



# Islamabad POST

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### Pakistan terms disinformation a 'global pandemic'

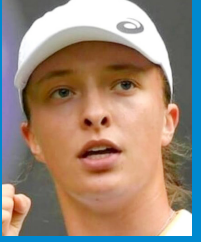
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## Briefs

### Time needed to get back on feet

DNA

LAHORE: "We are aware of the plight of the people but it will take time for the country to get back on its feet," Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) vice president Maryam Nawaz said Thursday. Jami- at Ahle Hadees Pakistan chief Senator Professor Sajid Mir met PML-N vice president Maryam Nawaz at Jati Umra and discussed in detail overall situation of the country. During the meeting, Professor Sajid described the meeting with PML-N leader and former PM Nawaz Sharif in London and conveyed an important message to Maryam Nawaz.

### Economy is on ventilator: Sheikh

SAIFULLAH

RAWALPINDI: Former Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid on Thursday said that the country's economy is on the ventilator while the political system of the country is in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The AML chief took to twitter and said that Musharraf's refusal to come back to Pakistan has blocked Nawaz's return too. The real budget is yet to be presented, which will worsen the conditions, he added. The AML head said that depriving overseas Pakistanis of their right to vote and amending the NAB laws and benefiting from them are national crimes.

### 'Stop fooling people,' Tareen slams Miftah

STAFF REPORT

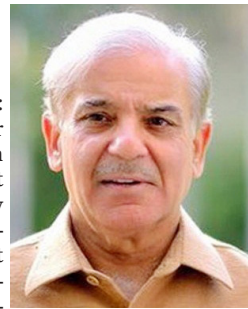
ISLAMABAD: Former Finance Minister Shaukat Tareen has said that Miftah Ismail should 'stop fooling people' by badmouthing out economic performance. Responding to Finance Minister Miftah Ismail's press conference on Thursday, PTI leader Shaukat Tareen said that the impression that Pakistan was near collapse when PTI left is false.

## Difficult time to stay, PM warns

### The Premier says IMF doesn't trust govt after PTI refusal to abide by agreement

SHUJAAT HAMZA / DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that the country may witness more difficult times as it struggles to steer itself out of the ongoing economic crisis. The coalition government has recently taken some "tough" decisions, including a massive increase on petroleum prices. PM Shehbaz Sharif, while addressing PML-N senators, said that some of his "companions" suggested making election reforms and announcing elections but the government plans to complete its constitutional term. "We faced many challenges when I took oath as the prime minister," the premier said. He said that the former government had struck a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to pass on the international prices of oil and gas. PM Shehbaz Sharif said that the terms with the IMF have been finalised and the deal with the Fund will close soon, barring any other conditions set by the global lender. Criticising the PTI government further, he said that the previous government "never felt strongly about doing anything for widows and the poor".



### Poor, rich must share sacrifices: Miftah Ismail

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said on Thursday that there was nothing wrong with taxing the affluent because they were "able to pay" as he talked about the government imposing additional taxes on industries and wealthy citizens. "In Pakistan, it is the poor who have always suffered the burden of taxes," he pointed out at a press conference in Islamabad alongside Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb. "But the Shehbaz-government has decided to impose taxes on the incomes of the rich. This time, we will ensure that the sacrifice is shared," he said, adding that this was evident in the "progressive" and "historic" budget unveiled for the new fiscal year. "You have always seen that previous governments imposed taxes on consumption which had a disproportionate impact on the poor. But we have not increased any indirect taxes or taxes on

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## PTI for allotting 'Lota' symbol to ruling parties

### Ch Fawad urges ECP to bar PPP, PML-N from using individual symbol

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry demanded that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) should allot "Lota" as a common electoral symbol to the ruling parties, which were jointly contesting the by-polls in Punjab. Fawad Chaudhry, in his open letter to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja on Thursday, said that PTI demanded to give a common electoral symbol "lota" to the ruling parties in the by-elections. PTI Central Senior Vice President said that Pakistan was facing serious multilateral crisis as a result of a dangerous external conspiracy through which



### Punjab By-Polls: report sent to ECP

DNA

LAHORE: The provincial election commissioner has sent the probe report to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice-Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi levelled allegations against the election process, citing sources, media reported on Thursday. Shah Mahmood Qureshi had levelled allegations against the ECP and the Punjab government over alleged illegal actions ahead of Punjab by-polls. Sources told media that the EC Punjab levelled allegations against Qureshi for pressurising the returning officer (RO) during scrutiny of the nomination papers in Multan.

