



Islamabad POST

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Detailed News On Page-06

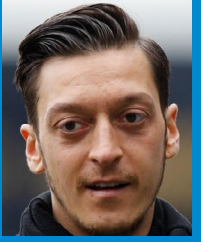
Tugio urges stronger Pak-ASEAN ties

Detailed News On Page-08



Ozil condemns situation of Indian Muslims

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

UK PM felicitates Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that he looks forward to working with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to address the global challenges. In his letter dated April 26, Boris Johnson congratulated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on his election. Prime Minister Johnson noted that the United Kingdom and Pakistan enjoyed deep ties supported by strong people-to-people links. — AGENCIES

Maryam slams PTI Punjab govt

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Despite the Lahore High Court orders for the administration of the oath to Chief Minister-elect Hamza Shahbaz on Thursday, no progress could be made on this front. Reacting to the development, PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz took to Twitter and lashed out at the PTI government in Punjab for deliberately delaying Hamza's oath-taking ceremony. "Despite the clear orders of the court, the swearing-in of Hamza Shahbaz is being arrogantly prevented," she said. "Making fun of the Constitution, law, and courts with such unmitigated effrontery cannot be the work of a normal human being."

Country put on path of prosperity

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has said the country has been put on the path of stability, development and prosperity. In a statement on Thursday, he said work is being done on war footing to check inflation and load shedding as well as improve the economy. The Interior Minister said we have to fight with these problems which kept the people in trouble over the last four years. Rana Sanaullah said there is serenity in the country with the installation of democratic government but some law breakers are restless.

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Embassy marks anniversary of Pak-Japan diplomatic ties — Page 06

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Huge scope of mutual cooperation between Pak, Azerbaijan: Minister — Page 08

'Pak grateful to Saudia for its support'

PM reaches Saudi Arabia; says his visit to take Pak-Saudi ties to 'unknown heights'

DNA

MADINA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said Pakistan was thankful to Saudi Arabia for its "consistent support" in difficult times and his visit to the kingdom after taking oath as the premier reflected this "special relationship". Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Saudi Arabia — for his three-day visit — at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz. Governor Madinah Faisal bin Salman Al Saud and high-level Saudi officials received the prime minister after he touched down in the kingdom. The prime minister held a brief meeting with Madinah's governor, where both the leaders exchanged views on bilateral relations. Prime Minister has paid respect at the Roza-e-Rasool (SAWW) in Madinah. He was also accompanied by a high-level delegation. Later, he offered Namaz-e-Maghrib at Masjid-e-Nabvi (SAWW). In a video message, Shehbaz said he was delighted that his first visit abroad was to Saudi Arabia which reflected Pakistan's historic and special relations with Riyadh. The premier said

Continued on Page 06

FM talks to Kuwaiti counterpart

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari says Pakistan and Kuwait are enjoying fraternal relations and Islamabad is committed to further strengthening bilateral relations with Kuwait. He was talking to his Kuwaiti counterpart Dr Sheikh Ahmed Nasir Al-Muhammad Al-Sabah on telephone on Thursday. He said a large number of Pakistanis are residing in Kuwait for employment and are playing a vital role in the development of both the countries. They also discussed bilateral relations between the two countries. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister congratulated Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on assuming the office of Foreign Minister. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari Wednesday took oath as a federal minister.

Russia warns West: Don't test our patience

Meanwhile NATO vows to back Kyiv for years in war against Russia

MONITORING DESK

LONDON: Russia on Thursday warned the West that there would be a tough military response to any further attack on Russian territory, accusing the United States and its key allies of undermining European security by openly inciting Ukraine to assault Russia. Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more and raised fears of the most

serious confrontation between Russia and the United States since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Two months since Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia has in recent days reported what it says are a series of attacks by Ukrainian forces on Russian regions which border Ukraine, and has warned that such attacks risk a significant escalation. Ukraine has not directly accepted responsibility but says the incidents are payback

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Switzerland Alberto Groff class on Leader of Opposition in Senate, Dr. Shahzad Waseem. —DNA

Japanese PM extends felicitations to Pakistanis

Japan and Pakistan have nurtured friendly relations over the years, extending support to each other when in need, says PM Kishida

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: On the auspicious occasion of the anniversary day when Japan and Pakistan officially established diplomatic relations on April 28 seventy years ago, Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio conveyed his congratulatory remarks to celebrate the 70 years of bilateral diplomatic relations. In the message, KISHIDA Fumio, the Prime Minister of Japan has extended his congratulations to Shehbaz Sharif on his assumption of office as Prime Minister. PM KISHIDA also congratulates the people of both Japan and Pakistan for successful seventy years of their bilateral relations. Japan established diplomatic relations with Pakistan on 28th April, 1952, the very day when the San Francisco Peace

Treaty went into effect and Japan regained its independence. Today marks exactly 70 years since then, and I am very pleased to celebrate this milestone with all of you. Japan and Pakistan have nurtured friendly relations over the years, extending support to each other when in need, said PM Kishida. The PM mentioned that in the postwar period, cotton exported from Pakistan to Japan backed its textile industry and greatly encouraged Japan's postwar reconstruction. In turn, Japan has continuously provided Pakistan with assistance mainly in its areas of expertise, such as water, healthcare, education and disaster management. "Both Japan and Pakistan are disaster-prone countries, and we have supported each other through the years. When Pakistan was struck by a massive earthquake in 2005 and by



severe floods in 2010, Japan dispatched its disaster relief team and provided yen loans and grant aid. When the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred in 2011, Pakistan not only delivered relief goods, such as milk and biscuits, but Pakistani people residing in Japan traveled to the affected areas to serve hot meals to disaster victims" he added.

Petrol price to remain unchanged: Marriyum

'Govt is making every effort not to put any burden on people'

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said Thursday the price of petroleum products would remain unchanged for the first half of the next month. In a statement, the information minister shared that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has, once again, decided against the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority's (OGRA) decision to hike the prices of petroleum products. Aurangzeb said the "incompetence and serious mistakes" of the last government were the reasons for people's suffering. "Former prime minister Imran Khan's government had accepted harsh conditions set by the International Monetary Fund related to increasing prices of the petroleum products to secure a loan," Aurangzeb said.

Punjab Assembly session adjourned

LAHORE: The much-anticipated session of the Punjab Assembly (PA) with a no-confidence motion — filed by PTI and PML-Q MPs against Deputy Speaker Dost Muhammad Mazari — on the agenda was adjourned till 11:30am on May 16 (Monday) without tabling of the resolution. PA Speaker Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, who was supposed to convene the session, called off the sitting at around 11am, half an hour before it was supposed to begin. — APP

Govt to try President, ex-PM under Article 6

Sources say that ministries are preparing a reference against the key members of PTI

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: The PML-N-led coalition government has decided to file a high treason case against President Arif Alvi, former prime minister Imran Khan, National Assembly ex-deputy speaker Qasim Suri and Punjab Governor Umar Sarfraz Cheema for allegedly violating the Constitution. Media quoting sources reported on Thursday that interior and law ministries are preparing a reference under Article 6 of the Constitution against the key members of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The federal government has accused President Alvi and the former deputy speaker of abrogating the Constitution at the behest of ex-PM Imran during the proceedings of the no-trust motion earlier this month. In a landmark unanimous ruling, the Supreme Court on April 7 set aside the NA deputy speaker ruling to dismiss the no-trust

Continued on Page 06

NAB launches inquiry against Farah Khan

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has initiated an inquiry into assets beyond known sources of income and money laundering allegations against former first lady Bushra Bibi's friend, Farhat Shahzadi — better known as Farah Khan. "The NAB has authorised an inquiry against Farhat Shahzadi alias Farah Khan and others on the allegations of accumulation of illegal assets beyond known sources of income, money laundering and maintaining various accounts in the name of different businesses," a notification issued by the anti-graft watchdog stated.

Pak to strengthen security, says China

BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said on Thursday that the Pakistani government has pledged to strengthen security for Chinese personnel, projects and institutions in Pakistan. Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Wang Wenbin, responding to a question at a regular news briefing, said Pakistan has vowed to not to allow any force to undermine the great China-Pakistan friendship and cooperation following the Karachi suicide attack. "We believe that the Pakistani side will earnestly take robust measures to ensure that China-Pakistan cooperation moves ahead in a safe and smooth manner," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson said that Beijing and Islamabad had the capability of cutting off the claws of terrorists who were involved in the Karachi suicide attack.



"China and Pakistan have the resolve and capability to cut off the claws of the terrorists and make them pay the price," Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said at a regular news briefing. The treatment of the injured and the follow-up work of the victims are in orderly progress, the spokesperson said, noting that Pakistan is going all out to investigate and hunt down the perpetrators. — APP

Express line feeder for Pabbi hospital inaugurated

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League-N leader and Member Provincial Assembly, Ikhtiyar Wali Khan on Thursday inaugurated express line feeder for Civil Hospital Pabbi, Nowshera. Speaking on the occasion, the PMLN leader said it was the long-awaited demand of people of tehsil Pabbi and adjoining villages fulfilled today by the Government.

"It is a duty of government to provide relief to its citizens at their doorsteps," he said, adding the PMLN Government strongly believed in practical work and resolution of masses problems at their doorsteps. He said people of tehsil Pabbi including villages Mohib Banda, Amankot, Azakhel, Pashtoon Ghari, Khuderzai, Dakbhehud and adjoining areas would be largely benefited from the facility. Civil hospital Pabbi is the biggest hospital of tehsil Pabbi with medical, surgical and diagnostic services to people around the clock. The people, while thanking the PMLN government, expressed the hope for more such welfare projects in tehsil Pabbi following rapid increase of its population.

Owners, managers of five petrol pumps arrested

FAISALABAD: The owners and managers of five petrol pumps were arrested on the charge of profiteering on diesel sale. A spokesman for local administration said on Thursday that Assistant Commissioner (AC) City Tandinwala Nauman Ali conducted surprise checking and found five petrol pumps involved in overcharging and selling diesel on high rates. Therefore, managers and owners of these petrol pumps were arrested and handed over to area police. Further investigation was under way. - APP

IUB ranked second among 65 Universities

SAQIB MUSHTAQ

BAHAWALPUR: The Islamia University of Bahawalpur has been ranked second among 65 universities in Pakistan in the Scimago International Institutional Ranking 2022. According to the Scimago International Institutional Ranking 2022, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur is among the top 500 universities out of a total of 4364 universities in the world. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur has been ranked 7th in Pakistan in societal rankings. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur is ranked 16th in Pakistan in research rankings. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur is fast emerging university on the nation-

PAJCCI urges immediate waiver of EIF for 6 months

DNA

PESHAWAR: Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has urged government to immediately extend waiver of EIF and E form for trade with Afghanistan for six months. In a press statement issued here on Thursday, PAJCCI said the waiver granted by government was going to expire on May 30, 2022 and needed immediate extension for continuing trade. Despite US relaxation in sanctions for facilitating commercial transactions with

Afghanistan, correspondent and commercial banks shying from engaging with Afghanistan. The resultant misery faced by business communities across the border had increased manifold, the statement added. Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Ministry of Commerce (MOC) and senior government functionaries had earlier agreed that in absence of viable barter trade mechanism the requirement of E-Form & EIF for trade with Afghanistan may be waived for further 6 months to ensure that trade does not suffer and revenue arrives in national treasury, however, despite nearing the deadline and

last ashra of Ramadan the notification has yet not issued causing uncertainty and distress. PAJCCI strongly urges to act with priority as already due to closure two important border crossings, the congestion is already affecting business especially in season of Afghanistan exports, now this suspension of waiver will significantly amplify the problem on both sides. In addition, the barter trade committee still is pending to be notified, which once will happen then deliberations can be initiated for developing alternate mechanism. It is important to note that Afghan side bar-

ter committee has already been formed in March 2022 and has initiated discussions under leadership of Khan Jan Alokozai, Co-Chairman PAJCCI. Zubair Motiwala; Chairman PAJCCI fears that lack of focus and delayed action will increase difficulties, loss of revenue and suspension of trading activities with Afghanistan. He mentioned that PAJCCI has relentlessly worked to build trade with Afghanistan especially after August 2021 which has picked up pace and is contributing to livelihood of people living in border areas and bringing much required revenue to national treasury.

