



Islamabad POST

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Britain plans to send migrants to settle in Rwanda

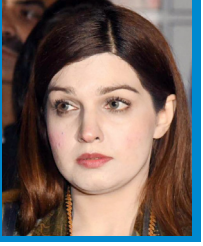
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Covid-19 still an emergency, warns WHO

Detailed News On Page-06

Mushaal for observing Black Day on 24 April

Detailed News On Page-03



US never asked for bases COAS will not seek extension

DG ISPR says General Bajwa will retire in November; rules out possibility of Martial Law; lambast smear campaign against top military leadership



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

RAWALPINDI: Major General Babar Iftikhar, Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), has categorically stated that Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa is neither seeking extension in service nor has he asked for it. He will retire in November when his retirement is due. He further said the re-

cent smear campaign against the top military leadership was quite unfortunate adding those elements who want to spoil image of armed forces of Pakistan shall fail. The DG ISPR made these remarks while addressing a press conference on Thursday. He further said that word conspiracy was never used in the minutes of the National Security Committee meeting adding the incumbent Prime Minister

has hinted at convening of an in camera session in order to discuss further details of the letter. He strongly dispelled the impression as if there were any differences among ranks of the military adding the Pakistan Army strictly believes in chain of command and would preserve and protect it at any cost. He said any effort to create a rift between people and the armed forces is against national interest. The military's spokesperson welcomed constructive criticism but pointed out that a "malicious campaign" is being run against the army and its leadership. Major Gen Iftikhar said that the formation commanders expressed confidence in the steps taken for the country's security, especially on account of international security and the Pakistan Army's role in upholding the rule of law. "All of them agreed that democracy, the strength of institutions and rule of law and all the institutions working within the constitutional limits is the guarantor of national interest," he said. Major Gen Iftikhar went on to say that the nation's support is the core of the army's strength and without it, the concept of national security is meaningless.

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ISLAMABAD: President PPP Asif Zardari and Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

PM thanks UAE PM, President
"I look forward to closely working with the UAE leadership to further strengthen the bilateral ties"

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday extended his thanks to President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi for their message of felicitation. In a tweet on social media platform Twitter, he said, "I extend my thanks to the President & Prime Minister of the UAE & the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi for their message of felicitation." "I look forward to closely working with the UAE leadership to further strengthen the bilateral relationship between our two brotherly countries," he added.

Army Jawan martyred

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On 13 April 22, fire exchange took place between own troops and terrorists in general area Isham, North Waziristan District. Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location. However, during intense exchange of fire, Sepoy Asmatullah Khan (age 28 years, resident of Mianwali), having fought gallantly, embraced shahadat. Sanitization of the area is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area. Pakistan Army is determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

Metro Bus delay: PM orders inquiry against PTI govt

The premier, at 7am, visited the Peshawar Morr metro bus station and reviewed the project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday issued orders of the first inquiry against the PTI-led government for a delay in the launch of a metro bus project pending for the last four years. He directed the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to operationalise the Islamabad Metro Bus Service from April 16. The premier, at 7am, visited the Peshawar Morr metro bus station and reviewed the on-ground progress of the project. Islamabad Metro Bus Service was launched by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017 and was due to become functional in 2018. PM Shehbaz Sharif directed to run the metro bus service from Peshawar Morr to Islamabad International Airport in order to facilitate the passengers travelling to and from the airport. He also ordered to carry

PTI's funding case to wrap up within month

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to wrap up the foreign funding case of the PTI within 30 days. The orders were issued by Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani on applications filed by the PTI asking for Akbar S Babar's separation from the case, the dismissal of the case, and keeping the PTI documents secret. The PTI had challenged the ECP's applications seeking the exclusion of Babar, the petitioner, from the

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Briefs

Hungarian envoy calls on COAS

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Hungarian Ambassador Bela Fazekas Thursday called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at GHQ, said a statement issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, overall regional situation and measures to enhance bilateral defence collaboration between both countries were discussed. COAS said that Pakistan values its relations with Hungary, which are based on convergence on all important issues relating to regional peace security and stability. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's positive role for regional peace & stability and pledged to keep working for better relations between the two countries.

Deadlock persists between PML-N, PPP over Cabinet

PPP's Raja Pervaiz Ashraf on top of the list for Speaker NA slot

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Despite multiple meetings between the leadership of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and other coalition partners, the new coalition set up has yet to reach understanding over the formation of federal cabinet. Sources privy to the development told that PML-N and PPP held talks on late Wednesday over the formation of federal cabinet after ousting the PTI government. PML-N delegation was represented by Ayaz Sadiq, Saad Rafique and Rana Sanauallah while from PPP was represented by Yousaf Raza Gillani, Sherry Rehman, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Naveed Qamar at the talks. Sources said that PML-N once again insisted PPP joining Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led federal cabinet. The PPP delegation suggested giving its ministries in a new coalition set up to other allies including the MQM-P, BNP and BAP. It emerged earlier that the federal cabinet under consideration will likely have 12 ministers from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and seven ministers from Pakistan People's Party.

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PTI's 123 MNAs' resignations accepted

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Qasim Suri on Thursday accepted the resignations of 123 PTI MNAs after they decided to disassociate themselves from the National Assembly following the ouster of PTI Chairman Imran Khan from the office of the prime minister. Khan was ousted through a no-confidence motion brought against him by the then joint Opposition, a move that the PTI called a "foreign conspiracy" hatched by the United States. The allegation, however, has been categorically denied by the superpower. After being removed from the office, the former premier asked his MNAs to tender their resignations and refused to accept the newly elected premier, saying "there can't be any bigger insult to this country".

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Bilawal hails DG ISPR press talk

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said the press conference of ISPR DG Maj-Gen Babar Iftikhar is a breath of fresh air for democracy. "It is a responsibility not only of every institution but every Pakistani to support democracy, constitution, and rule of law," the PPP chief said in a tweet. He continued: "If we continue on the path of democracy, no power in the world can stop the development of Pakistan." "The transition of Parliament, the judiciary and the Establishment from controversial to the constitutional role will not be easy."

Details of NAB's Rs 882 billion recovery sent to PAC

Rs 25 billion has been returned to the victims of housing societies and other institutions, Chairman NAB briefs the Public Accounts Committee

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was held at Parliament House on Thursday under the chairmanship of PAC Chairman Rana Tanveer Hussain. The meeting was attended by members of the committee Syed Hussain Tariq, Sherry Rehman, Ahmad Khan, Shahida Akhtar Ali, Khawaja Muhammad Asif Mushahid Hussain Syed and officials of relevant government agencies. During the meeting, Chairman NAB Justice Javed Iqbal said that questions were sent to NAB by PAC, the answers of which had been sent to PAC. Full details of NAB's Rs 882 billion recoveries have also been sent. More than 170,000 victims of housing societies and other institutions have been given Rs 25 billion after recovery. The audit of recoveries were also carried out. NAB has kept an

account of every penny. The NAB officials informed the PAC in a briefing that Rs 522 billion was recovered during the tenure of the current chairman till October 2021. By March 2022, these recoveries had reached Rs. 587 billion. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that from November 2021 to December 2021- Rs 58 billion was recovered in one month (by PAC). NAB officials said that the recoveries are direct and in-direct, sometimes even in the case of land, the full details can be given to the PAC separately, the record of which is with the NAB. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that how much has been recovered by NAB in the amount of money looted from government officials or corruption. According to NAB officials, so far plea bargain has been made with 444 officers across the country. Chairman NAB said that more than 99% of them are not working in their posts. NAB has written letters to the Chief Secretary of each province, the Feder-



al Secretary, to the Establishment to comply with the orders of the Accountability Court. NAB officials said that no one can work in his position after striking a plea bargain. Under Section 25-A of the NAB Ordinance, a person who voluntarily returns the amount of corruption cannot be fired. However,

in some cases there have been some punishments including demotion. Now this case is pending before the Supreme Court. We have returned more than Rs.25 billion to 177,000 effectees. Justice Javed Iqbal said that out of the recovery of Rs 5 billion from a housing society, more than Rs 3 billion has been recovered. He said that similarly NAB Rawalpindi has recovered about Rs 2.5 billion and returned the money to the people. Chairman NAB said that if anyone does a good job, it should be appreciated, I have no concern with the past. He said he has been in charge since October 2017. Chairman PAC said that these are really good deeds, we appreciate good deeds. Chairman NAB said that he should get some reward. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that scandals of wheat and LNG came but NAB did nothing. We want non-discriminatory and transparent ac-

countability. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that PAC has so far recovered Rs 589 billion in 3 years, it is PAC's responsibility. The PAC was told that 140 million pounds had been recovered from Malik Riaz's family in London, and that the money had been transferred to an account under the auspices of the Supreme Court. Khawaja Asif said that in a way this money has been returned to Malik Riaz and it has been adjusted in the fine to be imposed on him. The National Crime Agency UK imposed the fine on Malik Riaz and his family. He said that we have no grievances with NAB but only Malik Riaz has benefited from this amount of fine. Chairman NAB said that give him one to two weeks in this regard. He will get all the details and report to PAC. Responding to a question, the Chairman NAB said that after reading the report of the Broadsheet Commission, the situation would become clear.

