



Islamabad POST

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Briefs

Pak wants peaceful ties with India: PM

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday said that Pakistan desired peaceful and cooperative ties with India. Reciprocating a felicitation message of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his twitter handle, the prime minister said that the peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes including Jammu and Kashmir was indispensable. He also emphasized on securing peace and socio-economic development of the people in their respective countries.

Dissolve NAB, Abbasi tells govt

DNA

ISLAMABAD: PML-N leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Tuesday told the newly-elected government, which is being led by his party's president, Shehbaz Sharif, to dissolve the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and hold its employees accountable. "NAB's employees looted and tortured people for years. It's time they should be held accountable," he said at a media talk in Islamabad today morning. Abbasi came down on the chairman of the bureau, accusing him of "being fully under control" of PTI Chairman and former PM Imran Khan. "He used to take instructions from the previous government."

US values cooperation with Pak

APP

WASHINGTON: The United States values its long-standing cooperation with Pakistan, as Shehbaz Sharif was sworn-in as the country's prime minister. "We value our long-standing cooperation with Pakistan and have always viewed a prosperous and democratic Pakistan critical to US interests."

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meets with PPP leaders Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. - DNA

Pakistan Army takes notice of propaganda

The campaign aims to create division between the military and society

CENTRELINE REPORT

RAWALPINDI: The 79th Formation Commanders' Conference on Tuesday took note of the recent propaganda campaign by some quarters to malign Pakistan Army and create division between the military and society, said the military's media wing. Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa presided over the meeting, with corps commanders, principal staff officers, and all formation commanders of the Pakistan Army in attendance at the GHQ, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). The ISPR said that the meeting was briefed on the "professional matters, national security challenges and measures being undertaken to counter traditional and non-traditional threats". The military's media wing said that the army chief "expressed satisfaction over operational preparedness of formations and response mechanism to deal with emerging challenges". The meeting also paid tribute to the sacrifices of officers and men for the security of borders and the safety of the masses. "The forum took note of the recent propaganda campaign by some quarters to malign

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FIA starts crackdown

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has started a crackdown against social media users involved in maligning security institutions, sources said Tuesday, with five being arrested in different cities. Following directions from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the FIA launches a crackdown on people involved in the recent drive against security institutions on social media. The drive against the security institutions began with the ouster of Imran Khan as the prime minister. The detentions were made in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, the sources said. Meanwhile, PTI's leader and former information minister Fawad Chaudhry warned the government against the crackdown on social media and political rivals.

Continued on Page 06

2 terrorists killed during fire exchange

RAWALPINDI: The Security Forces on Tuesday killed two terrorists during a fire exchange occurred on the night of 11th and 12th April between the security forces and terrorists in general area Angoor Adda of South Waziristan District. The Pakistan Army troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location and resultantly, killed the terrorists whereas weapon and ammunition was also recovered from the killed terrorists, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release.

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PM tells employees Buckle up; we have work to do

Reduces 2 weekly holidays to one; advances office timings by 2 hours; order start of Metro Bus from Peshawar Morr to Airport in 5 days

SHUAAAT HAMZA / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his first day in office on Tuesday reduced two weekly off-days in government office to one and also advanced government office timings by two hours. The official timings in government offices started from 10:00 am during Ramadan but now after prime minister's orders the offices will start at 8:00 am. While addressing the PM House staff, Shehbaz Sharif warned "Tighten your belts, we are here to serve people." Panic gripped the officials as well as the staff members of the PM Office when the newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reached the office at 8:00 am on Tuesday, two hours before the start of working hours at government offices during the holy month of Ramadan. The prime minister, on the occasion, also ordered reducing two weekly

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Shehbaz Sharif given guard of honour; meets economists

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday was given guard of honour at the Prime Minister House as he assumed the responsibilities of his office. PM Shehbaz Sharif reviewed the guard of honour as the contingents of the armed forces presented salute to him. The prime minister was introduced to the officials and staff of the PM House. Shehbaz Sharif was sworn-in as the country's 23rd prime minister a day earlier after he won a no-confidence vote from

Continued on Page 06

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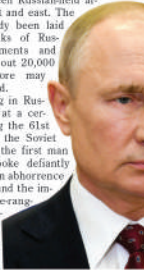
Putin defends 'noble' war amid west allegations

New Putin has cast what he calls a "special military operation" as a confrontation with the United States which he says is threatening Russia by meddling in its backyard

NEWS DESK

LIVIA: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday defended the war in Ukraine as a "noble" mission that would achieve its goals as his troops massed for a new offensive amid allegations of rape, brutality against civilians and possible use of chemical weapons. Ukrainian officials urged civilians to flee eastern areas ahead of the anticipated offensive, while the battle for the southern port city of Mariupol was reaching a decisive phase, with Ukrainian marines holed up in the Azovstal industrial district. Should the Russians seize Azovstal, they would be in full control of Mariupol, the lynchpin between Russian-held areas to the west and east. The city has already been laid waste by weeks of Russian bombardments and officials say about 20,000 people or more may have been killed. Putin, speaking in Russia's Far East at a ceremony marking the 61st anniversary of the Soviet Union putting the first man into space, spoke defiantly despite Western abhorrence at his actions and the imposition of wide-ranging international sanctions on his country. Asked by space agency

workers if the operation in Ukraine would achieve its goals, Putin said: "Absolutely. I don't have any doubt at all. 'Its goals are absolutely clear and noble,' Putin said. "We didn't have a choice. It was the right decision." He was due to meet his ally, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, to discuss Ukraine and Western sanctions while there. Putin has cast what he calls a "special military operation" as a confrontation with the United States which he says is threatening Russia by meddling in its backyard. The West says it is a brutal land grab of a sovereign country. Russia's tanks pulled out of northern Ukraine after falling in what the West believes was a mission to swiftly capture the capital Kyiv. Many of the towns they left behind were littered with the bodies of civilians killed in what Kyiv says was a campaign of murder, torture and rape. Moscow denies targeting civilians or carrying out war crimes. Russia says its campaign now aims to capture more territory on behalf of separatists in two eastern provinces, a region known as the Donbas. It includes Mariupol port, which has been reduced to a wasteland under Russian siege. Ukraine says tens of thousands of civilians have been trapped inside that city with no way to bring in food or water, and accuses Russia of blocking aid convoys.



Briefs

Government employees, welcome PM's decision

PESHAWAR: The Government employees and pensioners here Tuesday welcomed announcement of the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif regarding 10 percent increase in their salaries and pension. The labourers, farmers and general public also appreciated the newly elected Prime Minister for increasing minimum wages to record Rs 25,000 which was unprecedented in the country's history. Information Officer (Retd), Misal Khan while talking to APP said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has won hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of pensioners after announcing 10 percent increase in pension of government employees and termed it a landmark decision. He said it would provide significant relief to price-hike stricken families of pensioners in the wake of price-hike and inflation. He expressed the hope that PTI Government in KP would reciprocate the same decision as announced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for welfare of labourers, Federal Government employees and pensioners. Professor Dr Muhammad Naem of the Economics Department University of Swabi also welcomed increase in the salaries of Government employees and termed it a gift of newly elected Prime Minister for hundreds of thousands of Government employees. He said political stability was imperative for economic growth and development and inclusive fiscal and monetary policies were must for progress and prosperity of Pakistan. Labourer Muhammad Sadiq, a resident of Nowshera said the newly elected premier deserved appreciation for increasing minimum wages of labourers to Rs 25,000 that would benefit hundreds of thousands of labourers in the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. — APP

Corona positivity ratio further plunges

PESHAWAR: Positivity ratio has further plunged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as only 14 new Corona cases have been confirmed in the province during the last 24 hours, said Corona updates shared by the Health Department here on Tuesday. With the confirmation of only 14 new cases, the number of total active cases has also dropped to 452 in the province. Coronavirus has claimed 6322 lives during the period of over two years. However, no death has occurred due to the virus during the last one week. During the same period 31 patients have also been recovered from the disease in the province reaching the number of the recovered persons to 212522. — APP

Chinese envoy calls PM China's respected friend

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Charge d' Affaires of China Pang Chunxue Tuesday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and emphasized that the latter was viewed as a strong and committed friend of China and enjoyed great respect and admiration there. During the courtesy call, the charge d' affaires conveyed warm felicitations and good wishes of the Chinese government and leadership on the assumption of office by the prime minister. The charge d' affaires also lauded the prime minister's contribution to promoting China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation during the years that he was Chief Minister of the Punjab province. Conveying his warm greetings and gratitude to the Chinese leadership, the prime minister recalled his many visits to China, when he also met with President Xi Jinping who had taken a personal interest in promoting relations



with Pakistan. The prime minister appreciated CPEC's continued progress as the flagship project of President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative and its importance for economic development and prosperity of Pakistan.

He affirmed his government's resolve to speed up high quality development of CPEC projects and make it a symbol of China-Pakistan friendship and close partnership. He underlined the importance of enhanced invest-

ment from China in industrialization, agriculture, and digital technologies. Recalling his close cooperation with China as Chief Minister of Punjab, the prime minister reaffirmed the All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership

between Pakistan and China as a cornerstone of Pakistan's policy and factor for regional peace and stability. He underscored that friendship with China resided in the hearts of the people of Pakistan

and China was Pakistan's strongest friend and closest partner. The prime minister affirmed his government's commitment to further deepening the win-win economic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

FSC reserves verdict on interest monetary system

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) after hearing arguments reserved its verdict over the petitions with regard to the interest-based monetary system. A three-member bench of the FSC headed by Chief Justice Muhammad Noor Meskanzi heard the case. No representative from the Ministry of Interior appear before the court in the hearing today. Dr. Muhammad Aslam Khaki, an Islamic jurist, while seeking further time said that the meeting between the President and Attorney not yet confirmed. "It has to be seen that the schemes that have been challenged come in the definition of Riba or not," the counsel said. "No scheme has been challenged, are you opposing," the bench questioned the counsel. "I am not opposing anything, I am only trying to differentiate," Dr Aslam Khaki said. "A limited bank shares in profit and loss, charging interest on a citizen borrowing money, is unjust and it its Riba (interest)," the jurist said.

FCCI holds Pakistan Economic Conference

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) organized an epoch-making 3-day Pakistan Economic Conference (PEC) to sensitize and motivate the businessmen to transform Faisalabad from textile oriented city to a multidimensional industrial, business and commercial hub of central Punjab. Addressing the inaugural session of PEC Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh, President FCCI said that PEC-2022 will prove a game changer which would entirely change the industrial landscape of Pakistan. He welcomed the participants from all over the country, he mentioned the importance of Faisalabad in national economy and said that it has state-of-the-art M3 and Allama Iqbal Industrial estates which are open for local and foreign investors. Around 65 units with foreign investment have become functional and are providing thousands of jobs to our youth



in addition to contributing its role in Pak economy and exports. He said that being Muslim dominated population; most of our investors are reluctant to adopt conventional banking. We have arranged a special session which would dispel their apprehension about the Islamic banking system. Mr. Aitor Santiago Garin, Commercial Attaché Embassy of Spain, Islamabad appreciated the organizers of this conference and said that it would certainly attract much needed foreign investment as his country

was also contemplating to launch joint ventures in collaboration with Pakistani investors for the establishment of a well-developed Import Substitution Industry. The first formal session was on Islamic Banking. Renowned religious scholar Mufti Zubair Usmani of Jamia Darul Uloom Karachi chaired it which was also participated by Mr. Ghulam Muhammad Abbasi Director Islamic Banking Department State Bank of Pakistan, Mr. Hussain Mohi-ud-Din Qadri Vice Chancellor Minhajul Quran University Lahore

and Madam Kausar Safdar Chief Financial Officer PAIR Investment Company as panellists. Mian Muhammad Adrees former President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) was the moderator of this session and he also explained his practical experience regarding Islamic banking. Mr. Ghulam Muhammad Abbasi Director Islamic Banking Department State Bank of Pakistan said that Islamic banking system was started in Pakistan with a delay but now it is making substantial progress.

Imran Khan more dangerous as Opp. leader: Nusrat Khan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Nusrat Khan has said that PTI members have shown their conscience by resigning from the National Assembly. In a statement, he said that the imported government would soon find out that the opposition leader Imran Khan was more dangerous than Prime Minister Imran Khan. Nusrat Khan said that since independence, Pakistan's problems could



not be solved because the interest of foreign powers were protected more

than the country. The PTI leader said that Imran Khan's only fault was that he gave priority to the interest of Pakistan and only Pakistan. The present so-called government should know that the people have risen against it and will send it home. The PTI leader has said that it is such a pity that a person who is facing cases of looting billions of dollars has been made the Prime Minister of the country. — DNA

Secy reviews Ramadan bazars arrangements

SAQIB MUSHTAQ

Lodhran: Secretary Livestock South Punjab Nasir Jamal Hotiyana said that availability of affordable and quality items in Ramadan bazars is being ensured. He further said that district price control magistrates should carry out effective monitoring for eradication of artificial inflation. He said that negligence in providing relief to the people during the month of Ramadan would not be tolerated at all. He expressed these views while presiding over a high level meeting held in the Committee Room of the Deputy Commissioner's Office here today. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Capt (retd) Shoaib Ali, Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue Azuba Azem, Additional Deputy Commissioner General Ashraf Saleh, Assistant Commissioner Lodhran Farhan Mujtaba, District Price Control Magistrates and officers of other concerned departments.