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ISLAMABAD: The outgoing Ambassador of Turkey, Ihsan Mustafa Yurdakul called on President Dr. Arif Alvi at Aiwan-e-Sadr. - DNA

### Rupee makes big recovery against dollar

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistani rupee appreciated by Rs4.7 on Thursday morning in the interbank market, a day after Finance Minister Miftah Ismail announced a \$2.3 billion loan agreement with a Chinese banks consortium. According to State Bank of Pakistan, the US dollar closed at Rs207.23 in the interbank market. The previous day's close was Rs211.93 against the greenback, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). After losing 5.39% in last nine sessions, Pakistani rupee recovered 2.27% day-on-day against the US dollar. Last time the rupee made highest ever recovery of Rs 4 was on June 28, 2019. The appreciation was in line with the expectations of market analysts who foresaw that the rupee would see a correction today as it was trading at 208-209.50 against the dollar in the TOM (one-day forward) market.

### Heavy monsoon rains expected

ISLAMABAD: Heavy showers are forecast in Islamabad from July to August, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). Federal Minister for Climate Change, Sherry Rehman, announced that the extreme weather may cause flooding in Pakistan as it did in 2010. Meanwhile, the district administration claimed that they are planning to face an emergency situation. However, the encroachments on drains in Sector E-11 - which caused the death of a mother and her son - and the destruction of their property are still there. - DNA

## Alvi all praise for Pakistan-Turkiye brotherly ties

### The president appreciates Ambassador Yurdakul's personal contribution in further strengthening bilateral relations

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday said that the brotherly relations between Pakistan and Turkiye were anchored in the hearts of the people of the two countries. The president, in a meeting with the outgoing Ambassador of Turkiye to Pakistan Ihsan Mustafa Yurdakul, said both the nations enjoyed exemplary cordial ties rooted in shared social, cultural and religious values. He expressed the hope that these mutually rewarding multi-dimensional relations would go from strength to strength in future as well. The president observed that Turkiye and Pakistan, along with other Muslim countries, advocated the need to counter Islamophobia on various fora, including the OIC and the UN General Assembly, which finally bore fruit when the United Nations designated March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

He said that Islamophobia was on the rise around the world, especially in India where all religious minorities, especially Muslims, were being coerced and intimidated; their homes and places of worship were destroyed, and their religious symbols and personalities were ridiculed and insulted with impunity. President Alvi expressed Pakistan's gratitude for Turkiye's steadfast support to Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute and appreciated Turkiye's active role in the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir. He said that both the countries held similar views on the issue of Cyprus, the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, and the reconstitution of the United Nations. The president also congratulated the outgoing ambassador on the successful completion of his tenure in Islamabad and appreciated his personal contribution in further strengthening Pakistan-Turkiye bilateral relations during his tenure.

## US Supreme Court expands gun rights

AGENCIES

WASHINGTON: The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday declared for the first time that the U.S. Constitution protects an individual's right to carry a handgun in public for self-defense, handing a landmark victory to gun rights advocates in a nation deeply divided over how to address firearms violence. The 6-3 ruling, with the court's conservative justices in the majority and liberal justices in dissent, struck down New York state's limits on carrying concealed handguns outside the

home. The court found that the law, enacted in 1913, violated a person's right to "keep and bear arms" under the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment. The ruling, authored by Justice Clarence Thomas, declared that the Constitution protects "an individual's right to carry a handgun for self-defense outside the home." Thomas added: "We know of no other constitutional right that an individual may exercise only after demonstrating to government officers some special need."



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Pakistan wants to implement projects in Karabakh - Page 02

FPCCI, Kazakhstan agree to promote trade, direct links - Page 03

Critical, analytical thinking skills vital for students: Alvi - Page 04

Demystifying the myth of war crimes in Ukraine - Page 05

Turkey and UK agree to work together for peace in Ukraine - Page 06

President Raesi warns against expanding NATO influence - Page 07

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## The EU welcomes Ukraine as a candidate

### Although the approval of the Kyiv government's application by EU leaders meeting in Brussels is just the start of what will be a years-long process, it marks a huge geopolitical shift