Russia warns NATO over Sweden, Finland

MONITORING DESK

LONDON: One of Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest allies warned NATO on Thursday that if Sweden and Finland joined the U.S.-led military alliance then Russia would deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in an exclave in the heart of Europe. Finland, which shares a 1,300-km (810-mile) border with Russia, and Sweden are considering joining the NATO alliance. Finland will decide in the next few weeks, Prime Minister Sanna Marin said on Wednesday. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said that should Sweden

and Finland join NATO then Russia would have to strengthen its land, naval and air forces in the Baltic Sea. Medvedev also explicitly raised the nuclear threat by saying that there could be no more talk of a "nuclear free" Baltic - where Russia has its Kaliningrad exclave sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania. "There can be no more talk of any nuclear-free status for the Baltic - the balance must be restored," said Medvedev, who was Russian president from 2008 to 2012. Medvedev said he hoped Finland and Sweden would see sense. If not, he said, they would have to live with nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles close to home.

Continued on Page 06

National Days and Armed Forces Days

APRIL

April 04 / Senegal	National Day
April 07 / W. H. O.	World Health Day
April 12 / Somalia	Armed Forces Day
April 15 / DPR Korea	The Day of the Sun
April 16 / Denmark	National Day
April 17 / Iran	Army Day
April 17 / Syria	Independence Day
April 18 / Zimbabwe	Independence Day
April 24 / Holy See	Anniversary of His Papacy of his Pontificate
April 25 / DPR Korea	Armed Forces Day
April 26 / Tanzania	National Day
April 27 / Sierra Leone	Independence Day
April 27 / South Africa	Freedom Day
April 30 / Sweden	Birthday of His Majesty
April 30 / Netherlands	Birthday of Queen



Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....	111 133 133
Marriott.....	051-2826121
Monal.....	0334-5421812



Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....	8494949
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& Rescue Services.....	4451122
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Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....	0321-5744480
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Business community pins hopes on PM Shehbaz

Muhammad Shakeel Munir said that the incumbent government should engage the private sector in consultation process and make policies after getting their input to steer the economy out of current challenges

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) during an interaction congratulated Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif on being elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan and expressed best wishes for him. He said that Shahbaz Sharif was an accomplished businessman and was well aware of the key issues of the business community that needed urgent remedial measures to improve the economy. He proposed that the new

government should initiate reforms process on priority basis to revive the economy. He said that there was a great need to further promote the ease of doing business to boost industrialization and exports. He highlighted the many challenges being faced by the economy including depreciation of rupee, rising debt burden, high interest rates, surging inflation, falling foreign exchange, high energy cost and rising circular debt that needed priority attention of the government to address them. He said that the new government should take

strong measures to facilitate the private sector so that it could grow fast and play a more effective role in the economic development of the country. Muhammad Shakeel Munir said that the incumbent government should engage the private sector in consultation process and make policies after getting their input to steer the economy out of current challenges. He assured the Prime Minister that the business community would fully support his government in its endeavours for making Pakistan a progressive and prosperous country.



PM orders urgent formulation of economic strategy

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Thursday chaired a high level meeting to discuss the current economic situation wherein he directed his economic team to formulate an economic reforms strategy on an emergency basis. He said that the government was taking urgent measures to achieve the economic stability of Pakistan.

He asked the economic team to take all out measures for the economic uplift of the common man. The prime minister also called for urgent measures not only for improvement of the economic situation but also to overcome the inflation. The finance ministry gave detailed briefing to the prime minister who expressed his concerns over the worrisome economic indicators.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leaders including Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Ahsan Iqbal, Miftah Ismail, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Zubair Umar, Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, Tariq Mahmood Pasha, Bilal Kiyani and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

'See Pakistan' exhibition to conclude

ISLAMABAD: A fascinating Photo Exhibition 'See Pakistan' by M.H. Toori would be concluded on Friday (April 15) which has attracted a large number of people in which the unseen beauty of Pakistan creatively was showcased. A keen interest was taken by viewers because of the beautiful depiction of nature, historical places and culture of Pakistan the ongoing response was commendable by the audience visited there, an official of PNCA Masroor shah told APP.

Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) has extended the show till 15th April 2022. 'See Pakistan' is a fascinating show portraying the diverse natural beauty, historical heritage and amalgamation of culture and religion of Pakistan. From the grand mountain ranges in the North to the vast alluvial delta of the Indus River in the South remains a blessed land with natural beauty and majestic mountains with world high altitude desert and highest peaks are magnificently photographed by M.H. Toori and are on display in this beautiful show. A large number of the public from various walks of life alongside the press and media visited the exhibition to see the blend of culture and nature in Pakistan. - APP

Admissions to close on April 18, exams from April 25

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) has set April 18 as the last date for second phase admissions for the semester Spring, 2022. The programs offered at this stage include Associate Degree Programs, B.Ed, BS, BA, BBA, Postgraduate Diploma Programs and Certificate Courses. Admission forms and prospectuses for all the programs are available online at the University website www.aiou.edu.pk. According to the Controller of Examinations, Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Chaudhry, final examinations of BA (Associate Degree), Associate Degree in Education, Associate Degree in Commerce, Associate Degree in (Human Resource Management, Islamic Banking and Marketing), B.Ed, BBA, BS Accounting and Finance and Certificate courses will start simultaneously across the country from April 25 and will continue till June 22. Date-sheet has been uploaded on the University's website (www.aiou.edu.pk) while roll number slips have also been uploaded on students' CMS portals. The University has set up examination centers across the country to facilitate students at the nearest places of their residence and work. - APP

Tractor production increase 13.47% in 9 months

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The production of farm tractors in the country witnessed an increase of 13.47 percent to 41,872 units during the first nine months of current financial year 2021-22, against the production of 36,900 units in same months of last year. During the months under review, the production of tractors also witnessed an increasing trend as it went up from 2,509 units as compared to 4,445 units,

showing an increase of 77.16 percent, according to Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Association (PAMA) revealed. Production of pickups, Light Commercial Vehicle (LCVs) and Jeeps also rose by 43.33 percent to 32,268 units during the months under review from 22,512 units during same months of last year. Similarly, the production of buses witnessed an increase of 3.14 percent from 445 units to 459 units during the months under review, PAMA added.

Meanwhile, the production of passenger cars also posted a record increase of 56.67 percent as it plunged to 166,768 units during the period under review against the production of 106,439 units during July-March 2020-21, the data revealed. The manufacturing of motorcycles and three wheelers in the country plunged to 1386,709 units during July-March from the production of 1439,535 units during July-March, showing nominal decrease of 3.66 percent, it added.

Mung bean to be cultivated during Kharif

ISLAMABAD: Mung bean would be cultivated over 189.3 thousand hectares of land in order to produce about 179.3 thousand tons of the commodity during current Kharif season to tackle with local requirements of pulse as well as for producing exportable surplus. Mung was among the major pulses, which grown in irrigated areas with greater concentration in Khushab, Mi-anwali, Bhakkar and Layyah districts and there was great potential in central Punjab and Sindh to inter-crop mung bean with sugarcane, said an official in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. Talking to APP here on Thursday, he said that short duration varieties of mung

bean can be successfully grown as catch crop in rice-wheat cropping system to expand the area of cultivation and improve soil fertility. There was a great potential in central Punjab and Sindh to inter-crop mung bean with spring plant sugarcane, he said adding the government was also taking measures to promote production of pulses in order to reduce the reliance on imported leguminous. He further said that the mung bean would be grown over 172 thousand hectares in Punjab for producing about 162.8 thousand tons of the commodity, adding that in Sindh it would be sown over 2.8 thousand hectares to produce 6.3 thousand tons of the bean. APP



RAWALPINDI: Worshipers offering prayer in Markazi Jamia Masjid in the holy month of Ramazan-ul-Mubarak. - APP

New facilities inaugurated at NHMP training college

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) Inam Ghani has inaugurated Admin Block, Academic Block and Trainees Hostel at NHMP Training College Sheikhupura. Additional IG Khalid Mahmood, Commandant Training College DIG Mehboob Aslam, Deputy Commandant Taimoor Khan, CPO Training Nasim Shah, officials of PWD, and others were also present on the occasion. IG NHMP hoped that these new facilities will improve the quality of training of officers which will ensure better and improved public service delivery, said a statement. He said that NHMP was a prestigious department with deep-rooted respect in people's hearts due to adoption of golden principles of honesty, courtesy and help. - APP

Mushaal urges Kashmir to observe black day

Mushaal shared that a total of 95,995 Kashmiris including over 7,000 in fake encounters and custody have been killed in IIOJK since 1989. "Every day killings won't make Kashmiris relent in their pursuit of freedom," she vowed and added how long Kashmiris would be relentlessly killed by brutal Indian troops

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Peace and Culture Organization Mushaal Hussein Mullick Thursday urged the Kashmiri people to observe April 24 a black day when notorious Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Mushaal, the wife of illegally detained Chairman of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

Yasin Malik said that Modi is visiting the occupied valley to hold meetings with representatives of Kashmiri Pundit Community to express his sympathy with them after the release of the propaganda file 'The Kashmir Files', said a press release. She said that in the propaganda film is about exodus of Kashmiri Pundits from IIOJK, which is being portrayed as Hindu Pundits genocide by Muslims. Mushaal warned that the fascist premier's visit will be focusing on permanent settlement of Kashmiri

Pundit in IIOJK to change the demography of the valley in sheer violation of international law. She said that the brutal forces unleashed a fresh war of terrorism ahead of the scheduled visit of Modi, as the IIOJK continued to bleed due to Indian barbarism. The hurriyat leader lamented that India has been denying Kashmir's right to self-determination for 75 years and now it is utilizing all energies to change religious composition of Kashmir to convert Kashmir a Muslim majority into minority region.