The meeting reviewed in detail the administrative matters of the wheat procurement campaign including the measures to be taken for the convenience of the people in the cheap Ramadan bazars across the district. During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Capt. (R) Shoaib Ali said that Ramadan bazars are established. He further said that quota of 1,519 metric tonnes of wheat has been allocated to ensure availability of cheap flour in Ramadan bazars. He further said that 383 metric tonnes of wheat has been provided to flour mills for availability of flour in Ramadan ba-

zars and so far a total of 27,878 bags of flour weighing 10 kg have been provided to the people at cheap prices in Ramadan bazars. Deputy Commissioner Capt (retd) Shoaib Ali said that 309 metric tonnes of sugar has been allotted for Lodhran district out of which 120 metric tonnes of sugar has been lifted. He further said that 12,250 kg of sugar has been provided to the people cheaply through Ramadan bazars. He said that in Model Bazaar in front of Children Park in Lodhran Tehsil, near Veterinary Hospital in Kahrpapakka Tehsil and cheap Ramadan Bazaar has been set up on Railway Road in Tehsil Dunyapur. He further said that a place has been selected for Ramadan bazars where the citizens can easily reach and ensure the supply of quality goods as well as the best facilities. He said that Ramadan bazars should be open from 9 am to 6 pm. He said that stalls of all kinds of meat including sugar, flour, groceries, utility stores, fair price shops, ghee, fruits and vegetables have been set up in Ramadan bazars. I am available He said that sugar was being supplied in Ramadan bazars at a reduced rate of Rs. 80 per kg. He further said that 13 food items are being sold to the people at the rate of 2021 in Ramadan bazars. He said that chicken was available in Ramadan bazars at a price of Rs. 10 per kg and eggs at Rs. 5 per dozen below market rate. Deputy Commissioner Capt (retd) Shoaib Ali said Ensuring. He said that all the Ramadan bazars and markets are being directly monitored for which duty control magistrates have been assigned duty.

Deputy speaker cannot chair session, says Shazia Mari

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Central Information Secretary of PPPP and member of the National Assembly Shazia Mari has said that Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri has lost the moral grounds and legitimacy to sit on the chair of Deputy Speak-

er while united opposition had already submitted no-trust resolution against Qasim Suri under the Article 53(7-C) of the constitution of Pakistan on 8th of April in the National Assembly. This she said in a statement issued hereon today.

She said that resolution of the no confidence motion filled by the opposition should be placed in the National Assembly's agenda legally and constitutionally and informed that as per the Rule 12(3) of the National Assembly's that on the very first day, nothing would be included in the agenda of

the National Assembly's session after seven days of the already submitted no confidence motion. Shazia Mari said that the Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri should follow the Constitution and rules despite of preferring political interests while presiding over the session. She said that the date for the submission of the nominations papers for the election of the Speaker yet not announced so far Qasim Suri cannot chair the National Assembly's session to be held on April 16 and added that Qasim Suri should issue the new

Deputy Speaker's schedule of the election immediately because no-trust motion would be presented against him during the session of the National Assembly to be held on April 16, 2022. She said that the Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri has already violated the Constitution of the country and further, we would not allow him to violate the Constitution once again and she stressed upon that the position of the Deputy Speaker is neutral and one who holds this seat must defend and protect the Constitution.

Chinese companies launch 'Special Ramadan Plan' in Pakistan

Working hours have been adjusted from 9 am to 2 pm. Iftar are being organized variously with different groups

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Thousands of Pakistani workers and officials are experiencing ease in spending fast during their working hours in Chinese companies since the onset of Ramadan, according to a report published by Gwadar Pro. A number of Chinese companies have launched "Special Ramadan Plan" for Muslim staff as a considerate relief facilitating them to keep fast in true Islamic letters and spirit across Pakistan. Given the Special Ramadan Plan, Pakistani Muslim Staff

are having special allocated times for prayers, reduction in working hours, light workload and ample meal arrangements at sehri (fast-holding time) and Iftar (fast-breaking time). Meanwhile, many companies have announced additional salaries and beforehand salaries enabling Pakistani staff to manage their needs and budgets in Ramadan. Usama Hamid, senior translator in Challenge Textile, a Chinese company based in Lahore, said that under special Ramadan plan, half an hour of time has been set aside for "Asar prayer".

Meanwhile, Chinese management has allocated a separate space with prayer carpets inside the company's premises, allowing staff to do prayers conveniently. "The time-break and special prayer space have won the hearts of Muslim workers," he added. "Chinese companies allowed staff to leave work for 15 to 20 minutes before the holding and breaking of fast, allowing them to prepare themselves to perform religious practices in accordance with Islamic injunctions," he said. The special Ramadan budget is also serving staff with abundant quality food

during Sehri and Iftari times. Hafiz Hussam Sohail, a Pakistani official working as Manager of Stations in Orange Line Metro Train (OLMRT) told Gwadar Pro that all Muslim staff are in high spirit during Ramadan as the company has reduced working hours, duties and provided maximum ease from Iftari time to Sehri time since the advent of Ramadan. "Instead of 48 hours a week, Muslim staff only need to work for 36 hours. Workers have six hours cut on patrolling assignments. Drivers enjoyed nap arrangements after each trip to observe fast diligently.

There are elaborate arrangements in terms of the quality and the quantity of meals for fasting people. Another perk is that salary will be provided many days before the end of Ramadan," he detailed. China's Consul General in Lahore, Peng Zhengwu, said that Chinese companies offered more resting time for Pakistani Muslim staff in Ramadan. Most of them also send traditional gifts to Pakistanis working in various capacities in China-run enterprises. Especially in Gwadar Port where hundreds of local Muslims are at work, Chi-

na Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) has enforced Ramadan measures. Chairman of Z COPHC, Zhang Baozhong, said that all local employees are paid with a one-month additional salary to help support in the month of Ramadan. "Working hours have been adjusted from 9 am to 2 pm. Iftar are being organized variously with different groups," he added. President of Lahore Overseas Chinese Association (LOCA) Luo Jianxue said that in Ramadan, Pakistani staff in Chinese companies have less workload and shorter working hours.

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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
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April 27 / South Africa	Freedom Day
April 30 / Sweden	Birthday of His Majesty
April 30 / Netherlands	Birthday of Queen



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Kazakh CGS lauds PAF professionalism

The Air Chief said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan enjoy longstanding religious, cultural and historical bonds which are manifested through strong ties between both air forces

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Lieutenant General Khussainov Marat Rakhimovich, First Deputy Defence Minister/Chief of General Staff of Armed Forces of Kazakhstan, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force in his office today. During the meeting, both the dignitaries discussed matters of professional and mutual interest. Lieutenant General Khussainov Marat Rakhimovich commended the professionalism of PAF and acknowledged its rising indigenous capacity in aviation industry. The Air Chief said that Pakistan and Republic of Kazakhstan enjoy longstanding religious, cultural and historical bonds which are manifested through strong ties between both air forces. The Air Chief reiterated his resolve to further enhance the existing bilateral cooperation between the two brotherly countries.



OGRA, SBP discuss enhancement of oil industry's credit limit

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) Chairman Masroor Khan on Tuesday called on State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Reza Baqir and discussed matters pertaining to enhancement of credit limit to the oil industry. OGRA's Member (Oil) Zain-ul-Abideen Qureshi, the SBP Deputy Governor and his team were also present in the meeting, a news release said. The SBP confirmed that oil industry credit lines had been revisited by allowing oil industry to meet the country needs imported petroleum products. The OGRA management while appreciating the cooperation of SBP declared it a 'good step' towards facilitation of oil industry. - DNA

Three fresh Covid cases reported in capital

ISLAMABAD: Health officials on Tuesday said that three new Coronavirus cases were reported in the federal capital during the last 24 hours. According to an official of the Ministry of National Health Services, one case was reported on Monday while seven cases were reported on Sunday. He said that the figure remained high during the past months while the declining trend was observed in the last few days. He added so far 135,130 cases were reported from the federal capital and 1,023 deaths were reported from Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) while 134,036 patients had been recovered completely. He said that on the direction of the Ministry of National Health Services, the district administration of Islamabad had continued surveillance of the capital to control the transmission of the infection. The official said that the local administration had prepared a plan to regularly examine the marriage halls, markets, and petrol pumps by its inspection teams to monitor the implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs). He said that several local-level administrative decisions were being made to completely control the disease. He advised the citizens to follow precautionary measures to stop the increasing transmission of COVID-19 in the city. - APP

Eid ul Fitr preparations start in capital

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As the holy month of Ramadan has entered into second Ashra, the citizens are gearing up for starting the Eid-ul-Fitr shopping through visiting main markets of federal capital to celebrate the festivity in a fullest manner. Different famous brands as well as local markets have displayed the latest Eid editions of dresses, shoes and other essential accessories to attract the buyers and gain maximum profits. Although a number of buyers altered their mode of shopping from physical to digital one during last year's COVID situation, however, majority of the buyers still prefer visiting the shopping malls themselves to shop different items for their ultimate satisfaction. "I have started visiting the nearest shopping mall after Iftar time to complete Eid shopping for myself and family. Since the tailors have stopped taking orders of stitching dresses, so I have to buy ready to wear dresses for all my family members", Shaista Amin, a house wife said.

Railways earns Rs200.33 billion, in four years

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways (PR) has earned around Rs 200.33 billion during the last four years and also significantly decreased its working expenses to transform the organization into a profitable entity. "Pakistan Railways has earned Rs49.576 bln in 2017-18, Rs54.514 bln in 2018-19, Rs47.588 billion in 2019-20 and Rs48.652 bln in 2020-21," an official in the Ministry of Railway told APP. To question about facilitating the people of Gujranwala, he said that Khyber Mail, Tezgam Express, Awam Express, Jaffar Express, SubakRaftar and SubaukKharam were observing stoppages at main Gujranwala station. The official said that the punctuality ratio of Pakistan Railways passenger trains have improved by around 90 percent in year 2021-2022 due to untiring efforts of the management. "With the punctuality of trains and concrete measures taken by the previous government, over 20 million passengers have been added in the system, which is an ample proof of department's achievement," he added. "The quality of food served in the passenger trains had been improved considerably as it had been officially supervised by the authorities that passengers should get pure and quality food on the trains," he added. To another question, he

said Pakistan Railways had so far upgraded around 630 coaches from its own resources to increase revenue of the department and facilitate its passengers for comfortable travel. He said that 168 coaches were upgraded in 2016-17, 192 in 2017-18 and 260 coaches in 2018-19, while taking several steps to improve financial position of the organization included starting of new trains with the same rolling stock and human resources. The official said Pakistan Railways was also planning to repair another 472 coaches which were either out of service or non-functional since long and required heavy or light maintenance. - APP

8 vehicles added to CDA's water tanker fleet

ISLAMABAD: Capital Development Authority's (CDA) Water Management Wing has added eight (08) vehicles to water tankers' fleet after necessary repair and maintenance work to improve water supply at sectoral areas. The maintenance and repair work was done in workshop of Machinery Pool Organization (MPO) in short span of time following CDA chairman Aamer Ali Ahmed directions to relief the masses in the holy month said, Deputy Director

General (DG) Water Management, Sardar Khan Zimri. Talking to APP on Tuesday, he said currently the Wing possessed a fleet of around 34 water tankers to address water supply complaints from the residents. "CDA Supplying Water regularly as per available sources and Water Management Wing increased two (2) million gallons per day water on directions of authority's chairman due to Ramadan," he noted. The CDA through various measures has overcome the water shortage issue, he said, adding earlier there were around 350 daily complaints but nowadays they have been reduced to 150. Similarly, a helpline has been set up for protecting water from wastage and challans were issued to violators. - APP



ISLAMABAD: A disabled street vendor taking a nap at his roadside setup at Melody area in Federal Capital. - APP

Govt releases Rs 12,629.23 mln for Interior's Division

ISLAMABAD: The government has released an amount of Rs 12,629.23 million for various new and ongoing projects of the Interior Division under Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for year 2021-21 in last three quarters. As per the data of Planning Commission, the government had allocated a sum of Rs 21,048.715 million for various ongoing and new projects to the Interior Division under PSDP 2021-22. As per the Planning Commission, a sum of Rs 12,035.353 million has been specified for various on-going projects while Rs 9,013.362 million for new schemes. An amount of Rs 710.215 million, allocated for on-going scheme, capacity enhancement of CAF-Management of western border by raising eight additional wings for frontier corps Balochistan (North), Rs 3000.000 million for construction of 10 Avenue, Islamabad, Rs 457.000 million for construction of accommodation for Bhittai Rangers at Karachi, Rs 825.000 million for construction of Korang Bridge and PWD underpass Islamabad and Rs 800.000 million for construction of Model Prison at H-16, Islamabad. - APP

Water availability serious concern: EPA

Dr. Mehmood informed that for liquid waste management septic tanks would be established for sewage collection that would be transported to the Sewage Treatment Plant being jointly developed by the Imarat Group and Capital Enclave Society that would be completed by 2025

