trip to South Asia came at a time when the spill-over effect of the Ukraine crisis has been constantly spreading and world peace and development are facing new challenges. The senior Chinese diplomat said China deeply felt the strong desire of South Asian countries to maintain the hard-won peace and tranquility in the region and accelerate post-pandemic economic recovery as well as their hope to strengthen strategic communication and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with China. The visit consolidated the traditional friendship between



China and South Asian countries, enhanced mutual understanding, deepened strategic mutual trust, clarified key cooperation directions and areas, and gathered broad consensus on solidarity, coordination and common development under new circumstances, he added. During his trip to Pakistan, Wang attended the Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the first time for a Chinese foreign minister to be invited for such a meeting, during which China and Islamic countries reached important consensus on a wide range of issues. The two sides agreed to deepen strategic

communication and coordination, continue to work in solidarity in fighting against COVID-19, deepen cooperation in vaccine production and medicine research and development, jointly build the Belt and Road with high quality, and strengthen communication and coordination on implementing the Global Development Initiative, Wang noted. The two sides also agreed that it is of great urgency to promote a just settlement of regional hotspot issues and that the Palestinian question should not be forgotten or marginalized, he said, adding they both believe it is necessary to guide and promote the overall unity of developing countries, advocate true multilateralism, abandon the Cold War mentality, resist bloc confrontation and safeguard the common interests of developing countries. His visit to Afghanistan has three main objectives, including renewing the traditional friendship between the two peoples, observing the administration of the Afghan interim government, and promoting mutual understanding and building a foundation of mutual trust with the Afghan side through face-to-face exchanges, Wang said

## Efforts underway for settling conflict in Afghanistan

FROM PAGE 01  
Southern and Eastern parts of Afghanistan and now going ahead towards Central and Northern areas. Whatever might be claims and reaction of Emirate Islamic Afghanistan the fact is that there exists visible shifts in policies of Taliban's Qandaharis and Haqqani groups towards common people of Afghanistan. The Qandaharis are patient and tolerant towards all those who either remain part of previous Ghani and Karzai governments or remain in association with Jihadic, religious, progressive and nationalists' political parties or groups. But the Haqqanis are becoming notorious in violation of Human Rights by picking up rivals, putting them in detentions and even extra-judicial murder of those who have either ordered, lead or participated in security forces operation against those Taliban or resistance groups who have challenged the US led allied forces after 9/11 tragedy. Similarly, the Qandaharis allowed women to go colleges and universities but the Haqqanis are discouraging women in higher education institutions. Similar is the position of women who are working in offices. In the light of visible rifts in Taliban's two main groups, the western world is now insisting on an inclusive government with moderate policies. Similarly western world is also unhappy with growing influence and interference of Pakistan in internal affairs of Afghanistan. Common Afghans who have abandoned homes either before or after empowering of Taliban are also welcoming such proposals of western world. These Afghans are against fuelling of internal hostilities amongst the Afghans or interference in internal affairs of Afghanistan from abroad. No one can deny the fact that former President Hamid Karzai had made a valuable contribution by restoring centralized authority of Afghanistan, gifting an acceptable constitution, parliament and Presidential form of democracy. Even he had discouraged the warlords and self styles of commandership. But his only failure was "encouraging political trends by promotion of political party system. Similarly Dr Ashraf Ghani was so keen to end corruption and corrupt practices, nepotism and misuse of offices. But he was completely helpless before the so-called Northern Alliance- an alliance of Non Pushtoons who were reluctant in recognition of Pushtoons as majority of Afghanistan. Even time and again war lords like Rashid Dostam and followers of Ahmad Shah Masud went on revolt against Kabul even during Hamid Karzai regime. But Karzai had tactfully handled the situation whereas Ghani didn't. However, after Hamid Karzai, interference in affairs of Afghanistan was expedited when Dr. Ashraf Ghani assumed the office. Besides, neighboring countries increasing interference, no other than the US had forced Ghani to share power with defeated Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. Similarly no other than the US is responsible for not only encouraging Taliban by recognizing as a most powerful faction through so-called Doha Qatar accord but also allowing them to capture power in first half of August. And now like 90's, Afghanistan is no more suitable or safe for its own kids. It is the time for US led allies and European Union to realize their responsibilities at this crucial stage and let the people from Afghanistan decide their future according to their own rich Afghan traditions.

## Samson leads Royals to big IPL win

PUNE: Sanju Samson led from the front with a blistering 55 as Rajasthan Royals opened their season campaign in the IPL with an emphatic 61-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday. The captain, playing his 100th match for Royals who won the inaugural Indian Premier League edition under late Australian star Shane Warne in 2008, guided his team to 210 for six in Pune. Royals' bowlers led by Prasad Krishna, who rattled the top-order including dismissing skipper Kane Williamson for two, restricted Hyderabad to 149-7 despite an unbeaten 57 by Aiden Markram. - APP

## Australia beat Pakistan in 1st ODI by 88 runs

*That effectively decided the outcome of the match even despite Imam's best efforts, with the latter's exit prompting a collapse of 5-21*