The chairperson went on to say that unfortunately the world powers and human right organisations are will-aware of the worst human crisis in the valley but observed criminal silence. She said that every Kashmiri's life is at the mercy of brutal Indian troops, as 16 Kashmiris have been martyred by Indian troops during the previous month of March. Mushaal shared that a total of 95,995 Kashmiris including over 7,000 in fake encounters and custody have been killed in IIOJK

since 1989. "Every day killings won't make Kashmiris relent in their pursuit of freedom," she vowed and added how long Kashmiris would be relentlessly killed by brutal Indian troops. She raised question that hasn't time come for the world to take notice of Modi regime's brutalities in IIOJK. The hurriyat leader demanded that world must come forward to stop India's brutal campaign of repression in IIOJK and ensure the just resolution of Kashmir dispute as per the UNSC agreed resolutions.

PTI to move court against ECP delimitation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Chaudhry Fawad Husain said on Thursday that his party had decided to challenge the decision of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for fresh delimitation of constituencies. In a tweet, he said delimitation of the constituencies was possible only after a new census. The PTI leader claimed that this step of the Election Commission would make the election process controversial.

PM Shahbaz welcomes Sikh delegates

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday welcomed the Sikh delegates visiting Pakistan on the eve of their joyous festival Baisakhi. "I welcome all the Sikh delegates visiting Pakistan on the occasion of Baisakhi," he said in a tweet. The prime minister said the Punjab festival symbolised much more than merely the start of the harvesting season. "It is a sign of hope, renewal, and growth. Congratulations to all those celebrating this spring festival," he said. Over 2,000 Sikh pilgrims entered Pakistan on Tuesday from the Wagah border to attend the annual Baisakhi festival that started on Wednesday. The main festival ceremony is being held at Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdol on Thursday. - APP

CCoE contribution praised in providing opportunities

ISLAMABAD: Coordinator-General COMSTEC, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary acknowledged the contribution of COMSTEC Consortium of Excellence (CCoE) in providing learning opportunities to the citizens of member countries. "CCoE is playing a vital role in the COMSTEC programs and we have announced various fellowships for Yemeni, Lebanese, and Palestinian citizens", he said while chairing a meeting of Punjab Province based member universities of COMSTEC Consortium of Excellence (CCoE) held in Lahore. Vice-Chancellors/Rectors and senior officials from the member universities attended the meeting, said a news release issued here. While speaking on the occasion, Prof. Choudhary thanked the Vice-Chancellors and Rectors for their continued support of COMSTEC and CCoE and briefly discussed future initiatives under the umbrella of CCoE. Vice-Chancellors and Rectors of member universities and heads of institutions said on occasion, that they are ready for their role and they will continue their support for COMSTEC and CCoE. Members of the COMSTEC Team were also present in the meeting. - APP

IRSA releases 102292 cusecs water

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Thursday released 102292 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 97949 cases. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1084.35 feet, which was 34.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded a 24857 and 30000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa and Sukkur was recorded as 50028, 32263 and 23660 cases respectively. Similarly, from the Kabul River, a total of 19700 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 20292 cusecs released from the Chenab River at Marala.

Political stability vital for economy

PAKISTAN'S new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif warned shortly after taking office, that his country will be posting "the largest budget deficit in its history" as international financial institutions remain wary of the country's political conditions. Sharif, who succeeded the ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday, accused his predecessor of "economic mismanagement" and that his government will do its best to put the economy back on track. That is easier said than done. The new premier will be leading a short-lived government, as new elections are due in August 2023. Some in Pakistan call for even earlier polls. The time constraints thus will not allow for substantial and serious reforms that are needed to assure domestic and foreign institution.

Financial analysts say the Imran government was ousted by inflation. Over the past two years, due to the economic impact of the coronavirus among other things, Pakistanis saw the price of essential goods go up more than 15 per cent, a historic high. That led to the State Bank of Pakistan raising its policy rate last week by 250 basis points to 12.25 per cent, the biggest increase in years. The Central Bank said the measure was necessary because of "a deterioration" in the outlook for inflation and the global tension, especially the Russian war in Ukraine and of course the standoff between Imran Khan and the opposition. The political tension in the country was pushing the inflation higher, the Bank said.

Its statement said last week's wrangling between Imran Khan and his opponents "contributed to a 5 per cent depreciation in the rupee." It also pointed to pressure from a sharp drop in foreign currency reserves. Reserves held by the central bank dropped by \$728 million to \$11.3 billion by April 1, compared with \$16.2 billion on March 4, the bank said.

Pakistan is therefore, as the Central Bank clearly said, in dire need of a pause in the political tussle. The country cannot afford more of this tension. There is some sort of clarity today, which will obviously help in assuring international institutions such as lending bodies and credit agencies of the country's ability to stand by its financial commitments. But for the long term, Pakistan needs a viable, substantial and realistic reform programme to bring the economy back on track and rein in spiralling inflation. The new government, with an experienced administrator at its helm, needs to ensure that this is a national priority. It may not have much time to achieve such a goal. But it can get the process rolling, which begins with political stability.

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We should create thinkers

MUHAMMAD OMAR IFTIKHAR

THE youth of Pakistan must be taught ways to enhance their skills and not waste time in rote learning of facts. Schools and colleges focus on students learning what is mentioned in the textbooks. Their grades are dependent on how well they re-write the same in their examinations. This is not learning. This is memorizing facts that they will eventually forget once they move to higher classes.

I wonder who remembers the quadratic equations in mathematics, or the name of all elements in the periodic table in chemistry? The course structure and the curriculum must enhance the students' personality and not prepare them to become a part of the workforce. The modern education system that was created in the USA and the UK was to produce factory workers who would agree to their manager's orders and complete tasks as instructed. It was not made to produce creative thinkers. Unfortunately, education is based on studying concepts that the majority will never use in their lives. Do we know what is kinetic energy?

Do we know the various parts of the nucleus? Students spend time memorizing these and other details in fear of not earning good grades. In reality, such concepts are only to be understood and not rote learn. Our education system must build and enhance the skills of students. These include writing, speaking, presenting, painting, sculpting, carving, and drawing, among others. Furthermore, the learning must enhance their time management skills, sense of economy, taxing, banking, and commerce.

It must open their minds to become freelancers and provide services as a writer, translator, graphic designer, and voice-over artist, among a plethora of skills they can develop. The future is bright for those who know multiple skills. Tech giants including Google and Microsoft are hiring people with skills. The times are changing and we must adapt to them.

US-Gulf divergence: Placing risky bets

James Dorsey

Mr. Stravers and Ms. El Kurd's analysis raises the question of whether recent Gulf moves related to Ukraine and Emirati efforts to return Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the Arab and international fold signal a watershed in relations with the United States or an effort by Gulf leaders to flex their muscles at a time that the US may need them most

RUSSIA'S invasion of Ukraine spotlights seemingly widening differences between the United States and its closest Middle Eastern allies, sparking eulogies for an era of bygone American regional dominance. America's Middle East Friendships are Dying a Natural Death" predicted foreign policy analyst Steven A. Cook this week after countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, to varying degrees, rebuffed US requests to help reduce energy prices and join sanctions against Russia. A Saudi television satire that could not have been broadcast without at least tacit government approval mocked US President Joe Biden as a leader who had lost his memory and needed Vice President Kamel Harris as a prop. The reference to Mr. Biden's memory was an apparent reference to Saudi and Emirati assertions that Mr. Biden has forgotten who America's longstanding regional allies are.