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) on Tuesday underscored that the water availability was a serious concern due to growing scarcity issues in the Capital for sustainable high rise residential projects. Pak-EPA Director Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Ahsan Rafi Kiani chaired the public hearing of the EIA Reports of Imarat Residences (IR) 1&2 highrise residential towers to be developed along the Expressway near Capital Enclave Housing Society. The Project Proponent for IR-1&2 DrShahidMehmood Director Imarat Groups briefed the participants on both the projects located on Expressway at parallel loca-

tions. Mehmood said the IR-1 was located at Zone-V of the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) that would comprise of three towers. The project was spreading over an area of 14,336.36 square yards (Sqyd) that would upto 29 floors for Tower A, Ground plus 17 floors for Tower B and Tower C with the two basements (each accommodating 312 cars) and elevated site for parking. He added that the IR-1 had a unique location which was accessible from all areas of the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The total covered area of the project would be 14,000 Sqyd with its 47% area as ground cover and 53% for landscaping. The IR-1 would have 467 residential units which would be completed in three years at a cost of US\$80 million when no con-

struction was carried out on the site yet. He added that the project would have minimal impact on environment and biodiversity due to its small area. While briefing on the IR-2 project, he said the project's total area was 30.4 kanals located along Expressway opposite to IR-1 that would have 933 total units. The total solid waste generation was recorded to be 3,872 kilograms per day. He informed that the keeping in view the electricity demands, energy and environmental conservation best global practices and standards were being followed to ensure a self sustainable housing project. Dr. Mehmood informed that for liquid waste management septic tanks would be established for sewage collection that would be transported to the Sewage

Treatment Plant being jointly developed by the Imarat Group and Capital Enclave Society that would be completed by 2025. Responding to various queries, he said for the availability of water three different sources including ground water, Soan water station, and Ghazi Barotha project. The Project Architect Imarat Group Mr Abdullah informed that the three towers would have central cores and have separate garbage shoots to ensure waste segregation and proper management. "We have three car parkings comprising of two basements and one elevated platform. All units and towers have been designed to have natural air and ventilation for all apartments. We will introduce vertical gardening on the roofs and terraces.

Moreover, we are using porous materials and solar panels to ensure energy conservancy under our main concept of smart development", he added. Director EIA Pak-EPA DrAhsanKiani directed the project proponent to provide detailed information of public consultation and underlined that the project cost of IR-1 was \$80 million but no mention of second project cost was made in the EIA Report. He pointed out that the water crisis was going to be the major future concern of the Capital whereas the water availability and adequacy of source was not mentioned in the EIA report. He said that the EIA Report details pertaining to electricity demands and energy conservancy were generic and should be updated accordingly.

Police to resolve public grievances on merit: IGP

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad, Muhammad Ahsan Younas Tuesday said the police were committed to resolve public grievances on merit. He said this while listening to public issues during a 'Khuli Kacheri' (Open Court) held here at Central Police Office (CPO). The IGP listened to the grievances of the public as well as police officials and marked their applications to their relevant officers and directed them to resolve them on priority basis. He directed all zonal officers to listen to public complaints and resolve them purely on merit. "No laxity will be tolerated in this regard" he added. Ahsan Younas emphasized that the police would not leave any stone unturned to save the lives and property of the citizens adding that the police were taking many steps to facilitate the public. The IGP directed all the police officials to adopt courteous attitude with the complainants visiting police stations and accomplish their responsibilities in a professional manner. - APP

DC visits Ramadan bazaars

RAWALPINDI: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi, Tahir Farooq here on Tuesday visited Haideri Chowk and Committee Chowk Ramzan Bazaars to review arrangements and checked availability of sugar, wheat flour and other essential commodities. According to a district administration spokesman, the DC also checked quality of fruits, vegetables and essential commodities and inspected the Agriculture Fair Price Shop besides checking display of the rate lists at stalls. The DC also directed the stallholders to prominently display rate lists at each stall and instructed the officers concerned to ensure cleanliness of the bazaar on daily basis. The spokesman informed that the district administration had set up 16 'Ramzan Sasta Bazaars' in Rawalpindi district to provide relief to the citizens. Sasta Ramzan Bazaars were set up in Committee Chowk, Haideri Chowk, Khayaban Sir Syed, Kamran Market, Double Road Allama Iqbal Park, Gulzar Quaid, Adiala Road, Morgah, Chakri Road, Chohan Chowk, Chungi 22 and several other tehsils including Taxila, Kahuta, Kalar Syedan, Gujran Khan and Kotli Sattian. Sugar, flour, vegetables, fruits, chicken, beef, mutton, gram flour, pulses, chickpeas, spices and several other products were available at economical prices, he said. The bazaars were set up on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Tahir Farooq to provide relief to the citizens during Ramadan ul Mubarak, he added. - APP

Commissioner directs action against wheat smugglers

RAWALPINDI: Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Noor ul Amin Mengal has directed the authorities concerned to take strict action against wheat smugglers. According to a district administration spokesman, the administration in collaboration with police and special branch, was carrying out operations and a special monitoring system had also been developed particularly for exit points of Rawalpindi division to check wheat smuggling. The spokesman informed that the officers concerned were directed to take all possible steps to control wheat smuggling. He said a comprehensive plan had been formulated to curb the smuggling of wheat. According to Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi, Tahir Farooq, the authorities were continuing the administrative measures to control the smuggling of wheat. He informed that the administration had foiled a bid to smuggle 2500 bags of wheat that were being illegally shipped out of the division here the other day. - APP

Briefs

Serving the
countrymen
his top
priority: PM

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday terming diligence, honesty, and transparency his guiding principles said serving the people of Pakistan was his topmost priority. The next day after the taking oath, PM Shehbaz Sharif assumed the responsibilities at his office at 8 pm - much earlier than the Ramadan working hours of 10 am - and said he did not want to waste an iota of the time without serving the masses. During an interaction with his staff, the prime minister directed the officials to get into the action for robust performance. The prime minister ordered a single weekly off for public departments instead of the earlier two days. Also, the public offices will open at 8 am from now onwards. Soon after holding the office, PM Shehbaz Sharif issued directives to ensure relief for the masses, including the provision of low-cost edible items at Sasta bazaars, and also stressed its strict monitoring. Sharif said he would not tolerate any irresponsibility in ensuring the provision of inexpensive commodities to the general public.

Rs1, 949.72m
released for
13 petroleum
projects

ISLAMABAD: The government has so far released funds amounting to Rs1,949.72 million to execute seven ongoing and six new petroleum-related projects under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP 2021-22) against a total allocation of Rs3,249.54 million. Out of the total disbursement of Rs1,949.72 million, around Rs313.43 million have been spent on petroleum projects during an eight-month period (July-February) of the current fiscal year to accelerate oil and gas exploration activities and achieve self-sufficiency in the energy sector, according to official data available with APP. As per the PSDP document, funds amounting to Rs1,473.683 million had been earmarked for seven ongoing schemes, out of which Rs 263 million were meant for the establishment of the National Minerals Data Centre (NMDC), Rs345.321 for the Expansion and Up-gradation of Pakistan Petroleum Core House (PETCORE), Rs30 million for Geological Mapping on 50 Toposheets, out of 354 unmapped Toposheets of Outcrop Area of Balochistan Province, Rs385.336 million for strengthening and up-gradation of Karachi Laboratories Complex (KLC) at HDIP Operations Office, Karachi, Rs 76.580 million for the supply of 13.5 MMCFD gas at Doorstep (Zero Point) of Dhabeji Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Sindh, Rs 230 million for the supply of 30 MMCFD gas at Doorstep (Zero Point) of Rashakai Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Rs143.446 million for up-gradation of POL testing facilities of HDIP at Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta and ISO Certification of Petroleum Testing Laboratory at Islamabad.

NUST
announces
Internship
Program for
Int'l students

ISLAMABAD: National University of Science and Technology (NUST) has announced a four week "Internship Program for International Students (NIPIS) 2022", starting from July 04. According to an official of NUST, the internship program will be held under mentorship of industry leaders and provide hands-on experience of labs, workshops and studios, industrial visits, recreational visits to the participants during the internship. The university will provide visa processing support, free boarding and lodging, free transportation (on/off campus) while research active faculty would be engaged for them. The internship fields include Physics, Marketing, Chemistry, Economics, Psychology, Accounting, Mathematics, Biotechnology, Transportation, Engineering (all fields), Computer Science. - APP

ICCI demands business
friendly tax environment

DNA

The incumbent government should focus on taking strong measures to create a business friendly tax environment in the country as the policy of excessive tax demands, unnecessary notices to taxpayers and recovery proceedings have failed to increase tax revenue. This was said by Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) while talking to members of business community at Chamber House. Jamsaid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President, Basir Daud former President, Muhammad Naveed Malik former Senior Vice President, Ashfaq Hussain Chatha former Vice President ICCI and Raja Safer were present at the occasion. Muhammad Shakeel Munir said that the coercive tax measures and imposition of high tax rates have always promoted tax evasion and it was high time that the new government should focus on reducing high tax rates in



the forthcoming budget that would encourage voluntary tax compliance and expand tax base. He said the approach of over enforcement has always created an environment of fear and harassment in the business community and this approach should be changed towards promot-

ing a culture of voluntary tax compliance that would be more effective in increasing tax collection. He said that the government should consider offering some good tax incentives in the upcoming budget to the business community in order to boost their confidence and accelerate

the pace of business activities in the country. He also stressed necessary reforms in the tax system as over 52 percent tax collection was made from the import stage, which was not a wise approach. Jamsaid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President and Muhammad Faheem Khan

Vice President ICCI said that Pakistan needed to promote industrialization in order to create new jobs for youth, improve exports and enhance tax collection. To achieve this goal, it was necessary that the government in the forthcoming budget should reduce customs duties and

taxes on the import of industrial machinery and technology. They said that a cut in import duty on machinery and technology would also help in upgrading the industries to produce value added products that would make significant increase in exports.

PBM to provide
scholarships to
400 students

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with three universities to provide scholarships to 400 deserving students. The MoU was inked with Federal Urdu University, Women University of Mardan and Thal University Bhakkar to keep the deserving students to continue pursuing their studies. Under the MoUs, PBM would support 100 deserving students of Federal Urdu University, 200 post-graduate deserving students of Women University of Mardan and 100 deserving students of Thal University Bhakkar every year. Managing Director PBM, Malik Zaheer Abbas Khokhar signed the MoUs

with the Incharge Federal Urdu University, Dr. Amir Nadeem, Vice Chancellor Women University of Mardan, Prof. Dr. Ghazala Yasmeen and Vice Chancellor Thal University of Bhakkar, Dr. Islam Ullah. Addressing the ceremony, Managing Director PBM, Malik Zaheer Abbas said PBM was leading the country towards a social welfare state with its eminent pro-poor services. He further highlighted the PBM's proactive contribution towards poverty reduction in the country. Managing Director PBM also expressed his enthusiasm to support the deserving and promising students of the country enabling them to complete their education. - APP

Pak exports to
Italy increase
34% to \$651m

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exports of goods and services to Italy witnessed an increase of 34.69 percent during the first eight months of fiscal year (2021-22) against the exports of corresponding period of last year. The overall exports to Italy were recorded at \$651.691 million during July-February (2021-22) against exports of \$483.830 million during July-February (2020-21), showing growth of 34.69 percent, according to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the exports to Italy also increased by 18.88 percent by going up from \$68.825 million during February 2021 against the exports of \$81.826 million in February 2022, the SBP data revealed. On month-on-month basis the export to Italy also witnessed nominal increase of 0.80 percent in February 2022 as compared to the exports of

\$81.176 million in January 2021. Overall Pakistan's exports to other countries witnessed an increase of 28.11 percent in eight months, from US \$16.092 billion to US \$ 20.616 billion. On the other hand, the imports from Italy during the period under review were recorded at \$534.571 million against \$347.776 million last year, showing growth of 53.71 percent during the first eight months of fiscal year 2021-22. Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the imports from Italy increased by 40.66 percent, by going up from \$41.462 million during February 2021 against the exports of \$58.323 million in February 2022, the data revealed. On month-on-month basis the imports from Italy however witnessed decrease of 40.93 percent in February 2022 as compared to the exports of \$98.745 million in January 2022. The overall imports into the country increased by 49.11 percent, from US \$32.123 billion to US \$47.901 billion.

