



Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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United States cannot withstand a strong Iran

Detailed News On Page-07

Ethiopian envoy praises 'Engage Africa Policy'

Detailed News On Page-03


Infantino terms group stage as best ever

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

FM Bilawal reaches Indonesia

AGENCIES

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has reached Indonesia's Bali on official visit. The foreign minister will hold meeting with his Indonesian counterpart and will participate in two multilateral events including 15th Bali Democracy Forum and an international conference on Afghan women's education. In the 15th Bali Democracy Forum, the foreign minister would underscore Pakistan's commitment to democratic values and the importance of democracy in responding to modern-day challenges.

Fazl wants disbandment of NAB

DNA

D I KHAN: Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) President Maulana Fazl-Ur-Rehman has said that National Accountability Bureau (NAB) is a controversial institution and it should be abolished. He said that he always pointed out that NAB is being used for retaliatory action against politicians and to defame them. While talking exclusively to a private television channel in Dera Ismail Khan, the PDM chief said that NAB's 22-year progress is in front of our eyes, adding that the bureau failed to create a legacy of unbiased and effective accountability.

Shujaat proposes to mediate

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Q u a i d (P M L - Q) c h i e f Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain Wednesday proposed to become a mediator between the PTI and the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led coalition government. "Damage to the economy can be avoided if politicians stay in contact. If Imran Khan asks, I will personally speak to Prime Minister [Shehbaz Sharif] in this regard," he told media.

Assemblies' dissolution in few days

Qureshi says PTI does not want anarchy in the state and wishes to 'end the differences'

ALI HAMZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi said party's chairman Imran Khan has decided to dissolve the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) assemblies within the next few days. "Today, the party and the party's leadership have given authority to Imran Khan [for the assemblies' dissolution]. Imran Khan now intends to dissolve the assemblies soon so that the process can be taken forward," he said Wednesday while addressing a press conference along with the party's top brass. Qureshi said as a result of Khan's back-to-back consultative meetings with the party's lawmakers and local leadership, he is "convinced" that the way forward is the dissolution of both assemblies and snap polls. The PTI has been pressurising the coalition government in the Centre to hold early elections in light of the "deteriorating economy", but the former has not heeded the demand. Khan had last week said that he would delay the dissolution of the assemblies if the government decides to hold general elections in March, but the government rejected the offer saying that polls will be held on time — October 2023. In today's presser, Qureshi said: "We believe that even if the PDM's (Pakistan Democratic Movement) federal government is keeping its own interests above

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Marriyum slams Imran over 'dirty politics'

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Wednesday that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan who played politics on religion, ran dirty campaign against nation's martyrs and compromised on national interest when in power, was now doing 'dirty politics' on Kashmir. In a statement in reaction to Imran Khan's remarks, she said the person who looted the Tosha Khana and sold gifted watches was now doing "dirty and shameless politics" in the name of Kashmir. "Kashmir seller should not tell Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif what to do about Kashmir problem", she said while taking dig at Imran Khan. She said Imran Khan who did the antics of one hour protest on Kashmir and changed the names of road and chowks while in power, was now playing an unholy game with

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COAS pays homage to Father of Nation

The COAS appreciated the troops for their operational preparedness

NAZIR SIYAL / DNA

KARACHI: On his maiden visit to Karachi after reigning the military's top command, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir Wednesday visited the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to pay homage to the nation's founder, the Inter-Services Public Relations said in a statement. The newly-appointed COAS, according to the military's media wing, also laid a floral wreath and offered feteiha at the Quaid's tomb. During his visit to the metropolitan, the army chief also visited the corps headquarters where he was briefed on operational, security and other matters of the formation including assistance to civil administration during the recent catastrophic flooding in Sindh, particularly its rural areas. The COAS appreciated the army and Rangers' troops for their operational preparedness and for contributing their services for the relief, rescue and rehabilitation of flood during the time of calamity. He praised them for reaching out to Sindh's flood-stricken population during unprecedented flooding in the province. The army chief commended the formation, allied organisations, and



law enforcement agencies for maintaining a safe and secure environment in the province, particularly across Karachi. Upon his arrival, General Munir was received by Corps Commander Karachi Lieutenant General Muhammad Saeed. This is the COAS's first visit to Karachi following his appointment as the country's new army chief. General Asim was handed over the command of the military by General (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa in a ceremony held at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi on November 29.



ISLAMABAD: PM Shehbaz Sharif inaugurates 21st Asia Pacific ICT Alliance Awards. — DNA

Flood response Japan pledges USD 38.9 million

Govt of Japan provided USD 7 million in September 2022

ANSAR BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: On December 2, the Government of Japan announced its plan to provide grant assistance of USD 38.9 million to Pakistan as part of Japan's supplementary budget to deliver life-saving aid to the flood victims. The unprecedented levels of flooding have triggered a multi-dimensional humanitarian crisis, leaving the affected population with increased health risks and food insecurity, insecure livelihoods, and heightened vulnerabilities to gender-based violence. The Government of Japan will support the affected population in various social and economic dimensions in partnership with WHO, UNFPA, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, and IPPF in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Punjab provinces, as well as the Islamabad Capital Territory. For the total grant assistance of USD 34.2 million, the proposed areas of support include emergency medical assistance, food distribution, agriculture and livestock restoration, livelihood recreation, and gender-based violence risk mitigation and response. In order to ensure the rapid rollout to reach the most vulnerable, these projects will commence in January 2023. The Government of Japan will also provide support through JICA, equivalent to USD 4.7 million, for recovery from the floods in health, agriculture, education, gender, and

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PM, Chinese envoy review follow-ups on recent agreements

PM reiterated his condolences on tragic demise of former Chinese President

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: China's Ambassador to Pakistan Nong Rong on Wednesday called on the Prime Minister. Welcoming the Ambassador, the Prime Minister recalled his visit to China on 1-2 November 2022, which had demonstrated the abiding vitality of the Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership. On behalf of the government and people of Pakistan, the Prime Minister reiterated his profound condolences on the tragic demise of former Chinese President Jiang Zemin, noting that he was a trusted friend of Pakistan whose loss would be felt keenly. The Prime Minister and Chinese Ambassador discussed major outcomes of the recent high-level visit, agreeing on the need for effective follow-up to translate understandings reached in Beijing between the Prime Minister and China's leadership into tangible benefits for both countries and peoples. Last month, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had completed maiden visit to China. Pakistan and China have reaffirmed commitment to further strengthen and deepen bilateral All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership

and enhance practical cooperation in all areas. The resolve came during the joint statement issued at the conclusion of the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's two-day visit to China. The statement said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held in-depth discussion with the Chinese leadership, including President and the Prime Minister, on the bilateral relations as well as regional situation and international political landscape. The two sides agreed on the importance of China-Pakistan All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership amidst the emerging global challenges. The meetings were marked by traditional warmth, mutual strategic trust and commonality of views. The statement stated that the leaders reaffirmed that close strategic ties and profound friendship between China and Pakistan is time-tested and resilient. Pakistan-China friendship is a historic choice of both peoples that serves the interests of the two countries. The Chinese side reiterated that relations with Pakistan will always be given the highest priority in its foreign policy. The Pakistani side underscored that Pakistan-China relationship is the cornerstone of its foreign policy and that the Pakistani people always support the closest friendship between the two countries.

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Germany busts far-right cell plotting to 'overthrow state' — Page 07

Eyes on Belarus as Ukraine's neighbour moves troops — Page 08

IHC orders to include US Ambassador in Aafia Case

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court (IHC) expressed resentment over efforts for the release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui detained in the US. Dr Aafia Siddiqui's sister Fauzia Siddiqui appeared before the court. During proceedings, the IHC expressed resentment over the efforts made by the authorities for Aafia's release and further directed the authorities to raise the issue with American Ambassador in Pakistan. Giving his remarks, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan said that "They want to see how American Ambassador in Pakistan reacts to the matter." The foreign ministry presented their report on the case, to which Justice Ejaz observed that no progress has been made after October 17. Speaking to the representative of the foreign minister, the judge said that the foreign secretary should be summoned and tell the court that you cannot do anything, hence the case should be dismissed. The foreign ministry representative told the court that mercy petition is still pending with the US President's office. We are also using diplomatic channel in this regard, he added. The court inquired if

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SC orders new JIT in Arshad killing case

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Federal Government to form a new joint investigation team (JIT) comprising independent and senior officers to probe Arshad Sharif's killing in Kenya. A five-member SC bench comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Ijaz Ul Ahsan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Sayyed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi and Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar heard the suo moto notice case. During the course of the proceedings, the report of the fact-finding committee regarding the investigation into the brutal murder of Arshad Sharif was submitted to the court. The court rejected the special JIT already set up by the government to probe the senior journalist's murder. The chief justice ordered the government to issue the notification of a new JIT comprising representatives of the police, Inter-Services Intelligence,

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Stakeholders' moot on challenges faced by Afghan refugees

PESHAWAR :A one-day stakeholders' conference on political and socio-economic challenges being faced by Afghan refugees was held at the Institute of Management Sciences which was sponsored by Friedrich Naumann Foundation, a German organization working for the facilitation of Afghan Refugees. The welcome remarks for the ceremony were given by the Director of the Institute of Management Sciences, Dr. Muhammad Mohsin Khan, who set the pace for participants and guest speakers by raising some very thought-provoking points. Dr. Babar Ali Shah, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Peshawar, was the guest speaker at the event. Shedding light on the socioeconomic challenges faced by Afghan refugees in Pakistan, he informed participants about the unique geo-political location of Afghanistan and also mentioned foreign invasions and domestic turmoil as hindrances in the stabilization of Afghanistan.