FPCCI staff membersto perform Umrah

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD. Two staff members of the FCCI would perform Hajj this year, said Mr. Atif Munir Sheikh, President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI). Addressing the Hajj balloting ceremony, he said that two employees were picked a few years ago but they could not proceed to perform Hajj due to Covid-19 related restrictions. During this tenure one employee left the FCCI while another eligible employee is already available. Hence one employee would be picked through balloting as the Hajj program has now been restored by the Saudi government with a gap of two years. He said that the expenditure of one staff member would be borne by FCCI while the executive committee will fulfill the financial liability of the second employee. He asked senior staff member Sardar Sajid Aleem to pick the ballot. According to the ballot Mr. Riaz Hameed Data Administrator was declared successfully and President Mr. Atif Munir formally announced his name. He congratulated the successful staff members and requested them to pray for the success of Pakistan and FCCI while performing Hajj rituals in Saudi Arabia. Lat-

er successful staff members were also photographed with the President and executive committee members on the stairs of the FCCI. **FCCI concerned over four holidays** Atif Munir Sheikh, President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) has expressed concern over four Eid holidays and said that these would inflict a major shock to the national exports. He said that our per day export is estimated around 100 million dollars and due to these four holidays the country will experience a loss of 400 million dollars from exports. He underlined the need to enhance exports and restore the economy on a solid and sustained basis and said that Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif also believed that the nation must work, work and work to make Pakistan a strong and progressive country. He said that in the prevailing circumstances two Eid holidays were enough but due to extra two holidays the country would have to bear a loss of two million dollars. He said that exporters have sufficient orders and due to four-day long holidays the export consignments could also be delayed which would be a national loss. He said that the government must revisit its decision of 4 holidays to save the country from economic loss.

Traffic Police switching to E-Challan system

KAMRAN GUJJAR

JHELUM: According to the official sources, Punjab Traffic Police started issue E-Challan from 26 April, 2022 and the manual challan system will no longer be used. The E-Challan System adopted in Punjab not only to make the traffic police system more transparent, but it will also help to remove corruption, and allows all challan data to be unified.

Further, the E-Challan will include the challan officer's detail and beat as well as all the personal information of the violator and the vehicles. Digital app is also linked with Nadra, Excise & Taxation and licensing authority. When traffic officer entered a CNIC of violator, all information of violator and vehicles are shown on a record, as well as how many times before violator taken challan, violator deposit their challan through online banking app, jazz cash, easypaisa, 1-link, Atm etc. To replace the old challan books, traffic police equipped with smart printers. For violation of traffic laws in Punjab, including Jhelum, traffic officers will generate slips using a smart phone app and print them using smart printer/thermal printer generated inkless slips using an internet system, according to traffic officials.



Mayor Peshawar, Azeri envoy join hands for uplift



DNA

PESHAWAR: City Mayor Haji Zubair Ali and the Ambassador of Azerbaijan, Khazar Farhadov have joined hands for the development of the Peshawar city. The ambassador of Azerbaijan Thursday visited the offices of the Capital Metropolitan Government Peshawar wherein he met with the City Mayor Haji Zubair Ali, Director General (DG) Capital Metropolitan Government Arshad Ali Zubair, former DG Mian Shafiq-ur-Rehman and other authorities also attended the meeting. During the meeting, Mayor Peshawar and Azeri Ambassador

discussed matters relating to the development of Peshawar, Pak-Azerbaijan bilateral trade and exchange of traders' delegations. The ambassador congratulated Haji Zubair Ali on his election as Mayor Peshawar and said that Peshawar is an historic city and globally famous for hospitality. He said that Peshawar and Azerbaijan have similar culture and life and traditions. He further said that they will jointly work with the Capital Metropolitan Government for the development of the city and will bring forward formal projects in this connection.

Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali said that Pakistan and Azerbaijan are enjoying brotherly relations and will take all possible steps for bringing further improvement in them. He said that formal planning has been made for the development and welfare of the people of Peshawar, saying all capabilities would be utilized for provision of health and education facilities to the people at their doorsteps. He said that further efforts would be made for promotion of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Azerbaijan and exchange of trade delegations to bring the people of both countries closer to each other.

FSC declares Riba based banking system against Shariah

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) on Thursday announced its verdict on Riba (interest) based banking system and termed it against the Shariah. The three-member FSC comprising Chief Justice Muhammad Nour Maskanzai, Justice Dr Syed Muhammad Anwar and Justice Khadim Hussain M. Sheikh announced its reserved verdict on Riba. The FSC had reserved its verdict in the case on April 12. The court accepted the petition and declared that the prohibition of Riba was complete and absolute in its all forms and manifestations of Islam in accordance with the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. "Therefore, for all detailed reasons deliberated on this judgement the charging of any amount in any manner over the principle amount of a loan or debt is Riba which is completely prohibited according to the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah of Holy Prophet (SAW)." The court ruled that the federal and provincial governments must amend relevant laws and issued directives that the country's banking system should be free of interest by December 2027. The court observed that banks were receiving more than the loan amount when fell under the category of usury. "The Islamic banking system is risk-free and against exploitation," Justice Dr Syed Muham-



mad Anwar remarked. Justice Anwar said almost two decades had lapsed but the governments had not taken any decisions against the interest system. The court also declared all the provisions of the Interest Act 1839, which facilitate interest, as unlawful. The court said the prohibition of Riba was the cornerstone of the Islamic economic system. The FSC said the speedy proliferation and exponential growth of interest-free banking not only in Pakistan but also in the whole Islamic world and even worldwide was a reality that had established that the interest-free

banking system was not only practicable but feasible too. The verdict stated that the court did not agree with the apprehensions shown by the Federal Government that introduction of interest-free banking in the economic system of Pakistan could have a negative impact on the country's overall economic system. It stated that the elimination of Riba from the economic system was not only religious as well as constitutional duty; hence it had to be eliminated from Pakistan. Amir Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Siraj-ul-Haq while talking to the media outside the court aid,

"We welcome the decision of the Federal Shariah Court to abolish Riba in 5 years". He further said, "After Eid, we, together with our Lawyers, Muftis and experts in Islamic economics, will prepare a complete mechanism for abolition of Riba and give it to the government. This decision should be implemented as soon as possible. The government should also not block the path of elimination of Riba with cunning excuses". Siraj-ul-Haq strictly warned that, "we will guard the implementation of the decision of the Federal Shariah Court".

No one should be allowed to play with the health of the citizens: DC Gujrat

YOUSUF BHUTTA

GUJRAT: The District Quality Control Board has approved to send cases against 16 persons to the Drug Court for prosecution who were found selling counterfeit and unlicensed drugs. A meeting of District Quality Control Board was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Khurram Shehzad which was also attended by CEO Health Dr. Naem Akhtar Janjua, Secretary Quality Control Board Intiaz Aslam and other members. A total of 23 cases were presented for hearing in the meeting and after hearing the position of the accused, the committee approved to send 16 out of 23 cases to the Drug Court while the remaining 7 were given warnings. Deputy Commissioner Dr. Khurram Shehzad directed the Health Management Team and Drug Inspectors to make crackdown against counterfeiters and quacks more effective. "No one should be allowed to play with the health of the citizens" he added.

Murree: DC reviews Eid preparations

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Tahir Farooq on Thursday reviewed security and traffic arrangements of Murree finalized for Eid ul Fitr holidays to facilitate the tourists. According to a district administration spokesman, the holidays of all the departments concerned including Murree administration have been canceled to make the arrangements foolproof. Chairing a meeting, the DC said that the tourists could come to Murree during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays to relax and enjoy the holidays. Foolproof security would be provided to the tourists in Murree particularly during holidays, he added. Indecent treatment with the tourists visiting Murree would not be tolerated under any circumstances, the DC said adding, best possible arrangements were being finalized to facilitate the tourists in Murree. He urged the tourists to observe traffic rules on the roads of Murree to avoid traffic mess and any untoward incident during Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

KP CM inaugurates catheterization labs at PIC

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan on Thursday paid a visit to Peshawar Institute of Cardiology (PIC) at Hayatabad where he inaugurated three newly established Cardiac Catheterization Laboratories completed at a cumulative cost of Rs 515 million. With the establishment of these labs, total number of Cath labs in PIC has increased to six which will resultantly double the daily capacity of the procedures of Angiography and Angioplasty in the institute. The chief minister also inaugurated Centralized Sterilization Services Department (CSSD) which has been established at a cost of Rs 77 million. Addressing a ceremony, the chief minister said that health and education had been top most priority of PTI government in the province since its inception, adding that the provincial government has taken a series of result-oriented steps to improve services delivery in these sectors. He said that Sehat Card Plus Scheme was the most important initiatives of the provincial government which has now been extended to 100 percent population of the province. He said that keeping in view the importance of Sehat Card Scheme, legislation was also in progress to provide legal cover to the scheme to run it on permanent basis. - APP

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



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Water Tank

Islamabad.....	0321-5744480
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ICCI for uniform sales tax on overseas promoters

Muhammad Majid Qureshi, Advisor (IT), Federal Tax Ombudsman said that the tax issue of the Overseas Employment Promoters should be sent to FTO in writing and assured that all possible efforts would be made to address their concerns

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) briefed Muhammad Majid Qureshi, Advisor (IT), Federal Tax Ombudsman about the tax issues of Overseas Employment Promoters during his visit to ICCI. Jamshaid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President, Muhammad Faheem Khan Vice President ICCI and representatives of Overseas Employment Promoters Association including Muhammad Saeed Khan, Dildar Abbasi, Muhammad Zia Qureshi, Ch. Muhammad Ali, Khalid Chaudhry and others were present at the occasion. Muhammad Shakeel Munir called upon the government to introduce a uniform sales tax rate on the services of Overseas Employment Promoters across the country in the upcoming budget as the business community of this sector in Islamabad was paying the highest sales tax as compared to provinces, which was not justified by any account. He said that the Overseas Employment Promoters in Punjab and Sindh were paying 5 percent sales tax on their services, but the business community of this sector in Islamabad was paying 16 percent sales tax on the same services, which was discriminatory. He said that the Overseas Employment Promoters were playing an important role



in exporting the Pakistani human resources to various countries and stressed that the government should address their key issues to facilitate them in business development. He requested the Advisor (IT) FTO to take up their tax issue with FBR to remove this anomaly and introduce a uniform tax rate on this sector across the country. Muhammad Majid Qureshi, Advisor (IT), Fed-

eral Tax Ombudsman said that the tax issue of the Overseas Employment Promoters should be sent to FTO in writing and assured that all possible efforts would be made to address their concerns. He said that FTO was working to provide relief to the taxpayers against the maladministration of tax machinery. He stressed that the taxpayers should register their tax related complaint with FTO through online or by

sending in written form and FTO would take up them with relevant authorities in FBR for their redress. Jamshaid Akhtar Sheikh Senior Vice President, Muhammad Faheem Khan Vice President ICCI and the representatives of Overseas Employment Promoters Association also briefed the Advisor (IT) FTO about various tax issues of their sector and hoped that he would play role to address them.

Chairman HEC expresses full solidarity with Karachi University

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman HEC (Higher Education Commission) has expressed solidarity with the students and staff of the University of Karachi over the terrorist incident at the University's Confucius Institute. Condemning the loss of valuable lives in the blast that killed four people including Chinese faculty members, Chairman HEC Tariq Banuri conveyed his profound grief to the Vice Chancellor and extended full support to the University. The Chairman said that it was shocking to see that an institution of higher learning had been targeted in the attack, and especially that some of our foreign guests had also lost their valuable lives. However, the entire nation is united in its resolve to fight this evil through joint and coordinated efforts. HEC had already supported the smart university project through which security cameras had been installed at many universities. Work has started on developing and launching additional programs for harnessing technology, building capacity, and strengthening institutional cooperation in the service of campus security and student welfare.

Pakistan committed to cement ties with Cuba: Khar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar on Thursday expressed Pakistan's resolve to cement abiding ties with Cuba and its people. In a meeting with Cuban Ambassador Zener Caro, the State Minister fondly remembered the assistance provided by Cuba during the massive earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. The Cuban ambassador felicitated the Khar on assuming the office as State Minister for Foreign Affairs.