LAHORE: Travis Head ended a three-and-a-half-year absence from Australian gold with a starring all-round show to lead the undermanned tourists to a series-opening one-day international victory over Pakistan in Lahore. Head shook off a middling Test campaign with a startling onslaught against the white ball, peppering the off-side boundary as he surged to a 70-ball century, the quickest scored in an ODI between the two nations and the second fastest made at the Gaddafi Stadium Chasing 314 for victory. Pakistan failed to match their oppo-

ponents' fast start and were never in the hunt despite Imam ul-Haq (103 off 96 deliveries) hitting his third hundred against the Aussies this month. The depleted Australians, left with just 13 players to pick from after COVID-19 and injuries wreaked havoc on their selected squad, were further heartened by the performances of their two ODI debutants who delivered knockout punches with the ball. Adam Zampa stood tall as the side's most senior bowler, snagging 4-38 from his 10 overs as he became the 18th Australian man to take 100 ODI wickets. It was Head's first international limited-overs appearance since November 2018. Having reached 2-171 at the halfway point of their innings with first-drop Ben McDermott (55 off 70 for his first ODI half-century) set at the crease, a 350-plus score did not appear out of reach. Babar and Imam built a steady 96-run partnership but the asking rate was nearing 7.5 per over when Swepson, on his next ball after a lengthy review off Babar where lbw, caught and stumping appeals were considered and eventually dismissed, had the

hosts' star batter out sweeping. That effectively decided the outcome of the match even despite Imam's best efforts, with the latter's exit prompting a collapse of 5-21. Inserted by his opposite number Babar, Finch had appeared out of sorts as a succession of deliveries struck him on the pads in a laboured hand of 23 off 36 balls ended by leg-spinner Zahid, who found the right-handers' outside edge for his maiden ODI scalp. Finch's struggles stood in contrast to his opening partner Head, who blazed 11 off his first 26 balls to or over the fence. McDermott, playing in his third ODI and first at No.3, should have been run out on 38 when Marnus Labuschagne called for an ill-advised single but, after posting his maiden international half-century, was not as lucky a second time when he was caught short coming back for a third run. Labuschagne (25 off 35) and Alex Carey (four off as many deliveries) were out in consecutive overs, while Marcus Stoinis (26 off 42) and Sean Abbott (14 off 9) had their stumps rattled by Haris Rauf (2-44) at the death. - DNA

## Barcelona to sign Christensen and Franck Kessie

BARCELONA: Barcelona have agreed deals to sign Chelsea defender Andreas Christensen and AC Milan midfielder Franck Kessie on free transfers when their contracts expire in June, says Guillem Balague. The Spanish club are also in talks with Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta over a free transfer this summer. Club president Joan Laporta confirmed Barca had signed two players, but would not name them. "We've completed two signings for the next season," he said. Speaking to Catalan radio station Raci1, Laporta added: "One is a midfielder, the other one is a centre-back. But I'm not allowed to mention their names." Kessie has played 215 times for AC Milan since moving from Atlanta in 2017 but announced earlier this season that he did not intend to sign a new deal with the Italian club. Denmark international Christensen has made 156 appearances for Chelsea since joining from Danish side Brøndby as a 16-year-old in 2012. Like Christensen, Blues captain Azpilicueta is out of contract at the end of the season. Chelsea are unable to offer new deals to players because of sanctions placed on owner Roman Abramovich following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. All three players have been able to discuss terms with foreign-based clubs since they moved into the final six months of their contracts in January. Balague, BBC Sport's European football expert, says Barca are also targeting Leeds forward Raphinha and have an agreement with the player, but the Yorkshire club have asked to delay talks over a fee until next month so they can focus on their battle against relegation from the Premier League. Should Raphinha move to the Nou Camp then France forward Ousmane Dembele will likely leave, with Paris Saint-Germain the favourites to sign the former Borussia Dortmund player. - Agencies

## UK police to issue 20 initial 'Partygate' fines

NEWS DESK

LONDON: British police announced on Tuesday they would be issuing 20 initial fines, after probing suspected breaches of Covid-19 lockdown laws by Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his staff in Downing Street. London's Metropolitan Police said it would not be disclosing the number or identities of those being fined, but Johnson's spokesman confirmed that the UK leader was not among those hit in the first wave of sanctions. The news nevertheless revives the so-called "Partygate" scandal, which left Johnson him fighting for political survival after a number of lawmakers from his ruling Conservatives withdrew their support for his leadership. Opposition politicians promptly reiterated their calls for his resignation following the Met's announcement on Tuesday. "We will today initially begin to refer 20 fixed penalty notices to be issued for breaches of Covid-19 regulations," the Met said in a statement, adding that its investigation was continuing. "We are making every effort to progress this investigation at speed and have completed a number of assessments," it added. Because there was still a "significant amount" of evidence to be assessed, they did not rule out further action. The London force is investigating claims that Johnson and his Downing Street officials organised and attended at least a dozen alcohol-fuelled events in 2020 and 2021 that violated Britain's then-strict virus curbs. Johnson has already apologised for the parties, which included Christmas celebrations and a drink-fuelled gathering the evening before Prince Philip's funeral. The prime minister, who initially denied any rule-breaking events had occurred in the complex where he lives and works, has consistently rejected personal wrongdoing.