Ms. Saira Bano from UNHCR Peshawar discussed the educational interventions by international organiza-

tions for young Afghan refugees. She discussed the duties and services that UNHCR has already provided and will continue to provide for Afghan refugees. She went into detail about the organized educational approach that UNHCR is providing to the 34,000 primary-level Afghan students living in refugee camps and encouraged female students to participate. Dr. Javed Iqbal, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Management Sciences, talked about the state of urban refugees in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. He stated the findings of a study they recently conducted and came up with concrete results and figures about the number of Afghan refugees living in urban areas, the provision of WASH services to them, livelihood opportunities, educational attainment and other aspects. Speaking on the occasion, the Director Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said good relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were imperative for ensuring better law and order besides the promotion of commerce and trade in the region. He highly appreciated

15-day training programme arranged by IMSciences for Afghan students and said such initiatives will help a lot in the socio-economic uplift of Afghan refugees. Lastly, a panel discussion was conducted which was participated by Dr. Amjad Ali Arbab (Chairman MISFA), Saira Bano (Education Associate at UNHCR), Dr. Hameedullah (Deputy Commercial Attache in Consulate General of Afghanistan), Dr. Asif Ashraf Khan (Beyond Solutions), Dr. Babar Shah (Professor University of Peshawar), Mr. Rashid Aman (Provincial Chief SMEDA Khyber Pukhtunkhwa) and Zia ul Haq Sarhadi (Director Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry). The panel discussion yielded some fruitful recommendations for all sectors and was followed by a questions and answers session by the participants. The conference was concluded by Amir Amjad, senior program manager at Friedrich Naumann Foundation. He thanked all the esteemed guests for their valuable inputs and appreciated the role of the Institute of Management Sciences in arranging and organizing this conference.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Oman to Pakistan, Al-Sheikh Dr Mohammed Omer Ahmed Al-Marhoon calls on President Dr Arif Alvi at Aiwan e Sadr. – DNA

KP minister reviews progress on ongoing development projects

SWAT :Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister of Housing Amjad Ali on Wednesday chaired a review meeting on the ongoing development projects in PK-6 at Tehsil Municipal Office Frikot here. Tehsil Chairman Kashif Ali Khan also participated in the meeting. The heads and representatives of the district departments briefed the provincial minister about the four-year performance and ongoing projects. The issued orders to the concerned departments were to ensure progress in the development works on time while continuously monitoring the ongoing schemes and projects. He also stressed ensuring transparency, including ensuring progress in the projects.

KP govt approves project implementation Policy 2022

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has approved the Project Implementation Policy 2022 as a guiding policy for all approved development projects of the provincial government, according to a notification issued by the Planning and Development Department here on Wednesday. It said that the Planning Department would be the custodian of the Implementation policy, adding that the purpose of the policy was to cover financial management.—APP

Pakistan in dire need to upgrade healthcare system

ISLAMABAD: Expressing grave concern over Pakistan's healthcare system, representatives from AwazCDS-Pakistan, Pakistan Development Alliance and Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) shared where Pakistan is standing in terms of achieving Universal Health Coverage. They said in a joint statement that Pakistan is far away in achieving universal health coverage unless GDP spending's on health sector enhanced at least up to 8.2% from 2.8% today. Pakistan's healthcare system is extremely under served by both government and private sector as we spend only 2.8% of GDP to provide primary and tertiary level health services to 223 million people.

This is pertinent to mention here that public spending of GDP is less than half (0.9%) of the private spending i.e. 1.9 %. This spending is lowest if we compare with other peer countries in the region. Chief Executive, AwazCDS – Pakistan demanded that currently number of healthcare providers are far less than needed. For example Doctors rate per 1000 population is 0.6 whereas the least requirement is 0.9. This leads to greater vulnerability of poor households to health shocks. The number of other medical professionals and personnel such as nurses and midwives should increase to almost six times. According to the most recent Citizens Scorecard

conducted by AwazCDS-Pakistan only 28.90% people are satisfied by the health services being provided both in public and private sector, Zia added. Pakistan progress on SDG 3 (good health and well-being for all) is stagnating and need immediate attention of public and private sector. He further highlighted that there are numerous weaknesses in the health system with respect to reproductive health bill awaiting cabinet's approval, mental health policy is obsolete and was revised in 2003 last time, weak monitoring and feedback mechanism, poor inter department coordination and ineffective budget monitoring etc. are adding in the challenges.—APP

SCCI calls for framing sustainable economic policies with consultation of stakeholders

PESHAWAR :President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), Muhammad Ishaq underscored the need for framing sustainable policies in consultation with business community and stakeholders to revive economy, industry and business and trade. "Country's economic future has been associated with trade with Central Asian Republic and African countries," Ishaq stressed while responding to various queries that were made by members of a delegation of 35th Mid-career Management Course of the National Institute of Management (NIM), Islamabad here at the chamber's house on Wednesday. Ms Seemi A Khan, a senior faculty member/Directing Staff NIM Islamabad headed

the delegation of senior officers. The SCCI senior vice president Shahid Hussain, former president Faiz Muhammad Faizi, former vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, executive members, Laal Badshah, Manawar Khurshid, Hamza Ibrahim Butt, Kashif Amin, Naeem Qasmi, Minhajuddin, Waqar Ahmad, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Zahoor Khan, Rashid Iqbal Siddique, Ihsanullah, Fazal Wahid, Saddam Gul, Abdullah Yousafzai, along with traders, industrialists, importers and exporters were present. Ishaq briefed the participants on the occasion through his multi-media presentation regarding origin, history, importance, future plan and vision of the chamber and initiatives that had been made so far for promotion of business, industry,

trade and economy. He disclosed the SCCI 2.0 vision/programme will be formally unveiled next month, which aims to upgrade the chamber as per growing modern needs through digitization, capacity building, improving technical skills of workers and resolving business community through use of modern tools/ways. In response to a query, the chamber's president stressed the need of enhancing trade with central Asian republics and brotherly Muslim countries. We have initiated measures to improve and strengthen relation with CARs and friendly-Muslim states in this regard, he elaborated. He added joint exhibitions will be held shortly under a comprehensive plan for bilateral trade promotion.—APP

INSPAD, TILTI and "Friedrich Naumann foundation mull coop

DNA
ISLAMABAD: INSPAD- Institute of Peace and Development (think tank) and American based international Leadership Training institute TILTI and German based eminent think tank "Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom discussed cooperation and mutual interests collaboration in near future. INSPAD President Dr Muhammad Tahir Tabassum discussed with CEO TILTI

Mr. James Liton and Head of Programs & Amin Mr. Muhammad Anwar of Friedrich Numman Foundation of Freedom on matters in detail and shows interest to cooperate and collaborate each other and make agenda for peace, interfaith harmony, dialogue and Education. Dr. Muhammad Tahir Tabassum has said that only through knowledge, wisdom, practice and training, the steps of peace development can be crossed and the build-

ing of society is possible. As long as we have peace, tolerance, and technology among the youth. And they will not organize the trend of leadership education and training, it is not possible to cure the social deterioration. In our institutions and officers till now there is a process of reverse development due to which stagnation has arisen. Secretary General Mrs Kishwar Aqeel, Secretary Media Shahid Nauman and Secretary Finance Muhammad Aqeel Khan and Shahid Nauman Sec-

retary media were also with him. He said that educational complications are increasing in the young generation, the disease of immorality, drugs and disrespect to elders is taking root and its treatment is not only the responsibility of the government and educational institutions but parents and intellectuals for this. We have to play our role. Government and semi government organizations should plan strategy for it. He Emphasizing the need for co-operation and collaboration of like mind institutions.

Capacity building workshop for state media persons concludes

PESHAWAR :A two-day capacity building workshop for staffers of state media organisations conducted by Information Service Academy (ISA), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Islamabad, concluded here at Radio Pakistan on Wednesday. The workshop was attended by information officers, reporters, sub-editors, producers, cameramen, accountants and other staff members of the Press Information Department (PID) Peshawar, Radio Pakistan, Pakistan Television and Associated Press of Pakistan (APP). ISA Director General Saeed Ahmed Shaikh, PID Peshawar DG Ashfaq Ahmed Khalil, Station Director Radio Pakistan Peshawar Iffat Jabbar, Deputy Director ISA Muhammad Asif, PSDP Accountant Saba Waheed, IT Assistant PSDP Ayesha Bibi shared their rich experiences and viewpoints about observing social ethics in news reporting, office management and Information Technology. DG Saeed Ahmad said the information should be thoroughly checked to ensure it was based on facts and accuracy before its release and broadcast. He said that all news related information must be supported by strong evidence and must not be ambiguous. He said journalists were like a mirror of the society and were responsible for portraying the real picture of current issues, adding that speculations.—APP

Book fair, food festival for female students held at IIUI

ISLAMABAD :In connection with Extravaganza 2022, International Islamic University (IIU) on Wednesday organised a book fair and food festival for the female students, inaugurated here at the new campus by Deputy Commissioner Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon and President Islamabad Bar Shoaib Shaheen. On the occasion, IIUI President Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi, Vice Presidents of the university, Deans, DGs, students advisors, provosts and a large number of female students were also present. The chief guest visited the book stall set up by the publishers hailing from different cities of the country. Meanwhile, the guests also visited the stalls of the food set up by the female students of more than 40 countries. DC Memon said that it was very encouraging that IIUI has provided a dedicated platform to female students to showcase their culture and talent. He said the university management deserves appreciation for this long appreciable event to nurture the students by involving them in constructive activities. Shoaib Shaheen said that IIUI has a legacy of providing a peaceful milieu and diverse culture. He said on the campus more than 30,000 students were indeed ambassadors of the university who were being nurtured in an ideal learning environment. He said the book fair was also an effort to bring youth closer to reading habits. IIUI President Dr Alotaibi said that he was happy to see active participation of female students in all the activities of Extravaganza 2022 including the book fair. He said the university was keen to focus on the needs of society and we were making all out efforts to bring youth towards the initiatives that may pay back to the society. He said the university has a clear idea that youth were the biggest agent of change and this extravaganza was its true example as in dozens of events we have brought various platforms for the young talented students to shine and serve the society and humanity.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Henny Fokel de Vries, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Pakistan called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar.—DNA