President asks varsities to produce skilled workforce

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday urged universities in the country to prepare more skilled professionals in view of the emerging market trends. The president gave these remarks while chairing the fourth meeting of the Senate of National Skills University (NSU), Islamabad, here at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Members of the Senate, including the Vice-Chancellor of NSU, Prof Dr Muhammad Mukhtar, attended the meeting. The president asked the management of NSU to constitute a committee to chalk out a plan to upscale and multiply the number of students at the university. He underscored the need for double shifts at the universities in the country, besides initiating short courses to fulfil the market demand for skilled manpower. The president also called for providing

skill-based education through online and distance modes of learning to meet the growing demand for skilled human resources. The meeting confirmed the minutes of the third meeting of the Senate of NSU, Islamabad. It also accorded approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NSU and the Mir Chakar Khan Rind University of Technology, Dera Ghazi Khan for the promotion of research, education, vocational and skill development training programs between both institutions. Under the MoU, NSU will assist Mir Chakar Khan Rind University in establishing the technological, vocational and professional skill development programs and provide its students with practical training in technical and vocational fields. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar in a meeting with Cuban Ambassador Zener Caro. - DNA

Prevailing heatwave to jeopardise public health: Sherry

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman on Thursday said the Ministry had issued official heatwave alert to all provinces as abrupt temperature rise would also jeopardise public health and agriculture. In a statement issued here, the minister criticised the previous regime for not taking adequate measures despite prior warnings issued by various international environmental watchdogs at the onset of the ongoing year. Sherry said, "The former government should have taken precautionary measures to deal with the heatwave as international organizations had warned of a severe and prolonged heatwave in the region". The minister said the South Asia, including the world, was facing a severe heatwave this year. "The temperature in the border areas of Pakistan and India is expected to go up to 49 to 50 degrees Celsius", Sherry Rehman added. "Extreme heatwaves are a sign of climate change and global warming, Pakistan has been facing an unexpected heat wave since March", she mentioned. She further said that the temperatures in Pakistan were likely to rise by 6 to 8 degrees Celsius which was more than usual this year. According to the Meteorological Department, this year was the hottest month since March 1961, she added. While enunciating the global warming impacts recorded this year, she said the rainfall in March alone was 62 percent less than normal. - APP

Railways making efforts to vacate Zhob Station

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways was making all out efforts to vacate Zhob Railway Station building within the next few months. The building occupied by unauthorized outsiders was being used for residential purpose following its permanent closure. The notices as per new Ordinance of 2021 for removal of encroachment introduced by federal government were being served to un-authorized occupants, an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. He said the efforts were being expedited with assistance of local administration and the levies to retrieve the encroached structures and hopefully the encroachment issue would be resolved. The Zhob Railway Station was established in 1920 on Bostan-Zhob section which was a narrow gauge section and it was closed for passenger traffic in 1985 and for goods traffic in 1990 being un-economical hence no, renovation of the station was carried out, since its closure, he added. He said the anti-encroachment operation for vacation of these unauthorized service building would be carried out with the help of district administration of Zhob due to precarious law and order situation in this tribal area. To a question, the official said Pakistan Railways has taken several steps to improve financial conditions of the department including Raabta. - APP

Self-introspection inevitable: Chairman CII

ISLAMABAD: A conference based upon the theme of 'Creation of Pakistan in Shab-e-Qadr' has been held here at Aiwan-e-Quaid in Fatima Jinnah Park. The conference was attended by Mian Muhammad Javed, Chairman Nazriya Pakistan Council, Dr Qibla Ayaz Chairman council of Islamic ideology and Dr. Hafiz Ikram-ul-Haq Secretary council of Islamic ideology along with many famous poets. "Today's event holds two main themes. One is that Pakistan came in to being on a sacred night Shab-e-Qadr which is in fact the biggest gift from Allah and we should always confer upon its importance that such a sacred night was chosen for all the Muslims by Allah to bestow us with his blessing in terms of Pakistan. The second theme of today's event was related to pay the tribute to our national poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal upon the occasion of his death anniversary, a person who has the most important role in the creation of Pakistan." - APP

'Dark skies should be conserved as natural resource'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dark skies should be considered as natural resource that we need to conserve and pass on to our future generations. The experts on the subject said this while sharing their thoughts with the audience at webinar 'Light pollution and conservation of the dark skies' organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). Managing Director, National Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority (NEECA), Dr Sardar Mohazzam, informed the participants that NEECA has developed the Minimum Energy Performance Standards for LEDs which ultimately leads to conservation of dark skies. Besides, we are working with the manufacturers, assemblers, and importers to put lighting standards in place, he added. Technical Lead for the Clean Lighting Coalition (CLIC), Mr Michael Scholand, on the occasion shared some insights from the French National Regulation to reduce outdoor light pollution. Mr Michael Marlin, International Astronomical Union, emphasized that we should take dark skies as a national resource, and it is important to explore the monetary value of the dark skies through astro-tourism.

RCCI submits budget proposals with FBR

Nadeem Rauf said that a 17% sales tax has been imposed on the import of machinery for renewable energy including solar, wind and nuclear power generation. This is contradicting the Government's policy on renewable energy as well as contrary to the global direction

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has submitted to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) a set of proposals for consideration and incorporation in the federal budget for 2022-23, stating that these proposals would help increase economic activity and widen the tax net thereby increasing the government revenue. RCCI President Nadeem Rauf said that the proposals had been categorised into income tax, sales tax, Excess of FBR Powers and import and export with special focus on the documentation of the economy. Currently the rate of sales tax is 17% which is higher in the subcontinent, the rate should be reduced to single digit, he added. He strongly urged government to

revert back the taxes imposed in the mini budget 2022 earlier in January this year by slapping 17% tax at the import stage on nearly 80 items. The majority of these items are essential goods and do not fall in the category of luxury goods. He further added that it is very unfortunate that the government has imposed 17% GST on raw materials of the medicines; this has added more misery among the poor masses. Nadeem Rauf said that a 17% sales tax has been imposed on the import of machinery for renewable energy including solar, wind and nuclear power generation. This is contradicting the Government's policy on renewable energy as well as contrary to the global direction. We have only around 3 million people who are filing their income tax returns, out of which one million filed as zero. It is proposed that all the persons having



industrial or commercial electricity or gas connections should be brought into the tax net. This is the era of technology, it is recommended to consolidate the entire Provincial and the Federal sales tax returns, he added. Point of Sales for retailers: The limitation of 1000 sq.ft is unjustified, this need consideration. The robust linkage between the Government and

private sector boosts the economy, creates the friendly environment, generates employment, attracts investment and helps in the growth of SME sector. While showing grave concerns on current economic condition of the country, President Nadeem Rauf demanded that "All the political parties should sign a charter of economy and follow a single economic manifesto that should be evolved in consultation with the stakeholders. RCCI President Nadeem Rauf strongly recommended that harassment on the account of tax collection, registration and assessment must be stopped. The excesses (Section 38) have ruined the business activities and also damaged the repute of the businessmen. It is recommended that permission of Board is necessary and rules be made for the requirement to exercise this provision.

He said that the treatment with the taxpayers under the grab of reduction in sales is not acceptable. The taxpayers are paying taxes from their hard-earned amounts, in rewards, the sealing of premises, is a deter. It is highly recommended that the sales tax may be imposed on fixed basis and may add this industry in to the 9th schedule of the Sales Tax Act, 1990 basis on the electricity consumption. This will reduce the documentation cost and will increase the revenue multitudes. There is an urgent need to improve the trust level between the taxmen and the tax collector. We recommend that taxpayers shall be given respect. Higher taxpayers be given awards and recognition. Discounted rates besides dedicated treatments for the taxpayers in the Hospitals, Airports, Schools / colleges / universities, Police and Privileged cards be offered.

Briefs

USA, China, UK remain top countries of Pakistani exports

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The United States remained the top export destinations of Pakistani products during the first nine months of financial year (2021-22), followed by China and United Kingdom (UK). Total exports to the USA during July-March (2021-22) were recorded at US \$5000.275 million against the exports of \$3564.575 million during July-March (2020-21), showing growth of 40.27 percent, according to State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) data.

This was followed by China, wherein Pakistan exported goods worth \$2126.778 million against the exports of \$1405.890 million during last year, showing an increase of 51.27 percent.

UK was the at third top export destination, where Pakistan exported products worth \$1671.218 million during the months under review against the exports of \$1508.325 million, showing growth of 10.79 percent, SBP data revealed.

Among other countries, Pakistani exports to UAE stood at \$1360.317 million against \$1086.763 million during last year, showing an increase of 25.17 percent while the exports to Germany were recorded at \$1297.94 million against \$1134.728 million last year, the data showed. During July-March (2021-22), the exports to Holland were recorded \$1067.644 million against \$830.646 million whereas the exports to Italy stood at \$758.795 million against \$559.664 million.

'Efforts being made to get rid of inflation'

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Interior Rana Sana Ullah Khan on Thursday said that efforts were being made on war footing to get rid of inflation, power load-shedding besides strengthening the economy. He said the government had to give respite to the people from inflation, unemployment and load shedding, said a statement issued here.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif would address inflation, unemployment and load-shedding issues. The government was committed to fighting the problems that had plagued the people for the four years, he added. The minister said those who had terrified people for the last four years were now scared of themselves which would further intensify by pace of work of PM Shehbaz Sharif. Rana Sana Ullah said with the arrival of democratic government, the people felt relieve of their worries and anxieties.

The country was now moving towards stability, development and prosperity while anarchy was confined to a few minds, he added.

He advised Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) to pursue case of theft and foreign funding rather fighting with Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). "Don't exert undue pressure on ECP and respect the constitution and constitutional institutions," he further asked PTI leadership. He also advised them not to take law into their hands otherwise law would take its course. - APP

IRSA releases 85864 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Thursday released 85864 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 78638 cases.

According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1074.30 feet, which was 24.03 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet whereas the inflow and outflow of water was recorded a 19974 and 28,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa and Sukkur was recorded as 57051, 49362 and 29625 cases respectively. Similarly, from the Kabul River, a total of 14100 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera and 13364 cusecs released from the Chenab River at Marala. - APP



RAWALPINDI: The Ambassador of Republic of Indonesia to Pakistan Adam Mularwan Tugio visited the chamber house and distributed the Iftar boxes at RCCI Iftar Dastarkhwan. President RCCI Ch. Nadeem A. Rauf along with Senior Vice President Mr. Asim Mahmood Malik, Vice President Tallat Awan, Executive Committee Members were also present on the occasion. - DNA

Pak-China efforts to up wheat output bring amazing results

Abdul Rasheed is the R&D Director of an agricultural company based in Pakistan, which collaborates with Beijing Academy of Agricultural Sciences, to deliver hybrid wheat to Pakistan and to work on improving the productivity of wheat in the country

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pak-China collaboration to boost wheat output proved highly productive for enhancing per acre yield, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. Since April, the harvest of wheat in Pakistan has reached its pinnacle. 75% wheat of Punjab has been reaped. On the 8-hectare hybrid wheat trial in Pakpattan, Punjab, Mr. Abdul Rasheed held up a fresh bunch of recently harvested hybrid wheat with smile.

Abdul Rasheed is the R&D Director of an agricultural company based in Pakistan, which collaborates with Beijing Academy of Agricultural Sciences, to deliver hybrid wheat to Pakistan and to work on improving the productivity of wheat in the country.

"We have been working with Chinese com-

panies to produce hybrid rice in Pakistan with amazing results. We hope our hybrid wheat will bring about the same revolution as hybrid rice," Abdul Raheed told Gwadar Pro. While speaking about hybrid rice, he recalled monumental services of Dr. Yuan Longping, the father of hybrid rice in China, who contributed to massive output of rice production in Pakistan.

As one of the most important food crops, the status of wheat is self-evident for Pakistan with a population of more than 220 million. Rasheed and his instructor Zulfiqar Ali - a professor leading wheat breeding at University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) - shared their insights based on years of wheat research experience. Despite teaming up with China, being listed in the top 10 wheat creating nations, Pakistan's average wheat yield still remains

below the world average. Around 55% of its wheat is developed in rainfed and saline sodic patched areas, with a yield of less than 2 tons/ha. The 45% in well irrigated areas has a yield of 4.5 tons/ha. China is a major wheat developing country with wheat yield in excess of 5 tons/ha on the planet.

"It is imperative to collaborate with China to increase wheat yield per unit area," Prof Zulfiqar Ali further explained. "We can cooperate with China in germplasm exchange, hybrid wheat breeding, wheat added value and food processing plants to advance the wheat yield. Sino-Pak cooperation can not only further develop wheat yield in Pakistan, but also can further improve wheat yield in African nations, etc."