BAGHDAD: For the first time in the history of Pakistan, an exhibition was arranged in IRAQ for the made in Pakistan products under the patronage of H.E Ahmed Amjad Ali, Ambassador of Pakistan in Iraq. Mr Muhammad Asif represented made in UAE HVAC products of rubber world industry. - DNA

## Azerbaijan says ready for peace talks with Armenia

A major flare-up in Karabakh could pose a challenge for Moscow, at a time when tens of thousands of Russian troops are engaged elsewhere, in Ukraine. Moscow has deployed some 2,000 peacekeepers in Karabakh and a land corridor linking it with Armenia

DNA



BAKU: Azerbaijan said on Tuesday it was ready for peace talks with Armenia, after Yerevan urged Baku to negotiate a comprehensive peace treaty amid new tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh. "If Armenia is serious about a peace agreement, then concrete steps have to be made. We repeat that Azerbaijan is ready for this," the

foreign ministry in Baku said in a statement. The ministry pointed out that Azerbaijan had proposed that the two countries hold peace talks a year ago. In 2020, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over the long-contested enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh which claimed more than 6,500 lives. A cease-fire deal brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin saw Armenia cede swathes of territory to Azerbaijan, and Moscow deploy a peacekeeping contingent to the mountainous region. Last week, Yerevan and Moscow accused Baku of violating a cease-fire in the Russian con-

tingent's zone of responsibility. They accused Azeri forces of capturing the village of Farukh in the Askeran region of Karabakh, where three Armenian soldiers were killed in a shootout last week. Baku rejected the accusation, insisting the area was part of its internationally recognized territory. On Monday, Armenia's security council accused Azerbaijan of "preparing the ground for fresh provocations and an offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh." It urged Baku to "immediately start talks on a comprehensive peace treaty." Armenia also demanded an investigation into the

Russian peacekeeping contingent's actions during the Azeri "incursion" and urged the Russian force to take "concrete steps" to diffuse tensions. A major flare-up in Karabakh could pose a challenge for Moscow, at a time when tens of thousands of Russian troops are engaged elsewhere, in Ukraine. Moscow has deployed some 2,000 peacekeepers in Karabakh and a land corridor linking it with Armenia. Ethnic Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The ensuing conflict claimed around 30,000 lives.

## Briefs

## E-kachehry to connect govt, general public, says Secy Bol

ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary Board of Investment (BoI) Fareena Mazhar here on Tuesday termed e-kachehry an effective tool in cementing ties between the government machinery and the general public. The e-kachehry is a major instrument to reach out to the public and offer on-spot solutions to their problems and concerns, she said in a press release issued by BoI here. She was addressing at the fifth e-kachehry via zoom and telephone as regular public outreach activity at the BoI as per instructions of the Prime Minister's office. She also apprised the participants on recent achievements of BoI in context of investment facilitation and informed them about the recently launched Asaan Karobar program, launched by the President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi on March 18th to reduce compliance burden on businesses and facilitate Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Export Processing Zones, taxation, CPEC, Joint Ventures, issuance of business visas are the main areas of focus during the e-kachehry. Through this platform, several investors and members of the business fraternity reached out to the BoI with their queries regarding investment opportunities in Pakistan and put forward recommendations to overcome challenges pertaining to doing business in the country. - APP

## Egypt, Qatar agree on 5-bln-USD investment package

CAIRO: Egypt and Qatar have agreed on a package of investment worth 5 billion U.S. dollars in the North African country, the Egyptian government said in a statement on Tuesday. Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly and visiting Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and Finance Minister Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari discussed means of promoting bilateral ties and enhancing coordination in different fields, according to the statement. On Monday, Egypt and Qatar announced the establishment of a joint committee headed by their foreign ministers to boost cooperation and coordination in all fields. "A wide horizon of the relations between Qatar and Egypt is seen in boosting economic partnership and communication between the two countries at all levels," the Qatari foreign minister said. In January 2021, the Arab quartet of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain signed the Al-Ula Declaration with Qatar during the 41st Gulf Cooperation Council Summit held in Saudi Arabia, ending their all-round boycott of Doha since mid-2017. - APP

## Pakistan eyes China to boost potato industry

Badar Uz Zaman, Commercial Counselor of the Pakistani Embassy Beijing, said Pakistan is one of the largest potato producers in the world

DNA

BEIJING: Pakistan plans to flourish potato production through Chinese modern technology, high-quality seeds, and grab the Chinese market, said the Pakistani authorities, according to China Economic Net (CEN). Badar Uz Zaman, Commercial Counselor of the Pakistani Embassy Beijing, said Pakistan is one of the largest potato producers in the world. "The local consumption is around 4 to 5 million tons. We will have a good surplus quantity to export to regional countries. We have also taken up the issue with the Chinese government. In Pa-

kistan, we are introducing machinery from China to many processing plants. The prices of the fries and preserved well-shelf potatoes are extremely high compared with the potato on the farm. So, we need to improve the whole process", Badar Uz Zaman told CEN. He further said that China has achieved a very high yield per hectare due to its high-yielding varieties of seeds and efficiency. Post-harvest processing in China is also impressive as the country uses machinery and the process is highly mechanised. Similar things if introduced in Pakistan will help Pakistan take potato production a step further. "We are using archaic methods and too much labour is