AIOU relaunches
English access micro
scholarship program

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in collaboration with US Consulate has re-launched English Access Micro Scholarship Program in Gujranwala Region. The purpose of this initiative is to provide access to youngster education and employment opportunities through language teaching. According to Dr. Saira Maqbool, Program Coordinator, this 2-year English Access Micro Scholarship

Program is funded by the US Consulate in Lahore. AIOU has offered this program again after the successful conclusion of its first batch. 800 forms were received, and 100 students including 50 girls and 50 boys were selected after a written test and interview. This program is offered to the students of Gujranwala. Classes will be held thrice a week at the University's Regional Campus

Gujranwala after school hours. The program is free and the students will receive a US Certification after the completion of this course. As per the approval of Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum, 100 tablets have been purchased for academic purposes for selected students. He expressed his hope that the English Access Micro Scholarship Program would highlight

the new generation's ability to compete and participate in higher education. Regional Director Gujranwala campus AIOU, Dr. Qaiser Kazmi welcomed Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, Director Language Program, US Consulate and Program Coordinators, Dr. Saira Maqbool and Samina Rana who visited the Regional Campus to give a detailed briefing on the program to the selected students. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters enjoy bathing in the water to get some relief during hot weather at Federal Capital. - DNA

IGP directs arrangements to
solve Pindi's traffic
problem

RAWALPINDI: Inspector General of Punjab Police Rao Sardar Ali Khan on Tuesday directed to ensure best arrangements for solution of traffic problems in Rawalpindi city under a comprehensive strategy. The Inspector General of Police said that special attention should be paid to the security of mosques, imambarahs and Ramzan bazaars and markets during

the holy month. The IGP expressed these views while instructing the officers during the inauguration of the newly constructed Memorial of Martyrs and presiding over the meeting with the children of the martyrs on his visit to the Police Lines Headquarters Rawalpindi, said a news release. On arrival at Rawalpindi Police Lines, the children of Constable Muhammad

Mazhar Hussain Shaheed and Inspector Imran Abbas Shaheed presented bouquets to IG Punjab. IGP also laid flowers at the memorial and offered prayers for higher ranks of martyrs. On the occasion, police contingent extended salutations to IG Punjab whereas IG Punjab presented honorary shields and gifts to the children of martyrs at CPO office.

The IGP stressed upon taking concrete steps against criminals and organized crime. He also ordered to increase duty hours of patrolling forces in vicinity of major highways, business and public centers. The IG Punjab directed that measures should be taken on priority basis to enhance the welfare and efficiency of the force. - APP

Lok Virsa to
hold series
of training
courses in
folk, crafts &
folk music

ISLAMABAD: National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage-LokVirsa is planning to hold a series of training courses in folk crafts and folk music from next month (May-October). With an objective to promote traditional skills and inculcate awareness among the masses particularly youth students about the indigenous folk culture of Pakistan. In this regard the schedule of the courses included calligraphy, truck art, block printing, pottery and folk singing harmonium playing, said a press release issued here. There is no age limit to join these courses by any individual male or female who wants to learn traditional skills can apply for these courses. Courses fee is Rs 2,000/- per head per month non-refundable, fee will be charged in advance, fee once paid will not be refunded, payment can only be made by visiting lokvirsa office. Lokvirsa will arrange for resource persons/artisans/master trainers for the courses and take care of other arrangements involved. Participants will arrange for training material at their own purchasing the material. All individuals are requested to register themselves by providing following information in the form and payment of course fee. - APP

NCHD to
take various
activities
in Gilgit

ISLAMABAD: National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) would take various activities with prime focus in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) aiming to enhance future interventions through donors. Talking to APP, senior official of NCHD said with the development of a long-term strategy, Gilgit-Baltistan will have a clear way forward for quality education, and will be in a strong position to attract both government and donor funding to support it. He said the Department of Education will be able to prepare coherent annual and long-term plans, and can identify funding gaps and coordinate the inputs of development partners to create a coherent programme. Adding he said this in turn will pave the way towards establishing a Gilgit-Baltistan Sector-Wide Approach, led by the government and supported by development partners, formulating medium-term and long-term programmes within the framework of the long-term strategy. The key to the development of the vision and strategy was a public consultation exercise, in which over 1000 stakeholders from all walks of life throughout Gilgit-Baltistan were consulted to ascertain their views regarding the development of education in the region, he said. This vision and strategy was gradually refined through internal discussions and further consultations with all stakeholders, including representatives from the original public consultation exercise, and officials at Gilgit-Baltistan and federal level. - APP

PTA intro-
duces mecha-
nism to curb
pornographic
content

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) with joint efforts, close coordination of the telecom industry and other stakeholders has introduced mechanism to curb pornographic content. "To curb pornographic, indecent content as defined in Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA 2016) Section 37, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has implemented Central Domain Name System (C-DNS) policy enforcement mechanism to ensure the automated effective and seamless blocking of unlawful content in real-time" said a news release issued here on Tuesday. The authority inaugurated the mechanism at PTA Headquarters. The C-DNS mechanism was developed with months of joint efforts and close coordination with the telecom industry and other stakeholders. - APP

PBF hopes PM would cope the crises of economy

It is also a inevitable reality there had been a zero increase in average income as Pakistan never shook off the balance of payment (BoP) crisis

ISLAMABAD: Vice President of Pakistan Businesses Forum (PBF) Ahmad Jawad has extended his heartfelt congratulations to Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to sworn as 23rd Prime Minister of Pakistan. Talking to newsmen, PBF VP hoped that Shahbaz Sharif as Prime Minister would steer the country out of the multi-faceted challenges being confront-

ed the country. "It is extremely unfortunate that a government that millions had pinned high hopes on has ended in such colossal failure". However Ahmad Jawad on behalf of the PBF, assured Shehbaz Sharif of best co-operation and assistance in initiating business friendly economic and commercial policies as these policies have a direct bearing on

trade and industry. He wished Shehbaz Sharif every success in fulfilling his new responsibilities and dream of making 'Economic Pakistan' a reality. He also said Sharif personifies both the vision and the ability to deliver the vision in practical form. "It's not only his strategic vision of where to take his province but also a practical capacity to implement

that vision in the day to day life of his country and his city. That's something completely unique in my experience in the developing world. I have never seen anyone who is that capable of matching vision and execution as Shehbaz Sharif was". On the economic front, he hoped that Prime Minister Sharif would now prioritise some of the urgent economic

issues being faced by the country. The main issue which country is facing is inflation and weakening of the rupee. The PM may address these issue on priority so that common man may get relief and that would be only possible when PKR would be strengthened. He also urged the new economic team to revisit the free float policy of the rupee

because its not suitable for us. It is also a inevitable reality there had been a zero increase in average income as Pakistan never shook off the balance of payment (BoP) crisis. Similarly trade with regional countries may be on priority of the new government including Iran and India. Also the 2nd phase of the CPEC may execute speedily. - APP

Macron v Le Pen

AS the smoke cleared following the first round of France's presidential election on Sunday, the most significant political speech of the night was arguably delivered by one of the losers. After coming unexpectedly close to beating Marine Le Pen to second place in the race, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the hard-left leader of France Unbowed, urged his supporters not to vote for her in the runoff between Emmanuel Macron on 24 April. "There must not be one single vote for Le Pen in the second round," said Mr Mélenchon.

The bluntness of the message indicates the gravity of a political moment that feels alarmingly unpredictable and unreadable. Mr Macron secured 28% of the first-round vote. His four-point lead over Ms Le Pen was actually slightly bigger than five years ago, when he went on to win their head-to-head confrontation by a landslide. But the context of 2017 – when Mr Macron was seen as a fresh-faced liberal insurgent promising democratic renewal, and Ms Le Pen was struggling and failing to detoxify her brand – no longer applies. This time round, polls suggest a far tighter contest in two weeks, with some suggesting that the gap between the two candidates is within the margin of error; for the first time in the 64-year history of the Fifth Republic, the French far right has a genuine – if outside – chance of winning the presidency. How did France get here? Clever PR has enabled Ms Le Pen to successfully soften her public image, while the ongoing collapse of the centre-left and centre-right has normalised her presence in the spotlight. The emergence of a far-right rival in the form of the xenophobic television pundit Éric Zemmour has also helped, allowing the National Rally leader to present herself as a relative moderate while preparing to inherit his support. In the runoff, she will be able to consolidate a far-right bloc of more than 30% of voters.

A president sometimes perceived as aloof, high-handed and on the side of the wealthy – and whose relations with much of the left have ranged from tricky to toxic – thus faces the biggest test of his political career. Perhaps understandably, given his focus on events in Ukraine, Mr Macron has fought a lacklustre and lethargic campaign so far. His visit on Monday to a depressed post-industrial region in northern France signalled a change of gear. Between now and 24 April, Mr Macron must find a way to shore up a "republican front" of anti-far-right voters that appears dangerously fragile. The reckoning as to how it was ever allowed to get this close can come later.

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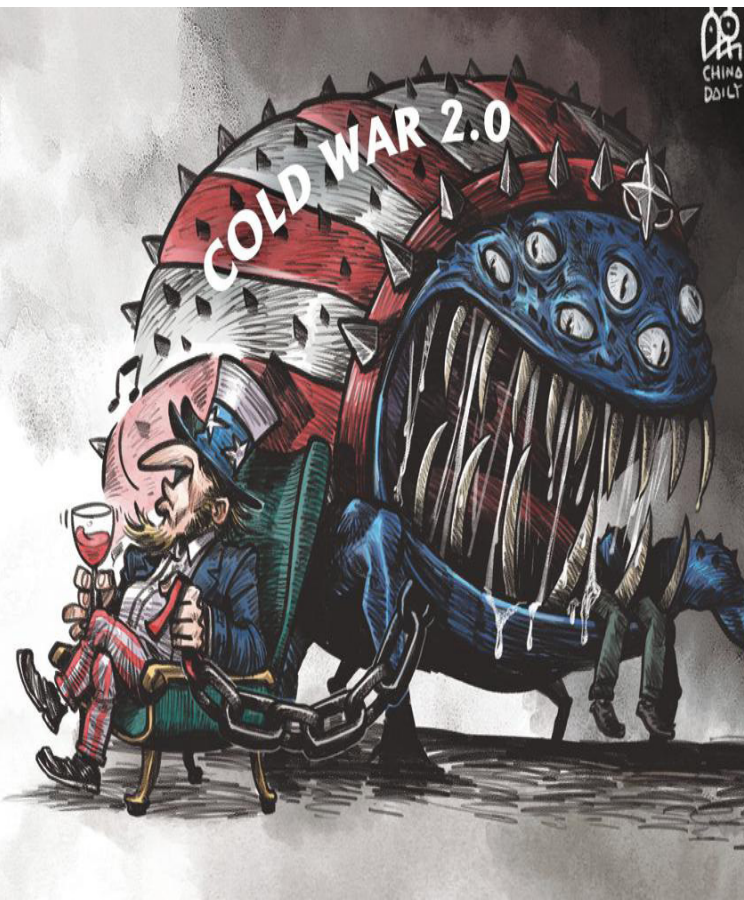
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Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



Hindu nationalism will ultimately harm all of India

Ruben Banerjee



The country, they say, would instead need freedoms, trust and stability to progress

THE ideology will likely leave India divided, weaker and poorer. India marked the festival of Ram Navami – commemorating the birthday of the Hindu deity Lord Ram – with gusto on April 10. But more than the customary celebrations that normally define such pious occasions, the day will be best remembered for the many acts of criminality that swept every corner of the vast nation. Across the Indian states this Sunday, marauding mobs of Hindu fanatics were out on the streets raising provocative slogans against minority communities, primarily Muslims, and vandalising mosques. In some places, they carried out physical assaults. Lord Ram embodies love and remains synonymous with righteous rule. But there was little that was righteous about the manner his birthday was celebrated this time. Amid reports of violence pouring in from various states – from Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east – even Delhi, the nation's capital, wasn't spared. At its sprawling Jawaharlal Neh-

ru University, known to be a citadel of left-wing liberalism, right-wing activists reportedly attacked students to prevent them from having meat on such an "auspicious" day. Scores were injured and dozens were arrested following the fracas. Minor details, such as Indians being overwhelmingly non-vegetarian, with surveys showing that some 70 percent of them regularly consume meat, mattered little to the assailants. An outspoken section of high-caste Hindus has long been peddling the misplaced religious virtues of vegetarianism, and the Hindutva (Hindu supremacy) brigade that is bent on establishing the supremacy of Hindus is attempting to force the rest of India to adhere to it.

Coming in the wake of a spate of assaults directed at minorities – from lynching Muslim cattle traders to the orchestrated opposition against students who wore the Hijab, the Muslim headscarf – Sunday's Ram Navami served the newest evidence that India is dangerously hurtling down the road of unabashed Hindutva.

But India is a diverse country where Hindus make up some 80 percent of the population. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and others make up the rest of the country, where 22 official languages are spoken across regions rooted in different landscapes, customs and traditions. Needless to say, the hegemonic vision of Hindutva does not sit well with an India that has always celebrated its unity in diversity. Many, therefore, are immensely concerned about its ultimate consequences. Muslims, for that matter, already have reasons to be worried. In state after state, they have been targeted, vilified and browbeaten; the latest being the Muslim traders of Karnataka state who have been barred from setting up shop in temple fairs. Before that, their right to offer prayers at designated places was curtailed in places such as Gurgaon, near Delhi. There is now a campaign to ban mosque loudspeakers. Suddenly, these 200 million Muslims can be excused for feeling less Indian. Report after report has indicated

that as a community they have not been doing well. For example, less than three percent of Indian executives in the top 500 companies are Muslim, and no more than 21 percent of Muslim workers have salaried jobs, compared to 33 percent of Hindus. The current situation, high on religious hatred and steeped in growing intolerance, will make it worse for them.