Air University holds conference on Cyber Security

ISLAMABAD: The National Centre for Cyber Security (NCCS) at Air University on Wednesday organized the 3rd International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security (ICCWS-22) in order to provide a platform for researchers and professionals engaged with contemporary research in the emerging areas of cyber security at national and international levels. Air University has had the privilege of hosting an IEEE International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security since 2020. Vice Chancellor, Air University Air Marshal (Retd) Javaid Ahmed, while expressing his viewpoints, highlighted that the cyber world is complicated and constantly evolving. Certainly, the cybersecurity workforce needs to be

trained in a well-defined formal way to meet and exceed national cyber security requirements. He mentioned Air University as one of the pioneer institutions in Pakistan to initiate numerous training programmes in cyber security that are well recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Chairman P@SHA M. Zohaib Khan, while addressing the ceremony emphasized that Cybersecurity is a burning issue not only in Pakistan but across the globe. He was appreciative of Air University's various efforts and the most recent initiative of the National Cyber Security Academy. He added programmes like these help in improving Pakistan's cybersecurity posture, both nationally and international-

ly. He strongly recommended HEC to strengthen the National Centre for Cyber Security further and fully support the Indigenization and commercialization efforts to help NCCS in establishing the Pakistan Cyber Security Industry. Director, National Center for Cyber Security Prof. Dr. Kashif Kifayat, in his speech added that he is proud to lead NCCS which has helped Pakistan move up in the global rankings for cyber security. This center is a collaborative platform that welcomes adjunct faculty members and researchers from academic institutions, both locally and internationally, who specialize in industrial cyber security. He emphasized the need to make the future generations of Paki-

stan better prepared than any of their predecessors to handle fast-evolving cyber threats. On the occasion, Chief Information Security Officer Asif Meenal and Air Commodore (R) Afzaal Ahmed Khan Director ORIC also signed an MOU between Air University and Habib Bank Limited (HBL). The MOU demonstrates the parties' intent and willingness to work together in areas of shared interest, particularly in the fields of big data, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and machine learning. The two-day International Conference includes a number of presentations, keynote speeches, panel discussions, technical hands-on workshops, paper presentations, technical expert talks, and il-

luminating statements by CEOs and CISOs of prestigious companies. Several national and international keynote speakers from various countries, including Estonia, Belgium, Qatar, Malaysia, and the USA, are also invited to deliver cyber security talks at the International Conference. Through this, the ICCWS offered students and professionals from all over the world an extraordinary learning opportunity. Practitioners from all over the world shared their research, ideas, methods, and experiences connected to various aspects of cyber-security, giving the participants a fantastic opportunity to deepen their understanding and effect real change for Pakistan's future.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

December

Dec 01 / RomaniaNational Day

Dec 02 / UAENational Day

Nov 07 / Russian FederationSocialist Revolution

Dec 02 / Laos RepublicNational Day

Dec 05 / ThailandNational Day

Dec 06 / FinlandIndependence Day

Dec 07 / IndiaArmed Forces Flag Day

Dec 09/ TanzaniaNational Day

Dec 11/ OmanArmed Forces Day

Dec 12 / KenyaIndependence Day

Dec 12 / TurkmenistanNeutrality Day

Dec 16 / BahrainNational Day

Dec 16 / KazakhstanIndependence Day

Dec 18 / QatarNational Day

Dec 18 / NigerNational Day

Dec 23 / PhilippinesArmed Forces Day

Dec 23/ JapanNational Day

Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....111 133 133

Marriott.....051- 2826121

Monal.....0334-5421812

Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....8494949

Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15

Bomb Disposal.....15

Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16

Emergency Ambulance.....1122

& Rescue Services.4451122

Motorway Police.....9266044

Motorway Police.....9270601-20

Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596

Rawalpindi.....9270601-20

Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115

PIAFlightInfo.....114

PIA Cargo.....9280979

Railway Inquiry.....117

Railway Exchange9270831-5

WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489

CAA.....9281092

Hospitals

CMH.....5611111

MH.....561116

Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11

DHQ.....5556311-4

RGH.....9290301-7

Holy Family.....9290322-7

PIMS.....9261170-79

Polyclinic.....9218300-09

Shifa International.4603666

Departments

CDA.....9221334-43

CDA.....9208301-04

Met Office.....9250360-6

RDA.....5555864

TMA.....5770886

Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

RawalTown.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5474480

Digital transformation to help improve living standards

Amin said, “We pledge full support to Electronic Certification Accreditation Council (ECAC) as an arm of the Ministry of IT to fully implement the mandate under 2002 ETO

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecom, Syed Amin-Ul-Haque here on Wednesday said the government was committed to the digital transformation of Pakistan as it would help improve the quality of life and economic well-being of the masses by ensuring the availability of modern, affordable, and reliable digital services. “Digital Pakistan is one of the flagship programs of the government of Pakistan initiated by the Ministry of IT and Telecom aimed at enhancing the pace of economic development of the country,” he expressed these views while inaugurating Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) for National Root Certification Authority. The minister recalled that in order to establish trust in cyberspace and safeguard the public interest legally, Electronic Transactions Ordinance (ETO) was promulgated in 2002 in Pakistan. “Under section 18 of ETO 2002, Electronic Certification Accreditation Council (ECAC) has been established under the Ministry of IT and Telecom,” he added. The minister said, “Electronic Certification Accreditation Council (ECAC) has established Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) for National Root Certification Authority for the government, public and private sector entities. It will be the first National Root Cer-

tification Authority to establish trust and security in electronic transactions, and communications in the country. It will be globally recognized through WebTrust audit and highly secured PKI setup for accreditation of Certification Service Providers (CSPs).” Amin-Ul-Haque also said, “Establishment of National Root Certification Authority is a step towards the achievement of “Accelerated Digitization”. It’s a historic occasion for the ECAC and the government of Pakistan for achieving this milestone which was committed by the Government.” The Minister further said that Pakistan had witnessed a dynamic revolution in the sphere of e-commerce and e-governance. “The use of Digital Signatures in Pakistan is unpredictable as it was unregulated due to the non-existence of the National Root Certification Authority, the monopolistic existence of the Certification Authority in the private sector, and the lack of enforceability and implementation in the public sector by the appropriate authorities.” However, he said, there was enormous use of digital signatures in Public and Private Sectors in digital contract signing, Webhosting, E-mails, E-voting of intermediaries, E-filing, and E-office services, etc. Syed Amin-Ul-Haque said; “Internationally, PKI and overall Information Security is a multi-billion-dollar industry. Pakistan has the potential in the form of its youth to participate in

this market and prove its mettle. It will improve Pakistan’s economy; presently the rights of digital certificate consumers are not sufficiently protected.” It is worth noting that currently, all the certificates used to secure these services within Pakistan are imported certificates either from Foreign Certification Service Providers like VeriSign, DigiCert, Entrust or Go Daddy etc. or through their partners/resellers in Pakistan which is a burden on foreign reserves of the Country besides security issues e.g. about 116 thousand websites and 1280 email servers registered with PKNIC making the import of only SSL certificates for these websites and mail servers worth hundreds of millions Rupees. He emphasized the role of ECAC’s PKI will address all these issues. The minister said the PKI was the foundation of modern information security that incorporates technology and personal identity in a way that it becomes capable to fulfil security needs all around the world, in all types of industries and organizations, governments, and in homes. ECAC with the support of MoITT, has deployed Pakistan’s National Root Certification Authority based on PKI that will act as the backbone for the digital economy of the Country. “Ministry believes this is an extremely positive development and would indeed result in economic prosperity for the nation through the promotion of e-businesses, the creation of jobs for the youth and numerous opportunities

for the IT industry and e-commerce of Pakistan” he added. Amin said, “We pledge full support to Electronic Certification Accreditation Council (ECAC) as an arm of the Ministry of IT to fully implement the mandate under the Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002 (ETO). The minister noted that rapid growth and Adoption of digital technologies in all sectors of the economy is inevitable for the development of the Country. Amin ul Haq said nowadays, it is very difficult to imagine any sector without digital technology. “During the last two years of the pandemic, we have seen our dependence on digital technologies has increased manifold” he added. He said that while technology has the advantages of ease of doing things and managing various functions, it also brings a number of vulnerabilities and cyber threats. “These threats are increasing day by day with the development of cyberspace damaging the Public trust in the digital environment,” the minister said. Amin said, “As Pakistan embarks on its journey towards becoming a truly Digital Economy, the establishment of regulatory frameworks for ensuring data protection, establishing trust, and maintaining the security of all digital transactions, documents, and systems are thus essential.” The minister appreciated National Telecom Corporation for providing technical and administrative assistance making it happen on a fast track. While

addressing the participants of the inaugural ceremony Additional Secretary (Incharge) Ministry of IT Mohsin Mushtaq Chandra “Congratulated and appreciated the continuous efforts of the Certification Council and its officers in establishing Pakistan’s first WebTrust Audited National Root Certification Authority. He said Pakistan was in the process of Socio-Economic digitization in all sectors including e-Health, e-Commerce, eJustice, eAgriculture, eEnergy, eEducation and FinTech. Digitalization of e-Commerce and FinTech is most prominent, its size has grown significantly in Pakistan over the last few years, transforming the way consumers interact with and especially pay business. Online transactions require a strong trust anchor to be trusted by all the relying parties. This trust anchor has been built by the ECAC, to enable trust in all the electronic transactions using Digital Certificates issued by Accredited Certification Service Provider.”Speaking at the occasion, Chairman ECAC Engr. Mairaj Gul apprised the audience that under the dynamic leadership of Federal Minister Syed Amin Ul Haq and Federal Secretary, ECAC has accomplished this task to provide an anchor for trust and security in the digital environment of Pakistan. Chairman ECAC also highlighted the initiatives taken by Minister Syed Amin ul Haque in IT & Telecom sector during his period.