involved as the processes are manual. The main issue is the lack of mechanisation. We also need cold storage to increase the shelf life but we lack the grading machinery", Badar stated. Potato Growers Association (PGA) Vice President Chaudhry Maqsood Ahmad Jutt, also chairman of Potato Research & Development Board, told CEN that in Pakistan the seven districts of Punjab, Okara, Pakpattan, Sahiwal, Khanewal, Vehari, and Multan contribute more than 60 % of potato produced in Pakistan, while Chakwal is one of the booming destinations of potato cultivation, adding that the high production of these areas is mainly due to better

irrigation facility. "Pakistan lacks an efficient seed supply system, new varieties of seeds, technical capacity and training of farmers, and it has inadequate resource allocation to seed systems. The cost of imported seeds is high and most farmers due to a shortage of funds rely on poor quality seed which causes poor yield and China could help us in all these areas", Maqsood said. Chaudhry Maqsood is convinced that China is a potentially big market for Pakistani potatoes because the price of potatoes is higher in China especially from January to April while the potato crop is being cultivated in Pakistan during this period and it is avail-

able at a lower price. He added that Pakistan already fulfills all international standards and exports potatoes to almost all continents, but he believes with the help of China, the country can further improve the quality and per acre yield production. Professor Audil Rashid, University of Gujrat told CEN that the bumper harvest of potatoes has inspired the potato growers in the country to look for global markets to increase their export and due to CPEC and friendly relationship farmers' eyes are on the Chinese market. "Previously, despite bumper crops in the country, the potato farmers were rou-

tinely suffering huge losses due to prices crashing by nearly 50 per cent. However, currently, exporters are thinking to export not only raw potatoes but other kinds of products. These include sliced potatoes duly preserved following international standards such as those used by KFC and McDonalds. Export of fried potatoes is the other option especially when low-cost containers in the local market are available that can enhance trade manifold between Pakistan and China", he added. Rashid believes that Pakistan can earn an estimated US\$ 2 billion by exporting potatoes and value-added potato products to China.

## UN nuclear watchdog head visits Ukraine to discuss safety

VIENNA: The head of the UN atomic watchdog, Rafael Grossi, is in Ukraine to discuss "the safety and security" of nuclear sites there, the agency said on Tuesday. This is Grossi's first visit to Ukraine since Russia seized several nuclear facilities, including Chernobyl, as part of its war in Ukraine. Grossi is holding talks with senior government officials and will travel to one of Ukraine's nuclear power plants, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a statement. It did not specify which plant. "Just crossed the border into Ukraine to start IAEA's mission," Grossi tweeted. "We must act now to help prevent the danger of a nuclear accident." Since the start of the Russian invasion on February 24, the IAEA director-general has repeatedly warned of the dangers of the conflict. The war is the first to occur in a country with a vast nuclear estate comprising 15 reactors in addition to Chernobyl, the site in 1986 of the world's worst nuclear disaster. During the visit, Grossi will discuss IAEA plans to ship "vital safety and security supplies" to Ukraine, including monitoring and emergency equipment, and dispatch experts to several of its nuclear sites, the IAEA said. "The military conflict is putting Ukraine's nuclear power plants and other facilities with radioactive material in unprecedented danger," Grossi said in the statement. "Ukraine has requested our assistance for safety and security. We will now start delivering it," he said. - Agencies



WASHINGTON: Lt. Gen. Nigar Johar, DGMS of Pakistan Army and Surgeon General calls on Ambassador of Pakistan in Washington, Ambassador Masood Khan. - DNA

## Govt mishandled the devaluation of dollar; PBF

DNA

KARACHI: Government mishandled the devaluation and now dollar is getting out of hands; the 32 percent devaluation of rupee against dollar in the last 3.7 years of the incumbent government. In this regard it's need of the hour that Parliament should intervene and may summon Governor State Bank and seek concrete explanation from him on unjustified devaluation said Vice President of Pakistan Businesses Forum (PBF) Ahmad Jawad. Talking to Presser, he said the weakening currency impacted the consumers' purchasing power as devaluation fuelled inflation. "Took from Rs 123 against the US dollar in August 2018 after sworn as PM to Rs 182.20 against the US dollar till March 29th 2022". One must understand with devaluation, there is inflation, when there is inflation, your disposable income goes down, which affects consumption behaviour and

spending power. There is a decline in aggregate demand, which is why there is an economic slowdown. Ahmad Jawad also said our monetary policy may effects day-to-day life of the common man which includes its effects on poverty, inequality and other social out comes. SBP, therefore, needs to assess, consider and communicate the side effects of monetary policy to the public for greater transparency, as well as to the government in order to align fiscal and regulatory policies to counter these unintended consequences. Today State Bank of Pakistan reserves stood around at 16 billion dollars, two billion dollars are on the way of the IMF trans, Chinese debt is going to rescheduled but still exchange rate at 182 against one dollar; even current account deficit shrinks to \$0.5 bn. But still country's economic team were forced for depreciation from international donors and it's nothing related with the fundamentals and

its one of the international agenda to weak Pakistan economically, as strong currency may impact the country economic outlook. "Now, Parliament of this country should understand where we are heading in rupee? The appreciation of the rupee is inevitable for the country. Until and unless we can't do we will remain in the vicious circle of the inflation and keep enjoying the sky rocket rates of every commodity from automobiles sector to food items". Similarly in automobiles sector depreciation supported much of the country automobile players. They increased their prices of about 72% regardless their assembly plants in Pakistan. Only few parts have to be imported. On the other hand the cost of essential medicines had also risen. Even the prices of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) of the common medicine, which is imported from China over the past years owing to rupee depreciation have increased manifolds.