If some among the community are to be believed, many Muslims who have the means are already leaving India for safer places. Those who cannot are putting their head down and withdrawing further into themselves, accelerating the process of ghettoisation.

As it is, India isn't doing too well economically. Growth has been sluggish, inflation high and unemployment is on the rise. The overall unemployment was at 7.6 percent, as of the end of March. It could get worse if hatred and strife are allowed to spiral. As many economists say, hate and paranoia are not exactly the means for societies to prosper. According to them, India is unlikely to become an economic powerhouse if it excludes its minorities – some one-fifth of the population – from economic activity.

The country, they say, would instead need freedoms, trust and stability to progress. And entrepreneurs, irrespective of their caste, creed and religion, would be required to innovate and inspire. Hindutva fanatics are continuing on their path of muscular nationalism though, undeterred by the commonly voiced apprehensions. They are apparently out to rediscover the lost glory that India forfeited during its long Mughal and latter-day British rule.

But they could be living in a paradise – a fool's paradise to be precise. Using inherently divisive religious nationalism to produce economic growth is the same as using the timber industry to increase the population of trees, a columnist pointed out recently. Many tend to agree that Hindutva will leave India divided, weaker and a lot poorer.

Courtesy: TRT World

No amount of Israeli violence will change reality of Palestine conflict

Ramzy Baroud

To placate angry Israelis, the Israeli military has in the past raided the city and refugee camp of Jenin on many occasions, each time leaving several dead or wounded Palestinians behind...

THERE is a reason Israel is insistent on linking the recent series of attacks carried out by Palestinians to a specific location, namely the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank. By doing so, the embattled Naftali Bennett government can simply order another deadly military operation in Jenin to reassure its citizens that the situation is under control. Indeed, on Saturday, the Israeli army stormed the Jenin camp, killing a Palestinian and wounding at least 10 others. However, Israel's problem is much bigger than Jenin.

If we examine the events – starting with the March 22 stabbing attack in the southern city of Beersheba, which resulted in the death of four Israelis, and ending with the killing of three Israelis in Tel Aviv, including two army officers – we can reach an obvious conclusion: These attacks must have been, to some extent, coordinated. Spontaneous Palestinian retaliation to the violence of the Israeli occupation rarely follows this pattern in terms of timing or style. All the attacks,

with the exception of Beersheba, were carried out using firearms. The shooters, as indicated by the amateur footage of some of the events and statements by Israeli eyewitnesses, were well trained and acted with great composure.

An example was the March 27 Hadera attack, carried out by two cousins, Ayman and Ibrahim Ighbariah, from the Arab town of Umm Al-Fahm inside Israel. Israeli media reported the unmistakable skills of the attackers and the fact they were armed with weapons that, according to the Tazpit Press Service, cost more than \$30,000.

Unlike Palestinian attacks carried out during the Second Intifada in response to Israeli violence in the Occupied Territories, the recent attacks are generally more pinpointed, seek police and military personnel, and are clearly aimed at shaking Israel's false sense of security and undermining the country's intelligence services. In the Bnei Brak attack on March 29, for example, an Israeli woman who was at the scene told reporters that "the militant asked us to move away from the place because he did not want to target women or children." While Israeli intelligence reports recently warned of a "wave of terrorism" ahead of Ramadan, they clearly had little idea of what type of violence to expect or where and how the Palestinians would strike.

Following the Beersheba attack, Israeli officials referred to Daesh's responsibility – a convenient move considering that the group had claimed responsibility. This theory was quickly marginalized, as it became obvious that the other Palestinian attackers had other political affiliations or, as in the Bnei Brak case, no known affiliation at all. The confusion and misinformation continued for days. A number of Palestinian workers were quickly rounded up in Tel Aviv on suspicion of being the attackers simply because they looked Arab, offer-

ing evidence of the chaotic Israeli approach. Indeed, following each event, total mayhem ensued, with large mobs of armed Israelis taking to the streets looking for anyone with Arab features to apprehend or beat senseless. Israeli officials have contributed to the frenzy, with far-right politicians like Itamar Ben-Gvir leading hordes of other extremists on rampages in occupied Jerusalem.

Israeli officials and media are, once again, conveniently placing the blame largely on Jenin, a tiny stretch of an overpopulated area. By doing so, Israel wants to give the impression that the new phenomenon of retaliatory Palestinian attacks is confined to a single place, which is adjacent to the Israeli border and can easily be "dealt with." An Israeli military operation in the camp may serve Bennett's political agenda, convey a sense of strength and win back some in his disenchanted political constituency. But it is only a temporary fix. Attacking Jenin now makes no difference in the long run. After all, the camp rose from the ashes of its near-total destruction by the Israeli military in April 2002.

The renewed Palestinian attacks speak of a much wider geography: The Negev, Umm Al-Fahm and the West Bank. The seeds of this territorial connectivity are linked to the Israeli war of last May and the subsequent Palestinian rebellion, which erupted in every part of Palestine, including the Palestinian communities inside Israel.

Israel's problem is its insistence on providing short-term military solutions to a long-term problem, which itself results from these very military solutions. If Israel continues to subjugate the Palestinian people under the current system of military occupation and deepening apartheid, Palestinians will surely continue to respond until their oppressive reality is changed. No amount of Israeli violence can alter this truth.

Courtesy: Arab News

Curbs must remain at place

THE recent global rise in Covid-19 cases has worried experts and public health officials. New worldwide infections have jumped by 8 per cent globally compared to the previous week, with 11 million new cases. As per the WHO, a combination of factors, including the highly transmissible Omicron variant and its BA. 2 sublineage, and the lifting of public health and social measures in several countries, have contributed to the current spike. Low vaccination rates in some countries, driven partly by a "huge amount of misinformation" also explained the rise in new cases, WHO officials noted.

Some of the biggest jumps in Covid-19 cases have been reported in South Korea and China, where cases rose by 25 per cent and deaths by 27 per cent during recent weeks. During this time Africa saw a 12 per cent rise in new cases and 14 per cent rise in deaths, and Europe a 2 per cent rise in cases but no big jump in deaths. While cases are on the rise in some geographies, there are no signs that it causes more severe disease.

In China where the spike is marked, the big jump in cases in Shanghai has resulted in mass Covid testing even as 26 million people face lockdown. Beijing has tightened curbs elsewhere in the country – consistent with the country's zero-tolerance policy to prevent its medical system from breaking down. At present the world is witnessing 1.5 million new cases each day. Large outbreaks are spreading in Asia. A new wave is sweeping across Europe. Presently BA. 2 is the dominant strain circulating around the US, accounting for almost three out of every four cases. Broadly the cases have dipped 5 per cent across the US to an average of about 28,700 cases from an average of more than 30,000 cases a fortnight ago. While experts note that a significant rise in hospitalisations or deaths is not expected, there have been signs of hospitalisations rising among the elderly in other countries like the UK.

The current situation calls for a balanced approach. While the world cannot afford to remain captive to Covid forever, we need to keep our guard up. National governments around the world must speed up the administration of the booster dose of the vaccine by opening it up for all. Countries where Covid relaxations are in place, health care infrastructure should remain in top gear. Testing must continue as also common sense measures like masking and sanitising.

Not only Ukrainians, but all refugees deserve compassion

Nhial Deng

That is, actually, more people than the entire population of Ukraine. In each refugee camp, each IDP (internally displaced people) camp, and each less formal refugee settlement, from Ethiopia...

IT has been more than a month since Russia embarked on an all-out invasion of Ukraine. A whole nation has been in despair since troops started moving towards Kyiv on February 24. Entire towns have been destroyed. Tens of thousands have perished. And more than four million people had to flee their homes to seek safety in neighbouring countries.

Day after day we watched tragic, but somewhat familiar, scenes on our screens: mothers running with babies in their arms, families searching for their possessions in the rubble of their homes, thousands of desperate refugees crowding border zones.

But among the footage from Ukraine, there were also some not so familiar scenes: border guards of neighbouring countries welcoming refugees with open arms; citizens hosting Ukrainians in need of accommodation in their own homes; politicians giving speech after speech outlining what they will do to help those fleeing the war; universities offering places to students from Ukraine so they can continue their studies.

I was, of course, pleased to see the world unite to support Ukrainians. As someone who knows the horrors of war all too well, I sympathise and stand in solidarity with all those fleeing Russia's brutal invasion. But like so many people who have had to flee a war, as I watched the Ukrainian refugee crisis unfold, I could not help but ask: Where were these world leaders, corporations and universities when armed invaders attacked and burned my village just 11 years ago? Where were the people of goodwill offering for me to stay with them instead of being stuck in a refugee camp for a decade? I have known forced displacement and war all my life. I was born and raised in a small village in Ethiopia where my father had settled after fleeing the first Sudanese civil war. When I was young, my father told me countless stories about his life in South Sudan. He told me not only about the beautiful village by the Nile where he spent his childhood, but also about the times he had to run and hide from helicopters

dropping bombs. In 2010, my father's story became my own. My small village in Ethiopia was attacked by armed militias, and I became a refugee. Eleven years later, I am still a refugee. All my family members are still refugees. I am lucky to be living and studying temporarily in Canada, but my family is still stuck in a refugee camp.

The war did not just steal my home and my childhood. It stole my family's future. How different our lives would be now if the world had responded to my father's cry for help some five decades ago with the same compassion and care it is now offering to Ukrainians?

Or 11 years ago, when our village in Ethiopia was attacked? My family and I are in no way part of an unlucky minority. According to the United Nations, before the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, there were already an unbelievable 82.4 million forcibly displaced people across the world.

That is, actually, more people than the entire population of Ukraine. In each refugee camp, each IDP (internally displaced people) camp, and each less formal refugee settlement, from Ethiopia to Bangladesh and Lebanon to Mexico, there are countless children, men and women who want nothing but safety, stability and a place to call home permanently.

There are teachers, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, students, mothers and fathers who just want to leave the pain and suffering of the past behind, live their lives and contribute to society. It showed us that the international community can embrace those fleeing war. That the governments can swiftly set up safe pathways for those seeking refuge. That universities and schools can offer places to refugee children to ensure they do not have to give up on their futures due to war and hardship. That common citizens can step up and speak up so the human rights of refugees in their countries are respected.

As the war in Ukraine continues, I cannot help but fear the international community will soon get used to the situation in Ukraine – like it got used to the endless wars in many other countries – and turn its back on Ukrainians in need. I also fear that once this crisis is over, governments and people who suddenly showed care and compassion to refugees will return to business as usual – they will continue to ignore the plight of those fleeing war, conflict and hardship elsewhere in the world.

In the past month, the international community showed what it is capable of doing for people fleeing conflict. Let us not forget this, and repeat this successful example in other geographies and conflicts. Because every child, every human being, everywhere, deserves peace and a place to call home.

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Briefs

Buckle up;
we have
work to do

FROM PAGE 01
offs at government offices to one besides the provision of quality food items to people at Ramazan Bazaars at cheaper rates. Shehbaz gave instructions to the concerned officials to keep an eye on vendors at Ramazan Bazaars to ensure they did not sell items at exorbitant rates. He made it clear that he would not tolerate any leniency in this regard. Similarly, he ordered that from now on office timings during Ramazan would start at 8:00 am instead of 10:00 am. The PM also ordered immediate implementation of the announcements he had made yesterday regarding raise in pensions and fixing minimum wages of labourers at Rs25,000. Shehbaz also met with the staff members of his office, and urged them to get ready to serve the masses, saying each and every moment was precious. Shehbaz Sharif was presented guard of honour at Prime Minister House after he assumed responsibilities of the office of country's chief executive. The contingents of armed forces presented salute to him as the premier reviewed the guard of honour. The new PM also met with the officials and staff of the PM House. On Monday night, Shehbaz Sharif took oath as the 23rd prime minister of Pakistan. Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani administered the oath to him as President Dr Arif Alvi went on leave. Earlier in the day, the National Assembly elected Shehbaz Sharif as new prime minister while the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) boycotted the election process and announced tendering en masse resignations. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) chaired the House and completed the PM election process. Shehbaz received 174 votes while his opponent Shah Mehmood Qureshi did not get a single vote as all the PTI MNAs left the assembly before the election. The cabinet division notified that Shehbaz had sworn in. According to the notification, Shehbaz became prime minister. After assuming charge of his office, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was briefed about the internal and public relations departments of the PM Office. While meeting with PM Office staff, Shehbaz asked them that without wasting time steps would be taken for the welfare of the public. He told them that he was punctual and expected his staff to be on time and do their duties honestly.

Shehbaz
Sharif given
guard of...

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the National Assembly against his predecessor Imran Khan. Later, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired an urgent meeting of economic experts and discussed the ways to address current financial challenges being faced by the country. The meeting attended by prominent economists deliberated upon the means to find a solution for country's financial stability, the PM Office said. The prime minister was given a briefing on the data of national balance-sheet and fiscal deficits. Important decisions will be taken in line with the recommendations of the experts.