Ombudsman summons relevant authorities of energy sector

ISLAMABAD:Federal Ombudsman, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has summoned Secretary Energy and Chief Executives of DISCOs against high number of complaints. The meeting was presided by federal ombudsman which was attended by Senior Officers of WMS, Secretary Power Division Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Chief Executives of IESCO, LESCO and PESCO. The meeting was informed that during the year 2022 more than 56,000 complaints were registered by the citizens against power sector companies. To review the performance of these companies and to address deficiencies therein which are causing huge hardship to people, because the consumers are already paying high charges beyond their capacity to pay. The meeting noted that the federal ombudsman office provided speedy relief to the common man within 60 days without any cost. This reduces the burden on our civil courts and NEPRA. It was informed that complaints involving big sums related to industrial and commercial consumers are referred to civil courts and NEPRA. Consequently, the poorest sector of the society has easy access to Wafaqi Mohtasib’s 17 Regional Offices, spread throughout the country. —APP

Around 9,986 acres Railways land under illegal occupation

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways’ major portion of around 9,986 acres of land worth billion of rupees was found under illegal occupation of private, individual and different government departments across the country. “Around 3,287 acres were occupied in Punjab, 832 acres under encroachment in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, 5,180 acres in Sindh and 687 acres land was occupied in Balochistan,” an official of the Ministry told APP. However, he said Pakistan Railways had retrieved as many as 955 acres of its land worth Rs 19, 603 million during various anti-encroachment operations across the country in the last five years. “Around 476 acres were retrieved in Punjab, 133 acres in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 327 acres in Sindh and only 19 acres in Balochistan,” he said. The official said in light of the Supreme Court’s orders, the anti-encroachment operations for retrieval of encroached railway land all over the railway network were initiated and a joint procedure order was issued to all divisional superintendents. APP

Nawaz will come to Pakistan soon: Former Minister Sheikh Aftab

FAISAL MUNIR

ATTOCK: Former Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and PML-N Leader Sheikh Aftab Ahmed has said that Nawaz Sharif is coming to Pakistan very soon. The nation will give him a historic welcome. The coalition government is trying to solve the country’s problems. If Nawaz Sharif’s path had not been blocked, today the Pakistan would have stood among the developed countries. He said present govt was taking country towards stability and development while opponents were trying to take it towards destruction. Talking to reporters at attack on Wednesday, he said the Imran Khan’s government sank the raft of the economy. Muslim League (N) always fought for democracy and did not hesitate to make the biggest sacrifice for the country. He said that I met Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz on the occasion of my visit to London. Nawaz Sharif will come to Pakistan soon.

Citizens urged to help CDA keep Islamabad clean



DNA

ISLAMABAD: In order to keep Islamabad and clean and green a, the citizens of Islamabad should also come forward voluntarily along with CDA to play their positive role in this regard. Waqar Zafar Bakhtawari

shared these views with the participants who came to clean the park in f-8/2. He said that in the last few years, CDA has developed parks in the whole of Islamabad of international standards, now it is our responsibility to make these assets of the city green clean and

beautiful. He along with friends and colleagues started a self-cleaning campaign by holding a broom and tried to highlight this awareness at the public level that we should not leave everything to the government and institutions. He further said in his ad-

dress that as a first step we are starting from f-8 and f-7. He encouraged the residents of f-8 and f-7 to come forward in this campaign and play their part. He said that today we have started in f-8/2 park and tomorrow we will continue this work at 3 pm in the park of f-8/1.

Vertical construction indispensable for solving scarcity

ISLAMABAD: Secretary Ministry of Housing and Works Iftikhar Ali Shallwani has said that the encouragement of vertical construction was indispensable for solving residential scarcity being faced in the country. “The construction sector has immense potential in this regard. The use of modern technology in the construction sector can bring innovation,” he said while talking to APP. Iftikhar Shallwani said the Ministry is trying to start more residential projects for government employees and common citizens with the support of the private sector. About the objectives First Ever

International Expo on Housing Sector, he said the Ministry is trying to develop the construction sector with the objective of providing a roof to government employees and people with average income. He said the Ministry in collaboration with the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has completed all the preparations for organizing the first of its kind, “International Housing Expo”. Iftikhar Shallwani said the expo would start on December 8 and conclude on December 11 in which eight sessions of mutual discussion would be organized and more than 50 experts

would deliver their opinions. He said that no reliance would be made on government resources and its financial support will be acquired through sponsors and partners. The secretary said that international countries have overcome housing problems by encouraging vertical construction. “We also want to build high-rise buildings in slum areas which will provide slum dwellers with paved roofs,” he added. He said the initiative would augment the growth of the housing sector in the country and would help contribute in the growth of economic development in broad terms. —APP

Inclusion of youth will determine future



ISLAMABAD: Mr. Zahid Latif Khan Chairman Asian Institute of Eco civilization Research and Development said, “inclusion or exclusion of youth will determine the future, success or failure of the regional connectivity, at a webinar on China-Pakistan-Afghanistan youth cooperation for shared destiny organized by Asian Institute of Eco civilization Research and Development in collaboration with Fudan University, China, Peshawar University Pakistan and Polytechnic University Afghanistan. —DNA

Ethiopian Envoy praises Pak for ‘Engage Africa Policy’

DNA

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan H.E. Jemal Beker Abdula on Wednesday appreciated the government of Pakistan for timely rolling out its “Engage Africa Policy” to explore areas of mutual economic interest within the African continent through robust economic development and trade. “It is my firm belief that the current century belongs to Africa which is emerging as a major destination for all the big investors around the world due to rapid pace of development and progress there,” the ambassador said while speaking at the Islamabad Conclave 2022. “Gone are the days when Africa was portrayed by the world as a gloomy and underdeveloped place, marred by civil wars and backwardness,” he said, adding the situation had been changed

in the continent altogether. He said Africa had undergone a lot of transformation shaping its own destiny and emerging as a land of opportunities. Since the beginning of 21st century, he said there had been a remarkable improvement in the governance style of African countries and political stability had become a hallmark of the continent with more democratic accountability and transparency within the governments. He said by 2050, a quarter of the world’s populations would be in Africa which would shape the planet earth’s future. “Africa’s unprecedented population growth will have impact on geopolitics, global trade, work force, and other dominant prospects,” he added. Giving some recommendations for reaping the fruits of “Engage Africa Policy”, he called for establishing the institutional linkages between Pakistan and the African countries to boost bilateral, regional and multilateral co-

operation for strengthening political, security, economic, social, and cultural ties. “It is also imperative for the Pakistani government to strengthen its relations with Ethiopia which is a gate way to Africa and connect the former with the latter,” he remarked. He said Ethiopia was playing a leading role in pan-Africa since the colonial period and still had a strong legacy in shaping the political, socio-economic and regional integration while striving to

achieve agenda 2063 of the Africa Union. Ethiopia, he said, was the founding member of the League of Nations, UN, OAU, African intercontinental free trade agreement and promoting free movement of people, goods and services across the continent. He said his country also owned the largest Pan-Africa Airlines with the name of Ethiopian Airlines. He said Ethiopia attached great importance to advancing the bilateral relationship

with Pakistan, and “opening of our mission in Islamabad reflects our commitment in this regard.” He said both Ethiopia and Pakistan shared similarities in many ways as both were heirs of ancient civilizations, influential diaspora and share social, cultural and political values. It had a federal system like that of Pakistan which held elections at regular intervals. He said Ethiopia was on upward trajectory registering a double-digit economy which had transformed the livelihood and well-being of its citizens. It had developed a home-grown economy as a result of the reforms initiated in 2018 led by Prime Minister of Ethiopia H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who envisioned to make the country a beacon of Africa’s Prosperity. “Currently, the bilateral trade between the two countries is minimal and amounts to 78 million US dollars, however, my target is to take it to 200 million US

dollars by the end of 2023,” he vowed. He said his country was powering its progress through cheap, clean and environment-friendly energy which was also being exported to other countries in the continent including Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan, connecting regional integration through energy. “My country has almost completed the Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam which is being built on the Nile River and set to produce 6,500 MW of clean electricity that can be sold at cheap price to neighboring countries and other regions. He said a one-window facility was on the cards where the investors would have all the facilities for import and export under one roof. Ethiopia has been offering multiple incentives to the investors who would be exporting the products to other destinations after ensuring their manufacturing in the country, he added.