## Blinken in Morocco for security talks

AGENCIES

RABAT: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was visiting Morocco on Tuesday to discuss regional security and meet the United Arab Emirates de facto leader Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. The trip comes in the shadow of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which along with sanctions has sent wheat and fuel prices soaring in a serious blow for import-dependent North African countries. "We know this pain is keenly felt in the Middle East and North Africa, where most countries import at least half of their wheat," State Department Acting Assistant Secretary Yael Lempert said before the trip. Blinken flew in late Monday from Israel where he had joined top diplomats from the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Egypt for a meeting that underlined a seismic shift since 2020 in relations between Arab countries and the Jewish state.

## Governor State Bank visits CDC

KARACHI: Governor State Bank Dr. Reza Baqir visited CDC House to mark the successful operationalization of important projects for Pakistan Capital Market, namely Roshan Equity and RAAST for Dividend payments, which have been implemented in the recent past by the State Bank in collaboration with the Capital Market and commercial banks. Speaking at the occasion Governor State Bank Dr. Reza Baqir, said, "This is an occasion of immense and significant achievement as we gather here to celebrate the successful roll-out of important projects of national interest—including Roshan Equity and RAAST—that have been initiated by the State Bank of Pakistan and very well executed by commercial banks and CDC. In all these projects, Central Depository of Pakistan has been playing the important roles of facilitator, infrastructure architect and information sharing hub. This is only the beginning of what our vision is for the development of Pakistan's Capital Market. SBP is committed to work with SECP to support Capital market entities in this regard. Now, we have initiated a new project for the Capital Market pertaining to Shared KYC through which investors can open Capital Market Account through their respective Bank's portal/app. This project will pave the way for wider outreach for our Capital Market." Mr. Badiuddin Akber CEO-CDC thanked SBP and SECP for their continued support and patronage in achieving this milestone in its market transformation journey. CDC is already processing thousands of transactions related to Roshan Digital Accounts and RAAST for Stock Exchange, for which CDC acts as the information sharing hub between the banks and capital market entities. Now, for the "Shared KYC project", CDC will again act as the Information Sharing bridge for the digital opening of capital market accounts through banking portals for Local Resident Investors with the objective of removing duplication of information capture and KYC processes, he further said. - DNA

## SE Australia facing gas shortage in 2023 winter

CANBERRA: Southeast Australia could face a risk of gas shortfalls as early as 2023, a report has warned. The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) published its annual statement of opportunities report on Tuesday, which forecasts the supply and demand for gas over the next 20 years. It found that Victoria, the state most dependent on gas for heating homes, Tasmania, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) could be affected by a shortfall in winter 2023. "A shortfall risk in the southeastern states in winter 2023 is forecast under extreme conditions, given ongoing production decline from Bass Strait, and pipeline capacity limits from northern Australia," Merryn York, AEMO executive general manager system design, said in a statement. "This leaves reducing electricity generation from gas as the likely solution to manage shortfalls, unless actions identified in the 'step change' scenario, like switching from gas to electricity for residential heating and hot water, are taken quickly," she said. Household gas use in Australia is about three times higher in winter than in the warmer months while electricity use peaks in summer. AEMO said that in "Step Change", a gas shortfall can be narrowly avoided. Actions and investments that reduce gas demand (like switching residential gas heating to electric and improving buildings' energy efficiency) are needed quickly to deliver the forecast demand reductions. "While these may be likely over time, the pace so far has been relatively slow, and urgent action would be needed to put southeastern regions on the Step Change path by next winter," AEMO said. According to AEMO, existing and committed gas production in southern Australia is forecast to fall from 487 petajoules in 2022 to 360 petajoules in 2026.

## Tarin assures KP Minister of full support

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin here on Tuesday appreciated the efforts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Minister, Taimur Saleem Khan Jhagra and assured him of full support and cooperation of the federal government. He made the assurance during a meeting with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the Finance Division, according to press statement issued by the finance ministry. Jhagra briefed the meeting about the financial performance of his government and highlighted the ongoing projects in the province. It was also shared that inflationary pressure especially on basic food items was properly tackled through Saasta Bazaars. Few challenges faced by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government were also shared by the KP finance Minister.