CENTRELINE REPORT

BRUSSELS: Ukraine has been accepted as a candidate to join the European Union on Thursday, a move that boosts the country's morale as Russian assaults wear down the defenders of two cities in the eastern Donbas region. Although the approval of the Kyiv government's application by EU leaders meeting in Brussels is just the start of what will be a years-long process, it marks a huge geopolitical shift and will anger Russia as it struggles to impose its will on Ukraine. The green light "is a signal to Moscow that Ukraine, and also other countries from the former Soviet Union, cannot belong to the Russian spheres of influ-

ence," Ukraine's ambassador to the EU, Vsevolod Chentsov, told Reuters. Friday will mark four months since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent troops across the border in what he calls a "special military operation" partly necessitated by Western encroachment into what Russia considers its sphere of influence. The conflict, which the West sees as an unjustified war of aggression by Russia, has killed thousands, displaced millions and destroyed cities as well as having ramifications across much of the world as food and energy exports have been curtailed. Russia has focused its campaign on southern and eastern Ukraine after its advance on the capital Kyiv in the early stages of the con-

## Western Balkans states determined on membership

NEWS DESK

BRUSSELS: The leaders of Albania and Serbia attended the summit after they had briefly considered not going amid disappointment over the lack of progress on milestones to becoming EU members. "We will keep going and working even harder to make Albania a nice EU member," Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama wrote on Twitter after the meeting in Brussels. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic wrote on Twitter after the talks that his country would "fight" for an EU future for Serbia. Speaking to reporters after the summit North Macedonia's prime minister, Dimitar Kovacevski, said:

flict was thwarted by Ukrainian resistance. The war of attrition in the Donbas - Ukraine's industrial heartland - is most critical in the twin cities of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, which sit on opposite sides of the Siverskyi Donets River in Luhansk province. The battle there is "entering a sort of fearsome climax", said Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Zelenskyy. Russian forces were trying to encircle Ukrainian troops defending Lysychansk, senior Ukrainian defence official Oleksiy Gromov said in a briefing on Thursday. Luhansk Governor Serhiy Gaidai said separately that all Lysychansk was within reach of Russian fire and the Ukrainian troops there might retreat to new positions to

avoid being trapped. Ukrainian forces were defending Sievierodonetsk and the nearby settlements of Zolote and Vovchayrovka, Gaidai said, but Russian troops had captured Loskutivka and Rai-Oleksandrivka to the south. Hundreds of civilians are trapped in a chemical plant in Sievierodonetsk while Ukraine and Russia dispute who controls the bombed-out city. Moscow says Ukrainian forces in the city are surrounded. But Gaidai said on Wednesday the Russians did not yet have full control of Sievierodonetsk. TASS news agency quoted Russian-backed separatists as saying Lysychansk was now surrounded and cut off from supplies after a road connecting the city to the town of Sievierk was taken.

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Briefs

Difficult time to stay, PM warns

FROM PAGE 01

They saw their defeat in March and so they lowered fuel prices, the prime minister said, adding that they just arbitrarily made the decision. The previous government signed a petroleum levy of Rs30 with the IMF, he said. Speaking of lost opportunities, the premier said that "billions and trillions of treasures" are buried in Reko Diq "but we could not dig them out."

Poor, rich must share sacrifices...

FROM PAGE 01

consumption in the budget this time round." The minister said the government had decided to impose additional taxes on the rich and some industries - one of them being the sugar industry. "One per cent tax will be increased on people whose annual income is over Rs150 million, 2pc more taxes for those earning over Rs200 million or more and those earning over Rs250 million will have to pay 3pc additional taxes."

Western Balkans states...

FROM PAGE 01

The Russian aggression on Ukraine is a threat to all countries in the region, and, in this context, European Union enlargement to the Western Balkans should be seen as a necessity but also an investment in the security of the European Union. "EU member state Bulgaria has been blocking the start of the accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, angering the two West Balkan states."

US Supreme Court expands gun rights

FROM PAGE 01

The New York restriction is unconstitutional because it "prevents law-abiding citizens with ordinary self-defense needs from exercising their right to keep and bear arms," Thomas added. The justices overturned a lower court ruling throwing out a challenge to the law by two gun owners and the New York affiliate of the National Rifle Association, an influential gun rights group closely aligned with Republicans.