2 terrorists
killed
during fire
exchange

FROM PAGE 01
The killed terrorists remained actively involved in terrorist activities against security forces, it said. The ISPR added that during the intense exchange of fire, Major Shujaat Hussain (age 30 years, resident of Toba Tek Singh) and Sepoy Imran Khan (age 27 years, resident of Naseerabad), after having fought gallantly, embraced Shahadat (martyrdom). "Area clearance is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area. Pakistan Army is determined to eliminate menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave officers and soldiers further strengthen our resolve", it said. — APP

UK PM to be fined over
Covid lockdown parties

The so-called "Partygate" scandal, which emerged in late 2021, has sparked the most serious threat to Johnson's premiership to date. Revelations that the Prime Minister attended several parties had already prompted furious calls for him to resign

MONITORING DESK

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his finance minister Rishi Sunak have been told they will be fined by police over lockdown-breaking parties held on UK government premises, a Downing Street spokesperson told CNN on Tuesday. London's Metropolitan Police said earlier Tuesday they had issued more than 50 fines as part of their "Operation Hillman" investigation into gatherings held on government premises in Downing Street and Whitehall while the rest of the country was living under strict pandemic restrictions. Revelations of the parties sparked national outrage. The police fines are confirmation that Johnson and Sunak broke Covid-19 laws created by their own government — even though the Prime Minister previously denied some parties were held and insisted all guidance was followed. The penalty makes Johnson the first sitting UK Prime Minister to be found guilty of breaking the law. It was unclear which gatherings Johnson and Sunak were facing fines over; the government spokesman said they had no fur-

ther details as of now. Carrie Johnson, the Prime Minister's wife, will also receive a fine, her spokesperson told CNN.

The so-called "Partygate" scandal, which emerged in late 2021, has sparked the most serious threat to Johnson's premiership to date. Revelations that the Prime Minister attended several parties had already prompted furious calls for him to resign even before Tuesday's announcement of a police fine. Johnson's handling of the scandal also sparked condemnation. The Prime Minister initially rebuffed allegations of illegal gatherings by saying there were no parties. When

images from these gatherings started to appear in UK media, he said he didn't know about them and that he was outraged. After another image emerged showing him and his wife allegedly attending one such party, he apologized, but said he thought he was attending "a work event."

The police launched an investigation into the string of gatherings after a January report by senior civil servant Sue Gray, commissioned by the government, condemned "a serious failure" to observe the standards of government. The Gray report said the police were investigating at least 12 events — including at least two

Johnson attended, and a third held in his flat that he previously told lawmakers did not happen. The police said later it was investigating events taking place on eight separate dates between May 2020 and April 2021. Boris Johnson condemned over 'failures of leadership' in 'Partygate' report. The Met said in a statement it was given more than 300 photos and 500 pages of information to review during the investigations. Reacting to Tuesday's development, the main opposition Labour party leader Keir Starmer immediately demanded that Johnson and Sunak step down. "Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have broken the law and repeatedly lied to the British public. They must both resign. The Conservatives are totally unfit to govern. Britain deserves better," Starmer tweeted.

London mayor Sadiq Khan also called for Johnson to quit, saying "a Prime Minister who breaks the laws his Government makes and then lies about it isn't fit for office." "Families made huge sacrifices and obeyed the law. Many said their last goodbyes to loved ones on the phone while the Prime Minister partied," Khan added in a statement on Facebook.

Clijsters retires from
tennis for third time

BRUSSELS: Kim Clijsters announced on Tuesday that the third—and likely final—chapter of her illustrious tennis career has come to a close, ending an odyssey that began when she first turned pro 25 years ago and yielded 52 titles in total. "I have decided to no longer play official tournaments," she wrote on Instagram. "I can't wait to see what new adventures will cross my path. Thank you to everyone who has supported me over the past two years!" A former No. 1 in both disciplines and six-time Grand Slam champion—four in singles, two in doubles—Clijsters shocked the tennis world at the end of 2019 when she revealed plans to make a third attempt at playing on the WTA tour. "I don't feel like I need to prove anything, but I want to challenge myself and I want to be strong again," she told WTA Insider at the



time. "This is my marathon. This is where I'm saying 'OK, let's try this.'" She went on to play her first match in over seven years at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships in February 2020, acquitting herself well in two competitive sets against Garbine Muguruza and giving the tennis world reason to believe that, even in her late 30s, her inimitable ball striking made her an immediate contender. After all, it wasn't the first time Clijsters made a sur-

prising return to action. Two years after bidding an abrupt farewell to the sport in 2007, the Belgian superstar came back just as quickly in 2009, winning the US Open in just her third tournament back. Clijsters would defend her title the following year and win a first Australian Open in 2011 shortly before earning a brief return to the No. 1 ranking she'd first earned in 2003. One half of an iconic rivalry with countrywoman Jus-

tine Henin, Clijsters' initial stint atop the WTA rankings came a full two years before she won her first major title. Though she had come close to victory with a pair of runner-up finishes at Roland Garros, there were some that questioned whether the amiable "Aussie Kim"—so named first for her relationship with fellow player Lleyton Hewitt, and later for her major win Down Under—was "too nice" to compete with the fiercely competitive Henin or the Williams sisters—all of whom had gotten the better in major clashes. Clijsters turned that narrative on its head after missing much of the following season due to a persistent wrist injury, winning a rare "Sunshine Double" at Indian Wells and Miami and putting together a near-perfect summer to finally win her first Slam at the 2005 US Open. — Agencies

Rafa Nadal skips
Barcelona Open

BARCELONA: Rafa Nadal is still uncertain when he can return to competitive tennis after withdrawing from this month's ATP Barcelona as he recovers from a rib injury, his team told Reuters on Tuesday. The Spaniard, who has won 21 Slam singles titles, was ruled out last month for up to six weeks with fracture in his rib. The old has withdrawn from month's Barcelona Open. "Rafa has just been withdrawn from the entry list in Barcelona," the team said in a statement sent to Reuters. "We don't know yet when he will be at his first tournament on clay this year. Hopefully, soon." Nadal complained of a chest issue during his run to the final of the ATP 1000 event in Indian Wells, California last month. Tests in Barcelona revealed "a stress fracture of the third left costal arch". Madrid and Rome host ATP Masters 1000 events next month and Nadal would be hoping to participate to get matches under his belt before the May 22-June 5 French Open, which he has won a record 13 times. — DNA

Russia arrests
prominent
opp figure

MOSCOW: Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr., a prominent Russian opposition figure and critic of the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, was detained in the capital Moscow late Monday. Ilya Yashin, another leading opposition figure, said on Twitter that Kara-Murza was detained Monday near his Moscow residence. Kara-Murza, 40, was set to stay in police custody overnight, his lawyer, Vadim Prokhorov, said. He was charged with failing to follow a lawful order of a police officer, a military service member, an officer of the federal security services.

The charge carries a penalty of up to 15 days in prison. Nothing was initially known about other allegations. Kara-Murza was hospitalized with poisoning symptoms twice, in 2015 and 2017. A journalist and associate of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was shot and killed in 2015, and oligarch-turned-dissident Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Kara-Murza nearly died from kidney failure in the first incident. He suspects he was poisoned but no cause has been determined. Kara-Murza was taken to a hospital with a sudden, similar illness in 2017 and put into a medically induced coma. His wife said doctors confirmed that he was poisoned. According to research by the investigative group Bellingcat, Kara-Murza was being pursued by agents of the Russian domestic secret service FSB, who are said to be involved in the poisoning of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny. "The United States is troubled by Russian authorities' detention today in Moscow of prominent civil society leader Vladimir Kara-Murza," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a tweet. — Agencies



BUCHAREST: Pakistan ambassador to Romania Dr Zafar Iqbal welcomed University students in embassy for an interactive session on Pakistan-Romania bilateral relations as well as regional and global issues.— DNA

Palestinian shot
dead by Israel

NEWS DESK

ASHKELON: Israeli occupation forces shot and killed a Palestinian worker at a construction site in Ashkelon city in the 1948-occupied Palestine, earlier on Tuesday. Israeli media reported that a police officer was on a patrol searching for Palestinians working in 'Israel' without work permits in construction sites in the area. However, the police officer opened fire at the 40-year-old worker, claiming the worker refused to show his identity and work permit, killing him on the spot. The worker has been identified later as Abdullah Srour, a resident of the city of Hebron, south of the occupied West Bank. The Israeli Occupation Forces also alleged that the worker stabbed the officer and injured him in the hand when he refused to show his identity and work permit. It is worth mentioning that this is the fifth Palestinian to be shot dead by Israeli forces in the last 24 hours. Earlier on Sunday, the Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian woman, identified as 47-year-old Ghada Ibrahim Sabatien who is a widowed mother of six, in the town of Husan, west of Bethlehem. Later that day, the forces shot and killed another Palestinian woman, identified as 24-year-old MahaKazemAwad, for allegedly carrying out a stabbing operation near the al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron.

Pakistan
Army takes
notice of
propaganda

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistan Army and create division between the institution and society," said the ISPR. The military's media wing emphasised that the national security of the country is "sacrosanct". "Pakistan Army has always stood by the state institutions to guard [them] and always will, without any compromise. The forum expressed complete confidence in leadership's well-considered stance to uphold the constitution and rule of law, at all cost," said the ISPR. "Pakistan Army is aware of its responsibilities and shall continue to defend territorial integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan against all internal and external threats under all circumstances," the army chief had said while concluding the conference.

FIA starts
crackdown

FROM PAGE 01

He maintained that the political crisis is worsening in the country as 135 MNAs have tendered their resignations. "The Parliament has lost its importance and the only solution to avoid clash is new elections," said Chaudhry. After the FIA's crackdown, Punjab Governor Omer Sarfaraz Cheema telephoned Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and condemned the "harassment" of PTI's social media team by the FIA.

45 dead in
South Africa
floods

DURBAN: At least 45 people have died in floods and mudslides after rainstorms struck the South African port city of Durban and surrounding KwaZulu-Natal province, the authorities said on Tuesday. The country's meteorologists forecasted more "extreme" rains on the way Tuesday night accompanied by "widespread flooding". "The latest reports indicate that over 45 people have lost their lives as a result of the heavy rains, this number could possibly increase as more reports come in," the province's Department of Cooperative Governance announced in a statement. Days of pounding rain flooded several areas, tore houses apart and ravaged infrastructure across the southeastern city, while landslips caused train services across KwaZulu-Natal province to be suspended. The rains have flooded city highways, torn apart bridges, submerged cars and collapsed houses. A fuel tank was floating in the sea after being tossed off the road. Several shipping containers that were stacked high atop of each other, fell like dominoes and lay strewn on a yard, while some spilled over into a main road in the city, one of southern Africa's largest regional gateways to the sea. "At around 3am (0100 GMT), I felt the truck shaking and I thought maybe someone bumped it and when I tried to open the curtain I saw the water level... was very high," said truck driver Mthunzi Ngcobo.

PCB, Engro
Corporation
join hands

LAHORE: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and Engro Corporation Limited will collaborate for the development of cricket at the grassroots level, making Engro Corporation an official partner of the PCB Pathway Cricket Programme. The two parties here on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding naming this sponsored leg of the Programme the Engro Cricket Coaching Project. Under this commitment, Engro Corporation will bear the cost of high performance coaches hired by the PCB to coach teenagers enrolled in the PCB Pathway Cricket Programme. The PCB-Engro collaboration will stand for a three-year period, extendable based on mutual consent of both the PCB and Engro Corporation. Engro Cricket Coaching Project high performance coaches will be based at the National High Performance Centre in Lahore and will work at cricket venues across Pakistan for talent hunt and development. — APP

Impact of social media on online sales

AIMON KHAN &
FARHAD HAIDER

A LARGE proportion of purchases are being made online these days and by 2020 this number has grown significantly due to the recent covid-19 pandemic. As the number of internet users grows and technology companies develop more ways to integrate the online world into shopping, online sales are expected to grow significantly. Logically, most consumer shopping decisions are also made online, and where people spend most of their online time on social media. According to the GlobalWebIndex, 54% of social media users use so-

cial media to research products and get information and 71% are more likely to purchase products and services based on social media. It is difficult to say exactly how much social media influences customers, not just what they buy, but their consumer behavior in general. Social media changed the way we market our products and even gave us new ways to advertise. It enables entrepreneurs to find out how their business is viewed by their customers, including how their customers think about their competitors, allowing them to make the necessary changes to their products or services and initiate negotiations to develop trust or sales leads. The social media platform has developed in such a way that

companies are now able to use this platform to display useful information eye catching content, advertising content etc. Whether you run a small or a large company, social media will likely have an impact. Increasing product awareness is one of the main reasons for using a social media platform for your business. If people know about you, even if they don't buy or subscribe to your email newsletter right away, chances are they'll do it later. Posting attractive videos and photos of your product on social media regularly can help attract new customers to your company. This can be very beneficial for your company because by exposing your content to a wider audience,

you are drawing attention to many of the important things in your company that visitors will find useful. The more you post, the more traffic you will drive to your website. Customers can learn about new trends or successes in your organization using this approach. This is one of the most beneficial effects of business communication forums that mostly likely to help today's entrepreneurs. For someone who wants to learn more about what you can offer, any information about your organization, whether it is about your products or services, is helpful. You give them a chance to learn more about your company and eventually buy anything from you through the social media platform.