Briefs

ANF seizes
over 96
kg drugs;
arrests one

RAWALPINDI :Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan while conducting two counter-narcotics operations seized over 96 kg of drugs and arrested a female drug smuggler, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed in an operation at Lahore International Airport, ANF recovered 89 heroin-filled capsules from the possession of a woman resident of Sahiwal who was going to Bangkok on flight no TG346. In another operation conducted on Coastal Highway near Pasni, ANF seized 96 kg charas. Cases have been registered at respective ANF Police Stations and further investigations are under process.—APP

Condolence
meeting held
at MoIB

ISLAMABAD :A condolence meeting was held on Wednesday in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to offer Fateha for the soul of Senior Parliamentarian Begum Najma Hameed, the maternal aunt of Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb. Secretary Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid, Additional Secretary I&B Sohail Ali Khan, Managing Director Associated Press of Pakistan Akhtar Munir, Chairman Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Saleem Baig, Director General Information Service Academy Mubasher Tauqeer, Press Registrar Tariq Khan, Director General Radio Pakistan Tahir Hassan, Principal Information Officer Mubashir Hassan and other senior officers of the Ministry participated in the condolence meeting. The meeting prayed to Allah Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to the bereaved family to bear this loss with fortitude.—APP

393
candidates
pass CSS
exam

ISLAMABAD :Federal Public Service Commission has announced results of Central Superior Services (CSS) Competitive Examination 2022, and a total of 393 out of 20,262 appeared candidates passed the examination. A total of 32,059 candidates applied to appear in the exams, but 20,262 candidates appeared in it. A total of 393 candidates passed the examination and the overall passing percentage was 1.94. The result of rejected candidates shall remain withheld as per Rule 16 (6) of CSS Competitive Examination Rules, 2019. According to the press note, the result of the remaining candidates who could not pass may be checked at FSPC's website www.fpsc.gov.pk. Candidates who have passed the written examination will be intimated about the schedule of medical examination, psychological assessment and viva voce. However, they are advised to stay informed by visiting FSPC website regularly.—APP

10 illegal arm
holders held

RAWALPINDI :Police have arrested 10 illegal arm holders and recovered arms, ammunition, knife and sticks from their possession here on Wednesday, informed police spokesman. According to the details, Ganjmundi police arrested Daniel and recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from his possession. Similarly, Waris Khan police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Usama Anwar. While, Bani police nabbed Sher Ali and recovered knife while iron rod was recovered from Rafiq. Wah Cantt police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Afzal. Saddar Wah police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Ismail. Rawat police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Haq Nawaz and same police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from accused Kaftan. Chontra police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Hasnain Shah. Kotli Sattian police recovered 01 pistol of 30 bore from Anwar-ul-Haq.—APP

US continues to assist
Pakistan in Covid fight

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The U.S. government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), donated \$7.5 million worth of medical oxygen supplies to the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination. The support will also provide training to 163 hospitals throughout Pakistan to increase their capability to treat patients suffering from severe COVID-19 and other lung conditions. This U.S. government support was received by the Federal

Health Minister, Mr. Abdul Qadir Patel, in a ceremony at the Ministry of National Health Services in Islamabad. In his remarks, Mr. Patel said, "We are thankful to the U.S. government for their continued support during COVID-19 and especially during the recent floods." He also expressed that these efforts reflect the strong bilateral relations between the two countries. Addressing the Ministry of Health officials at the ceremony, Ambassador Donald Blome remarked, "Today's donation is not just about COVID-19. It is an investment into



Pakistan's long-term health system. This assistance — that started at the very outset of COVID, continued throughout the pandemic, and is now addressing the lasting effects of the floods on health — is a prime example of the long history of U.S. assistance to Pakistan. The United States were there

at the beginning, and we will continue to find ways to support Pakistan as it recovers and rebuilds from disasters — whether that is a global pandemic like COVID-19 or a flooding disaster like Pakistan has just experienced." The U.S. government donation provides thousands of essential supplies and equipment for oxygen therapy that the Ministry of Health requested. The U.S. government will also develop a web-based information system that will allow real-time surveillance of patient oxygen levels, as well as strengthen Pakistan's medical oxygen systems, while

technical assistance provided will train public-sector staff working at intensive-care units on how to effectively use the equipment. The U.S. government has provided more than 79 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Pakistan including 16 million pediatric doses, one million COVID-19 rapid diagnostic tests, and critical health supplies and training to health workers. These efforts are supported by the more than \$80 million the U.S. government has provided to assist the Pakistani people in the fight against COVID-19.

POWERCHINA helps
flood-hit people of Pak

DNA

ISLAMABAD: POWERCHINA has said it has donated funds, repaired roads and agricultural infrastructure and helped local employees overcome the disaster following this year's devastating floods and heavy monsoon rains. Since mid-June, under the influence of the monsoon season, many provinces in Pakistan have been hit by unprecedentedly severe floods. POWERCHINA said in a statement on Wednesday that it has also played a leading role in donating money to the flood-affected people in Pakistan, and received positive response and strong support from the Associa-

tion. Giving details of the aid and relief activities, it said the first batch of donations was raised on 26 August for the flood-affected Pakistani brothers to rebuild their homes. After the first timely donation, as the disaster continued to worsen, in response to the call of the Pakistani government, POWERCHINA made a further donation of USD 104,000 to the Prime Minister's Flood Relief Fund on October 21. POWERCHINA also participated in a second round of donations to the Chinese Embassy and APCEA. The Chinese staff, enthusiastically and spontaneously donated tents worth about 2 million rupees and officially handed over to the Islamabad

Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry and to a Balochistan-based party at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan on December 1. In the face of the sudden flooding, Diamer Basha Dam Project was also seriously affected by the flooding. The project department responded quickly to the flooding, and after surveying the affected site, formulated a relief plan and sent a rescue team with excavators and other large machinery and equipment to participate in the rescue and relief work, helping local villagers to clean up the collapsed road sections, to remove the hazards off the road and backfill the irrigation canal foundation. After four days of reconstruction, the 8 km collapsed roads were

cleared and the main road to the nearby villages was restored, thus helping the locals to get out of the trouble. Affected by secondary disasters such as landslides and triggered by floods, many sections of the Karakoram Highway, the main road to and from the project construction site, were either eroded or actively closed, and the construction and logistical materials required for the project could not be delivered to the site for quite some time. The project manager said, "The tougher it is, the more courageous we have to be." Despite the extremely difficult times, the project is still actively assuming social responsibility, demonstrating the responsibility and commitment of a "great power".

Zong empowering
female students

ISLAMABAD: China Mobile's Zong 4G is providing digital equipment to students at Pak-China Gwadar Middle School in order to give female students the opportunity to learn more about technology

and its effective use, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. Under the initiative, the students are getting a projector and screen, printing facilities, and digital learning materials. The Pak-China Gwadar Middle School, also commonly known as Faqeer Middle School, is located in Gwadar's Faqeer Colony. This school is part of a China-funded initiative aimed at developing a high-quality educational system in the area. We have a mission to ensure the complete digitalization of Pakistan. Through our inclusive approach, we are ensuring all our children—especially young girls—be provided with quality digital education to ensure their future competitiveness in an increasingly fast-paced technological world," according to a spokesperson of Zong 4G. The management of the Pak-China school appreciated this, citing that only a handful of their students had used a computer before and thanked Zong for setting up a digital lab for their students. "Zong's Digital Lab has helped the Pak-China School transform into the only non-profit digital school of Gwadar. Our students are very keen on learning digital technology and they look forward to their newly commenced computer lessons. We would like to thank Zong for their consistent support.—DNA

Decision to buy
cheap petro products
from Russia lauded

Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain on Wednesday said the decision to buy cheap petroleum products from Russia is correct which will support our weak economy. This will reduce the burden on the country's exchequer, thereby reducing the current account deficit and inflation, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the price of petroleum products will also be reduced for the consumers, electricity will also become cheaper and the people will get relief. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that despite Russia's attack on Ukraine and US sanctions, European countries, Saudi Arabia, India, and many other countries are continuing to trade with Russia, but we have waited for eleven in this regard. Now, without wasting any more time, the import of crude oil, petrol, and diesel should be started, while the possibility of importing other essential commodities should not be delayed, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that a long-term contract to import LNG with Russia is also essential. He said that the government has announced the import of cheap petroleum products from Russia, but the price details have not been released.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Photojournalist Sultan Bashir getting award from Federal Secretary National Heritage Fareena Mazhar.—DNA

Historic action of Hangor

ASAF HUMAYN

Dark nights at sea can be scary. When you see a light closing in, you are not sure whether it is a menacing warship, a harmless fishing boat or a benign merchant ship. If it is wartime, many dangers lurk hidden in the cloak of darkness. On 9th Dec 1971, a similar situation existed. The moon was to rise after 9:30 pm and it was pitch dark. Pakistan and India had been at war since 3rd Dec. Two Indian Navy anti-submarine frigates KHUKRI and KIRPAN were patrolling near Diu Head searching for their prey, the Pakistan Navy submarines. Submarines and naval ships are old adversaries. This rivalry was joined by aircraft as a potent weapon to kill submarines in World War I. World War II saw many epic battles between submarines and submarine-hunters. The war at sea in the Atlantic was characterised by U-boats playing havoc with the allied supply lines. In the Pacific, Allied and Japanese submarines made their name. Admiral "Bull" Halsey of the United States Navy speaking well after the war, observed, "If I had to give credit to the instruments and machines that won us the war in the Pacific, I would rank them in this order; submarines first, radar second, planes third, and bulldozers fourth." As compared to the United States, Royal, Japanese, and German navies of WW II, Pakistan Navy is a small force. In 1971, the Indian Navy was 5 times bigger than Pakistan Navy. Nevertheless, we can proudly

claim a similar feat by our small submarine force during the 1971 Indo-Pak war. On this night, the time was 8:19 PM. A massive explosion under the Indian Navy Ship KHUKRI doomed the anti-submarine frigate and sent her to a watery grave. An E-15 acoustic homing torpedo fired by HANGOR found its mark and hit the ship's magazine full of explosives. PNS HANGOR's daring action etched the fateful moment in the annals of naval warfare. World War II saw U-boats; Japanese and Allied submarines sinking many warships. HANGOR's historic action took place about 26 years and 6 months after submarine attacks in the closing stages of World War. We can recall 2 successful actions by submarines. On 29th April 1945, at about 10 PM, the U-boat U-286 hit anti-submarine frigate HMS Goodall (K 479) with a Gnat (German Naval Acoustic Torpedo) in the entrance to the Kola Inlet near Murmansk (Russia). The magazine exploded, blowing away the forepart of the vessel and killing the commander. One hundred twelve crew members died. The abandoned ship had to be scuttled by gunfire. This was the last confirmed U-boat success in the North Atlantic theatre. The war in the Pacific continued awhile longer. At 00:15 AM on 30th July, the USS Indianapolis (CA 35) Heavy Cruiser was torpedoed by the Imperial Japanese Navy submarine I-58 and sank in 12 minutes. The cruiser was heading for the Philippines after delivering parts

of the nuclear bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on 9th August. The ship was struck by 2 straight running torpedoes. Of 1,195 crewmen aboard, approximately 300 went down with the ship. Like the sinking of KHUKRI, both these sinkings occurred in the dark of the night. PN Submarine HANGOR had arrived in Pakistan in December 1970. PN Dockyard, Karachi, only had only rudimentary repair and logistic support for these newly acquired platforms. A similar state existed in PN Torpedo Depot that supplied the submarines' main weapon — torpedoes. However, the gathering war clouds after March 1971 urged all-around dedication, zeal, and application. Everyone in the logistics chain rose to the task at hand. All the Daphne class submarines — HANGOR, SHUSHUK and MANGRO — remained fully operational and war-ready. PNS HANGOR carried out a reconnaissance patrol off the Indian coast during August 1971, thus, gathering valuable experience and data. India unleashed an undeclared war on the eastern front on 21 Nov 1971. Within