About 70% of Pakistani wheat tonnage is contributed by irrigated land that is based heavily on pumping ground water

via fossil energy. This leads to higher costs in wheat production. Prof. Zulfiqar Ali revealed that new development has been made with Chinese experts in wheat breeding for climate resilience especially for water saving, nutrition use efficiency, disease resistance, and hybrid breeding. He suggested helping farmers obtain disease resistant wheat that utilizes less water. "The equipment involved in wheat processing should be economical in energy. In addition to that, better government policies are also necessary for stabilizing price," he added. Abdul Raheed is working on the seeds of conventional varieties. The yield of hybrid wheat has been increased by 20 percent in previous years and is expected to increase further. He hopes to bring this benefit to local farmers.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran Ali Hosseini in a meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar. - DNA

Five healthcare establishments sealed in ICT

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) has sealed five Healthcare Establishments (HCEs) in different areas of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). According to IHRA, inspection teams carried out inspections of 34 Healthcare Establishments (HCEs) in different areas of ICT during the past two weeks. Zobia Hospital, Perfect diagnostic Center and Rawat Clinic were

sealed due to different malpractices like not getting registered with IHRA, not maintaining patients record, keeping HCE functional despite suspension orders by IHRA and keeping expired kits, reagents and blood bags. The OT and Labour Room of National Hospital and Humaira Medical Centre were sealed due to absence of qualified medical staff and usage of unsterilized instruments. Similarly, 16 healthcare establishments were served notices for minor non-compliances and instructed to comply with the directions given by the inspection teams. Four HCEs were recommended for registration and revocation of suspension. Nine HCEs were found closed at the time of visit by inspection teams. IHRA teams were also carrying out zone-wise mapping of healthcare establishments of Islamabad. Mapping of Zone I and II has been completed while 1074 healthcare establishments have been mapped so far. - APP

No fresh borrowings from SBP, clarifies finance ministry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Finance here on Thursday clarified that there had been no fresh borrowings by the government from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). "In fact the government has been retiring its previous stock of debt with the SBP on its maturity," the ministry said in a statement while responding to news circulating on social media whereby an impression was being created that government had borrowed from the central bank. The statement termed it grossly incorrect which depicted the

limited understanding of the monetary variables. It said, as reported in the monetary tables (M2), the government's borrowing from the SBP for budgetary purposes was calculated as the difference between the government's stock of borrowing from the SBP and its deposits with the central bank. Therefore, net borrowing number may change due to fluctuation in cash balance with SBP and other accounting conventions, it said adding this change was not fresh budgetary borrowing by the government from SBP but just a change in government's cash balance with the SBP.

All Banks to remain open on April 30: SBP

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan on Thursday clarified that all banks and their branches will remain open on Saturday, in line with SBP's instructions embodied in BPRD Circular Letter No. 11 of April 13, 2022. In the wake of public holidays announced by the Government of Pakistan on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr from 2 to 5 May, 2022, the general public is encouraged to undertake their banking transactions on the coming Saturday, said SBP release. Banks have also been advised to ensure 24/7 availability of Alternate Delivery Channels such as ATMs, mobile banking and internet banking during the Eid holidays. - DNA

Musadik Malik takes oath as State Minister

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday administered the oath of office to Senator Dr Musadik Malik as a Minister of State at a ceremony held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. The oath-taking ceremony was attended by parliamentarians and senior government officials. Belonging to Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Senator Musadik Malik joined the cabinet in the fourth phase of its formation as the earlier swearing-in ceremonies were taken place on April 19, April 22, and April 27. The new cabinet reflects the political mix of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), Pakistan Muslim League-Q and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM).

Govt notifies transfer, posting of officers

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Thursday notified transfer and posting of high rank officers.

According to a notification issued by Establishment Division, (Mohammad Jamil, Flt. Lt. (Rtd) Muhammad Khalid Khattak, a BS-20 Officer of Police Service of Pakistan, presently awaiting posting in Establishment Division, is posted as Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in Establishment Division until further orders.

While, Ms. Aqsa Munir (OMG/ BS-17/Prohibitioner), awaiting posting in Establishment Division is transferred and posted as Section Officer, Cabinet Division, with immediate effect and until further orders. - APP

Calligraphy classes in full swing at PNCA

ISLAMABAD: Calligraphy classes is in full swing at Pakistan National Council of the arts (PNCA) under the supervision of instructor Shabbir Ahmad Zia.

A large number of students had been registered to present their abilities in calligraphic art or other writing instruments and contemporary ideas related to the theme, said a press release issued here.

A calligraphic student Faiza Hassan sharing her remarks about calligraphy said modern calligraphy ranged from functional inscriptions and designs to fine-art pieces.

Classical calligraphy differed from type design and non-classical hand-lettering, though a calligrapher might practice both, she said. She said calligraphy continues to flourish in the forms of wedding invitations and event invitations, font design and typography, original hand-lettered logo design, religious art, announcements, graphic design and commissioned calligraphic art, cut stone inscriptions, and memorial documents. It was also used for props and moving images for film and television, and also for testimonials, she added. - APP

Over 5.134 million tons of wheat procured

ISLAMABAD: Wheat procurement campaign across the grain producing areas in the country was in full swing as 74.42% procurement tasks set for current season has been completed.

Under wheat procurement campaign for crop season 2021-22 over 5.134 million tons of wheat so far procured as against the set target of 6.900 million tons in order to maintain strategic reserves of the country as well as keeping the demand and supply smooth in local markets, said Food Security Commissioner Dr Intiaz Ali Gopang.

Talking to APP here on Thursday, he said that Punjab Province has completed 83.53% of its procurement targets as it has procured about 3.341 million tons of grains as compared the set targets of 4 million tons. Meanwhile, Sindh has completed 47.30% task by mid of current month and it procured 662,261 metric tons of wheat as against the set targets of 1.400 million tons, he added. - APP

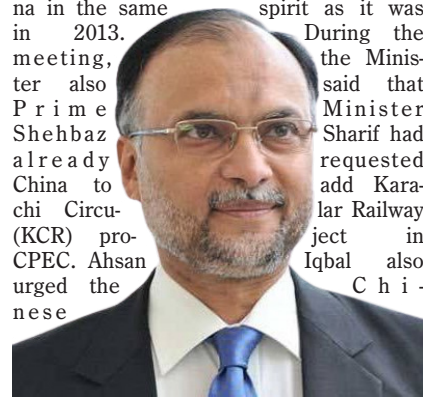
Winning the trust of Chinese Investors first priority

SHUJAAT HAMZA

Ms Pang Chunxue appreciated the steps taken by the Minister since he took charge of the Ministry. The Minister stressed that the incumbent government will maintain the lasting working relationship with China in the same spirit as it was in 2013.

ISLAMABAD: "My top priority is to expedite the CPEC projects to restore the confidence of the Chinese investors," said Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (PD&SI) Professor Ahsan Iqbal during his meeting here with Charge d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy, Ms. Pang Chunxue, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. Mr. Iqbal told Ms. Pang Chunxue that the progress in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been expedited since the new government came into power and regular meetings are being held for the implementation of the projects. Ms. Pang Chunxue appreciated the steps taken by the Minister since he took charge

of the Ministry. The Minister stressed that the incumbent government will maintain the lasting working relationship with China in the same spirit as it was in 2013. During the meeting, the Minister also said that Prime Minister Shehbaz already requested China to add Karachi Railway project in CPEC. Ahsan urged the Chinese official to resolve the issues of Pakistani students studying in China. In this connection, 200 students are being issued visas so that they can complete their studies in China. Similarly, the Minister also suggested that Pakistan and China should start working on space technology and said that Pakistani astronauts should be given the opportunity to go to space with Chinese. This act will further take the relationship between the two countries to new heights higher than the skies, he added. The Minister also pointed to the shortage of water in Karachi and asked the Chinese official to collaborate in establishing desalination plants in the city to overcome paucity of clean drinking water. Ms. Pang Chunxue assured to extend full support of China to uplift the water related projects.



Power crisis

THE holiest month of Ramazan comes as a test; barring Muslims from food and water; from sunrise to sunset. This year, however, those living in Pakistan are being forced to sit through an even more difficult version. Long days, scorching heat and unending bouts of load shedding. There have been reports of unscheduled power outages disrupting both Sehri and Iftaris, even in major cities. What is going on in small towns and rural areas in the name of maintenance-related disruptions and so-called operations against power theft is a different saga altogether. While the present and former governments continue to engage in a vicious game of pass the parcel, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has set May 1 as the deadline for the power woes to end. Neither long-winding stories of how we ended up here from the ruling party's representatives nor the smug looks on the PTI supporter can pull any rabbits out of the hat. There has been swirling talk of depleting furnace oil reserves for quite some time, which requires acquisitions on a war footing. Still, investing all our energies in putting out fires is exactly what set the stage for such dismal affairs in the first place. Every government loves singing the tunes of a new energy policy, which is very conveniently shoved inside some dusty folder once the hue and cry die down. It is high time that Islamabad comes clean about the degree of emergency of its constituents because providing clarity and holding up the mirror remain its foremost responsibilities. Raising hopes unnecessarily only to come up with a trumped-up explanation on the target day is an immensely counter-productive strategy that does not win hearts or index points. How about some confidence-building exercise for a change, which is then backed by fruitful deliberations with all agents of change. Whether it be increasing the stock of natural gas, investing in procurement of LNG or finally opening our eyes to sustainable solutions (because like it or not, we are in 2022), a determined resolve can choose from a number of ways out. All that's needed is a will to improve lives and pave the path for a vibrant economic activity. If not for the people, do it for the businesses.

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West, Russia need to tone down rhetoric

UNITED States Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that his country hoped President Vladimir Putin would de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine.

However, at his meeting in Germany with the rest of Nato ministers, he appeared determined, just like his western allies, to defeat Russia at all costs. Germany was thus forced to send anti-aircraft tanks directly to Ukraine in a major shift in long-held policy of refraining from supplying heavy weapons to a conflict zone.

Just a day before the Nato meeting, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his governing alliance rejected the idea. But it seems the US pressure was overwhelming as Washington seeks to 'weaken' Russia and "make it harder for Russia to threaten its neighbours." Austin vowed to move "heaven and earth" to ensure that Russia is defeated – hardly a de-escalating gesture. Scholz' critics are right, the German move will escalate the war.

The UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss took a more hawkish attitude on Wednesday, drawing in a foreign policy speech from Cold War era vocabulary. The 'free world' must defeat Russia, her message was, otherwise, "there will be untold further misery across Europe and terrible consequences across the globe ... We would never feel safe again."

In retaliation for the increasingly harsh tone by the US-led Nato alliance, Moscow took the rhetoric a level up. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted as saying on Monday that there was a "serious and real" risk of World War Three. With the United Nations unable to intervene, as its Secretary General made it clear on Tuesday, the chances for escalation seem high at the moment, especially with the capture of Ukraine's port city of Mariupol.

On the economic level, the war is hurting in a significant way the fragile recovery of the global economy post Covid-19, especially in the developing world, the World Trade Organisation said in its latest Trade Forecast 2022-2023. The WTO has downgraded expectations for 2022 trade growth from 4.7 per cent to 3 per cent. The conflict, with the unprecedented sanctions imposed by the west on Russia, has led to skyrocketing of commodity prices and disruption in supplies of essential goods.

Instead of mitigating the risk of escalation and pushing for peace, the latest moves by both Russia and the US-led Nato are clearly aimed at not only prolonging the conflict but also widening its scope. It is going to be a long summer, unfortunately.

OIC has key role to play in Afghan girls' future

Maha Akeel



OIC delegations meeting with the de facto Taliban government should consist of women – prominent women and experts in various fields, especially religion – who speak up on the rights of women and girls according to Islamic principles...

AFGHANISTAN'S schoolgirls suffered a heart-breaking moment last month, when the Taliban reneged on their decision to allow them to return to school for the first time since the group regained control of the country in August last year. On March 23, the Taliban leadership announced that schools for girls in Grade 6 and above were closed until further notice, turning more than a million girls away from their school gates across Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the Taliban is still allowing young women to attend university, but only in gender-segregated classes and with strict dress codes. So, girls in secondary and high school are supposed to stay at home and that will be the end of their education, while those who are already in university can complete their studies, if possible, considering the harassment and difficulties they could face reaching their classes. And once they graduate, they can stay home too because there will be very limited opportunities for work. Clearly, this outrageous decision is meant to keep girls from getting any meaningful education. What kind of future will this mean for these girls? And how is it Islamic, since the Taliban claim to be applying Is-

lamic principles? There is no discrimination of rights in Islam – pursuit of knowledge is an obligation for all Muslims and Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, made no distinction between boys' and girls' education. History is full of the names of Muslim women educators, innovators and pioneers. There was some hope that life for women and girls in Afghanistan would not be so harsh when the Taliban initially promised they would not go back to their former ultraconservative attitude toward women. But obviously this was only lip service in an attempt to gain recognition and support from the international community in the face of dire economic and humanitarian conditions. However, with this shortsighted decision and blinded by their condescending and malicious view of women, they are shooting themselves in the foot.