## Steel radial plant opens new era in tyre industry: Report

Mr Li Qingwen, Chairman, LongMarch Tyres, expressed his tremendous gratitude to the Chinese and Pakistani govts and everyone who make efforts for the project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's first all-steel radial truck/bus tyre plant set up by SEZ Long March (SLM), a Pak-China joint venture has been inaugurated, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. This milestone opened a new era for Pakistan's tyre industry, transferring a new technology for the manufacture of truck and bus radial tyres from China and putting Pakistan on the global export map

of engineered goods. On the occasion, Mr Omar Saeed, CEO, Servis Long March Tyres (Pvt.) Ltd, introduced the background of the plant. "Chaoyang Long March and Servis partnered to produce tyres for USA, Brazil and Pakistan in Phase 1. 1,000 direct employment opportunities were already created. Annual exports will cross USD 300 million on achieving annual capacity of 2.4 million tyres, which will achieve import substitution, foreign exchange generation through exports, and premium foreign direct investment from China." Congratulating the great progress, Mr Muhammad Azfar Ahsan, MOS/Chairman BOI, stated that SEZ plays a very important role in Pakistan's economic development. He explained, "it is necessary for BOI to take the initiative of ease of doing business, and BOI will continue to facilitate Chinese businesses which are interested in relocating and investing in Pakistan." Dr Reza Baqir, Governor

of the State Bank of Pakistan, praised this move as a dedication to diversifying exports. It has set a good example for Pakistan to participate in international value chains. The central bank has given support to SLM during the pandemic, and it will formulate more policies to make an enabling investment environment. Through video links, Mr Li Qingwen, Chairman, Long March Tyres, expressed his tremendous gratitude to the Chinese and Pakistani governments and everyone who make efforts for the project. He underlined that this project is a positive response of Chaoyang Long March to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Stakeholders of Chaoyang Long March Tyres attach great importance to this project and another capital injection has just been approved. "In the future, SLM will certainly live up to the expectations of both governments and strive to build the joint venture into a model of private enterprise cooperation between the two countries."

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**Briefs**

**PML-Q will be baffled when they face public: Khaqan**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Tuesday said that Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan had nothing to show that is the reason he waived a piece of paper in the air. During his media talk, the former prime minister said that Imran Khan is 'not blackmailed' by anyone whereas he takes U-turn on every decision he makes. While commenting on the latest developments, he said that PM Imran was talking about giving a surprise to the opposition but ended up surprising the former Chief Minister (CM) Sardar Usman Buzdar. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi further warned the Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid (PML-Q) leadership that they will be shocked when they will have to face the public while lifting the PTI Government burden on its shoulders.

**Joint drill between RSLF, Pak troops culminate**

RAWALPINDI: The joint training exercises between Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF) and Pakistani troops culminated at Khairpur Tamewali (KPT) on Tuesday. The training provided an excellent opportunity for the troops of both brotherly countries to enhance their tactical & technical skills and professional abilities through mutual exchange of respective operational experiences, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release. - APP

**More than 3.9 million Ukrainians flee war**

GENEVA: More than 3.9 million Ukrainians have now fled Russia's invasion of their country, the United Nations announced Tuesday, with the Red Cross saying refugees were arriving exhausted and feeling "hopeless". UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said 3,901,713 Ukrainians had fled the country - a figure up 38,916 from Monday's update. The daily flow of refugees has slowed to around 40,000 in recent days. But the exodus "is unprecedented since World War II in Europe, certainly in terms of the speed and scale of the displacement," UNHCR spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh told reporters in Geneva. Francesco Rocca, the president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), added: "We are seeing millions of people arriving at borders, their coping capacities stretched by what they have experienced and witnessed. "People are understandably tired and stressed, physically, mentally and emotionally," he said. - APP

**Covid: One death, 269 fresh cases in Pakistan**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As many as 269 fresh Covid cases surfaced in Pakistan during the past 24 hours, according to the government's database. The NCOC said one more person succumbed to the viral disease, taking the death toll to 30,347. The number of confirmed cases of Covid has reached 1,524,355 with the addition of 269 new infections. The NCOC said a total of 27,046 samples were tested during the last 24 hours, out of which 269 turned out to be positive, showing the positivity rate of 0.99 per cent. The number of critical Covid-19 patients in various hospitals across the country has come down to 432. Pakistan last week reported zero daily Covid deaths for the first time in the past two years.

# Russia to scale down operations near Kyiv

During talks at a palace in Istanbul, Ukraine for its part proposed adopting neutral status in the most detailed formula yet for a potential settlement to the 5-week conflict

AGENCIES

ISTANBUL: Russia promised on Tuesday to scale down military operations around Kyiv and northern Ukraine as a confidence-building step, in the most tangible sign yet of progress towards negotiating an end to the war. During talks at a palace in Istanbul, Ukraine for its part proposed adopting neutral status in the most detailed formula yet for a potential settlement to the five-week conflict. Moscow's Feb. 24 invasion has been halted on most fronts by strong resistance, with Ukrainians recapturing territory even as civilians are trapped in besieged cities. "In order to increase mutual trust and create the necessary conditions for further negotiations and achieving the ultimate goal

of agreeing and signing (an) agreement, a decision was made to radically, by a large margin, reduce military activity in the Kyiv and Chernihiv directions," Russian Deputy Defence Minister Alexander Fomin told reporters. He made no mention of other areas that have seen heavy fighting, including around Mariupol in the southeast, Sumy and Kharkiv in the east and Kherson and Mykolaiv in the south. Some analysts noted that Russia's promise to reduce fighting mostly covered areas where it has been losing ground. "Does 'we'll drastically reduce military operations around Kyiv' = 'we're getting our ass kicked, transitioned to a hasty defense?'" tweeted Mark Hertling, a retired U.S. lieutenant general and former commander of U.S. forces in Europe. Ukrainian negotiators said that under their proposals, Kyiv would