Turkey and UK agree to work together for peace in Ukraine

FM Mevlüt Çavuşoglu appeared to deny Ukraine's claims of stolen grain shipments arriving in Turkey, saying Ankara had not yet seen any such cases and it had notified Kyiv of every investigation's outcome

DNA

ANKARA: Turkey is investigating allegations that Ukrainian grain has been stolen by Russia and will not allow any such grain to be brought to the country, its top diplomat said Thursday. Kyiv's ambassador to Ankara said in early June that Turkish buyers were among those receiving grain that Russia had stolen from Ukraine, adding he had sought Turkey's help to identify and capture individuals responsible for the alleged shipments.



about Turkey," Çavuşoglu told a joint news conference alongside British Foreign Minister Liz Truss in Ankara. "We notify especially the Ukrainian side of the result every time." Russia and Ukraine account for nearly a third of global wheat supplies, while Russia also heavily exports fertilizer and Ukraine corn and sunflower oil.

Çavuşoglu said Turkey would oppose Russia or any other country taking Ukrainian grain or other goods and selling them illegitimately to international markets. "We are against Ukrainian grains or other goods being taken by Russia or any other nation and then illegitimately, illegally being sold to international markets, and we, as Turkey, will not allow these goods to come to us," he said.

grain from Ukraine. Asked about Çavuşoglu's comments, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: "You should ask the foreign ministry. Russia has not stolen any grain." The United Nations has appealed to both Russia and Ukraine, as well as maritime neighbor Turkey, to agree to a sea corridor for grains to be exported from the Black Sea.

'Devastating consequences' For her part, Truss said the U.K. and Turkey were working closely together to get the trapped grain out of Ukraine, also offering Britain's expertise to help resolve the situation. Hailing Turkey's "leading role" in opening a grain export corridor from Ukraine, she stressed the urgency of the crisis, adding that it will have devastating consequences if not solved within the next month.

Swiatek seeks to dominate Wimbledon

LONDON: A key element in the appeal of any sport is the presence of a dominant figure - a benchmark for the rest to aspire to - and in that respect women's tennis has been blessed to have Serena Williams as its figurehead. But with the American in her 41st year and back at Wimbledon for a potential farewell after a year out, the worry has been whether any player can fill her shoes.

PTI for allotting 'Lota' symbol to ruling parties

FROM PAGE 01

PTI democratically elected government was ousted. Fawad stated that on the one hand, the economy of the country was nose-diving and on the other the country was facing worst constitutional and political crisis. He said that arch rivals political parties that contested the 2018 general elections against one another were making electoral alliances at the center as well as in the provinces against PTI.

New Yorkers slam 'stupid' gun ruling

AGENCIES

NEW YORK: From the streets of New York to the corridors of Congress, Americans expressed both outrage and delight at the Supreme Court's striking down of a gun law Thursday, reflecting the country's bitter divide. New York's governor Kathy Hochul said the decision marked a "dark day," while Big Apple mayor Eric Adams said it "may have opened an additional river feeding the sea of gun violence."



LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board, Ramiz Raja presiding 69th BoG meeting at the NHPC. - DNA

Wimbledon without Federer

Federer, who has won a record eight men's titles at the All England Club, said this month that he is "definitely" intending to return to top-level tennis in 2023

LONDON: Wimbledon is set to kick off without Roger Federer for the first time in over two decades next week and with the clock ticking down on the Swiss maestro's career John McEnroe said he was grateful for being able to watch him play the sport for so long. Federer, who turns 41 in August, has undergone three knee operations in the last two years and has not played a competitive match since his quarter-final defeat to Hubert Hurkacz at last year's grasscourt Grand Slam.

Aung San Suu Kyi sent to solitary confinement

AGENCIES

YANGON: Myanmar's deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved from house arrest to solitary confinement in a prison in the capital Nay Pyi Taw. The Nobel laureate, 77, was arrested when the military overthrew her elected government in February 2021. For the past year she has been held at an undisclosed location in the capital.

prison staff assigned to assist her. A brief statement from the military government confirmed her move to prison, saying it was in accordance with criminal laws in Myanmar, also known as Burma. Human rights groups have



condemned the secret trials as a sham. The closed-door hearings have been shut to the public and media, and Ms Suu Kyi's lawyers forbidden from speaking to journalists. It is unclear how long Ms Suu Kyi, who vanished from public view after the coup, will stay in solitary confinement. Although the location of

her house arrest was not disclosed, she is known to have had several close companions with her until now, the BBC's Jonathan Head reports. AFP news agency quoted a source saying Ms Suu Kyi's domestic staff and her dog had not accompanied her to prison. The charges on which she has been convicted in several trials so far include incitement, corruption, breaching Covid rules and breaking a telecommunications law. More trials await and the military is accused of planning to keep her in custody for the rest of her life.