24 hours of this aggression, PN submarine HANGOR sailed from Karachi. Despitetesterious machinery defects, she continued to pursue her mission. The courageous commanding officer Commander Ahmad Tasnim SJ was leading a motivated and brave crew of 53 officers and men. In the face of daunting risks, they repaired their submarine close to the enemy waters. During this perilous period, HANGOR dodged several enemy hunters both surface ships as well as aircraft. When the war was declared on 3rd Dec, HANGOR was ready in her assigned area near Bombay, Pakistan government had only permitted attacks on men of war and not on unarmed merchant ships. (This was in stark contrast to the Indian Navy's policy of attacks even on unarmed merchant vessels). HANGOR signalled the deployment of the Indian Navy units to Naval Headquarters. After intercepting this radio communication, the Indians were alerted, evaded this position and deployed anti-submarine forces to find the Pakistani submarines. The vigilant attack team

of HANGOR soon realised that the enemy warships were not anywhere near. So, they requested Pakistan Navy Headquarters to shift their patrol area, to seek battle with the enemy. By 8th Dec, HANGOR was patrolling in her assigned area. The redeployment proved fruitful and HANGOR started to track enemy ships. After the sunset at 6 PM on 9th Dec, Commander Ahmad Tasnim started steering to intercept the enemy frigates. The submarine crew was full of confidence that their desire to seek battle with the enemy would soon be fulfilled. In less than 2 hours, the enemy frigates came within torpedo range, and the attack team of HANGOR, on their commander's order launched the first torpedo at 7:57 PM. This torpedo did not find its target. The Indians claim that KHUKRI and KIRPAN were alerted by this torpedo and KHUKRI started to search for and attack the prowling submarine. However, this manoeuvre brought the ship within HANGOR's torpedo range again. HANGOR fired a

second E-15 homing torpedo on the approaching KHUKRI at 8:14 PM and the rest is memorable history. Within 5 minutes the torpedo homed on to its target and broke KHUKRI in two parts. The ship sank within 2 minutes. One hundred and ninety-four of her crew including her commanding officer Captain M N Mulla perished. Most of them had no time to escape the sinking ship. As per normal tactics, HANGOR should have started her withdrawal from the battle because her position was now well-known. Not the redoubtable HANGOR; her valiant commanding officer and the crew continued their attack and fired a third torpedo which hit KIRPAN at considerable range. After this debacle, the Indian Navy did not dare repeat its attacks on Karachi or Pakistani naval forces. Thus, HANGOR's action thwarted the Indian Navy's further aggressive designs. After getting rid of the two Indian Navy anti-submarine frigates, HANGOR came under repeated counterattacks by aircraft and ships. The crew of HANGOR counted 156 attacks during the next 72 hours. However, she evaded the enemy. Commander Tasnim who was decorated with a second Sitara-e-Jurat (SJ) bar dedicated his award to all members of his gallant crew. HANGOR's attack was not a one-sided affair. The Indian Navy, which did not venture out at sea in the 1965 war due to the fear of PN submarine GHAZI, had bolstered her anti-submarine by the 1971 war. The Indian Navy inducted

4 stolen
motorcycles
recovered

RAWALPINDI :Police on Wednesday claimed to have arrested an accused who was involved in motorcycle theft and recovered four stolen bikes from his possession. According to the police spokesman, Bani police held Faizan, involved in motorcycle theft and recovered 4 stolen motorcycles from his custody. Police have registered a case against him and further investigation was in progress. SP Rawal Babar Javed Joya appreciated the performance of police team and said that accused will be brought to court with solid evidence, such elements who deprive the citizens of their valuable assets cannot escape from the grip of the law. Meanwhile, Rawalpindi police have arrested 29 professional beggars during the operation. The professional beggars were held from different areas of the city. SSP Operations Rawalpindi said that operations will be continued against professional beggars in the future.—APP

CDNS
receives Rs
405b through
fresh bonds by
December 02

ISLAMABAD :The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) on Wednesday achieved the target of issuing Rs 405 billion fresh bonds in the current fiscal year 2022-23 from July 1st to December 02, 2022. The CDNS has set a saving target of Rs1.5 trillion for the current financial year (2022-23) which will promote the savings culture in the country, the senior official of CDNS told APP here. At this time, the current market trend in the country and the ambitious target has been set to further improve the savings culture, he said. Replying to a question, he said the CDNS surpassed its annual target in the previous fiscal year 2021-22 and set a historic record of Rs1,250 billion in savings till June 30, 2022. For the first time in its history, CDNS crossed Rs1,000 billion in fresh deposits and achieved the target of Rs1,250 billion by June 30, 2022. He said the CDNS had attained the target of issuing Rs1,250 billion fresh bonds from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. It had set an annual gross receipt target of Rs 980 billion from July 1 to June 30 of the previous fiscal year 2020-21 to promote savings in the country. The senior official said the CDNS had set Rs 250 billion annual collection target from July 1 to June 30 for the year 2020-2021 as compared to Rs 352 billion for the previous year (2019-20) during the same period to enhance savings in the country.—APP

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Russian dissent: a seed to be nurtured

Vladimir Putin's failure to complete his initial war aims in Ukraine is so complete, it is unclear to what end Russia fights on, except to protect the president from the humiliation of admitting defeat. Since the Kremlin's territorial ambitions have been checked, Russia's offensive capabilities have been directed more at terrorising civilians and degrading Ukrainian infrastructure. The plan is to plunge the country into freezing darkness through the winter in the hope of depleting the will to resist. There is no sign of that working. Mr Putin's failure to understand the resilient character of Ukraine as a proudly independent nation was the foundational error of his war. The Russian president has also miscalculated when measuring his own people's appetite for war. It looked voracious in the opening weeks, when state propaganda channels had little difficulty whipping up a bellicose fervour. But hundreds of thousands have also fled the draft, probably more than the number successfully recruited (exact figures are a shrouded in official secrecy). Many of those who report for duty have been appalled by the lack of equipment, training or purpose for their deployment. Those who see themselves as cannon fodder make unmotivated soldiers. Despairing videos lamenting their plight circulate widely online. It is hard to measure the public mood in a quasi-totalitarian regime, but the evidence points to war fatigue. A leaked private poll conducted for a Russian state security agency last week showed 25% of respondents wanting the military campaign to continue and 55% wanting peace talks. In February, Mr Putin's invasion commanded about 80% support. There is also evidence that the Kremlin is losing full-spectrum dominance of the information space. Russians are now the world's biggest users of virtual private networks – online services that can circumvent state censorship of the internet. It would be premature to imagine that Mr Putin's position is much weakened. He has levers of coercion to compensate for any decline in enthusiasm for his rule. But the signs of brittleness are still encouraging as evidence of some potential appetite among Russians, inside and outside the country, for a different kind of politics. Cultivating that interest, supporting the exiles, and recognising and amplifying the difference between the Russian people and their criminal leadership will be increasingly important in the months and years to come. While Mr Putin's defeat in Ukraine is a strategic and moral imperative for European democracies, and normalisation of relations with Moscow seems like a remote prospect, the ambition cannot be abandoned altogether. For that ambition to be plausible, the seeds of a different Russia must be nurtured wherever they grow.

Myanmar's military: in power but not in control

In February 2021, Myanmar's army ended its decade-long, grudging tolerance of limited democracy by launching a coup, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other elected civilian politicians. Since then, its ruthlessness has only increased. The number of political prisoners has soared to more than 13,000. The junta has resumed executions for the first time in decades. The UN human rights chief, Volker Türk, said last Friday that the regime was using the death penalty to crush political opposition, expressing shock that 130 people have been sentenced to death by military courts behind closed doors. Many of the 1,700 people who have stood trial have been denied access to lawyers or relatives. Not one has been acquitted. The pandemic, war in Ukraine and uprisings elsewhere have meant that the world has largely stopped paying attention to events in Myanmar, where the military is literally pursuing a scorched earth policy. It has razed villages that it accuses of supporting the opposition and has bombed hospitals, schools and even a concert. An estimated 1.3 million people are displaced and living in horrific conditions. It continues to add to the raft of convictions and prison terms for Aung San Suu Kyi. Rights groups report extra-judicial killings by soldiers and militias. The assumption at first was that the military, long expert in suppressing stirrings of dissent and democracy, would soon reassert control. Even when some protesters took up arms – and the pro-democracy national unity government backed a "defensive war" – it seemed a hopeless endeavour, given their lack of money, equipment and training. Yet the resistance has been not only remarkably protracted but – under the circumstances – surprisingly effective. Each fresh abuse by the regime gives opponents reason to fight on – no one believes it will compromise. Elections are promised next year, but the power seizure resulted from the military's repeated failure to win at the ballot box, and opponents are all locked up. The regime made a vague attempt at PR by releasing 6,000 or more prisoners last month, including a former British ambassador, Vicky Bowman. But some were detained again on the same day, and the total number of those held soon rebounded. Sanctions should remain carefully targeted at those in the regime and their families. Though supporters of the democracy movement praise the UK for taking the lead internationally, they believe much more must be done. They make a strong case for cutting off the supply of aviation fuel – used by the military even when it has supposedly been destined for civil flights. The junta's increasing brutality, however, is a sign of fear as well as further evidence of its viciousness. Some of those struggling for democracy now speak not of a coup, but an attempted coup; thanks to the resistance, they say, it has not yet succeeded. They need more support to ensure that it does not.