agree not to join alliances or host bases of foreign troops, but would have security guaranteed in terms similar to "Article 5", the collective defence clause of the transatlantic NATO military alliance. They named Israel and NATO members Canada, Poland and Turkey as countries that may give such guarantees. Russia, the United States, Britain, Germany and Italy could also be involved. The proposals mentioned a 15-year consultation period on the status of Russian-annexed Crimea, and could come into force only in the event of a complete ceasefire, the negotiators said. The fate of the southeastern Donbas region, which Russia demands Ukraine cede to separatists, would be discussed by the Ukrainian and Russian leaders, they added. Any peace deal would require a referendum in Ukraine. The Russian delegation said it

would study and present the proposals to President Vladimir Putin. The Ukrainian negotiators called for a meeting between Putin and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, with top Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky saying that could take place when foreign ministers were prepared to initial an agreement. "If we manage to consolidate these key provisions ... then Ukraine will be in a position to actually fix its current status as a non-bloc and non-nuclear state in the form of permanent neutrality," Ukrainian negotiator Oleksander Chaly said. "We will not host foreign military bases on our territory, as well as deploy military contingents on our territory, and we will not enter into military-political alliances," he said. Military exercises would take place with the consent of the guarantor countries.

## Thai Airways starts Pakistan operation after two years

*PIA has begun preparations for the direct flights to Australia, which would reduce travelling time by approximately one-third to and from down under*

ISLAMABAD: Thai Airways started its flight operation to Pakistan on Tuesday after a gap of two years. The airline's first flight, TG-349, with 208 passengers on board landed at Islamabad airport today. Sources at the airport said the plane later flew back to Thailand carrying passengers. Recently, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed direct flights to Australia. The approval was given by the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority on the request of the PIA. Following the approval, Pakistan International Airline (PIA) has begun preparations for the direct flights to Australia, which would reduce travelling time by approximately one-third to and from down under. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of MNAs, MPs and party leaders call on PM Imran Khan. - DNA

## Conspirators to fail in toppling Khan's govt, says Rasheed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed on Tuesday said an international conspiracy and investment was made to topple the government of Imran Khan adding that the conspirators would fail in their designs. Addressing a press conference here, the minister said foreign funding was being made for no confidence motion against the Prime Minister. Imran Khan would fight till last ball and negotiation was underway with allies, he added. He said debate on no-confidence motion would start from March 31 and voting would be held on April 3. However, he said that the opposition could not bring 172 members required for success of the no confidence motion. He reiterated that he stood firmly with Imran Khan whether he (PM) re-



mained in power or not. Lauding the decision of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) to support PM Imran Khan, he expressed the hope that MQM would also follow the PML-Q. The entire nation stood by the PM and the mammoth PTI public gathering on March 27 was its manifestation, he added. He said the governor Punjab would issue notification of Punjab Chief Minister's resignation. He said containers have been re-

moved and now all roads were clear in the federal capital. Rasheed said security forces arrested four terrorists harboring nefarious designs from Islamabad and they would be tried in anti-terrorism courts. Similarly, as many as four terrorists involved in attack at Mosque in Peshawar were also killed in an operation. He appreciated interior ministry, Rangers, FC, Police, local administration and other law enforcing agencies for maintenance of law and order and provision of security to all public gatherings and marches. Personnel of FC, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir have been sent back while Rangers would also be withdrawn soon. Replying to a question, he said he was not a part of the government negotiation team with MQM. However, he said the decision of MQM would be very decisive.

## 6 Pakistani soldiers on UN mission martyred in crash

**Security Forces, Police kill four terrorists**

RAWALPINDI: The Security Forces and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police Tuesday killed four terrorists and apprehended one in a joint Intelligence Based Operation (IBO) conducted in Sheri Khel area of Lakkhi Marwat. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a news release said, "On night, March, 28/29, Army and Police conducted a joint Intelligence Based Operation on reported presence of terrorists in general area Sheri Khel, Lakkhi Marwat". The four terrorists killed during intense exchange of fire were identified as Terrorist Commander Sajid, Terrorist Aleem, Terrorist Aftab and Terrorist Fazal ur Rehman. The Security Forces also recovered a large quantity of weapons and ammunition from the killed terrorists. It added that the killed terrorists remained actively involved in kidnapping and terrorist activities against innocent civilians and security forces. - APP

## KP cabinet approves Ramadan Subsidy

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet in its 68th meeting held here on Tuesday with Chief Minister Mahmood Khan in the chair approved Rs.2,552 billion as subsidy under the Ramadan Package to ensure uninterrupted supply of the edible items to the consumers on subsidized rates during the forthcoming Holy month of Ramadan. As many as 2800 sale points have been established the province over, which will be provided Aata three times a day to avoid any shortage of this essential commodity. The 20 kg bag of Aata will be available at these points at a subsidized rate of Rs.800 instead of Rs.1100 during the