UN Women Pakistan, foodpanda collaborate

"Women's economic empowerment lies at the heart of this partnership" said Sharmeela Rassool, Country Representative, UN Women Pakistan. She added "foodpanda has caused a positive disruption in society through its dignified approach to food delivery profession

DNA

ISLAMABAD: UN Women and foodpanda Pakistan have announced a partnership on promotion of gender equality in the workplace. Under the partnership various initiatives and training will be undertaken to address and implement strategies pertaining to gender-responsiveness and creating a healthy work environment.

in the organisation while acknowledging the rights and needs of our female counterparts and ensure an all-inclusive workplace," said Muntaha Peracha, Managing Director, foodpanda Pakistan. "No economy can thrive without the contribution of women and here at foodpanda Pakistan, we are committed to advancing the agenda of empowering our

female stakeholders at all levels. This includes entrusting them with decision making powers, placing them in key leadership positions, and designing an environment conducive to their professional growth." "Women's economic empowerment lies at the heart of this partnership" said Sharmeela Rassool, Country Representative, UN Women Pa-

kistan. She added "foodpanda has caused a positive disruption in society through its dignified approach to the food delivery profession. By creating an enabling and inclusive environment at the workplace, as well as particularly driving women inclusion as home based vendors and fleet of riders is an exemplary effort to enable them to break stereotypes at one hand and earn a respectable living at the other hand."





Briefs

Pervaiz Elahi announces support for PTI in by-polls

DNA  
LAHORE: Punjab Assembly Speaker Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi on Thursday announced the backing of his party to the PTI in the upcoming by-polls, asking the PML-Q leaders to run a full-fledged campaign for the PTI candidates. He made this announcement during a meeting with a PML-Q delegation, led by the party's Rawalpindi President Zubair Khan, which called on him in Lahore for discussions about the political situation in the country and the party's strategy for the upcoming by-polls. Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, on the occasion, said those who claimed to be 'experienced' had been exposed badly in front of the people. "No good is expected from the current rulers," he maintained. "After the destruction of the economy, people are being told [by the current rulers] to be prepared for more bad news," Pervaiz Elahi flayed, adding: "These rulers cannot give relief to the people. A new tax is imposed every day." He lamented that the prices of electricity, gas and petroleum products were beyond the reach of the common man, adding: "There is a wave of anger among the people against the rulers due to the rising prices of electricity."

Turkey foiled Iranian plot to kill Israelis: FM

DNA  
ANKARA: Israeli foreign minister Yair Lapid thanked Turkey on Thursday for helping foil an Iranian plot to harm Israelis in Istanbul and said the effort was still under way. Turkish authorities arrested five Iranians suspected of planning attacks on Israelis ahead of Lapid's visit, Turkish media reports said earlier in the day. "The lives of Israeli citizens have been saved in recent weeks thanks to security and diplomatic cooperation between Israel and Turkey," Lapid said during a visit to Turkey. "These efforts are ongoing." Lapid arrived in Turkey on Thursday for talks with Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu as the two countries press ahead with efforts to repair ties strained over Turkey's strong support for the Palestinians. Hurriyet newspaper reported Turkish authorities arrested five Iranian nationals on Wednesday suspected of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate Israeli citizens in Istanbul. Police seized two pistols and two silencers in searches conducted in houses and hotels where the suspects were staying, according to the report. No immediate response from Iran was available.

SL parliament shuts early after petrol runs out

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's parliament has cancelled its remaining sittings for the week to save fuel, officials said Thursday, with a disastrous economic crisis rapidly depleting the island nation's already scarce petrol supplies. A foreign currency shortage has prevented the import of food, oil and medicines, while runaway inflation and regular blackouts have made life miserable for Sri Lanka's 22 million population. Parliamentary officials said lawmakers decided to cancel sessions on Thursday and Friday to avoid unnecessary petrol use, days after authorities closed schools and some state offices for the same reason. Energy minister Kanachana Wijekera said a gasoline shipment that was due Thursday had been delayed and urged motorists to cut down on travel. "Only limited amounts of petrol will be distributed to pumping stations today and tomorrow," he told reporters in Colombo, with motorists already waiting in line for days to top up their tanks. - APP