The Taliban have imposed strict rules on wearing the hijab in public and segregation in workplaces, prevented women from traveling, conducting their affairs or even seeking medical care without a male chaperone, and dismissed women from their jobs and any public role. As long as the Taliban insists on its hard-line approach toward women's rights, it will not gain access to the billions of dollars it desperately needs in aid, loans and frozen assets for humanitarian and economic assistance. Furthermore, according to the UN, keeping women out of work could immediately cost Afghanistan up to \$1 billion, or 5 percent of its gross domestic product. The decision to ban girls from going to school came the day after the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held its Council of Foreign Ministers conference in Islamabad, which stated in its declaration: "We underline the importance of full respect for the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children and persons belonging to ethnic, religious and cultural minorities." The OIC later issued a statement expressing its disappointment over the decision to keep girls out of school, but words are not enough. The OIC should try to be more forceful in negotiating with the Taliban. There is a deep-seated distrust between the Taliban and the West, and vice versa, politically and ideologically. Any reference to women's rights and gender issues coming from the West or Western-based international organizations will probably be rejected or met with suspicion and disdain by the Taliban, if it is acknowledged at all. Therefore, it is necessary to build confidence and trust between the Taliban and international organizations through the OIC, which, as an umbrella organization for the Muslim world, is probably more acceptable to the Taliban. Efforts to engage and implement programs in Afghanistan by international organizations would be more fruitful if

led by the OIC and should avoid using terms and references that might offend or irritate Kabul's rulers. On the sidelines of last month's ministerial conference in Islamabad, the OIC secretary-general and the president of the Islamic Development Bank signed a charter establishing the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund. This implemented a decision made by the OIC foreign ministers' extraordinary session held in December 2021, also in Islamabad and at the initiative of Saudi Arabia, to mobilize humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan.

The fund, which will be managed by the bank, will be tailored to enhance food security, support small and medium-sized enterprises to create local employment opportunities, ensure access to quality education (especially for females), women and youth empowerment, and rural electrification. The bank could ensure a percentage of the money from the fund goes to girls' education and women's healthcare and employment as a condition for any project or program implemented. It could also specify the inclusion of women as direct beneficiaries from development projects. OIC delegations meeting with the de facto Taliban government should consist of women – prominent women and experts in various fields, especially religion – who speak up on the rights of women and girls according to Islamic principles, while demonstrating the important role women have played throughout Islamic history in the development and prosperity of their communities.

The delegations should insist on meeting with women's civil society groups and leaders and make them partners in implementing projects and programs. They should also insist on including women in any deliberations, or at least ensure they are consulted and their views are incorporated and taken into consideration. OIC institutions, especially the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the IDB and the Women Development Organization, should play an active role, each in its own capacity and under its own mandates. The OIC Humanitarian Office in Kabul should try to engage and communicate with different sectors of society, including women in rural areas. To be able to do that and deliver, monitor and engage, it needs to be strengthened with human and financial resources. There is a big responsibility on the shoulders of the OIC, not only to help Afghan women but also to portray a positive image of Islam by empowering Muslim women everywhere.

– Courtesy: Arab News

Israel in cahoots with extremist outpost settlers

Yossi Mekelberg

Justice Minister Gideon Sa'ar, leader of the right-wing New Hope party, was quick to take to Twitter and congratulate Yulis for this legal advice, fully understanding that it is a landmark decision in legitimizing and legalizing...

IT is about time that Israel's charade of differentiating between its official settlements and the so-called illegal outposts in the occupied West Bank was brought to an end and for all. Israel is attempting – not very successfully – to pull the wool over the eyes of the international community in making this disingenuous distinction, yet it is doing nothing to dismantle these illegal forms of settlement and is instead gradually legitimizing and legalizing them. In any case, international law does not distinguish between such settlements, whether or not they are approved by an Israeli government. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention clearly prohibits the occupying power from transferring its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. Israel's legal quibble that Jordan never had legitimate sovereignty in the West Bank is getting old, worn out and irrelevant, coming from a country that in the past claimed to be negotiating in good faith for its withdrawal from most of this territory so as to enable a peace agreement that would have allowed a Palestinian state to be established.

This month's decision to approve a controversial bill that will enable these illegal outposts to be connected to the electricity grid has let the cat out of the bag and exposed the government's pretense that it considers these settlements illegal. A tenuous argument was presented by Deputy Attorney General Carmit Yulis and is based on a differentiation between outposts built on land declared to be "state-owned" that will be connected to the power grid, while excluding those built on private Palestinian land.

It might be my legal ignorance, but does this ruling mean that, from now on, anyone can grab state land anywhere inside Israel and the Occupied Territories and then enjoy the government's services, such as water and electricity, or does it only apply to Jewish settlers in the West Bank? The distinction between private land and state land is there for the purpose of serving the constant expansion of settlements and stealing this land from the Palestinians, who desperately need it for housing and agriculture as their population grows.

– Courtesy: Arab News

Ukrainians: No nationality and now, no home

Kristina Fried

Critically, Europe has excluded stateless individuals from its refugee response plan, which offers immediate protection to Ukrainian...

AS Europe mobilises to accommodate the growing number of Ukrainians fleeing the country – now more than four million – stateless Ukrainians are fighting a losing battle for protection and recognition. Not recognised as nationals by Ukraine or any other state under the operation of its laws, stateless Ukrainians, who number approximately 40,000, are denied access to basic rights and have been the targets of pervasive discrimination as they seek refuge abroad. European states must act decisively within their international legal obligations to ensure protections for all refugees, irrespective of nationality, race, or ethnicity.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people in former Soviet nations who fell through the gaps of new nationality laws became stateless. Racism and ethnic discrimination left certain minority groups particularly vulnerable. For example, Roma represent one of the largest groups of stateless people in Ukraine – and one of the most discriminated against across Europe. Lacking a nationality – and the corresponding ability to establish one's legal identity – has severe consequences. Nationality

is often referred to as a "gateway right", without which access to other basic rights is extremely challenging. Statelessness creates barriers to accessing work, healthcare, education, and housing, and even to pursuing redress for those rights violations in court. Without a legal identity, it is as though stateless people do not exist.

When stateless people become refugees, these risks multiply. Stateless status – which should alone be grounds for protection – is regularly overlooked in immigration proceedings, despite being a critical factor in the assessment of a refugee or asylum claim. Where their refugee or asylum claim is denied, stateless people are often indefinitely detained [PDF] simply because there is no state that recognises them as nationals to which they can be "returned". With Europe facing what UNHCR Commissioner Filippo Grandi called "the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II", stateless Ukrainian refugees are forced to confront these problems head-on. One stateless Ukrainian woman expressed her fear of leaving, even as her home was bombed: "I'm afraid that if I decided to leave I wouldn't be able to cross checkpoints or borders because I don't have documents. I'm also very scared they'd separate me from my children because I have no proof that I'm their mother."

But the lack of legal protection is not the only problem stateless refugees are facing. Racial and ethnic minorities – such as the Roma, whose intersecting ethnic and stateless identities make them doubly vulnerable to discrimination – are finding it particularly difficult to access the protection they so desperately need. Many have recounted horror stories of waiting for days in camps without food or water, while their Ukrainian citizen counterparts were welcomed with open arms. States' lack of comprehensive legal frameworks addressing state-

lessness – in violation of their international legal obligations – is largely to blame for the chronic disenfranchisement of stateless people.

To be sure, many European states have created safeguards against statelessness. Ten states have a procedure for identifying stateless individuals and conferring a dedicated stateless status. Other states have piecemeal procedures, but no comprehensive framework that allows for both determination and protection. Ukraine's new framework, adopted in 2021, establishes a stateless status determination procedure and a process for naturalisation.

Critically, Europe has excluded stateless individuals from its refugee response plan, which offers immediate protection to Ukrainian nationals and permanent residents. Although Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania have promised to admit all refugees, including those who are stateless, experts worry that without dedicated protections, stateless refugees will be left behind. Importantly, these ad hoc policies do not consider that many stateless refugees are at increased risk because of their ethnicity or race – officials have prevented Roma refugees from entering Hungary and Slovakia, and they have experienced widespread discrimination in Moldova. European states must make the necessary policy and legislative changes to fulfill their legal obligations respecting stateless people. Statelessness is not a new problem in Europe, but as the number of Ukrainian refugees continues to rise, it has taken on a new sense of urgency. Granting stateless Ukrainians immediate, non-discriminatory protection is the first step. But long-term, systemic change is needed to ensure that stateless people across Europe can finally access their most fundamental right – the right to a nationality.

– Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Briefs

'Pak grateful to Saudi for its support'

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistan and Saudis were bound by deep-rooted ties built on solid foundations of mutual trust. "We are profoundly grateful for its consistent support to Pakistan in its difficult hours," he said, adding that Pakistan always stood by Saudis and would continue to do so. He also thanked Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman for the invite and lauded his 2030 vision for achieving "greater progress" for his people. Shehbaz also lauded commitment to the Muslim causes as he looked forward to "interaction with the Saudi leadership to review the bilateral ties" and take them to the "unknown heights". "I would also like to convey sincere good wishes to Pakistani expats in the Kingdom," the prime minister said calling them key partners in fortifying ties with Pakistan. Federal Ministers and parliamentarians, including Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Miftah Ismail, Shahzain Bugti, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Khawaja Asif, Ch Salik Hussain, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, and Mohsin Dawar accompanied the prime minister.

Govt to try President, ex-PM under Article 6

FROM PAGE 01

resolution against then Premier Imran and the subsequent dissolution of the lower house of parliament by President Arif Alvi on the premier's advice.

"The ruling of the deputy speaker of the National Assembly in relation to the resolution for a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister under Article 95 of the Constitution is declared to be contrary to the Constitution and the law and of no legal effect, and the same are hereby set aside," the top court said in its short order. The apex court ruled that President Alvi's decision to dissolve the National Assembly was also "contrary to the Constitution and the law and of no legal effect". It noted that the prime minister could not have advised the president to dissolve the assembly as he continued to remain under the bar imposed under Clause (1) of Article 58 of the Constitution.

Russia warns West: Don't test our patience

FROM PAGE 01

while Russia has taken umbrage at statements from NATO-member Britain that it is legitimate for Ukraine to target Russian logistics. "In the West, they are openly calling on Kyiv to attack Russia including with the use of weapons received from NATO countries," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters in Moscow. "I don't advise you to test our patience further." The Kremlin said Western - and in particular British - attempts to supply heavy weapons to Ukraine threatened the security of Europe. Russia's defence ministry said on Tuesday that if such attacks continued then Moscow would target decision-making centres in Ukraine, including those where it said Western advisers were helping Kyiv.

Saudi visit shows 'will' to start new era: Erdogan

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said his visit to Saudi Arabia was an example of a common will to start a new period in relations between Ankara and Riyadh and he hoped to improve ties on a basis of mutual respect and trust. Speaking to reporters before his departure from Türkiye, President Erdogan said he believed increasing cooperation on health, energy, food security, defence industry and finance would be mutually beneficial.

Embassy marks anniversary of Pak-Japan diplomatic ties



DNA
TOKYO: To commemorate the 70th Anniversary of establishment of Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Japan, a reception was held at a local Hotel on 28th April 2022. A large number of people including Japanese Government officials, Parliamentarians, Heads of Mission, Academia, Think-tanks, leading media and

business personalities and people belonging to different walks of life participated in the event. The reception commenced with recitation from the Holy Quran followed by the National Anthems of Japan and Pakistan sung by well known Japanese music composer and singer Ms. Masako Shindo. A video message of H.E. Mr. Mian Muhammad Shahbaz Shareef, Prime Minister of Pakistan pre-

recorded for this special occasion was also played for the audience. Mr. Taro Honda, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan was the Chief Guest at the reception. Mr. Honda read-out the message of H.E. Mr. Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan on the occasion. Ms. Ismat Hassan Sial, Charge d' Affaires a.i., in her remarks welcomed and thanked the guests for joining



the occasion. She highlighted the close, historical, political, trade and business relations between the two countries. She expressed gratitude to the people and Government of Japan for assistance during the natural calamities. Documentaries on Pakistan - Japan relations and tourism potential of Pakistan were displayed at the event. The Embassy also arranged a Pakistan traditional stall display-

ing handicraft, paintings, carpets woodcarved items, ethnic jewellery, blue glazed pottery etc. A Japanese national Mr. Takayuki Ueda played Pakistani instrument Rubab that cheered the audience. The guests later enjoyed sumptuous Pakistani and Japanese food. The event helped showcase multiple strands of linkages between Pakistani and Japanese societies and was well appreciated by the participants.