Since social networks are so effective in increasing brand awareness, in delivering your product there, and increasing traffic to your website, it makes sense that such an impact can translate into higher sales especially with the help of social media marketing strategies. Social media statistics show that 93% of social media advertisers report that their social media efforts have increased traffic to their websites. And 82% said their social media efforts had boosted sales. Additionally, 67% of marketers with blogs have noticed that these programs have increased sales. — The contributors of this article are students at SZABIST

Briefs

Civilian deaths in Ukraine rise to 1,892

GENEVA: The civilian death toll in the Russia-Ukraine war has climbed to 1,892, the UN said on Tuesday, while the number of people fleeing the war is now above 4.6 million. At least 2,558 more people have been injured in Ukraine since Feb. 24, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a statement. "Most of the civilian casualties recorded were caused by the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, and missile and air strikes," it added. Data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showed the number of people who have left Ukraine since the start of the war has risen to more than 4.6 million. Most of them have gone to neighboring countries - over 2.64 million to Poland, 701,741 to Romania, 433,083 to Russia, 428,954 to Hungary, 413,374 to Moldova, 320,246 to Slovakia, and 21,292 to Belarus, according to the latest UNHCR figures. Millions more are internally displaced in Ukraine, with an update from the International Organization for Migration earlier this week placing the number at 7.1 million. - APP

Philippines floods kill 42 people

MANILA: The death toll from the floods and landslides in the Philippines rose to 42 on Tuesday, according to local sources. Authorities said search and rescue operations in the Baybay city of the Leyte province were suspended since it was "too dangerous" to continue in the dark, according to the US television network CBS News. Earlier, the country's disaster management authority said at least 20 people were killed in floods caused by a tropical depression, locally known as Agaton. Bad weather caused over 280 flooding incidents in many parts of the country, including in the Bicol and autonomous Bangsamoro regions in Muslim Mindanao, the daily Phil Star reported, quoting the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. Central Philippines also reported landslides triggered by the floods. Police teams have been deployed to the flood-hit areas. More than 95,700 families were affected by the floods, with a large number of people being displaced. The bad weather situation damaged 37 roads, five bridges, and 84 houses. Agriculture fields in many parts of the archipelago nation, including in Bangsamoro, have become inundated. Brig. Gen. Roderick Alba, who is overseeing the rescue efforts, said: "We have also conducted rescue operations for stranded residents. Our rescue teams are on standby. The only way that we can alleviate the worst effect of this typhoon is through the co-operation of every stakeholder." - APP

Germany's annual inflation at 7.3%

BERLIN: Germany's annual inflation rate was at 7.3% in March, the highest since 1981, the Federal Statistical Office's (Destatis) data showed on Tuesday. On a monthly basis, consumer prices went up by 2.5% in March, Destatis added. In March, prices increased mainly due to the surge in prices of natural gas and mineral oil products after Russia launched a war on Ukraine. Delivery bottlenecks due to interruptions in supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the reading. The annual inflation rate was 5.1% in February, which also was the highest level since the German reunification, the office recalled. -APP

Sri Lanka joins the debt defaulters club

PARIS: Crisis-hit Sri Lanka said Tuesday it was defaulting on all payments on its \$51-billion external debt after running out of foreign exchange to import desperately needed goods. The Indian Ocean island, which is battling its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948, joins a small club of countries that have failed to repay their debts. Lebanon, Argentina, Belize, Zambia, Suriname, 2020 - Lebanon, once known as the "Switzerland of the Middle East", defaults on a debt payment for the first time in its history in March 2020 with the country sunk in a deep economic crisis amid huge protests about corruption.

In May 2020, Argentina defaults for the ninth time in its history, unable to make a \$500-million payment. Its previous default in 2001 was at \$100 billion the largest in history at the time. It took until 2016 for it to return to international credit markets. The pandemic also sends Belize, Zambia and Suriname into default in 2020. - Venezuela, 2017 and 2018 - In November 2017, Venezuela - which has the world's largest oil reserves - is declared to be in partial default by rating agencies Fitch and S&P Global Ratings. Badly hit by falls in the price of oil and American sanctions, the economy is in free fall, with shortages

of food and medicine. Despite Moscow agreeing to give its ally a \$3.15 billion restructuring package on its \$150-billion debt, Caracas defaults on a payment on its sovereign debt on January 2, 2018. - Greece, 2015 - Greece becomes the first developed country to default on its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) when, at midnight on June 30, 2015, it misses a 1.5-billion-euro (\$1.7-billion) repayment. Two weeks later it missed a second payment to the IMF of 456 million euros. An emergency short-term loan from a European Union crisis fund, however, enables it to pay off these debts. An 86-billion-euro

bailout (\$96-billion) over three years is approved in August 2015, after Greek lawmakers agree to tough austerity measures and reforms. - Ecuador, 2008 and 2020 - In December 2008, Ecuador's President Rafael Correa suspends the payment of nearly 40 percent of the Latin American country's debt for the third time in 14 years. Ecuador is also tipped into default by the pandemic in 2020, but it restructures its debt in a move praised by the IMF. - Russia, 1918 and 1998 - Russia defaults on foreign currency-held debt in 1918, when Bolshevik revolution leader Vladimir Lenin refuses to recognise the debts of

the deposed tsar. In August 1998, Russia declares a 90-day moratorium on the payment of its foreign debt and a de facto devaluation of the ruble, and defaults on its domestic debt. Its foreign debt stands at \$141 billion, while Fitch estimates its internal debt at the equivalent of \$50.6 billion. The country had been hit by the ripple effect of an Asian economic crisis and the ruble was attacked by speculators as oil prices plunged, weakening the value of a key Russian export. It was more than a decade before Russia was able to borrow money again on international markets. Under heavy sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, Rus-

sia risks another foreign debt default this year. In April, S&P declares Moscow in "selective default" after it pays a dollar-denominated debt in rubles. - Mexico, 1982 - In August 1982, Mexico says it can no longer service its debt of \$86 billion, with \$21 billion also owed in interest. After the default, the United States provides emergency loans and the IMF grants aid in exchange for structural economic reforms. Commercial banks later write off large chunks of the debt. The IMF comes to Mexico's rescue again in 1995 with \$17.8 billion in loans as part of a \$50-billion international aid package. - Agencies

Miftah berates PTI for damaging economy

ISLAMABAD: Senior Leader of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Miftah Ismail here on Tuesday lamented that the country's economy was badly damaged during the tenure of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which had piled the public debt to the level of Rs 6400 billion. Addressing a press conference along with other PML-N leaders Musaddiq Malik and Muhammad Zubair, Ismail said that PTI had made people to suffer by taking the economy to this bad condition. He said, the fiscal deficit was hovering at around Rs5600 billion and if supplementary grants of Rs800 billion was included, the total amount would reach to Rs6400. The PML-N leader elaborated how the illogical decisions by the previous government had resulted in increasing overall debt. He, however, expressed the hope that future of Pakistan was brighter under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif. He said all possible efforts would be made to contain the deficit, adding that it was their responsibility to lead country towards better future. Miftah Ismail who is expected to become Advisor to Prime Minister on Finance, also criticized the PTI government over providing relief package of Rs 370 billion under which the former prime minister Imran Khan had announced to reduce the petroleum prices by Rs 10 per liter and electricity by Rs 5 per unit. To a question, he said the government had not decided yet to increase the petroleum prices but the decision would be taken after reviewing the summary issued by Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA). This was a landmark that the PTI government had laid for the upcoming government, he said adding that the amnesty scheme was also needless as it was against the conditions agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). - APP

Somalia at risk of famine 'catastrophe': UN agencies

NAIROBI: Millions of people in Somalia are at risk of famine, with young children the most vulnerable to the worsening drought, UN agencies said Tuesday, warning that the troubled nation is on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. Many parts of Somalia are being ravaged by an extreme months-long drought that has also taken hold in other countries in the region including Ethiopia and Kenya, destroying crops and livestock and driving huge numbers of people from their homes. "Somalia is facing famine conditions as a perfect storm of poor rain, skyrocketing food prices and huge funding shortfalls leaves almost 40 percent of Somalia on the brink," the World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), humanitarian agency OCHA and the United Nations Children's Fund said in a joint statement. "We are literally about to start taking food from the hungry to feed the starving," WFP Somalia country director El-Khidir Daloum said in the statement, describing the nation as "on the cusp of a humanitarian catastrophe". - APP

SCO SG meets Sri Lankan envoy

BEIJING: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Secretary-General Zhang Ming met Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sri Lanka to China, Palitha Kohona. The two officials exchanged views on Sri Lanka's involvement with the SCO as a dialogue partner on topics set forth in the memorandum granting Sri Lanka its status within the organisation, according to SCO Secretariat here. Both sides reaffirmed the importance of regular contacts between the SCO Secretariat and the Embassy of Sri Lanka. Ambassador Kohona affirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to obtaining observer status within the SCO under the application filed by the country, and emphasised the organisation's constructive role in regional and international affairs. - APP

No 'Secret Agenda' to Exit EU: Le Pen

PARIS: French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen on Tuesday said she had no "secret agenda" for France to leave the European Union, even if her attempts to reform the bloc fail. "I don't have a secret agenda," Le Pen told France Inter radio. "I think a large majority of French people no longer want the European Union as it exists today, which is a European Union that functions in an absolutely undemocratic way, which advances by threat, by blackmail and which implements policies that are against the interests of the people." Le Pen has ditched past plans to haul France out of the EU, its free-move-

ment Schengen zone and the euro. However, she remains deeply euro-skeptic. She says she would renegotiate the agreement on Schengen and increase the number of customs agents, re-introducing checks on goods entering the country from other EU states. She says such a move would be to fight against "fraud" but analysts say it raises questions over friction-free trade within the EU's single market. Ultimately, Le Pen envisages the EU as an alliance of member states. Asked if she would leave the EU if all her attempts to reform the bloc fail, Le Pen replied: "Not at all." - Agencies

11 Kazakh regions put on storm alert

NUR-SULTAN: Storm alert was issued for 11 regions of Kazakhstan, Kazinform cites the National Met Office Kazhydromet. Almaty region is to brace for thunderstorm in the south, east, and mountainous areas in the night-time and morning as well as in the east at daytime. Easterly, northeasterly wind at 18-23mps gusting up to 29mps is predicted in the northeast of the region. Akmola region is to see southeasterly, easterly wind with gusts of up to 15-20mps in most parts at night as well as in the northwest, and southeast at daytime. The east of Aktobe region is to expect fog. Southeasterly wind is to gust up to 15-20mps in the region's west at daytime. The west and east of Atyrau region are to see thunderstorm, dust tides. 15-20mps southeasterly wind with gusts of up to 23mps at times is forecast. Thunderstorm is to batter the south and northwest of West Kazakhstan region during the day on April 13. Easterly wind at 15-20mps

in much of the region with gusts of up to 23mps is predicted. The west and south of Karaganda region are to brace for thunderstorm and fog. Easterly, northeasterly wind is to gust up to 15-20mps in the north and southeast of the region. Dust tides are to batter Kyzylorda region at daytime on April 13. Northeasterly, easterly wind with gusts of up to 15mps is forecast for the northwest of the region during the day. Mangistau region is to brace for dust tides. Southeasterly wind reaching up to 15-20mps with gusts of up to 23mps at times is in store. The north and east of Pavlodar region are to expect easterly wind gusting up to 15-20mps during the day on April 13. North Kazakhstan region is to see easterly, southeasterly wind at 15-20mps, with gusts of up to 25mps at daytime on April 13. Thunderstorm and squall are to hit the mountainous areas of Turkestan region in the first half of the night on April 13. Southeasterly wind reaching 15-20mps during thunderstorm is forecast. - APP



CANBERRA: Pakistan high commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry meets Senator Susan McDonald and discussed various aspects of Pakistan-Australia relations and ways to further enhance bilateral cooperation. - DNA

Turkey, Russia Hold Joint Patrol in Syria

DAMASCUS: Russian Military Police held a joint patrol with Turkish forces in Syria's Ain al-Arab (Kobani). The patrol was the 95th between the two forces in the region since both countries signed a ceasefire agreement in 2019. It comprised eight Russian and Turkish military vehicles, accompanied by two Russian helicopters, and set off from Gharib village, east of Kobani. The patrol toured the villages of Qarah Mogh, Jaishan, Kharabasin Tahtani and Baghdik to Khan village in the western countryside of Tel Abyad then returned to their set off position. Separately, the Turkish Defense Ministry announced the killing of two members of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the Euphrates Shield zone, under the control of Turkey and its loyal factions. - APP

PM vows to boost Sino-Pak friendship

Referring to foreign policy, he said relations will be further strengthened with all friendly countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The newly elected Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif in his maiden speech pledged that his government will uphold the evergreen Sino-Pak friendship, Gwadar Pro reported on Tuesday. He said no matter which government comes in Pakistan this friendship will keep growing. Showing his firm commitment to implementing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he said "China will remain our strong

socio-economic partner." While addressing the parliament Sharif said, "Pakistan's relations with China are time-tested as Beijing has always supported Pakistan in the hour of need." He said CPEC mega project will be implemented at "Pakistan Speed." He said the new government would take steps to make Pakistan an "investment heaven" for investors as he noted their capital would help the country move forward. Referring to foreign policy, he said relations will be further strengthened with all

friendly countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey. He said "Afghanistan is our neighboring country facing difficult times. We will raise voice for assistance of the people of Afghanistan." Earlier, Pakistan's lawmakers voted to remove Prime Minister Imran Khan from office in a vote of no confidence. The Opposition's joint candidate and PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif was elected as the 23rd prime minister of Pakistan after PTI boycotted the election and announced resignations from the National Assembly.