In a further sign of strained US-Saudi relations, Saudi Arabia this week pushed the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its partners, including Russia, to stop using oil data from the International Energy Agency's (IEA) numbers when assessing the state of the oil market because of the United States' alleged sway over the organisation.

Swansongs for US regional partnerships may be premature, despite the daylight in attitudes towards the Ukraine crisis, a divergence in perceived national interests, Saudi and Emirati frustration with recent American policies towards Iran, and uncertainty about Washington's continued commitment to regional security. Analysis of the impact and political significance of the US military presence in the Middle East suggests a degree of interdependence between the United States and its regional partners that makes their partnerships both indispensable and irreplaceable for Middle Eastern autocratic rulers.

The analysis also suggests that neither China nor Russia have the capability, or a military strategy predicated on the ability to project force in any part of the world or the wherewithal to replace the United States as the guarantor of the Middle East's autocratic rule.

Moreover, the Russian military performance in Ukraine laid bare logistical and maintenance problems that, coupled with the sanctions, make Russia a less attractive alternative arms supplier. Saudi and Emirati crown princes Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed may be testing the limits of the leverage they derive from their interdependence with the United States by refusing to increase oil production to reduce oil prices and condemn Russia. They may also be venting their anger at a US refusal to respond more robustly to Iranian and Iranian-backed Houthi rebel attacks on their oil facilities and critical infrastructure. The US Navy said this week that it would initiate a new task force with allied countries to patrol the Red Sea in response to Houthi attacks on shipping in the strategic waterway without identifying the rebels by name.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reportedly apologized to Mr. Bin Zayed last month for the slow US response to the attacks. Yousef

Al Otaiba, the UAE ambassador to Washington, said a meeting between the two men had helped "move the relationship between the UAE and the US back on the right track."

The announcement and Mr. Biden's apology reaffirmed that the US military presence in the Gulf remains one pillar of the Gulf states' multi-faceted regime survival strategy.

A study by political scientists and international affairs scholars Andrew Stravers and Dana El Kurd argues that, despite paying lip service to democratic values, the US commitment to autocratic rule in the Gulf is as much a function of US military strategy as it is of the Middle East's strategic geography that straddles some of the world's most important maritime chokepoints. "American forces have an autocratising effect on host nations in strategically valuable regions. American and host interests align...in supporting regime survival where the location is critical to the United States and its global system of trade and military pre-eminence. This alignment produces increasing autocracy rather than simple regime stability," Mr. Stravers and Ms. El Kurd wrote. The authors argue that an American military presence can increase autocracy in strategic regions "where American planners are uncertain of the (national) military's ability to withstand regime change."

Some leaders in the Gulf have at times shared that uncertainty. Mr. Bin Zayed, for example, contracted Erik Prince, founder of the controversial private security firm Blackwater, more than a decade ago to help ensure regime security.

Mr. Stravers and Ms. El Kurd go on to reason that the US military presence "produces a need for the host regime to suppress opposition, in order to maintain perceived stability and entrench its domestic position. This increases the level of authoritarianism over time." This phenomenon is particularly true for the Gulf, where the loss of a military base would have far more far-reaching consequences for the US global position than the need to close or move a facility in, for example, Japan. The authors' emphasis on the significance of strategic geography in support of autocracy or democratization is borne out in a comparison of US policy regarding the 2011 popular upris-

ing in Bahrain, home to the US Fifth Fleet, and protests six years earlier in Uzbekistan, where the US had a significant military presence at the height of the Afghan war. The US stood aside when Saudi-led Gulf troops quashed the revolt in Bahrain. In Uzbekistan, Washington had no problem losing its military facilities after taking the government to task for repressing protests and violating human rights.

"An American military presence has an autocrating effect in particular regions of strategic importance. In areas of less strategic importance, American presence has relatively little effect on regimes," the authors concluded. Mr. Stravers and Ms. El Kurd's analysis raises the question of whether recent Gulf moves related to Ukraine and Emirati efforts to return Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the Arab and international fold signal a watershed in relations with the United States or an effort by Gulf leaders to flex their muscles at a time that the US may need them most.

The tendency of the US military presence to encourage increased autocracy may be something Messrs. Bin Salman and Bin Zayed don't want to lose, particularly not without an immediate replacement.

That is all the truer, given that it is not clear that either man has full confidence in the ability of his security forces to fend off a concerted effort at regime change or an assault by Iran.

Messrs. Bin Salman and Bin Zayed's problem is that the decision about the future of the US presence in the Gulf is beyond their grasp.

Washington is lowering its valuation of the strategic importance of the Gulf's geography as its interest in the free flow of the region's energy diminishes.

Messrs. Bin Salman and Bin Zayed may be placing a risky bet: put the relationship with the US on edge in the hope that the need to replace Russian energy will return Washington to its senses. That may be a long shot. But, just like Saudis and Emiratis remember that the US did not respond robustly to attacks on their critical facilities even if it took steps to reassure them, US policy and opinionmakers are likely to recall friends who were absent when they needed help most.

2022 elections are a monument to France's deteriorated democracy

Yasser Louati

Emmanuel Macron has waged a war on Muslims during the past five years, culminating in the "anti-separatism law" passed in August 2021 after a year-long tsunami of anti-Muslim racism within the halls of parliament and media. Today the French government can shut down any Muslim organisation – and has been doing so – at will. The future of French Muslims will be grim if things persist as they are. Their capacity to organise and act as a community has so far been a total failure, as illustrated by the fact that Macron faced little to no resistance when pushing for his "anti separatism" law

THE vote bodes a grim future, not only for Muslims and minorities but also for French society as a whole. "To exist is to exist politically," Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad once wrote. There are reasons to question whether President Emmanuel Macron ever read Sayad's writings because his past five years in power have been about keeping French Muslims from being fully-fledged citizens. For Muslims, the election of Emmanuel Macron was supposed to provide relief after five years of Francois Hollande. However, like his predecessor, he posed as the providential man protecting the nation against the enemy within – French Muslims. So much so that his Minister of Interior accused Marine Le Pen of being "too soft, not on Islamism but on Islam." While passing reforms to dismantle the welfare state and protections for millions of workers, Emmanuel Macron claimed – and continues to claim – that he has been waging a battle against so-called "political/radical Islam." With just days before the 2022 presidential election, the political offerings will likely, once again, push many to abstain. Extreme far-right candidate Eric Zemmour broke into the election with an unapologetically anti-Muslim platform. His chances of making it to the second round are slim, but his nine percent in the polls does confirm that Marine Le Pen, polling at 22 percent, is not only capable of reaching the second round but could also win the presidency.

For fear of seeing Macron reelected or Le Pen replacing him, grassroots organisers have managed to overcome their differences to work together in a campaign for left-wing candidate Jean Luc Melenchon, despite his years of stoking anti-Muslim racism. The rationale is that he is the "lesser evil" and that voting for him is the only way to defeat the far-right. But one can only question how come the same organisers and activists have been unable to work together as a collective for the past five years in order to prevent this long-forecasted far-right blackmailing. They could not work together for themselves, but they managed to do so for the white man who had a role in the racism they

had supposedly been fighting against.

It is understandable that many have so far refused this electoral blackmailing. Twenty years ago, people voted in droves for Jacques Chirac in the 2002 elections to block the historic far-right leader Jean Marie Le Pen during the second round. But to what end? Jacques Chirac passed the law against the Muslim headscarf in public schools and set the stage for the next twenty years of legal Islamophobia. Again in 2017, people rushed to vote for Macron to block Marine Le Pen, with the results we see in front of us. Emmanuel Macron has waged a war on Muslims during the past five years, culminating in the "anti-separatism law" passed in August 2021 after a year-long tsunami of anti-Muslim racism within the halls of parliament and media. Today the French government can shut down any Muslim organisation – and has been doing so – at will. The future of French Muslims will be grim if things persist as they are. Their capacity to organise and act as a community has so far been a total failure, as illustrated by the fact that Macron faced little to no resistance when pushing for his "anti separatism" law. As citizens, French Muslims belong on the side of dissent and protest in times of profound inequality and injustice. If France can pride itself on its Revolution, countless labour movements, and the bitter fights of the dominated against the dominant, as taught in history books, why should French Muslims be any different?

If mosques have historically either remained silent or actively collaborated with the government cracking down on Muslim communities, maybe it is time for them to seek accountability from their representatives and replace them if they need be. Macron himself voiced this concern during his speech on "separatism" and by announcing that the French state should intervene in charity elections if incumbents are removed. Thus, maybe it is time for many to redefine what faith means and what values French Muslim identity is built around. Submission to whomever is in power? Conformism with the dominant ideology or liberation? Dogmatism or critical thinking?

But this lack of action and mobilisation against this piece of legislation that quite literally violates freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of religion goes beyond Muslims to French society as a whole. Broader French society supported the 2015-2017 state of emergency, and even it becoming permanent. Less than five years later, the majority non-Muslim population of France felt unconcerned about the anti-separatism law meant to crack down on Muslims.