# Disinformation a 'global pandemic': Pakistan

"Countering the scourge of disinformation is a shared responsibility which requires international cooperation and solidarity," he said

NEW YORK: Warning that disinformation has become a "global pandemic", Pakistan Thursday called for international cooperation to confront, counter, and defeat this scourge which fuels hate speech. "We can succeed in doing so only through comprehensive international cooperation," Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said at the launch meeting of "Group of Friends for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms". Established by Pakistan, the Group, which has representation from all regions of the world, seeks the implementation of the landmark General Assembly resolution 76/227 on Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which was adopted by consensus last year. In his recorded keynote address, FM Bilawal thanked all the countries who joined the Group and urged others to also be part of it. Utilizing this platform, we should agree on an International Plan of Action to counter disinformation, on-line and off-line, in the public and private domain," he said. "The exponential proliferation of disinformation, especially through on-line platforms and social media, has spread social discord; fostered hate speech, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, Islamophobia; and exacerbated competing nationalisms and inter-State tensions and conflict," the foreign minister warned. "Disinformation has often justified and intensified the violations of human rights." FM Bilawal urged member states and the United Nations to enhance public awareness about disinformation through information campaigns. We should enhance the capacity of governments and their relevant institutions to detect, analyze and expose disinformation and disinformation campaigns and networks,"

he said. "We should make a concerted effort, through cooperation, to minimize the negative impact of disinformation on human rights and relations between communities and States, by building firewalls against false information, ensuring transparency, adhering to human rights principles, such as respect for personal privacy and reputation, preventing the propagation of racism, discrimination and hate speech." Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, who moderated the virtual event, thanked the participants, saying the "Group of Friends" provides a platform for deliberations to member states to discuss means to counter disinformation and raise awareness. "Countering the scourge of disinformation is a shared responsibility which requires international cooperation and solidarity," he said. A distinguished panel of speakers, comprising key representative and experts of UN entities, deliberated on approaches to countering disinformation. Among them were Melissa Fleming, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications; Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ambassador Cristian Espinosa of Ecuador and Chairperson of the Committee on Information, and Irene Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression. Among the diplomats who spoke were: Zhang Jun, Permanent Representative, China; Gennady Kuzmin from Russia; Silvio Gonzato from European Union; and delegates from Permanent Mission of Morocco, UK and Syria. In his closing remarks, Ambassador Munir Akram said that today's deliberations have provided us the basis to forge international

cooperation on countering disinformation as it affects all. We look forward to strengthening our attention and cooperation dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders to deliberate upon developing a range of global responses to countering disinformation in accordance with international law. The event was webcast live on UN web tv. - APP



## Political crisis brewing in India's Maharashtra

NEWS DESK

MUMBAI: India's richest state, Maharashtra, is witnessing high political drama that has put the fate of its government in jeopardy. Around 35 lawmakers - led by an influential state minister, Eknath Shinde - are holed up in a hotel in Guwahati city in the north-eastern state of Assam, thousands of kilometres away from Maharashtra. They belong to the Shiv Sena party, which is currently governing Maharashtra as part of a coalition with the Congress party and the regional Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Mr Shinde - who has been part of the Shiv Sena for decades - claims that he is acting in the interests of his party. But his rebellion has brought the state's government to the brink of collapse. On Wednesday night, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray - who also heads the Shiv Sena - left his official residence after delivering an emotional speech urging the rebel lawmakers to return and speak to him. Reports say that Mr Shinde is inter-

ested in reviving the alliance with BJP, bringing it back to power in the state. If he draws support from more Shiv Sena lawmakers, the current coalition government would lose its majority. The crisis began after Mr Shinde became "unreachable" after Monday's legislative council elections in the state. The Shiv Sena and its allies were predicted to win six of the 10 seats, but they got only five. The BJP, which was expected to win only four, won the other five, amid reports of cross-voting by Sena rebels. Media reports then said that Mr Shinde, accompanied by 11 other Sena lawmakers, had left for Surat city in the western state of Gujarat - where a BJP government is in power. Mr Thackeray responded by removing Mr Shinde as party whip. Mr Shinde then dropped the Shiv Sena from his Twitter profile and was seen meeting BJP leaders who later visited him at his hotel in Gujarat. Mr Shinde and his supporters flew to Guwahati city in Assam - which is also ruled by the BJP - on Tuesday night, shortly after a phone conversation with Mr Thackeray.