When Mr. Xi comes to town

James M. Dorsey

At the same time, China's framing of the crackdown as a fight against extremism, terrorism, and separatism legitimises the clampdown by Saudi Arabia and the UAE on any expression of political Islam. For Mr. Gargash, the UAE diplomatic advisor, the Gulf's ties to the United States and China fit neatly into a box. "Our trade relations increasingly look to the East, while our primary security and investment relations are in the West," Mr. Gargash said. The official did not mention increasingly close political ties to China.

So are multiple agreements to be signed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia this week, his first venture beyond East and Central Asia in three years. No doubt, Mr. Xi's reception will be on par with the welcoming of Donald J. Trump when he headed to Saudi Arabia in 2017 on his first overseas trip as US president. At the same time, it will contrast starkly with the more downbeat response to Joe Biden's hat-in-hand pilgrimage to the kingdom in July. Mr. Xi Jinping and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's timing is perfect. The visit allows Gulf states, with Saudi Arabia in the lead, to further diversify their foreign relationships and hedge their bets as the world moves from a unipolar to a bipolar, if not multipolar, order. In addition, Mr. Xi's visit boosts the positioning of Mr. Bin Salman and his kingdom as undisputed leaders of the Muslim world. Like when Mr. Trump was in town five years ago, Mr. Bin Salman has ensured that Mr. Xi's visit will involve bilateral talks and multilateral gatherings with Gulf and Arab leaders. Even though Mr. Xi and Gulf leaders project the Chinese president's visit as a milestone rather than the latest of regular high-level gatherings, neither seeks to fundamentally alter the region's security architecture with the United States as its guarantor. On the contrary. While eager to strengthen and expand relations with China, Gulf states see Mr. Xi's visit as a vehicle to pressure the United States to spell out and formalize its security commitment to the region at a time when America has made China and the Indo-Pacific its main strategic concern and has not lived up to the region's expectations. Speaking three weeks before the Chinese leader's visit, Anwar Gargash, the diplomatic adviser of United Arab Emirates President Mohammed bin Zayed, insisted that "our primary strategic security relationship remains unequivocally with the United States... Yet, it is vital that we find a way to ensure that we can rely on this relationship for decades to come through clear, codified, and unambiguous commitments." Mr. Xi has no problem with that. On

the contrary, China is not interested and perhaps incapable of replacing the United States militarily in the Gulf. So while it may want the United States out of East Asia, the same need not be valid for the Middle East. That allows Mr. Xi and his Saudi and Arab counterparts to focus on the nuts and bolts of their meetings. High on Mr. Xi's agenda is the export of its model of authoritarianism, involving one-person rule, a surveillance state, and the ringfencing of the Internet. It's a model that appeals to men like Mr. Bin Salman and UAE and Egyptian presidents Mr. Bin Zayed and Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. The appeal remains, even if Mr. Xi's proposition has lost some of its shine as a result of his faltering zero-tolerance Covid-19 policy that has slowed economic growth, hindered the country's private sector that is also hobbled by punitive state interventions, and sparked an anti-government protest that has forced the Chinese leader to abandon core elements of his effort to control the pandemic. Moreover, Middle Eastern leaders will have noticed that China's firewall failed to prevent Internet users from discovering that a majority of spectators at World Cup matches in Qatar were unmasked. Nor were Chinese censors able to prevent an avalanche of video clips of nationwide protests against strict Covid-19 rules from flooding the country's tightly policed social media. In addition, Gulf efforts to diversify their economies and reduce dependence on fossil fuel exports centre on a free-market economy and a private sector driven by innovation and creativity rather than the kind of state-controlled capitalism envisioned by Mr. Xi. That has not prevented China from advancing its control and governance systems with investments and partnerships in Middle Eastern telecoms, corporate communication systems, cybersecurity, and smart cities in countries stretching from Morocco to the Gulf. Chinese involvement runs the gamut from building 5G systems and data centres to providing cloud services and developing artificial intelligence systems. Investments in technology and knowledge transfers enable Arab autocracies

to enhance their surveillance capabilities and Internet control. Furthermore, countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have looked for inspiration in China's restrictive cybersecurity legislation. Days before Mr. Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia, China's foreign ministry released a report on 'Sino-Arab Cooperation in a New Era' that, according to Chinese media, misleadingly asserted that China "never seeks any geopolitical self-interest." China probably meant to say that it is not seeking to challenge the US position in the Gulf any time soon but intends to be the region's major partner economically and in terms of technology, a focal point of US-Chinese rivalry. Speaking last month at a regional security conference, senior Pentagon official Colin Kahl spelt out limits to Gulf-China technological cooperation that the United States would seek to impose. "If our closest allies and partners cooperate too deeply with China on the security side, it'll create security risks for us. Getting into certain networks that create real cyber vulnerabilities and risks for us. Infrastructure that generates real intelligence risks for us, and networks that touch our military networks that create real risk for us, or a presence in certain countries that allow surveillance of our forces and what we're doing in ways that presents a threat to us," Mr. Kahl said. Although Chinese 5G projects in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and elsewhere in the region have progressed despite US objections, Mr. Kahl left unaddressed whether they threatened to cross his threshold. The Chinese foreign ministry report identified technology, agriculture, and investment as focal points of Chinese-Arab economic cooperation. During his visit, Mr. Xi was likely to also angle for construction contracts for Mr. Bin Salman's US\$500 billion futuristic Red Sea city of Neom, as well as involvement in developing a Saudi defense and automotive industry. For its part, Saudi Arabia will want to attract Chinese investment in its mining sector. Khalid Al Madaifer, the kingdom's deputy mining minister, said he is seeking US\$170 billion by 2030. In a bid to exploit strains in Saudi- and potentially UAE-US relations and uncertainty about

America's reliability as a security partner, the Chinese report asserted that "China has always believed that there is no such thing as a 'power vacuum' in the Middle East and that the people of the Middle East are the masters of the future and destiny of the region." Mr. Xi arrived in the kingdom as a US district court in Washington dismissed a lawsuit against Mr. Bin Salman and 20 others for the 2028 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The court based its decision on a finding by the US government that Mr. Bin Salman enjoyed sovereign immunity. On another note, the Chinese report predicted that China and the Arab world would continue to support each other's counterterrorism and deradicalisation policies. In stressing counterterrorism and deradicalisation, the report suggested that Gulf silence, and in the case of Saudi Arabia, endorsement of Mr. Xi's brutal crackdown on Turkic Muslims in the north-western Chinese province of Xinjiang, reflected a more complex balance of power in the Chinese-Gulf relationship. In other words, Gulf acquiescence is more than simply wanting to ensure that the region stays on China's right side or seeking to shield autocracy from criticism as the preferred political system in both parts of the world. Because the crackdown targets Islam as a faith, not just Turkic Muslims as a minority, Gulf support offers China badly needed Muslim endorsement, particularly from Saudi Arabia, the custodian of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. In doing so, the support enhances Gulf leverage in relations with China. At the same time, China's framing of the crackdown as a fight against extremism, terrorism, and separatism legitimises the clampdown by Saudi Arabia and the UAE on any expression of political Islam. For Mr. Gargash, the UAE diplomatic advisor, the Gulf's ties to the United States and China fit neatly into a box. "Our trade relations increasingly look to the East, while our primary security and investment relations are in the West," Mr. Gargash said. The official did not mention increasingly close political ties to China, like in the case of Xinjiang or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and that is where things potentially get messy

Target Kidnapping in the Philippines

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



These are mostly young people, in their 20s, with little job prospects in China," said Ben Lee. Some are lured to the Philippines with the promise of high-paying jobs in prestigious tech companies, but upon arrival they discover they will be working for an online gambling platform and paid a fraction of what they were promised, he added.

Chinese women are reportedly being targeted in a new wave of gambling-related kidnappings in the Philippines, alarming Beijing's ambassadors in Manila and the local Filipino Chinese community. The Philippine Daily Inquirer reported that the Chinese Embassy has also investigated and verified specific cases to protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens in the country. The victims are "mostly Chinese women, and recently Cambodian and Vietnamese," said Teresita Ang-See, founding president of the Movement for the Restoration of Peace and Order (MRPO). Several organized crime syndicates focusing exclusively on kidnap for ransoms operate in and around the National Capital Region. Some criminal groups target workers or customers of POGO companies, Chinese nationals, East and South Asian expatriates, short-term travelers, and members of the Chinese-Filipino business community and their families. Criminal abductions of Westerners occur less frequently, though the threat remains. Most victims are rescued by authorities or released unharmed relatively quickly after the abductors receive a ransom payment. In the past three years, the Philippines has emerged as a major hub for online gaming, according to Filipino officials, attracting more than 100,000 Chinese nationals who work in virtual casinos catering to players back in China where gambling is illegal. The online casinos generate tax revenue and desperately needed jobs in Manila's crowded downtown area. But at the same time, they've pushed up rents and created new challenges for the Philippine National Police. Online gaming platforms allow players to gamble remotely. They sign up, choose a game and it is played over a livestream in another jurisdiction. Manila has become the number one hotspot worldwide for online gaming, in front of Malta, the Isle of Man and Curacao, according to David Lee, a