Yet the very measures that caused little concern while the government targeted Blacks, Arabs, Muslims and inhabitants of the Banlieues are now being used against white organisations, organisers, and potentially any dissenting voice. This, in turn, raises fundamental questions not only for French Muslims but for all French people. Is democracy only about voting for representatives every five years? And what does it even mean to vote, if it serves to legitimise a system that does not offer choices but instead pushes the masses to "choose" the perceived lesser evil at that moment? Time will tell whether the far-right's "ideological quasi total victory" becomes fact, as claimed by Marine Le Pen, or if we are witnessing the convulsions of a dying order that has become so convinced of its near demise that it needs to secure its grip on power through ever more repressive laws, made acceptable by scapegoating minorities.

Macron has been branded "the president of the rich" for his neoliberal policies and complete disdain for the working class. Yet, if he managed to work for the most comfortable layers of French society, he also did his best to please its most reactionary.

Hence, if he spent the past five years working for the few, he needed to divide the many. The latter will only have themselves to blame if they keep falling for the same farce. Islamophobia made no one richer; it only hijacked the much-needed debate over the legitimacy of a man who was elected while the majority abstained, and who is trying to do it again now. Fool me once...

– Courtesy: TRT World

Briefs

COAS will not seek extension

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He said that that is why any intentional or unintentional effort that becomes the reason for creating a rift between the nation and armed forces is against the broader national interest. Responding to another question, he reiterated that the army has nothing to do with politics.

"There is no interference by the army in any by-election or local bodies election." He said that it was said that "calls were received", therefore evidence should be brought to the fore if there is any.

"An organised malicious propaganda is being run against the Pakistan Army and its leadership. Even fake audio messages of different retired senior military officials are being created using a deep-fake technology to create a divide between the nation and armed forces. This is illegal, unethical and totally against national interest," he said. He then requested the public and political parties to not drag the army into politics.

"We want to stay out of it. Keep us out of this discourse," he said, adding that this campaign didn't get successful ever in the past nor will it in future. Word 'conspiracy' not included in NSC statement: DG ISPR

The DG ISPR clarified that the word "conspiracy" was not used in the statement issued after a meeting of the National Security Committee last month. His clarification came in response to a journalist's question. He asked about the military leadership's stance on former prime minister Imran Khan's claims that it acknowledged the "foreign conspiracy" in the NSC meeting. Maj Gen Ifthikhar said that he cannot discuss what was said in the meeting. He, however, said that the stance of the military leadership was conveyed in the meeting as well as the statement issued after it. He said that Pakistan's military agencies are working day and night against such plots and will not let them get successful.

Responding to a question about the BBC report on events that took place at the Prime Minister's House on the night of Imran Khan's ouster from power, Maj Gen Ifthikhar said that it is a "false story" and nothing but a pack of lies.

"The army has nothing to do with the political process that took place a few days back in the country," he iterated. "Do not drag the army into political matters." On the ongoing propaganda against the security forces, the DG ISPR said that the concerned departments of the government were taking action against it and maintained that they have also traced foreign linkages during the probe into the malicious campaign. "We have collected data around the malicious campaign against institutions. The campaigns started locally and have expanded globally. We will share our analysis in the coming days."

He also urged the people to avoid sharing such reports without confirming them.

In response to a question, the DG ISPR said the "cyphers" are top-secret documents that are sent to the Foreign Office by Pakistani ambassadors from across the world. "...we also receive some of these [cyphers] at the directorate of the Inter-Services Intelligence that is considered to be related to national security," the military's spokesperson said. ISI had started its work when the cypher was received on March 7 or 8, and based on that, it gave its input to the NSC, the DG ISI said, but noted that cyphers come under the domain of the Foreign Office and only those related to the national security were shared with the military.

Maj Gen Ifthikhar asked the political leadership to not malign the army chief and termed it unfortunate as the leader of an institution — that keeps working for Pakistan's security — is defamed. Moving on, the DG ISPR said the military had a lot on its plate already and was busy tackling the pre-existing issues. "We cannot get involved in something else and dragging us into something else and blaming us for it is not justified." Maj Gen Ifthikhar said the military would "absolutely not" impose martial law, noting that democracy was the only way forward for Pakistan — and the COAS has time and again maintained this.

Covid-19 still an emergency, warns WHO Chief Tedros

This has led the WHO to call on all countries to sequence at least 5 percent of their COVID-19 samples in order to keep track of the coronavirus mutations

DNA

NEW YORK: As the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths continues to decline, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that the pandemic remains a public health emergency, advising countries to be prepared to scale up COVID-19 response rapidly.

"On COVID-19, there's good news. Last week, the lowest number of COVID-19 deaths was recorded since the early days of the pandemic," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press briefing on Wednesday. According to the WHO, the global number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths continued to decline during the week of April 4-Sunday for a third consecutive week, with over 7 million cases and over 22,000 deaths reported, a decrease of 24 percent and 18 percent respectively, as compared to the previous week.

"However, some countries are still witnessing serious spikes in cases, which is putting pressure on hospitals. And our ability to monitor trends is compromised as testing has significantly reduced," Tedros said. The WHO's COVID-19 International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee released on Wednesday its recommendations from its latest meeting, which upheld



that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to constitute a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).

The committee said that countries should continue to use evidence-informed and risk-based public health and social measures (PHSM) and be prepared to scale up PHSM rapidly in response to changes in the virus and the population immunity if COVID-19 hospitalizations, intensive care admissions and fatalities increase and compromise the health systems' capacity. As the number of severe cases has dramatically declined in many countries - in Britain, Sweden and the US, among others - widespread COVID-19 testing and surveillance programs have been widely scrapped there. This has led the WHO to call on all countries to sequence at least 5 percent of their COVID-19 samples in order to keep track of the coronavirus mutations.

In an earlier statement, the WHO said that scientists in Botswana and South Africa had detected new forms of the Omicron variant, labeled as BA.4 and BA.5. But due to the limited number of samples and sequencing, it is still not fully clear whether these might be more transmissible or dangerous. "The best way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated and boosted when recommended. Continue wearing masks, especially in crowded indoor spaces. And for the indoors, keep the air fresh by opening windows and doors, and invest in good ventilation," the WHO chief advised.

Barca look to ensure place in UEL semis

MADRID: FC Barcelona aim to seal their place in the semi-finals of the UEFA Europa League when they entertain Eintracht Frankfurt on Thursday night. Xavi Hernandez's men will be favorites to progress into the last four after a 1-1 draw in Germany a week ago, but should bear in mind that their two home matches in the Europa League this season ended in draws against Napoli and Galatasaray. The Catalans have improved drastically since Xavi took over as first-team coach, and are unbeaten in their last 15 matches in all competitions, with just two losses in their last 23 games. (3-2 against Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup and 3-2 against Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey). Sunday saw Barca become the first side in Spain to win after conceding three penalties in the same match when they won 3-2 away to Levante, although Xavi will make some changes to the side that won in the Ciudad de Valencia Stadium. 18-year-old Pedri will start on Thursday, with Nico Gonzalez probably stepping down to the bench, while the fact Dani Alves isn't included in the Europa League squad, coupled with Sergino Dest's ongoing injury, will see either Oscar Mingueza or Ronald Araujo forced to cover at right-back.

Gerard Pique is struggling to recover from a groin injury and his fitness could decide who finally plays on the right, and given that Clement Lenglet looked very shaky at the back at the weekend, Xavi would probably prefer Araujo to partner Eric Garcia. A great part of Barca's recovery in 2022 has been down to the success of their January signings, with Alves, Ferran Torres, Adama Traore and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang contributing 18 goals and 13 assists between them, with Aubameyang scoring ten times and Torres netting seven goals. — Agencies

Tsitsipas through to Monte Carlo quarters

DNA

MONTE CARLO: Holder Stefanos Tsitsipas moved into the Monte Carlo Masters quarter-finals with a 7-5 7-6(1) victory over Laslo Djere on Thursday while fourth seed Casper Ruud was knocked out in straight sets by Grigor Dimitrov.

Tsitsipas broke only once in a match where break points were in short supply but the Greek third seed pounced when it mattered most at the end of both sets to seal victory. The opening set went with serve but Djere was nearly broken when he was down 5-4 after he made three double faults. Djere held on but Tsitsipas switched gears and broke him in his next service game when the Serbian fired wide on set point.

The second set was nearly identical to the first with just one break point between the two. This time Djere forced a tiebreak, but Tsitsipas was

unstoppable as he took the first five points before sealing the match with a forehand winner. "I knew that I was going to have to be alert and 100%, he's someone that can compete very well on clay... I really had to work hard for this win," Tsitsipas said in an on-court interview.