Mesut Ozil slams 'shameful situation' of Indian Muslims



WEB DESK

ISTANBUL: German-Turkish footballer Mesut Ozil has taken to twitter to spread awareness of the plight of India's Muslims who face persecution in the Hindu-majority country. Yesterday, on one of the final ten days of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the former Real Madrid and Arsenal player called on the international community to "break the silence" on what is happening in India. He added that he is praying for the safety and well-being of the country's substantial Muslim minority. Describing the "shameful situation", Ozil raised the issue of human rights in the "so-called largest democracy in the world". His tweet, which includes an image of Delhi's Mughal-era Jama Masjid at dusk when the faithful break their fast, has since garnered almost 80,000 likes. Ozil's intervention comes amid the growing persecution of India's 200 mil-

lion Muslims, which includes calls by influential extremists for genocidal violence as well as sexual violence against Muslim women and girls. Last week, Hindus for Human Rights issued a statement signed by Hindu leaders from around the world expressing dismay over "anti-Muslim hate". The signatories criticised Hindutva, "A century-old political ideology [of the ruling party] that sees citizens of other faiths as inherently foreign and not qualified to enjoy the full benefits of Indian citizenship."

They added that, "We have seen Muslim women put up for 'auction' on an app created by college students, and hijab-wearing Muslim girls being denied their right to equal education in Karnataka." This is not the first time that Ozil has been vocal about human rights issues affecting Muslim minorities. In 2019, the 33-year-old criticised China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims which caused a backlash against him. His club at the time, Arsenal, distanced itself from his comments, stating that it "does not [get involved] in politics". Such a position, however, has not stopped Arsenal from joining other clubs, organisations and brands in voicing support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion. The North London club has been accused of hypocrisy given its previous "no involvement in politics" claim and lack of backing for its former player.

Halep, Badosa sweep into Madrid 2nd-round showdown

MADRID: The Mutua Madrid Open already has a marquee second-round tussle lined up, with two-time champion Simona Halep and World No.2 Paula Badosa advancing to face each other after speedy openers.

Halep got her 2022 campaign in the Spanish capital off to a flying start, easing past Zhang Shuai 6-2, 6-3 on Manolo Santana Stadium. Badosa followed up on the same court shortly thereafter, sweeping the final nine games en route to a 6-3, 6-0 win over Veronika Kudermetova. Despite their elevated status in the elite of women's tennis, this will be the first meeting between Halep and Badosa. "I think it's going to be an interesting match, because it's going to be quite a clay-court match very tactically, and I'm really looking forward to that," Badosa said, looking ahead to her match with Halep. "Of course she's a great champion. So maybe I'm the favorite or no, I will try to give my best, because for sure she will push me to the limits. I'm really looking forward to these kind of matches, because I really like them and it's the matches that you work for, you know."

Under the roof on a rainy day, former World No.1 Halep executed a 68-minute victory over an opponent who had defeated her on multiple occasions in the past. With the victory, Halep edged ahead to a 3-2 lead in her head-to-head with Zhang, who had stunned the Romanian in the first round of the 2016 Australian Open after previously being 0-14 in Grand Slam first-round matches. Halep has reached the Mutua Madrid Open final a tournament-record four times, winning the title in 2016 and 2017 and finishing as runner-up in 2014 and 2019. Newly under the tutelage of Patrick Mouratoglou, Halep was precise against Zhang on Thursday. "I'm really happy that I could win this match," Halep said afterward. "It means a lot. Being in Madrid, I have great memories. So everything together today and I played a good match. Every time when you start with someone, it's tough because you are nervous, you don't know how it's going



to be. But I was pretty confident that everything will be okay because I have a great relation with [Mouratoglou]. I'm honored, because I always thought that he's great. Now I have the confirmation that he's great, and he's helping me a lot with all the things that I have to improve and I have to do on court." Zhang matched Halep in winners on the day, but Halep kept her unforced error count much lower, with 17 to Zhang's 39. Halep converted all five of her break points to take the swift victory.

Two breaks in the first five games of the match gave Halep a quick advantage, and the two-time Grand Slam champion slammed two wonderful passing winners to hold for 5-1, averting break points in the process. A forehand winner closed out the opening set for Halep. World No.40 Zhang used aggressive play to nudge ahead by an early break in the second set, but



Halep quickly turned that set around, winning six of the next seven games to romp to the second round. Blistering Badosa: Badosa, who is enjoying her first week as the newly-installed World No.2, was equally impressive on her home soil. Badosa required just over an hour to dispatch World No.25 Kudermetova. Like Halep, Badosa notched a victory over a player who had given her much trouble in the past, with Kudermetova having won their first three meetings.

However, Badosa at last defeated Kudermetova in Indian Wells earlier this year, and now has two wins in a row against her rival. Badosa was superb coming back to the event which catapulted her towards the top of the game. Only a year ago, Badosa came into the event as a 62nd-ranked wildcard, but the Spaniard thrived amongst her compatriot crowds to storm into the semifinals. - Agencies

Int'l dev't conference kicks off in Shusha

Hikmat Hajiyev said that the peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia will serve the development of integration in the South Caucasus

DNA

BAKU: An international conference on the topic "Development and Cooperation in South Caucasus" has started in Azerbaijan's Shusha. Two-panel discussions on topics "Shusha-road to revival" and "Cooperation, opportunities, and challenges" will take place within the framework of the conference. Speaking at the conference, presidential aide Hikmat Hajiyev said that the peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia will serve the development of integration in the South Caucasus.

"Azerbaijan, for its part, is ready to sign the peace treaty, demonstrating this by participating in the negotiation process, which lasted 30 years," he said. Noting that Armenia is still refraining from concrete steps which will benefit it, Hajiyev stressed that joint development in various sectors such as transport, trade and energy will bring social and economic benefits to Azerbaijan, Armenia and the entire region. Moreover, he mentioned that Azerbaijan will continue to develop its security and defence forces. "We cannot forget everything that has happened over the past 30 years in Karabakh and we will continue to build our defence forces," he said. He emphasized that Azerbaijan is ready to sign a peace treaty with Armenia and that



the country is not seeking vengeance. "We are striving for justice," he said. Speaking about the OSCE Minsk Group,

Hajiyev stated that its work on peaceful settlement of the conflict turned out to be fruitless. "Negotiations within the Minsk

Finland will soon decide on NATO membership

AGENCIES

HELSINKI: Finland's parliament will soon decide on whether it will seek NATO membership or not, said the nation's prime minister on Wednesday. The possible membership of Finland, which already maintains a robust army, could make sizeable militarily contributions to the alliance, Sanna Marin told a news conference in the Greek capital Athens alongside her Greek counterpart Kyriakos Mitsotakis. She reiterated that Russia's protracted war in Ukraine has radically altered Europe's security landscape, adding that her country will continue to support Ukraine. After long resisting NATO membership, the public and politicians in Finland - which has a long border with Russia - had a change of heart after Russia's war on Ukraine began on Feb. 24.

Sanctions are already having a significant impact on the Russian economy, according to Marin, who supports even harsher moves, such as a complete ban on Russian energy imports to Europe. She added that Finland supports additional aid to Ukraine, including humanitarian, financial, and military assistance. Mitsotakis stressed Greece's support for sanctions, as well as his call for an investigation of alleged Russian war crimes in Mariupol and elsewhere in Ukraine. On Finland possibly joining NATO, he said the decision would be taken by the Finnish people, and Greece will respect that.

He vowed that bilateral ties with Finland will be strengthened, particularly in tourism, energy, and trade. Russia has repeatedly expressed opposition to Finland or Sweden joining NATO. In starting its war on Ukraine, Moscow cited the possibility the country might join NATO, although its membership process had barely begun. On April 23, Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said the Russian war on Ukraine has caused a drastic shift in the European security environment, and that it is the right time for his country to join NATO. At least 2,787 civilians have been killed and 3,152 others injured in Ukraine since the war started on Feb. 24, according to UN estimates. The true toll is feared to be much higher. So far, 7.7 million people in Ukraine have been internally displaced, with more than 5.3 million fleeing to other countries, according to the UN refugee agency.

Saudi visit shows 'will' to start new era: Erdogan

FOREIGN DESK

ANKARA: Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said his visit to Saudi Arabia was an example of a common will to start a new period in relations between Ankara and Riyadh and he hoped to improve ties on a basis of mutual respect and trust. Speaking to reporters before his departure from Türkiye, President Erdogan said he believed increasing cooperation on health, energy, food security, defence industry and finance would be mutually beneficial.

He will also meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during the visit, he said. President Erdogan visiting Saudi Arabia upon the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Turkish Presidency said in a statement earlier.

Relations between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia "will be reviewed in all aspects and the possibilities of developing cooperation will be discussed," the presidency said. "During the meetings, views will be exchanged on regional and international issues as well as bilateral relations," it added.

Relations between Ankara and Riyadh have seen a drop in recent years due to political tensions, but both countries are now seeking to revive ties. Erdogan and King Salman had discussed bilateral relations in April and May in 2021. In July 2021, Mevlut Cavusoglu met his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, describing it as "a fruitful meeting." In August, Ibrahim Kalin, the Turkish presidential spokesperson, announced some positive developments in relations. - APP

Briefs

Algeria threatens to cut off gas supplies to Spain

DNA

ALGIERS: Algeria threatened Wednesday to cut off gas supplies to Spain if any of the gas winds up in a different location than specified by a contract. Transporting any amount of Algerian gas to a different destination is considered a breach of contractual obligations and would lead to the termination of the contract binding state-owned energy company Sonatrach and the Spanish customer, Algeria's Energy Ministry said in a statement.

As Algeria broke diplomatic relations with the Moroccan administration, the Maghreb-Europe Gas Pipeline - with a capacity of 12 billion cubic meters connecting Algeria to Spain via Morocco - has not been used since last October. Spain's Energy Ministry earlier confirmed that it planned to ship gas to Morocco but noted that none of that gas would be of Algerian origin.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez sent a letter to King Mohammed VI of Morocco on March 14 saying they found the "autonomy plan" proposed by the Rabat administration to solve the Western Sahara problem to be correct. Algeria recalled its ambassador to Madrid for consultation on March 19 after Sanchez supported the Moroccan plan for the solution of the Western Sahara problem. Regarding close relations with Morocco, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said "what Spain is doing is morally and politically unacceptable." The Western Sahara problem has caused tensions in the relations between Morocco and Algeria. Morocco accuses Algeria of supporting the separatist Polisario Front. It is known that Algeria does not support its neighbor Morocco's steps in Western Sahara.

22,800 Russian troops killed: Ukraine

KYIV: At least 22,800 Russian soldiers have so far been killed in Ukraine, the Ukrainian military claimed on Thursday.

The Ukrainian troops destroyed 970 Russian tanks, 2,389 armored personnel vehicles, 431 artillery systems, and 151 multiple launch rocket systems, the Ukrainian General Staff announced in a statement.

The Ukrainian forces also destroyed 187 aircraft, 155 helicopters, 17 air defense systems, 1,688 vehicles, eight ships, a light speedboat, 76 fuel vehicles, and 215 unmanned aerial vehicles, the statement added.

The Russian army lost 400 more soldiers in the last 24 hours, it added.

At least 2,787 civilians have been killed and 3,152 others injured in Ukraine since the war started on Feb. 24, according to UN estimates. The true toll is believed to be much higher.

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ADB pledged \$3.23 billion for various projects in Pakistan

The Zu Peshawar BRT system features hybrid electric buses and 30 stations along a 27-kilometer (km) corridor that links east to west across the city

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed \$3.32 billion in 2021 to help Pakistan tackle the immediate effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and promote a green recovery. The commitment made by the Bank in 2021 includes loans and guarantees, grants, equity investments, and technical assistance provided to governments and the private sector. In addition, ADB also mobilized \$2.019 billion in co-financing. According to a report issued by the ADB, \$300 million were committed for Balakot Hydropower Development, \$372 million for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement, and \$5 million were committed

for Preparing Kurram Tangi Integrated Water Resources Development Project. In addition to reducing dependence on fossil fuels and increasing energy security, the 300-megawatt, run-of-river hydropower plant in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, will boost economic activity and create jobs for local communities. During construction, more than 1,200 workers will be hired and at least 500 community members, including many women, will benefit from skills development programs. Furthermore, the ADB also committed \$600 million for Pakistan's Integrated Social Protection Development Program and \$235 million for the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor Development Program Tranche 2.