## Afghan brethren would not be left alone, says Barrister Saif

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif has said that on special instructions of Chief Minister Mahmood Khan, medical teams have been sent to assist the Afghan earthquake victims. He said we will not leave our Afghan brothers alone in this difficult time. These views were expressed by Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Information and Public Relations Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif in a statement issued from his office. Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that 20 medical teams have been sent to Pak-Afghan border, each team consisting of orthopedic surgeons, medical officers, nurses and paramedics. Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that Earthquake victims are being provided complete availability of all medicines as per their requirements, 100 mod-

ern medical beds have also been provided. He said that all DHQs and civil hospitals in North Waziristan and South Waziristan have been directed to remain on high alert. DHQ Miranshah and DHQ Mir Ali in North Waziristan and DHQ Wana, Civil Hospital Shalam, Civil Hospital tway khulah in South Waziristan have been placed on high alert for the earth quake victims. In addition, Khalifa Gulnawaz Hospital Bannu has also been placed on high alert. There are also six ambulances at Zero Point Ghulam Khan Border to transport the injured to DHQ Hospitals. Another medical camp has also been set up at Alwada Mandi border along with Ghulam Khan border. He said that the Afghan government has offered accommodation to the doctors coming to Afghanistan in the general hospital of Khost province. Doctors volunteering will be sent. Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government would provide all possible facilities to the earthquake victims.



ISLAMABAD: Outgoing Ambassador of Switzerland Benedict Cerjat speaking during a reception he hosted to say goodbye to his friends. - DNA

## Punjab to get more than 20 new ministers

DNA

LAHORE: Punjab cabinet is likely to see an expansion as more than 20 MPAs and five advisers are likely to take oath on June 27. According to details the likely minister Malik Nadeem Kamran, Saiful Malik Khokhar, Bilal Yasin, Mian Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman, Khawaja Imran Nazir, Rana Mashhood, Makhdoom Usman Mahmood, Mehar Aijaz Chillana, Malik Ahmad Ali Olakh, Jugnoo Mohsin and Mian Yawar Zaman among others will take the oath as Punjab ministers. Punjab governor Baligh Ur Rehman is likely to administer the oath of the new minister on June 27 at Governor House. Earlier, an eight-member provincial cabinet of Punjab was sworn in during a ceremony at the Governor's House in Lahore on May 31. Punjab Governor Baligh Ur Rehman administered the oath to the new cabinet members. Punjab Chief Minister Hamza Shehbaz and other highups of Punjab government were present in the oath-taking ceremony.

## Kyiv says US precision artillery systems arrive

KYIV: Ukraine said Thursday that it had taken delivery of precision artillery systems from the United States which is the latest country to answer Kyiv's plea from allies for advanced weapons. "Himars have arrived to Ukraine. Thank you to my colleague and friend of SecDef Lloyd J. Austin III for these powerful tools! Summer will be hot for Russian occupiers. And the last one for some of them," Ukraine Defence Minister Olexsij Reznikov wrote on Twitter. The United States and NATO partners are sending Ukraine heavy armament, such as howitzers and HIMARS rocket artillery - the latter offering greater range and precision than that offered by the Russian equivalent. While the West has sent weapons into Ukraine to help it fight the Kremlin's forces, Kyiv complains it has only received a fraction of what it needs and is clamouring for heavier weaponry. - APP

## Austria to scrap mandatory Covid-19 vaccination

AGENCIES

VIENNA: The Austrian government said Thursday it will scrap the country's controversial policy of mandatory vaccination against the coronavirus, just months after it became law. The measure - which was an EU first - came into legal effect at the beginning of February and the first checks had been planned for mid-March, with those refusing to get the jab facing fines of up to 3,600 euros (\$4,100). However, the measure was suspended in March before any checks took place, with the government saying such a far-reaching measure could no longer be justified by the danger the coronavirus posed. Health Minister Johannes Rauch told a press conference that the measure had caused deep divisions in the country of nine million and said that the element of compulsion had even deterred some people from getting the jab. "The mandate isn't bringing anyone to get vaccinated," he said. The Omicron variant had also "changed the rules", Rauch added, as the wave driven by that variant tended to lead to cases with milder symptoms. The mandate had applied to all over-18s except pregnant women, those who had the virus fewer than 180 days prior and those with medical exemptions. August Woeginger, head of the parliamentary grouping of the ruling People's Party (OeVP), told the same press conference he expected the law mandating compulsory vaccination to be repealed in the coming weeks.