"The beginning of the tiebreak was very important to get such a good, dynamic start... I was able to dictate those rallies and really get ahead of the game early on." Earlier, Norwegian Ruud became the tournament's latest high-profile casualty as he went down 6-3 7-5 to Bulgarian Dimitrov, who moved into the quarter-finals for a fourth time.

"It's always tough this week because you're switching surfaces," Dimitrov said. "So I try and not be too tough on myself in practice. I just try to do the simple things. It's going so well so far." Unseeded Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who beat world number one Novak Djokovic earlier this



SOFIA: Pakistan ambassador to Bulgaria inaugurates Pakistan Corner at the National Library of Bulgaria as part of the 75th Anniversary celebrations. — DNA

Britain plans to send migrants to Rwanda

DUNGENESS: Britain could send tens of thousands of asylum seekers to Rwanda to be resettled, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Thursday, setting out a tougher approach to break people-smuggling networks and stem the flow of migrants across the Channel. Concerns over immigration were a big factor in the 2016 Brexit vote, and Johnson has been under pressure to deliver on his promise to "take back control" of Britain's borders. But his plan drew swift criticism from opponents of his Conservative Party and from charities. "We must ensure that the only route to asylum in the UK is a safe and legal one," Johnson said in a speech in Kent, southeast England, where thousands of migrants in small boats landed on Channel beaches last year.

"Those who try to jump the queue or abuse our systems will find no automatic path to set them up in our country, but rather be swiftly and humanely removed to a safe third country or their country of origin." Anyone who has arrived in Britain illegally since Jan. 1 could now be relocated to Rwanda, in East Africa, which would disrupt the business model of people-smuggling gangs, the prime minister said. "The deal we have done is uncapped and Rwanda will have the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people in the years ahead," he said. The plan drew strong criticism from opposition parties, with interior minister Priti Patel's Labour Party counterpart, Yvette Cooper, saying it was costly, "unworkable and unethical". Concerns were also raised about Rwanda's human rights record, which the British government itself noted last year. Johnson said Rwanda was "one of the safest countries in the world", adding however that the risk of ending up in the country would prove a "considerable deterrent" over time.

Human Rights Watch said Rwanda did not respect some of the most fundamental human rights. "Refugees have been abused in Rwanda and the government has, at times, kidnapped Rwandan refugees outside the country to bring them home to face trial and ill-treatment," said Lewis Mudge, HRW's Central Africa director. Patel signed the partnership agreement in Kigali on Thursday, and she presented it at a joint news conference with Rwandan Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta. — Agencies

Stones praises City after Atletico win

Kevin De Bruyne scored the only goal of the tie in the first leg in Manchester and City held on despite a bad-tempered finish to the return leg in the Spanish capital

WED DESK

MADRID: Manchester City defender John Stones praised his team's "incredible" composure in a fiery goalless draw away to Atletico Madrid as Pep Guardiola's side set up a blockbuster Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid. Kevin De Bruyne scored the only goal of the tie in the first leg in Manchester and City held on despite a bad-tempered finish to the return leg in the Spanish capital.

Atletico centre-back Felipe was sent off late on for a wild swipe at Phil Foden, an incident that triggered a mass brawl in the corner of the pitch and resulted in more than 12 minutes of

stoppage time being played. Video then showed clashes continuing in the tunnel with police called to help separate the two squads. "We knew it was not an easy place to come, it is a hostile environment, it was a difficult night all round and how we defended and controlled ourselves over the two legs was incredible," Stones told BT Sport. "We know that they sometimes try and make things happen like that and we dealt with it really well," Stones told BT Sport. "It is not nice to talk about and I don't want to dwell on it because over the two legs we played incredibly against such an experienced side in what they do." He added: "We kept our tempers and it is easy to get drawn into stuff like that."

Guardiola opted not to get involved in a war of words with his Spanish opponents. When asked if he thought Atletico had gone too far, and targeted Foden in particular, he said: "Nothing to say. I don't know I cannot talk about what other people do, I don't know." Guardiola said City would have to raise their game as the club go in search of a first European title. "It is the champion of Spain and they played with energy and in second half were better than us and we were lucky we didn't concede," he said. "In the first half we had chances, overall we are in the semi-finals - it is well deserved." Jurgen Klopp admitted he was relieved to

see Liverpool book a Champions League semi-final showdown against Villarreal as the quadruple chasers survived a late collapse in Wednesday's 3-3 draw against Benfica. Klopp's side already had one foot in the last four after winning 3-1 in the quarter-final first leg in Lisbon. They were on cruise control for long spells in the second leg at Anfield, but had to hold their nerve before advancing 6-4 on aggregate after an uncharacteristic meltdown in the closing stages. IbrahimaKonate put Liverpool ahead before Goncalo Ramos equalised late in the first half. When Roberto Firmino netted twice after the interval, the tie looked all but over. However, Roman Yaremchuk and Darwin

Nunez struck for Benfica to briefly give the visitors hope of an astonishing escape act, before Liverpool finally restored order. "When I'm not over the moon about qualifying for the Champions League semi-final, something is really wrong and maybe I should quit!" Klopp said. "The situation was the defence had never played together and it was about details, staying 100 percent concentrated. "We were 6-2 up on aggregate. The players are human beings, they were like 'Ok job done'. But Benfica kept fighting and I respect that. "It was not exactly what we wanted but it is absolutely not important. We are through and that's all that matters. I'm really happy." The Reds will face

Spanish side Villarreal in the semi-finals as they look to reach their 10th Champions League final and claim a seventh title in the competition. Despite Villarreal's impressive wins over Bayern Munich and Juventus in the last two rounds, Liverpool will be firm favourites to make a third Champions League final in the last five seasons. "To beat Juventus and Bayern Munich, they deserve to be in the Champions League semi-finals. Unai Emery is the king of the cups, it is unbelievable what he is doing. But give me a bit of time to prepare it properly," Klopp said. Liverpool sit one point behind Premier League leaders Manchester City after Sunday's draw against their title rivals.

Metro Bus delay: PM orders...

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out a feasibility study as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules for two additional routes, namely from Rawat and Bhara Kahu, connecting the airport. He directed to establish a metro bus station at the motorway for better connectivity and to enhance the benefit of the service to a maximum number of people. Terming it "severe negligence", PM Shehbaz expressed dismay over the delay in the materialisation of the project as Rs16 billion had already been spent on the mega project of public importance. He termed it "unfair" towards the general public whose tax money had been consumed, however, the return facility was being denied to them. He directed the officials concerned to make TORs of the inquiry to assess the reasons for the delay that led to the loss of national wealth.

PTI's funding case to...

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foreign funding case. It had also demanded that all records of the case, including the documents requisitioned through the State Bank of Pakistan, should not be shared with Babar, who had filed the case in November 2014.

However, the IHC ruled that the ECP's role "is of important nature and same cannot be curtailed in any manner". It noted that the body is a "supervisory, regulatory and administrative body under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 to deal with the affairs of political parties, election and its results".

It also noted that "no restriction could be imposed upon ECP to adopt any process of inquiry, investigation, scrutiny to reach out the mandate of assigned duty in terms of Article 17(3)".

"If any of the party funding has been received through prohibited sources, it will affect the status of such political party including its chairman, therefore, it is necessary to dig out the truth, even petitioner being political party is also under obligation to maintain its dignity and integrity, which has far reaching effect in Pakistani society and if any foreign funding has been received contrary to law and mandate of the Constitution, the petitioner has to face the music," said the judgment.

Deadlock persists between...

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Moreover, JUI-F will likely to be given four ministries, MQM two ministries, while BNP-Mengal, ANP, Jamhoori Watan Party and Balochistan Awami Party will also be given cabinet portfolios. Moreover, the name of PML-N Senator Azam Nazir Tarar has been under consideration for the slot of Leader of the House in the Senate.

PTI's 123 MNAs...

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Taking to Twitter Thursday, Imran Khan lauded his MNAs for tendering their resignations. "Want to appreciate our 123 MNAs as their resignations have been accepted by Speaker Qasim Suri. Their standing firm for a sovereign Pak & against US-initiated regime change bringing to power criminals, convicted & on bail — the ultimate insult to any self-respecting independent nation." Responding to the call of the former prime minister, PTI's MNAs tendered their resignations to the deputy speaker of the National Assembly hours before the election of Shehbaz Sharif as the new prime minister.

Russia warns...

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Russia has the world's biggest arsenal of nuclear warheads and along with China and the United States is one of the global leaders in hypersonic missile technology. Lithuania said Russia's threats were nothing new and that Moscow had deployed nuclear weapons to Kaliningrad long before the war in Ukraine. NATO did not immediately respond to Russia's warning.