ADB provided the loan to strengthen and expand social protection programs in Pakistan. The project includes measures to boost access to secondary education for children and adolescents of poor families, especially girls. It will also enhance access to health services and nutrition supplies for impoverished mothers and children in 22 districts. In Pakistan, ADB provided \$377.8 million (with an additional \$200 million in cofinancing) to assist the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in improving living conditions across five cities. The total financing will enhance water supply, sewerage, and solid waste infrastructure; expand public parks and green spaces; and streamline service delivery and the performance of municipal companies. Through the project, ADB will improve urban life for up to 3.5 million people in the five target cities. The ADB also committed \$300 million concessional loan for Pakistan's Energy Sector Reforms and Financial Sustainability Program, and \$500 million concessional loan for COVID-19 Vaccine Support under the Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility. The report added that supporting cleaner, safer travel in Pakistan, a bus rapid transit (BRT) system in Peshawar, Pakistan made possible by financing from ADB's breaking records for passenger use and attracting more women to public transport. The Zu Peshawar BRT system features hybrid electric buses and 30 stations along a 27-kilometer (km) corridor that links east to west across

the city. Despite restrictions on movement imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership of the system reached more than 50 million passengers in 2021, with over 25% of commuters being women and children. The only gold-standard BRT system operating in Pakistan, the Zu Peshawar service prioritizes accessibility and security for women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable users. Women are provided priority queuing areas on the platform and a dedicated space inside the vehicles. The ADB-supported project also ensured complete urban regeneration along the route, including new energy-efficient streetlights, quality footpaths, drainage systems, and dedicated cycle lanes. It

is already improving air quality for Peshawar's residents due to reduced traffic congestion. Around 150 bus stops are planned across a network of 83 km of direct service routes that connect densely populated communities directly to the system. In 2021, the Zu Peshawar BRT system earned an honorable mention in the prestigious 2022 Sustainable Transport Award. ADB provided a \$235 million loan to expand 222 km of National Highway 55 in Pakistan. This will improve transport times along CAREC corridors which have become congested due to growing traffic volumes between Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore covering substantial economic losses and reducing air and noise pollution.

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Somalia's parliament elects new speaker

MOGADISHU: Lawmakers in Somalia's lower house of parliament chose Sheikh Adan Mohamed Nur as its new speaker early Thursday after a much anticipated election held inside the heavily protected Aden Adde International Airport in the capital Mogadishu. Over 250 parliamentarians took part in the election following several days of political tensions in the country. Nur, also known as Aden Madobe, who previously served as speaker of parliament from Jan. 31, 2007 to May 25, 2010, won with 163 votes after defeating lawmaker Hassan Abdinur in the second round. Abdinur had been widely seen as the candidate backed by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed. In a statement after the election results were announced, Madobe congratulated Nur for his election win. - Agencies

UK parliament passes 'anti-refugee bill'

LONDON: UK's controversial Nationality and Borders Bill, described as the "anti-refugee bill", has been adopted in the House of Lords, the upper house of Parliament. The bill was passed in the House of Lords by a vote of 212 to 157. The bill would criminalize entering the UK without a visa, as well as allow the government to strip an individual's citizenship without telling them. The bill, which needs the approval of Queen Elizabeth to become law, includes provisions such as imposing prison sentences on migrants who attempt to enter the country illegally. "It truly is a bleak day for refugees fleeing conflict and persecution," Steve Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty International's refugees and migrant rights program director for the UK, said in a statement following the adoption of the bill in the House of Lords. UN refugee agency head Filippo Grandi also decried the bill. "The UN Refugee Agency regrets that the British government's proposals for a new approach to asylum that undermines established international refugee protection law and practices has been approved," Grandi said in a written statement. "This latest UK Government decision risks dramatically weakening a system that has for decades provided protection and the chance of a new life to so many desperate people," he added. - Agencies

Oil drops as China fuel demand falls

DNA

BEIJING: Oil prices decreased on Thursday as declining fuel demand in China due to the spread of COVID-19 eased supply concerns. International benchmark Brent crude cost \$103.27 per barrel at 0600 GMT for a 1.60% decrease after closing the previous session at \$104.95 a barrel. American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$100.44 per barrel at the same time for a 1.55% fall after the previous session closed at \$102.02 a barrel. The drop in oil prices was triggered by lockdowns in the world's largest importer, China, meaning less fuel demand while relieving pressure on global supply and demand.



ISLAMABAD: Leader of the opposition in the Senate and PTI head of diplomatic affairs Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem recording his remarks on the condolence book placed at Chinese embassy. - DNA

Azerbaijan ready for peace with Armenia: Presidential aide

BAKU: President's special representative in the liberated territories Emin Huseynov has said that Azerbaijan sends Armenia a message of readiness for peace, local media has reported. Huseynov made the remarks at the international conference "South Caucasus Development & Cooperation" held in Azerbaijan's Shusha city on April 28. "Our country is interested in peace and stability in the region. Azerbaijan is a country that has managed to integrate well into regional processes, and Armenia still has a chance to join the regional integration. Better late than never," Huseynov stressed. He emphasized that the Karabakh conflict is over, and Azerbaijan has shown its willingness to create peace on several occasions. Meanwhile, Deputy Director-General of Trend news agency, political expert Sahil Karimli stated that international events held in Shusha are very important for conveying Azerbaijan's realities to the world, Day.az reported.

The arrival of foreign think tank officials to Karabakh, as well as an international conference in Shusha, is a significant occasion. World-class, influential experts, research scientists, and media representatives get acquainted with Azerbaijan's liberated territories and witness the Armenian savagery, as well as the rapid reconstruction activities carried out there. This is critical because, as a result of such events, the international community has a better understanding of the new realities produced by Azerbaijan in the area and follows the process of reconstructing Karabakh and East Zangazur from the ground up, the expert emphasized. This event brings together think tank representatives from over 20 nations to debate how Armenians have destroyed Azerbaijani settlements, witness the destruction of the territory, the demolition of the cultural, religious, and historical monuments, environmental terrorism, and other acts of vandalism, he added. It is known that Armenia mined Azerbaijani territories en masse during the occupation. At present, the Azerbaijani government is rapidly clearing the area of mines. But the situation is so complicated that demining takes a long time because Armenia has mined almost every inch of territory. - Agencies

Microsoft unveils Russian cyberattacks

NEW YORK: US-based multinational tech firm Microsoft unveiled Wednesday that Russia has conducted cyberattacks against Ukraine in concert with its military action. In a report prepared with Ukrainian cybersecurity officials and private sector companies, Microsoft said: "The cyber component of Russia's assault on Ukraine has been destructive and relentless." "At least six Russian Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) actors and other unattributed threats, have conducted destructive attacks, espionage operations, or both, while Russian military forces attack the country by land, air, and sea," the report said. It added that a day before Moscow's military attack in Ukraine, operators associated with the Russian military intelligence service launched destructive cyberattacks on hundreds of systems in the Ukrainian government, information technology, energy and financial organizations. - Agencies

Int'l Forum on Aerospace Education boosts China-Pak space cooperation

DNA

BEIJING: With the approaching of the 7th Space Day of China, International Forum on Aerospace Education & Belt and Road Aerospace Innovation Alliance (BRAIA) 5th Anniversary Conference successfully concluded online, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday.

Prof. ZHANG Weihong, member of the Chinese Academy of Science and Vice President of Northwestern Polytechnical University (NPU), Ms. FENG Chunping, Vice Chairman of Governing Board of Chinese Society of Astronautics (CSA), Mr. LIU Baoping, Deputy Director of Education Department of Shaanxi Provincial Government, Ms. JIANG Hui, Counselor of China National Space Administration to Russia, Ms. YU Qi, Secretary-General of Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) attended the meeting and

delivered speeches. Over 100 representatives of BRAIA members and international organizations, including the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs attended the meeting. The conference was presided by Prof. Zhang Fuli, Director of Office of International Cooperation and Dean of International College, NPU. Experts and scholars from Pakistani universities, which are important partners of NPU in South Asia, attended the conference and made reports. Dr. Adnan Maqsood from National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) made a work report, indicating that NUST has achieved fruitful results through close cooperation with BRAIA and a group of Chinese universities including NPU in the past five years. For example, since October 2020, scholars from Pakistani universities have been actively engaged in joint research seed fund projects initiated by BRAIA in aero-

dynamics, composite and microsatellite. Moreover, during the difficult time of fighting against COVID-19, the Permanent Secretariat of BRAIA has been keeping close touch with NUST. The Permanent Secretariat office in NPU managed to offer a batch of masks to NUST, hoping that BRAIA members will overcome the difficult time hand in hand. Besides, Dr. Adnan Maqsood also promoted an upcoming internship program for international students this summer. "Essentially, the notion of this internship for international students is to acclimatize them with hi-tech research labs. Moreover, the opportunity will also enable foreign students to learn from the industry experts besides gaining hands-on experience." The program is open to university students from all BRAIA members, and plays a huge role in promoting talent exchange in aerospace and other fields among different countries.

Jordan 'pushing' to restore Al Aqsa Mosque status quo

Israeli attacks on worshippers during the month of Ramadan at the mosque compound have stoked anger and international concern about a slide back to a wider Israel-Palestine conflict

NEWS DESK

AMMAN: Jordan has intensified efforts to push Israel to respect the historic status quo of occupied East Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque and avoid violent confrontations that could threaten a wider conflict, Jordanian officials and Western diplomats have said. The officials on Thursday said Jordan had notified Washington it was ready to discuss the issue with Israel after the end of the holy month of Ramadan next week. The aim would be to identify steps that Israel could take to return conditions at the mosque to those of 22 years ago. Jordan accuses Israel of having gradually changed restrictions on worship at the

mosque since 2000. The new diplomatic effort is "to deal with the roots of the tension and ensure that matters don't explode again," a Jordanian official who requested anonymity said, adding that Washington had recently been given a paper that "clearly" stated the kingdom's position. Israeli attacks on worshippers during the month of Ramadan at the mosque compound have stoked anger and international concern about a slide back to a wider Israel-Palestine conflict. A tinder-box for the regional tensions, the compound is the third holiest site in Islam. Jews refer to it as the Temple Mount and regard it as the holiest site in Judaism. Jordan, whose ruling Hashemite family has custodianship of the Muslim and Christian sites, says that

since 2000, following the start of the second Intifada (uprising), Israel has undermined a centuries-old tradition under which non-Muslims do not worship in the mosque compound. The second Intifada, a five-year-long uprising that killed thousands of Palestinians, was sparked in 2000 after Israeli security forces killed and wounded dozens of worshippers in Al Aqsa Mosque after Ariel Sharon, an Israeli general who served as the 11th Prime Minister of Israel, stormed Al Aqsa Mosque accompanied by a heavy security presence. A Western diplomat said Jordan's proposal did not include convening a joint committee with Israel concerning Muslim and Christian shrines in occupied East Jerusalem.

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Briefs

Pakistan lauds Iran's support on Kashmir issue: Khar

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar on Thursday said Pakistan appreciates Iran's continued support on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. The state minister expressed these views in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Syed Mohammad Ali Hoseini here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting focused on various aspects pertaining to further strengthening bilateral fraternal relations between the two countries. Khar lauded the similarity of views between Pakistan and Iran on important regional and international issues.

SBP imposes Rs 100 mn fine on four banks

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan has imposed penalties of over Rs 100 million on four banks including a public sector bank, an Islamic bank, and a microfinance bank against violations of rules and regulations of various nature. According to enforcement orders issued, the banking watchdog penalized three commercial banks and one microfinance separately with an overall penalty of Rs. 108.9 million during the first quarter of January to March 2022, said SBP release on Thursday. Albaraka Bank has been slapped with a penalty of Rs.140.90 million on the violation of regulatory instructions pertaining to AML/CFT, asset quality, foreign reserves, and general banking operations.