## IRGC say intelligence chief replaced

WEB DESK

TEHRAN: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on Thursday replaced its intelligence chief Hossein Taeb, who had held the position for more than 12 years, the Guards said in a statement. "The Guards' chief Major General Hossein Salami appointed General Mohammad Kazemi as the new head of the IRGC Intelligence Organisation," Guards spokesman Ramezan Sharif said in the statement. Salami also appointed Taeb, who is a cleric, as his own adviser, according to the statement. The replacement of the intelligence chief comes after the killing of a number of members of the Guards, which is designated as a terrorist group by Iran's arch enemy the United States. Iran and US ally Israel have been engaged in a years-long shadow war but tensions have ratcheted up following a string of high-profile incidents Tehran has blamed on the Jewish state. On June 13, Ali Kamani, a member of the Guards' aerospace division, was killed while on a mission in Khomsin in the central province of Markazi, the Guards said in a statement without elaborating.

## BRICS push for global clout amid Ukraine war

Pratyush Rao, director for South Asia at the Control Risks consultancy, says Ukraine, without a doubt, will be the elephant in the room

MONITORING DESK

BEIJING: The leaders of the Brics group of nations are meeting this year amid major shifts in the geopolitical order. The group, which owes its name to the initials of its five member states - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - is holding its annual summit on Thursday, but without much fanfare or huge expectations. Talks will also be held in a virtual format, for the third consecutive year. The last two were held during the Covid pandemic, but it's not clear why the leaders chose to skip face-to-face meetings this year. It's in stark contrast to the Quad - which groups India with Australia, Japan and the US - whose leaders met in person in Japan last month amid the global media glare. Some analysts say that this is also partly due to the fact that the Brics hasn't really lived up to expectations over the years. When it was formed in 2009, the group was expected to reshape the global economy and create a new financial order to help the devel-

oping world. Its success can be described at best as moderate, but its importance can't be overstated. Brics nations have a combined population of 3.23 billion and their combined GDP is more than \$23tn. "The Brics may seem irrelevant because it hasn't really moved the needle forward on its long-standing efforts to usher in viable global economic alternatives to the US-led existing system," says Michael Kugelmann, deputy director at the Wilson Center think-tank in Washington. But he adds that writing the Brics off will be a mistake because of its collective economic might, "even though it often tends to punch below its weight". The economy has always been at the heart of the Brics but the Ukraine war is likely to loom large over the summit on Thursday. The nations may not overtly mention the war, but it will definitely be discussed when Indian PM Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro talk to each other. Pratyush Rao, director for South Asia at the Control Risks

consultancy, says Ukraine, without a doubt, will be the elephant in the room. "A lot of people will be keeping an eye on the summit, especially on the dynamics between Russia and China over Ukraine," he says. While China has been more open about its support for Russia, India, South Africa and Brazil have tried to walk the diplomatic tightrope over the war. They haven't openly criticised Russia but have advocated talks to end the war. But a lot has changed since the war started. The economic impact of the war and the West-led sanctions is showing across the world - inflation is up in many countries, global supply chains have been disrupted and there are fears of food shortages. Russian commentators have been talking about the importance of the Brics nations in blunting the impact of the sanctions. Mr Rao says some pushback against Western sanctions can be expected at the summit, and that will be comforting for Russia. "But it should not be interpreted as an endorsement of Russia's actions," he adds. However, Brics members would want to be seen as taking an initiative to help de-

veloping nations overcome the economic impact of the war. "I expect the summit to underscore the group's global importance because of its collective demographic and economic clout. I also expect it to help poorer and middle-income countries build resilience to deal with the economic impacts of the Ukraine crisis," says Mr Kugelmann. But then there will be challenges within the group. Beijing and Moscow might agree on taking tougher lines against the West, but Delhi would not like the summit to be used to openly criticise the US and more broadly the West. Delhi takes pride in its "strategic autonomy" and the policy of non-alignment and has proven that it can be a significant member of even competing multilateral forums. "India has an independent strategic policy and an independent autonomous voice on the global stage and it wouldn't want to compromise on that," says Mr Rao. Both Russia and China have criticised the Quad as "Asia's Nato" but this hasn't deterred Delhi from pledging its support to the group's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, which Beijing considers as its area of influence.