Azerbaijan, EU eye future peace deal with Armenia

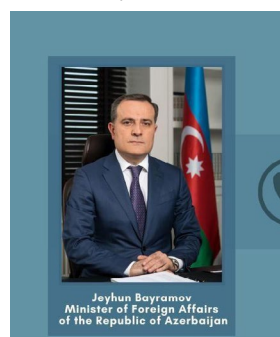
Direct phone conversation between the Azerbaijani and Armenian ministers, the first in about 30 years, is a follow-up to the agreements reached at the level of both states' leaders in Brussels on April 6

BAKU: Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Toivo Kluar have discussed regional issues, as well as a future peace deal with Armenia, the ministry reported on April 12. In a telephone conversation, the sides discussed the latest regional developments, steps to normalize relations between the two countries, including the preparation of a future peace agreement, following the meeting held between the Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders in Brussels with the EU Council

president's mediation and participation, as well as exchanged views on humanitarian issues. On April 11, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan discussed the work on the preparation of the future peace treaty, the convening of the Joint Border Commission, as well as humanitarian issues. The direct phone conversation between the Azerbaijani and Armenian ministers, the first in about 30 years, is a follow-up to the agreements reached at the level of

both states' leaders in Brussels on April 6. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian

Charles Michel met in a trilateral format in Brussels on April 6. The meeting was held for



Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and European Council President



a continuation of the discussions on the situation in the South Caucasus re-

gion and the development of EU relations with both countries. The leaders took stock of developments since their last meeting in Brussels in December 2021 and their videoconference, together with French President Emmanuel Macron, in February 2022. They reviewed progress on the implementation of undertaken commitments. The leaders discussed the recently reported tensions and reiterated the necessity of adhering fully to the provisions of the 9/10 November 2020 trilateral statement. Both Aliyev and Pashinyan have expressed a will-

ingness to work quickly toward a peace agreement between their countries. To that end, it was decided to instruct foreign ministers to begin work on drafting a future peace treaty that would address all of the issues. At the same time, it was also agreed to convene a Joint Border Commission by the end of April. The Joint Border Commission's mandate will be to: delimit the bilateral border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and ensure a stable security situation along and in the vicinity of the borderline. - Agencies

Briefs

PML-N leaders slam PTI for damaging economy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders say PTI's wrong economic policies have led to a projection of 6,400 billion rupees in the current budget deficit. PML-N leaders Miftah Ismail, Muhammad Zubair and Dr Musaddik Malik claimed this while talking to media in Islamabad on Tuesday afternoon. Miftah Ismail said expenditures are likely to go beyond 9,500 billion rupees, which is unprecedented in the history of Pakistan. He said the total debt from 1947 to 2018 was 25,000 billion rupees, whereas PTI Government took 80 percent of the total debt in just three and half years. He said primary deficit is being projected as 1650 billion rupees. He said trade deficit is expected to touch the figure of 45 billion dollars, which is all time high in the history of Pakistan. He said foreign exchange reserves are also depleting with growing Current Account Deficit.

Imran stresses upon immediate elections

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former premier and Chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan on Tuesday urged the nation that it should run a movement for holding immediate general elections in the country. The PTI chairman released a video message regarding his Peshawar Rally tomorrow (Wednesday). Imran Khan said that he is ready, he is coming to Peshawar tomorrow. He further said that under a big conspiracy, an imported government was imposed on the country.

LHC reserves verdict in CM election case

DNA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Tuesday reserved its verdict on the petition filed by Leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Assembly and PML-N leader Hamza Shehbaz for convening the assembly's session for the election of new chief minister of the province. Earlier, Barrister Ali Zafar, counsel for PA Speaker Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, who is also a candidate for the seat of CM along with Hamza Shehbaz, and Azam Nazir Tarar, PML-N's lawyer, completed their arguments in the case. Addressing parties to the case, Chief Justice of the LHC Ameer Bhatti remarked that whether they reached any conclusion or not, the law would take its course.

Pakistan's relations with Arab Islamic states eternal



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's mutual and stable relations with the Islamic countries and also with the rest of the world will make Pakistan more stronger, said Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council, International Islamic Council. While talking to media following an 'Iftaar Dinner' arranged in honour of the ambassadors of the OIC countries in Pakistan, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi said that Pakistan thanks the ambassadors and the leadership of the Islamic world in view of OIC Foreign Ministers' Council summit in Pakistan. Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi said that Arab Islamic world has nothing to do with the change of

government in Pakistan. All the countries including Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) have relationship with Pakistan and the people of Pakistan. Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi also vowed that they will continue to play respective role for stability and betterment of Pakistan's relations with the Arab Islamic world as continued in the past. Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi said that no one becomes a traitor by holding meeting with the ambassadors, said Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council and President of International Islamic Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi. At Iftaar Dinner, hosted in the honor of the ambassadors of OIC member countries, Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf Saeed Al Maliki and ambassadors of Egypt,

Iran, Palestine, Morocco, Japan, Germany, Libya, Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Norway, Holland, Jordan, Bangladesh and many other countries attended. Speaking on the occasion of Iftaar Dinner, Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi said that he worked day in and day out to strengthen and enhance coordination among Pakistan's relations with the Arab Islamic world and all these efforts will be continued. Pakistan's relations with Iraq moved towards stability after 35 year, with Egypt after 16 years and with Kuwait with 16 years, said Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi. OIC Foreign Ministers' Council summit in Islamabad twice in a period of four months is success of Pakistan and for the people of Pakistan. The positive conduct demonstrated by the opposition during the OIC

Foreign Ministers' Council summit in Pakistan was lauded and appreciated. Responding to a question, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi said that during the last 15 months, not a single case registered in Pakistan on account of misuse of blasphemy law and on the misuse of Toheen-e-Namoose-e-Risalat (S.A.W) and Toheen-e-Mazhab'. He also stated that holding meeting with the ambassadors does not make anyone traitor and disbelief. Thorough investigations should be conducted into the 'Threat letter' from US, said Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi. He also stated that Pakistan is a great power of the Islamic world. Pakistan should not be misunderstood. He said that he has not seen the US threat letter, therefore he can't comment on it.

World Bank to send Ukraine \$1.5 bln as prices spike

AGENCIES

KYIV: The World Bank is preparing a \$1.5 billion support package for war-torn Ukraine and plans to aid developing countries struggling to keep up with surging food and energy prices, World Bank President David Malpass said on Tuesday. In remarks at the Warsaw School of Economics in Poland, Malpass said the bank was helping Ukraine provide critical services, including paying wages for hospital workers, pensions and social programs. "The World Bank was created in 1944 to help Europe rebuild after World War Two. As we did then, we will be ready to help Ukraine with reconstruction when the time comes," Malpass said. Malpass said the package was enabled by Monday's approval of \$1 billion in International Development Association (IDA) aid by donor and recipient countries, along with a \$100 million IDA payment to neighboring Moldova.

'Russia reinforcing positions in E. Ukraine'

AGENCIES

WASHINGTON: The United States believes that Russia has started reinforcing and resupplying its troops in Donbas in eastern Ukraine, a senior U.S. defense official said on Monday. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Monday thousands of Russian troops were massing for a new offensive in the east, and Russia said it would not halt its military operation in Ukraine for any further peace talks. Despite the resupply efforts in Donbas, the United States did not believe this was the start of a new offensive in the region, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We believe that this is an effort to reinforce and resupply their forces in the Donbas, they're still north of Izyum," the official told reporters, referring to a town about 180 km (112 miles) north of the city of Donetsk.

PM holds consultations over cabinet formation

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday held important consultations with the leadership of allied parties over the formation of federal cabinet. During his meetings with key leaders of various parties at their residences including PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui of MQM, Maulana Fazur Rehman, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, Dr Khalid Magasi, Shah Zain Bugti and Aslam Bhotani, the prime minister individually expressed his gratitude to these leaders and their members of the assembly for supporting him during his nomination and election to the office of the prime minister, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister said that with the same confidence and passion, they would move ahead. - APP

US monitoring rise in rights abuses in India

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was monitoring what he described as a rise in human rights abuses in India by some officials, in a rare direct rebuke by Washington of the Asian nation's rights record. "We regularly engage with our Indian partners on these shared values (of human rights) and to that end, we are monitoring some recent concerning developments in India including a rise in human rights abuses by some government, police and prison officials," Blinken said on Monday in a joint press briefing with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Singh and Jaishankar, who spoke after Blinken at the briefing, did not comment on the human rights issue. Blinken's remarks came days after US Representative Ilhan Omar questioned the alleged reluctance of the US government to criticise Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government on human rights. "What does Modi need to do to India's Muslim population be-

fore we will stop considering them a partner in peace?" Omar, who belongs to President Joe Biden's Democratic Party, said last week. Muslims see wave of attacks on Hindu festival Muslims in several Indian states are on edge after mobs came out in processions, making hate speeches and attacking their properties during the Hindu festival of Ram Navmi. Most of the violence was reported from the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand and West Bengal on Sunday as the Hindu community celebrated the birthday of the god Ram, one of the chief deities of right-wing Hindu groups in India. Dozens of videos have been going viral on Indian social media since Sunday, showing processions of Hindu men wearing saffron scarves - and, in some cases, carrying sticks and swords - stopping their motorcycles in Muslim neighbourhoods, playing provocative songs laced with threats of genocide outside homes and mosques, and raising hate slogans. In one of the videos, purportedly from the eastern state of Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, a man was seen climbing a mosque wall and planting a saffron flag on its entrance as others cheered, flashing swords and hockey sticks.

CM Khan urges high ups to fill vacant posts

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: The Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has directed the concerned authorities to take necessary measures for filling all the vacant posts in public sectors in the Merged Districts at the earliest so as to strengthen government offices and improve the quality of service delivery to the masses there. He also directed the Provincial Ministers and Administrative Secretaries to review the progress of work on the ongoing development projects in their respective sectors on monthly basis

and submit report to him with regard to the utilization of funds. He further directed that the development scheme, which have been included in the current ADP and not yet approved from the relevant forum, must be approved up to June this year. He further directed that the Local Government & Rural Development Department should place all the Fire Brigade Vehicles of the TMAs at the disposal of Rescue-1122 within a week time as was decided during the previous meeting of the provincial cabinet. He issued these directives while chairing a meeting of the Provincial Cabinet held here on Tuesday.

The meeting besides the cabinet members was also attended by the Provincial Chief Secretary, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Additional Chief Secretary and Administrative Secretaries of various Government Departments. Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information & PRs Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif while briefing media persons about the decisions of the cabinet meeting at IT-LA Cell informed that the Cabinet as a major step to facilitate the people of South Waziristan bifurcated South Waziristan into two districts namely South Waziristan Upper and South Waziristan Lower.



ISLAMABAD: The First Deputy Defence Minister and Chief of General Staff (CGS) Armed Forces of Republic of Kazakhstan, Lieutenant General Khussainov Marat Rakhimovich calls on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi. - DNA

At least 13 injured in Brooklyn subway shooting incident

New York governor Kathy Hochul said she had been briefed on the "developing" situation

NEW YORK: At least 13 people have been injured in a shooting incident at a subway station in the New York City borough of Brooklyn, where "several undetonated devices" were recovered, authorities said Tuesday. A New York police spokeswoman told AFP officers responded to 911 call of a person shot in the Brooklyn subway at 8:27 am (1227 GMT). The city's fire department gave a toll of "13 injuries at this time," while ABC News quoted police sources as saying at least five people

were shot in the incident at the 36th Street subway station. The police department tweeted that there were "NO active explosive devices at this time." "Please stay clear of the area" the NYPD tweeted, urging witnesses to contact a police tip line with any information. New York governor Kathy Hochul said she had been briefed on the "developing" situation. "First responders are on the scene and we will work with @MTA & @NYPD-news to provide updates as the investigation contin-

ues," she tweeted. ABC News reported that police were investigating whether a smoke device was detonated, and that police are hunting for the suspect. According to NBC, citing NYPD officials and senior law enforcement officials, a man in a gas mask and orange construction vest may have tossed a smoke canister on the platform to distract the rush hour crowd. Mass casualty shootings happen with relative frequency in the United States, where firearms are involved in approximately 40,000

deaths a year, including suicides, according to the Gun Violence Archive website. The incident came just a day after US President Joe Biden announced new gun control measures, increasing restrictions on so-called "ghost guns", the difficult-to-trace weapons that can be assembled at home. Lax gun laws and a constitutionally guaranteed right to bear arms have repeatedly stymied attempts to clamp down on the number of weapons in circulation, despite greater controls being favored by the majority of Americans. - Agencies

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11# Block 18-A, Awan Plaza,
G-8 Markez, Islamabad-Pakistan
Ph: 051-2261960, 051-2266165