Briefs

Iran will harshly confront Israel: Qaani

TEHRAN: Iran will harshly confront Israel "wherever it feels necessary", Esmail Qaani, the head of the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, said on Thursday, according to the semi-official Nour News agency. In March, Tehran targeted what it called "secret Israeli bases" during a missile attack on Iraq's northern Kurdish regional capital of Erbil. The assault was meant to avenge Israeli air strikes that killed Iranian military personnel in Syria. "Wherever we identify a Zionist threat, we will harshly confront them, they are too small to confront us," said Qaani, whose unit is in control of the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations. According to Reuters, the commander pledged to support any group that fights the "Zionist regime" and added that "the destruction of this regime is gaining ground." Tensions deepened at a time when Iran and world powers were engaged in talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, which Israel opposes. While not a party to the nuclear negotiations between Iran and world powers in Vienna, Israel has conferred with the US administration in hope of wielding more clout over any revival of a deal with Tehran that was reached over its objections. - APP

Shoukry, Blinken hold talks in Washington

WASHINGTON: Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry held talks with his US counterpart, Antony Blinken, in Washington on Wednesday. Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez said discussions tackled aspects of bilateral and strategic ties. "Shoukry underscored the importance of continuous political consultations and coordination on various international and regional issues of common interest," Hafez added. Shoukry held a discussion panel in the Middle East Institute, in which he underlined the depth of US-Egyptian strategic ties and reviewed Egypt's vision on regional issues and challenges. He also met with representatives of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) and pointed to the comprehensive development boom in Egypt. Talks also touched on the economic and trade relations between the two countries. The FM invited US companies to take part in Cairo's sustainable development efforts, especially in the clean and renewable energy sectors. He referred to Egypt's vision for the upcoming COP27 Climate Summit, which will be held in Sharm el-Sheikh Red Sea Resort, in addition to the private sector's key role in addressing climate change. - APP

Death toll in Philippines floods hits 115

MANILA: The death toll from landslides and flooding in the Philippines triggered by tropical storm Megi hit 115 on Thursday, official figures showed, as more bodies were found in mud-caked villages. Scores of people are still missing and feared dead after the strongest storm to strike the archipelago nation this year dumped heavy rain over several days, forcing tens of thousands into evacuation centers, AFP reported. In the central province of Leyte - the worst affected by Megi - devastating landslides smashed farming and fishing communities, wiping out houses and transforming the landscape. The disaster-prone region is regularly ravaged by storms - including a direct hit from Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 - with scientists warning they are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer because of human-driven climate change. Emergency personnel in Abuyog municipality have retrieved dozens of bodies from a coastal village destroyed by a landslide on Tuesday. - APP

Chinese company for deeper seed co-op with Pakistan

The seed company, with nearly two decades experience in promoting hybrid rice in Pakistan, has contributed to the examination of the first Chinese hybrid rice variety QY0413 in Pakistan's history and developed Komal, the first hybrid rice variety

DNA

BEIJING: "We look forward to establishing a "technology transfer-product process-export" model for seed cooperation with Pakistani partners. Under this model, we grow crops in Pakistan utilizing Chinese technology together with local companies and then sell the processed products back to China." This was stated by Zhou Xusheng from Wuhan Qingfa Hesheng Seed Co., Ltd. in an interview with China Economic Net (CEN) following

a recent salon on market access organized by the National South Asian Standardization (Chengdu) Research Center of China and attended by participants from both Pakistan and China. "Take hybrid rice as an example. Pakistan, once the world's seventh-largest rice exporter, became the fourth-largest after the introduction of hybrid rice from China, which improves production by 50-80% and enhances the process quality by 10%. By doing so, local farmers benefit from rice of higher quality and more pro-

duction, local enterprises become more competitive in the global market, and huge revenue can be brought", Mr. Zhou told CEN. The seed company, with nearly two decades experience in promoting hybrid rice in Pakistan, has contributed to the examination of the first Chinese hybrid rice variety QY0413 in Pakistan's history and developed Komal, the first hybrid rice variety with long growth period in Pakistan. Currently, the company is providing the seeds of hybrid rice, rape, tomato,

pepper, and watermelon in Pakistan. Research is also underway in Sindh for heat- and alkaline-resistant rice varieties. But to set up a complete "technology transfer-product process-export" chain, more needs to be done. According to Mr. Zhou, to build the model well, first there should be high-quality selected varieties that can be adapted to local conditions in Pakistan. According to Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), the average rice yield of Pakistan is generally lower than that of

China, U.S., North Korea, South Korea, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brazil, Egypt, Iran, etc. In the past ten years, the average rice yield in Pakistan almost stagnated with only a slight increase. To solve this problem, Pakistan can only rely on introducing high-yielding varieties. In this regard, Mr. Zhou recommends more R&D investment on varieties with good quality, high production, and resilience to local climate. In addition, according to Mr. Zhou, a complete rice grading mechanism that

distinguishes rice of different quality for different purposes, as well as enhanced awareness of the value of high-quality rice throughout the planting, purchasing, processing, and exporting process are also in need. "We would like to enhance exchanges and training with local partners, collaborate with Pakistani rice export association to set up grading system, and build local production bases to help stabilize rice production area and guard against emergencies threatening food security", Mr. Zhou added.



MINSK: Pakistan ambassador to Belarus Sajjad Haider meets Alexander Moshensky, a leading Belarusian businessman, owner of JV "Santa Bremor" & Maksim Kasareuski and discussed collaboration in IT & dairy sectors. - DNA

Le Pen showing authoritarian intentions: Macron

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron launched a scathing attack on far-right rival Marine Le Pen on Wednesday, saying her true "authoritarian" intentions were showing after she banned a team of reporters and did not rule out a return to the death penalty. Macron, a pro-European centrist, became president in 2017 after easily beating Le Pen when voters rallied behind him to keep the far-right out of power. This time, he faces a tougher challenge. Slightly behind in opinion polls, Le Pen has successfully softened her image and tapped into anger over the cost of living and a perception that Macron is disconnected from everyday hardships. Some polls show her victory in the April 24 runoff is within the margin of error. "Despite all the efforts, the true face of the far-right is coming back. It is a face that doesn't respect freedoms, the constitutional framework, press independence and fundamental freedoms, rights," Macron told France 2 television. Such comments are the start of an "authoritarian drift," said Macron, who has of late categorized Le Pen's manifesto as full of lies and false promises that conceal a far-right agenda ultimately leading to France leaving the European Union. Le Pen said the show whose journalists were refused accreditation was entertainment rather than journalism and that she reserved the right - now as a candidate, and later as president if elected - to choose who may attend her news conferences. - Agencies

France seizes 41 properties of Russians

PARIS: France has seized 41 properties located in Paris and along the scenic French Riviera worth 573 million (\$623 million) belonging to wealthy Russians as part of the global sanctions against Moscow's war on Ukraine, BFMVTV broadcaster reported on Thursday. In total, the government has seized Russian assets amounting to 23.7 billion (\$25.8 billion) including bank accounts, cargo ships, yachts, and jets. The report said it also includes the real estate of 573.6 million (\$624 million) as per the current market value.

According to a list released by Directorate General of the Treasury on Wednesday, 41 properties have been frozen. Of these, 6 are in the heart of the capital city Paris, 7 in the Alps, and the rest in the south of France overlooking the Mediterranean coastline, known as the getaway of the rich: St Tropez, Cannes, Villefranche Sur Mer, Antibes, St Barthelemy, St Jean Cap Ferrat, Le Lavandou, and Nice.

A dozen of these properties including Chateau de Croe in Antibes and Villa Gouverneur in Saint-Barthelemy are owned by Russian oligarch and Chelsea football club owner, Roman Abramovich, the Parisian news daily reported. - APP

Slovakia considers buying Turkish drones

ANKARA: Battle-tested Turkish combat drones seem to have gotten yet another customer as Slovakia has expressed interest and signaled it could become the second European Union member state to acquire Bayraktar TB2s. The intention was reaffirmed by Slovakia's Defense Minister Jaro Nad who on Wednesday said talks on acquiring unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) for the country's armed forces were moving forward. "Works on acquiring drones for the Slovak military (are) moving forward," Nad said in a tweet after meeting with Haluk Bayraktar, the CEO of the Turkish drone magnate, Baykar. "Good talk today with Mr Bayraktar from Turkey, and discussions with other drone producers (are) ongoing," he said in the tweet featuring a model of the Bayraktar TB2 UCAV with Slovak markings. The battle-tested drones have already proven their capabilities in Libya, Syria and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey has also sold Kyiv several batches of Bayraktar TB2s. The TB2 has also been used by Qatar, Azerbaijan and Poland, which in May last year became the first European Union and NATO member state to acquire drones from Turkey. Many other nations have also hinted at buying the UAVs. - APP