Ramazan and the additional financial burden to be incurred in this regard to be borne by the Provincial Government. The subsidized Aata will also be available in bags of 10 kg for the ease of the consumers at a price of R.400 pr bag. The meeting besides the cabinet members was also attended by the Provincial Chief Secretary, Senior Member Board of Revenue and Administrative Secretaries of various Government Departments. Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information & PRs Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif while briefing media persons about the decisions of the cabinet meeting at ITLAA Cell informed that the cabinet also decided to set up 123 Ramazan Facilitation Centers, 42

mobile utility stores, 83 sasta bazars and 96 'Ramazan Dastarkhwan's during the upcoming Holy month, which will be supervised by the monitoring units headed by the respective Secretaries and Deputy Commissioners to ensure quality and thwart hoarding, price hike as well as shortage of the essential commodities in the markets. The provincial cabinet, he said, also approved granting the status of force as well as Shuhada Package to the field employees of Forest & Wild Life Department. Under the Shuhada Package, the heirs of the martyred employees of Scale 3-16 to be given Rs.3.3 million, Rs. 5.5 million to BS-17 employees, Rs.9.9 million to BS-18 & 19 employees and Rs.11 million to BS-20 employees.

## US supports 200 schools in Sindh, Balochistan

US Consel General Mark Stroh added that promotion of journalistic services and encouragement of women journalists across Sindh, there is journalism exchange programs regarding educational and training programs under the Center for Excellence in Journalism at Karachi IBA in which youth should apply

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The US Consel General in Karachi, Mark Stroh has said that there is no support from the provincial governments regarding improving education and health, while representing Sindh and Balochistan. Speaking to reporters after visiting the archeological site of 5,000-years-old Moin-Jo-Daro, following the visit of Larkana Press Club. US Consel General Mark Stroh added that promotion of journalistic services and encouragement of women journalists across Sindh, there is journalism exchange programs regarding educational and training programs under the Center for Excellence



in Journalism at Karachi IBA in which youth should apply. He said they have developed across 200 schools, which are monitored by the community itself and we support and assist the community. He expressed happiness over the free medical facilities provided at the Gambat Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) in Gambat area of Sindh and appreciated the efforts of the government and the organizers. US delegation met with different walks of life including journalists, educators, business, bankers and different schools of thoughts were participated. On this occasion, they were presented Sindh Topi and gifts of Ajrak to the American delegation by Larkana Press Club office bearers.

## Energy prices in Germany rise sharply

DNA

BERLIN: Uncertainties on energy markets and a tightening supply of natural gas before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict led to high increases in energy prices at all stages of Germany's economy in February, the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) said on Tuesday. Prices for energy produced in Germany were up by 68.0 percent year-on-year, while prices for imported energy even soared 129.5 percent. Already, consumers had to pay 22.5 percent more for household energy and motor fuels than in February last year, according to Destatis. The main reason for the "high increase in energy prices at the upstream economic levels" was the development of natural gas prices. According to Destatis, imported natural gas was three and a half times more expensive than last year. The development of natural gas prices in 2020 and 2021 was also influenced by the economic slump caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the following recovery. Uncertainties ahead of the Russia-Ukraine conflict exacerbated the already strained situation due to low gas storage in Germany, Destatis noted. Last week, Germany's lower house of parliament Bundestag approved a law amendment to oblige all operators in the country to gradually fill their gas storage facilities, according to the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).

## Indonesia extends public curbs outside Java, Bali

JAKARTA: Indonesia has extended public mobility restrictions outside Java and Bali from Tuesday to April 11 based on current COVID-19 situation, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said on Tuesday. Meanwhile, worship activities such as optional evening taraweeh prayers in mosques are allowed to be carried out during the Ramadan fasting month, said the minister, who is also the coordinator for the implementation of public mobility restrictions. In his statement, the minister noted that 45 percent of the targeted population have received two doses of COVID-19 vaccines, while 60 percent have received their first dose. Hartarto called on the heads of regional administrations in Indonesia to anticipate the potential for further spread of COVID-19 and increase the coverage of two doses of vaccination plus a booster, especially for the elderly. He also asked for the enforcement of the mandatory provisions for booster and antigen tests for people going home to their villages for Eid Al-Fitr, while calling for preparation for health facilities to anticipate the potential increase in positive COVID-19 cases after the fasting month and Muslim post-fasting festivities. - APP

## DR Congo joins the East African Community

KINSHASA: The East African Community (EAC) approved Tuesday the admission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) into the regional bloc, at the 19th Extraordinary Summit of EAC Heads of State conducted virtually. "The EAC now spans from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean making the region competitive and easy to access the larger African Continental Free Trade Area," said EAC Secretary-General Peter Mutuku Mathuki. "Rwanda supports the admission of the DRC into the region and stands ready to play its part in supporting the integration of the DRC into the EAC," said Rwandan President Paul Kagame at the virtual conference. "The Republic of Burundi openly welcomes the DRC into the EAC. Widening and deepening economic, political, social and cultural integration will improve the quality of lives and prosperity of the people of East Africa," said Prosper Bazombanza, Vice President of Burundi. - Agencies