In addition to penal action, the SBP advised to conduct an internal inquiry on breaches of regulatory instructions and take disciplinary action against the delinquent officials. Askari Bank Limited was fined Rs 38.5 million for the violation of regulatory instructions pertaining to CDD/KYC, asset quality, and general banking operations. National Bank of Pakistan also faced a penalty of Rs 19.28 million against violation of regulatory instructions pertaining to asset quality. In addition to penal action, the SBP advised the bank to strengthen its controls and processes in the identified areas. U Microfinance Bank was slapped with a fine of Rs 10.2 million against violation of regulatory instructions pertaining to asset quality. Besides penal action, the bank has been advised to conduct an internal inquiry on breaches of regulatory instructions and take disciplinary action against the delinquent officials.

OGRA advises chief secretaries to assist tourists during Eid

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) advised Chief Secretaries to manage visitors at tourist areas and to control traffic as per parking capacity around hilly areas and also to avoid any shortage of essential commodities including fuel during Eid holidays. The Chief Secretaries Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been asked to depute concerned DCOs to manage the affairs in order to avoid any untoward incident. Further, OGRA has also advised all OMCs to maximize their supplies towards north in order to ensure smooth and uninterrupted fuel supplies at the main consumption areas. The OGRA enforcement teams have been directed to inspect and verify stocks at depots and monitor the fuel supply situation closely.

Huge scope of Pak, Azerbaijan mutual cooperation: Minister

Khazar Farhadov thanked the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and especially the Minister for Local Government for their excellent hospitality and invited the Chief Minister and the Minister for Local Government to visit Azerbaijan at the govt level

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Local Government, Elections and Rural Development Faisal Amin Khan Gandapur has said there are vast opportunities for enhancing friendly relations and trade activities between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. He assured the provincial government would endeavor to promote economic and trade relations between the two countries wherein concrete steps would be taken on a priority basis to enhance mutual contacts. He however acknowledged that increasing regional trade was need of the time for boosting bilateral trade and stabilizing the national economies, which would further strengthen the fraternal ties between the two brotherly countries as well. He was speaking at an Iftar dinner hosted in the honor of visiting Azerbaijani Ambassador to Pakistan, His Excellency Khazar Farhadov at University Town Club Peshawar.

Besides Provincial Minister for Finance and Health Taimur Saleem Jhagra, some other members of Provincial Assembly, Secretary Local Government and Rural Development Syed Zaheerul Islam Shah, Special Secretary to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Khaliq Kaka, Syed Zafar Ali Shah, MD, Small Industries Development Board, Secretary Local Council Board, Director General PDA and Regional, Town Municipal Officers, and Azerbaijani diplomats also attended the Iftar dinner. On the occasion, the minister for Local Government discussed in detail issues of mutual interest and briefed the Azerbaijani ambassador on the geographical and political significance of the province, prevailing local government system, economic and tourism opportunities and ongoing de-



velopment activities in the province especially in the newly merged districts. HE Khazar Farhadov thanked the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and especially the Minister for Local Government for their excellent hospitality and invited the Chief Minister and the Minister for Local Government to visit Azerbaijan at the government level. Faisal Amin Gandapur said the provincial government highly valued the friendly ties with Azerbaijan. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially Peshawar is in fact a golden gate for bilateral trade not only with Afghanistan but also with all the Central Asian states including Azerbaijan while its historical background is a testimony to this fact.

The Minister for Local Government said that as soon as the situation in Afghanistan improves, Pak-Afghan relations, the economic and trade relations with all Central Asian states including Azerbaijan, would increase significantly. He invited Azerbaijani investors to invest in various sectors of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and said that there are excellent investment opportunities in hydropower, oil, gas, minerals, precious stones, tourism, culture and many other areas. On this occasion the Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov said that his country attached great importance to increasing bilateral relations with Pakistan, especially with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He acknowledged that there are vast

trade opportunities between Pakistan and Azerbaijan and that several working groups have been set up for this purpose. He also invited investors from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to invest in Azerbaijan and said that Azerbaijan is a very suitable country for foreign investors. He said that Pakistan has maintained friendly relations with Azerbaijan in a good way, especially on the issue of Armenia. Earlier the Azerbaijani ambassador and Minister for local government planted saplings at the lawn of Town Club as memorial of the friendship between the two brother countries whereas gifts and shields were also exchanged between the ministers and the Azerbaijani ambassador on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner Dr. Christian Turner calls on Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain. – DNA

EU defies gas 'blackmail' as Russia pushes deeper

BRUSSELS: The European Union has warned Russia it will not bend to "blackmail" over its support for Kyiv after the Kremlin cut off gas supplies to Bulgaria and Poland. The warning on Wednesday came ahead of UN chief Antonio Guterres arriving in Kyiv to meet Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky following talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Putin issued his own warning the same day, saying that if Western forces intervene in Ukraine, they will face a "lightning-fast" military response. "We have all the tools for this, that no one else can boast of having," the Russian leader told lawmakers, implicitly referring to Moscow's ballistic missiles and nuclear arsenal. "We won't boast about it; we'll use them, if needed. And I want everyone to know that," he said. "We have already taken all the decisions on this." The dire threats came as Moscow claimed to have carried out a missile strike in southern Ukraine to destroy a "large batch" of Western-supplied weapons. As the war, which has already claimed thousands of lives, entered its third month, Kyiv conceded that Russian forces had made gains in the east. Russia's military offensive saw it capture a string of villages in the Donbas region, now the focus of its invasion. And in its economic standoff with the West, Moscow cut off gas supplies to Bulgaria and Poland, two EU and NATO members backing Ukraine in the conflict. However, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, said Poland and Bulgaria are now receiving gas from their EU neighbours. – DNA

Joe Biden to seek \$33 billion for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden will ask Congress on Thursday for \$33 billion to support Ukraine – a dramatic escalation of U.S. funding for its war against Russia – as well as new legal tools to tighten sanctions and siphon assets from Russian oligarchs, U.S. officials said. The vast funding request includes over \$20 billion for weapons, ammunition and other military assistance, as well as \$8.5 billion in direct economic assistance to the government and \$3 billion in humanitarian and food security aid. Biden is also seeking the ability to seize more money from Russian oligarchs to pay for the war effort. His proposal would have lawmakers hand his administration new capabilities, letting U.S. officials seize more oligarchs' assets, give the cash from those seizures to Ukraine and further criminalize sanctions dodging, the White House said. The proposed steps include letting the Justice Department use the strict U.S. racketeering law once deployed against the mafia, the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act,

to build cases against people who evade sanctions. His proposal would let U.S. officials seize more oligarchs' assets, give the cash from those seizures to Ukraine and further criminalize sanctions dodging, the White House said. The proposed steps include letting the Justice Department use the strict U.S. racketeering law once deployed against the mafia, the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, to build cases against people who evade sanctions. Biden also wants to give prosecutors more time to build such cases by extending the statute of limitations on money laundering prosecutions to 10 years, instead of five. He would also make it a criminal act to hold money knowingly taken from corrupt dealings with Russia, according to a summary of the legislative proposals. The measures are part of U.S. efforts to isolate and punish Russia for its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, as well as to help Kyiv recover from a war that has reduced cities to rubble and forced more than 5 million people to flee abroad. – Agencies

Pak urges 'quantum leap' in financing for peacebuilding

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan has called for a "quantum leap" in financing for peacebuilding, saying it was critical for promoting peace and stability in a world of proliferating conflicts. "Investing in peace is a moral imperative," Ambassador Munir Akram told a high-level meeting of the UNGA spotlighting financing for peacebuilding on Wednesday. Pakistan, he said, has always been steadfast in extending financial and political support to UN's PBF. "As a longstanding troop contributing country to UN peacekeeping, Pakistan understands the critical value of peacebuilding investments for the promotion of durable peace and stability in conflict affected countries." The boost in peace investment could be achieved through a two-pronged strategy: Enhancing the current funding streams by widening the donor-base for peacebuilding activities, and through new partnerships and developing innovative instruments to finance peacebuilding projects. Ambassador Akram underscored the need for increasing voluntary contributions for programmatic funding in peacekeeping budgets, saying that such a course could also develop synergies with the Peacebuilding Fund. – APP

Russia condemns Israeli strike on Syria

WEB DESK

MOSCOW: Russia on Thursday urged Israel to cease its strikes on Syria, saying the attacks are "categorically unacceptable and inadmissible." Speaking at a press briefing in Moscow, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova strongly condemned the Israeli actions, stressing that they violate international law.

"We demand that the Israeli side stop this vicious and dangerous practice. We consider it necessary to emphasize that the ongoing Israeli shelling of the territory of Syria is violation of the basic rights of international law, it is categorically unacceptable and inadmissible. "We strongly condemn such irresponsible actions, which multiply the number of casualties among soldiers and civilians, and pose a real threat of uncontrolled escalation of tension across the region," Zakharova stressed. The spokeswoman said Israeli strikes weaken the combat potential of the Syrian Armed Forces and negatively affect the efforts to combat terrorism on Syrian soil. Earlier, a source from the Syrian military said that Israel hit an area near the international airport south of the capital Damascus, with four Syrian soldiers killed and three others injured.

ECP seeks records of Imran's anti-CEC remarks

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Taking notice of PTI Chairman Imran Khan's remarks against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja and the commission, the ECP has sought a record of his speech. In a letter written to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), the ECP expressed its desire to obtain the complete record of the addresses of the following persons aired on April 26, 2022 on different news channels:

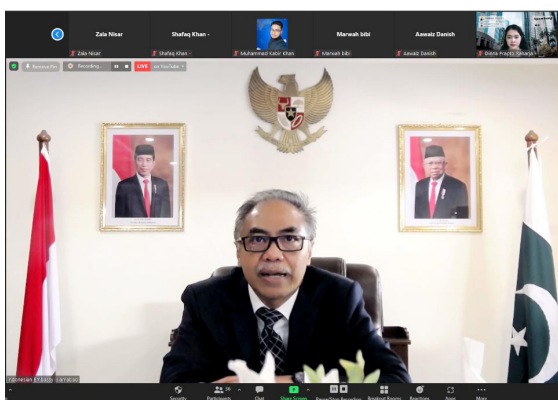
"You are, therefore, requested to provide a recording of the aforementioned addresses immediately for placing before the commission," the letter read. A day earlier, at the workers' convention in Peshawar, the PTI chairman had lashed out at the CEC, calling him a "planted agent" of the PML-N. "Raja has lost all his credibility and he should immediately resign," he had said.

Amb. Adam Tugio stresses stronger ASEAN-Pak ties

Dr Dinna informed that ASEAN Charter calls for ASEAN to develop friendly relations and mutually beneficial dialogue cooperation and partnerships with countries and sub-regional

STAFF REPORT / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Adam Tugio has suggested a two pronged strategy to strengthen Pakistan ties with ASEAN. He said that while Pakistan needs to further develop its relationship with ASEAN states on bilateral levels but these ties should also take institutional route through ASEAN Secretariat that is headquartered in Jakarta. Ambassador Adam was speaking at the 6th session of the Online Internship Program "Contemporary Dynamics of Indonesia" which titled "The Miracle of ASEAN". The OIP is being jointly organized by the Embassy and University of Peshawar. Further elaborating, the Envoy also stressed that the Pakistan should take full advantage of the recently concluded plan of actions extended for two years. He said that there were eleven potential areas that were identified by the two sides for collaboration including those of politics, economy and social & Cultural spheres. He suggested that scholarship programs for the students from the ASEAN countries could help a lot in promoting people to people contact and general public interest in Pakistan. Ambassador Tugio mentioned that since last one year he has made sincere contributions in promoting rela-



tionship between ASEAN and Pakistan. He also mentioned of the publishing of the booklet that outlines the potential areas for cooperation between ASEAN and Pakistan. The speaker at the OIP session, Prof. Dinna Prapto Raharja, a senior public policy advisor and a tenured Associate Professor in international relations at the Department of International Relations of Bina Nusantara University, said that the ASEAN was the fastest growing regional bloc in

the world and Indonesia was at its heart being the largest country in SEA, over 270 million in population, 108,000 km in coastal lines, 17,504 islands, 8.3 million square km in territory, 3 time zones, over 1,300 ethnic groups, 300 languages, 6 religions & many traditional faiths. Dr. Dinna Prapto Raharja appraised the participants about the history and background of the ASEAN and said that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. She said that Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN on 7 January 1984, followed by Viet Nam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999, making up what is today the ten Member States of ASEAN. While outlining the evolution of political security contents of ASEAN meetings, Dr. Dinna mentioned that the Bangkok Declaration 1967 was primarily aimed to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region. She said that Bali Concord 2 was a historic milestone which provided the framework to achieve a dynamic, cohesive, resilient and integrated ASEAN Community.