Lebanon to demolish blast-hit silos

BEIRUT: Lebanon on Thursday ordered the demolition of Beirut's grain silos which are at risk of collapse following a devastating 2020 port explosion, prompting protests from relatives of blast victims who want the silos preserved. "We tasked the Council for Development and Reconstruction with supervising the demolition process," Information Minister Ziad Makari said after a cabinet meeting, without specifying a time frame. Makari said the government's decision was based on a report by Lebanon's Khatib and Alami Engineering Company, which warned that the silos in the port of the capital Beirut could collapse within months. "Repairing them will cost a lot," Makari said. Last year, Swiss company Amann Engineering also called for their demolition, saying the most damaged of the silos were tilting at a rate of two millimetres per day (0.08 inches). Once boasting a capacity of more than 100,000 tonnes, an imposing 48 metre (157 foot) high remnant of the structure has become emblematic of the catastrophic August 4 port blast. It killed more than 200 people and devastated entire neighbourhoods of the capital in 2020. Still, the silos absorbed much of the blast's impact, shielding large swaths of west Beirut from its ravaging effects. Activists and relatives of blast victims have called for the grain storage facility to be preserved as a memorial site. - APP

Nigeria: 154 people killed in gun attack

ABUJA: At least 154 people were killed and many houses were torched in an attack in Nigeria's northern Plateau state carried out by bandits related to Boko Haram, according to officials. Gunmen on motorbikes opened indiscriminate fire on shops and houses in Kanem region on Sunday, Ya'u Abubakar, a senior councillor of the local government, told reporters on Wednesday. Confirming the fatalities, he said approximately 4,800 people have fled their houses fearing for their lives. President Muhammadu Buhari condemned the attack in a statement saying the perpetrators should not be "spared and forgiven." Information Minister Lai Mohammed said in a statement that armed gangs in cahoots with Boko Haram were responsible for the attacks. "What is happening now is that there is a kind of an unholy handshake between bandits and Boko Haram insurgents," Mohammed said. Sadiya Umar Farouq, the minister of humanitarian affairs, said aid such as food, water and blankets have been delivered to the displaced people. Boko Haram launched a bloody insurgency in northeastern Nigeria in 2009 before expanding to neighboring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, prompting a military response. The terror group has killed more than 30,000 people and displaced nearly 3 million in Nigeria, according to the UN. In the Lake Chad region, violence committed by Boko Haram has affected 26 million people and displaced some 2.6 million, the UN refugee agency has said. - APP

Uzbekistan welcomes Yemen truce

TASHKENT: Uzbekistan welcomes the announcement of a two-month truce and ceasefire in Yemen mediated by the UN, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. "We believe that the temporary ceasefire, as well as a determination to firmly uphold the rule of law in this country, will help find compromises in the name of establishing comprehensive peace and stability in Yemen," the statement said. "We call on all warring parties to show restraint and political will to resolve the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. For more than seven years, armed confrontation has continued in Yemen between the pro-government coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebel militias, according to UN materials. The agreement on a two-month truce in Yemen was signed on April 1. The parties agreed to stop all offensive air, land and sea operations inside Yemen and near its borders. - DNA

Medvedev warns against Finland, Sweden joining NATO

MOSCOW: Dmitry Medvedev, former Russian president and currently deputy head of the country's Security Council, warned on Thursday that if Finland and Sweden join NATO, the nuclear-free status of the Baltic could no longer be discussed. In an article, published on his Telegram channel on Thursday, Medvedev pointed out that when two more countries will join the alliance, Russia will have two more "officially registered" adversaries, and the length of the alliance's land borders with Russia will more than double. He said Russia has to re-

act without emotions and with a cool head, has to strengthen the boundary line with NATO, boost the land forces and air defense system, and deploy the navy in the Gulf of Finland. "In this case, it will no longer be possible to talk about any nuclear-free status of the Baltic - the balance must be restored. Until today, Russia has not taken such measures and was not going to. If we are forced - well: 'notice - it was not us who offered that,' as the hero of the famous old movie said," Medvedev noted. Medvedev said it is not relevant to tie Sweden and

Finland's admission to NATO with the situation in Ukraine as the two countries had considered joining NATO before the conflict in Ukraine started. "We do not have territorial disputes with these countries as we do with Ukraine. Therefore, the price of such a membership is different for us," he added, meaning that Ukraine's admission to NATO could lead to a direct conflict between Russia and NATO if Ukraine tried to retake Crimea. Medvedev also indicated that the public opinion in Finland and Sweden about the admission to NATO is

Tunisia hikes fuel prices for 3rd time this year

TUNIS: Tunisia raised fuel prices as of Thursday, for the third time this year. In a statement, the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy said the prices of gasoline and gas (diesel) rose by 5-10%. The ministry said the fuel price hike was triggered by the turmoil of the crude oil prices in global markets, which exceeded the threshold of \$101. Tunisia is going through a severe economic crisis aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic amid the ongoing Russian war on Ukraine. - APP

New mass grave exposes war crimes in Libya

TRIPOLI: Newly discovered mass graves in Libya continue to reveal the extent of humanitarian tragedies and war crimes committed in the North African country's civil war. Most recently, 11 more unidentified bodies were found in the Mediterranean coastal city of Sirte. While 376 bodies have been found in 94 different graves in Libya so far, only 70 of them have been identified. The General Authority for Research and Identification of Missing Persons announced the discovery of 11 bodies in a newly found mass grave in Sirte. With the mass grave discovered in the Sirte region, the number of graves found in Libya has reached 94. It was learned from the regional sources that the bone samples belonging to the corpses were sent to the regional hospitals to be examined by forensic specialists. The United Nations previously stated that the situation in Libya regarding the mass graves found in the country was very dire and made an urgent call for the criminals to be found. Most of the 94 mass graves in the country are located in the city of Tarhuna, a strategic town some 65 kilometers (41 miles) southeast of the Libyan capital of Tripoli. Tarhuna was under the control of the al-Kaniyat militia, which gained a reputation for its brutal tactics. Led by al-Kani, the militia had initially sworn allegiance to a former government in Tripoli. But it switched sides in the civil war and aligned with the east-based forces of military commander putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar in 2019. Identification of the bodies is largely impossible. Families with missing relatives in Libya want those responsible for the mass graves to be found and brought to justice. - Agencies

Baku urges Armenia to fulfil its obligation

NEWS DESK

BAKU: President Ilham Aliyev has said that communication between Azerbaijan's western regions and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is essential and Armenia must facilitate this. He made the remarks during his closing speech at a meeting dedicated to the results of the first quarter of 2022. "Armenia must also see that it cannot thwart our plans. If it doesn't grant us passage through Zangazur, it will lose and, first of all, be in violation of the November 10 statement. Because the November 10 statement explicitly states that there must be a connection between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and this is Armenia's obligation," he said.

The president stressed that if Armenia doesn't want to fulfill its obligation, then Azerbaijan will not be under any obligation to fulfill its commitments either. "They should know this and not procrastinate. We will achieve what we want sooner or later anyway," he said. Speaking about the reservoirs in liberated lands, the president underlined that Azerbaijan is currently restoring those reservoirs that were destroyed during the occupation. "The construction of the Hakarichay reservoir is on the agenda. It will be a new reservoir. The Sugovushan water reservoir and canal will be renovated... The Khachinchay reservoir and a 7-kilometer canal will be renovated," he said. The president noted that the Khachinchay reservoir is right under Mount Farrukh,

next to the Farrukh village, adding that the Armenian military positions were threatening the operation of this reservoir. "In other words, it was a huge source of danger. Shots were repeatedly fired in the direction of Aghdam from there and other villages. I think there is no one in the world who wouldn't know of Mount Farrukh, and Mount

Farrukh, the great mountain of Azerbaijan, is under our control now. The Azerbaijani flag flies there now," he said. Aliyev stressed that Mount Farrukh is of great importance for the safety of Khachinchay and the use of this water. The president noted that a special report on Armenia's environmental terror against Azerbaijan was pre-

pared and adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe a few years ago. He stated that the rivers in Azerbaijan's Karabakh were occupied and mercilessly exploited by Armenians. "The catastrophe of the Okhchuchay River is before the eyes of the world now. We have raised this issue," he said.

Noting that when raising the issue, Azerbaijan was promised that the company that caused the disaster would come and clean it up, he stressed that a year has passed now, but no proposals were received. "Cronimet is the company that contaminated the Okhchuchay River. It is a large company, and according to some foreign media, it had an illegal business relationship with representatives of Serzhik Sarkisyan's former junta regime using corruption schemes. Togeth-

er they operated the copper plant there," he said. Aliyev noted that the preparations for a legal claim in this regard with the involvement of international experts are underway. Recalling that a gas line in Karabakh where the Armenians live was in disrepair and there was no gas supply there for some time, he noted that Armenians were saying that Azerbaijan was causing a humanitarian catastrophe there. "They had cut off the gas supply for Nakhchivan for 15 years and kept it that way. The winter in Nakhchivan is harsher. The frost reached minus 30 degrees," he said. Noting that the people of Nakhchivan lived without gas from 1990 to 2005, the president underlined that Armenian leadership and state deprived them of gas.