lawyer at Taiwanese firm Lin & Partners who specializes in gaming laws. "The Philippines pioneered online casinos in the early 2000s, when Cagayan, a province to the north of the country, started awarding licenses to a handful of operators," explains Ben Lee, the founder of GamiX, a Macao-based consultancy firm focused on the gaming industry in Asia. "But they really took off in 2016, when President Rodrigo Duterte came into office." Duterte handed the right to issue offshore gambling licenses to the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR), a government entity that operates casinos and regulates the industry. "It began to aggressively develop the industry by awarding dozens of licenses," said lawyer David Lee. Chinese businessmen were quick to seize the opportunity and the number of POGOs mushroomed. Last November, Manila expelled hundreds of Chinese nationals who had been arrested in a series of raids against online gaming operations and other cybercrimes in Palawan province, for allegedly working illegally in the country, according to CNN Philippines. Many Chinese nationals working in the Philippine casino industry are attracted by the promise of jobs not available at home, experts say. "These are mostly young people, in their 20s, with little job prospects in China," said Ben Lee. Some are lured to the Philippines with the promise of high-paying jobs in prestigious tech companies, but upon arrival they discover they will be working for an online gambling platform and paid a fraction of what they were promised, he added. "The workers frequently have their passports confiscated, are crammed 10 to a room meant for three to four people and have to work 12-hour shifts, with only one day off per month," said Pitlo. On the job, they are expected to approach prospective players in social media chat groups and convince them to give online gaming a try, according to Lee. Once players are hooked, they

are encouraged to wager increasing amounts of money, he added. POGOs cater to foreign customers and thus employ foreign nationals as customer service representatives to "effectively invite players and attend to their needs and concerns," the PAGCOR spokeswoman said. Most of these foreigners are Chinese nationals, she said. "But we can't categorically say they are based in China or are targeting players in China," she added. "They might be catering to Mandarin speaking people in other countries. In their free time, their Chinese employees often gamble at the casinos and end up in debt," explained Elmer Cereno, a spokesman for the Philippine National Police-Anti Kidnapping Group. "They are then approached by loan sharks who offer to lend them money. When they fail to pay it back, the loan sharks kidnap them and try to get ransom from their relatives back home, he said. On October 2019, police rescued two Chinese POGO workers, whose families had been asked to pay ransoms ranging between 68,000 yuan and 80,000 yuan (about \$9,800 to \$11,500) for their release, according to a summary of the case seen by CNN. They had been abducted from a hotel six days earlier and held by five Chinese nationals in an office building in Taguig, a suburb south of Manila. Between January 2017 and October 2019, Philippine police dealt with 65 cases of kidnap-for-ransom involving POGO workers or casino customers, leading to the arrests of 132 people, according to an official tally provided to CNN by the Philippines police. "Almost all the victims and perpetrators were Chinese nationals," said Cereno. Manila has its own concerns about the industry, with top officials suggesting that the influx of Chinese workers could turn to spying, posing a risk to national security. "You would also start getting worried when a whole building, a condominium tower is occupied by only one nationality where you might not be able to guard their activities," Philippine National Security Adviser Hermogenes

Esperon, Jr. said in July 2019. The recent kidnapping cases led by Chinese are getting worse and worse! A Chinese national who is working in Philippine just released a guess how much to kidnap a Filipino Chinese to remind everyone to be wary of being used as a "walking peso"; Unexpectedly, because of the incentive of the high kidnapping reward, these scum without convergence, but intensified, is bound! The worst areas of kidnapping are now concentrated in Makati and Pasay, as these two places have a large number of gaming parks and homes, such as 1322, TechZone, and some bars popular with Chinese people. As long as you dare to step out of your house, the chance of being randomly kidnapped in the street is very high! And this rampant army of kidnappers is said to be from Cambodia up to a thousand people! Some abductees said they were scared to escape: "On July 22, I am Angelina, angel city is in the van slammed to a car, get in the car after I had a meal with blindfold my eyes, with handcuffs handcuff me, after 15 minutes I was taken to a village, in after they took me 80000 pesos, and my We Chat borrow money from friends and relatives, with my pay treasure to loans, After two days of signed, they persecute me and forced me to record video to their borrowing 1 million yuan for commercial turnover, he ask my family to 1 million yuan, with a gun on my head, my family have got 560000 yuan, the last is powerless, they open video beat me in front of my family, If you don't pay off a million dollars, 100,000 for one hand." Here has been more than one victim broke the news, kidnappers from the north, Hunan, we do not say that the region is black, but vigilance is better! Now in the Philippines, no Chinese can be trusted. Chinese Embassy in Manila urged Philippine agencies to strengthen law enforcement. It also reminded Chinese citizens to "stay away from immoral activities" and avoid online gambling and telecom fraud.

Briefs

Assemblies' dissolution in few days

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the state's and not thinking about holding general elections, then new governments should be formed in both provinces before Ramadan." The former foreign minister said PTI does not want anarchy in the state and wishes to "end the differences" that have taken place in the last eight months, hinting at the party's worsening relations with the establishment. Qureshi said that the PTI leadership, including Khan, believe that the incumbent government has lost the trust of the business community as well as the agriculturists. "The growth figures are dropping — whether it be industrial production, private sector investment, or any other indicator — which shows that the economy is deteriorating." Cash-strapped Pakistan is currently waiting for funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as cataclysmic floods, depleting foreign exchange reserves and depreciating currency adversely affected the economic situation in Pakistan. In the meeting today, the party also appreciated the Supreme Court's decision to take suo motu notice of senior journalist Arshad Sharif's murder. PTI's vice chairman said. Qureshi said a fact-finding report has also been presented before the five-member SC bench. "We believe that justice should be done in this case and the human rights violations that have been taking place were unprecedented."

Marriyum slams Imran over 'dirty politics'

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the national interests. She said that the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, at the instigation of Imran Khan, indulged in a regrettable act during the Mangla Dam refurbishment project ceremony. Imran Khan, for the sake of bolstering his sinking politics, stooped to a mean and reprehensible trick of giving a negative colour to an event of Azad Kashmir and Pakistan's progress. What else can be expected from an "artisan" who harmed national interests by changing the minutes of the cipher, she said while referring to the so called foreign intervention claim of Imran. The minister lamented that Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir neither cared about his position and nor did he care about the sensitivity of the Kashmir issue. She said it was not appropriate to use the Kashmir issue for personal and political interests.

IHC orders to include US Ambassador in Aafia Case

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they had written a letter to American Justice Department inquiring about Dr Aafia's mental and physical health. He further asked if Pakistani Ambassador in the US could assist. The court while ordering foreign ministry representative to submit report with Foreign Minister and Foreign Secretary's signature in the court and adjourned the hearing till January 20. In 2003, Siddiqui was wanted by the FBI for questioning for possible ties to al Qaeda and was detained by Pakistani authorities, according to U.S. media reports at the time. U.S. officials alleged that when the Afghan police captured Siddiqui in July 2008, she was carrying two pounds (900 grams) of sodium cyanide, which releases a highly toxic gas, notes that referred to a mass casualty attack, and a list of U.S. landmarks. Siddiqui was never charged with links to terrorism. The FBI agents, U.S. soldiers, and interpreters said that as they were about to interrogate her at an Afghan police compound in Ghazni, Afghanistan, she grabbed a rifle and began shooting at them. None of them were wounded, but Siddiqui was shot in the abdomen when they returned fire.

Bangladesh stun India to clinch ODI series

All-rounder was unbeaten on 100, adding 148 runs for the seventh wicket alongside former captain Mahmudullah (77) after Indian bowlers left them reeling on 69-6

DNA

DHAKA: Bangladesh stunned India by five runs during the second one-day international (ODI) of the series on Wednesday in Mirpur. With the win, the Tigers took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. Indian skipper Rohit Sharma's heroics were in vain as India failed to chase down a target of 272 runs. It must be noted that Rohit Sharma injured his hand while taking a catch and went off the field for scans. He was later seen with a heavily bandaged thumb in the dressing room. However, Sharma came out all guns blazing to play an impressive unbeaten knock of 51 runs in 28 balls. Although, his innings was not enough to take his side over the line. India were restricted to 266-9 in their allotted 50 overs with Ebadot Hossain claiming figures of 3-45. Shreyas Iyer and Axar Patel also scored fifties for the visitors. Earlier, Mehidy Hasan Miraz hit his maiden ODI century to help Bangladesh recover and post 271-7 against India. The all-rounder was unbeaten on 100, add-



ing 148 runs for the seventh wicket alongside former captain Mahmudullah (77) after the Indian bowlers left them reeling on 69-6. Mehidy hit eight fours and four sixes in his 83-ball knock, reaching his hundred on the final ball of the innings. India's Mohammed Siraj led the attack after he removed the openers and fellow quick Umran Malik, who also took two, soon joined forces to push Bangladesh onto the backfoot. Mystery spinner Washington Sundar struck three times in seven deliveries including the key wickets of Shikhar Dhoni (eight) and Mushfiquur Rahim (12). But Mehidy, who went past his previous ODI best of 81 not out with two successive fours off Umran, joined Mahmudullah to thwart the opposition attack and rebuild the innings. Mehidy hit a couple of sixes en route to his third ODI fifty and soon after Mahmudullah got his 27th half-century. The duo then shifted gears with regular boundaries. The partnership was the highest seventh-wicket stand against India by any team in 50-over matches and was finally broken when Umran, a tearaway quick, got Mahmudullah caught behind.

CNS all Pakistan squash c'ship 2022 commences



SPORTS DESK

KARACHI: The opening ceremony of 1st Chief of the Naval Staff All Pakistan Squash Championship was

held at Pakistan Navy Roshan Khan Jahangir Khan Squash Complex, Karachi. Commander Karachi Rear Admiral Mian Zakirullah Jan graced the occasion as Chief Guest and declared

the Championship open. Earlier during his welcome address Tournament Director Commodore Tauqeer Ahmad Khawaja said that the National Squash tournament will be organized

every alternate year. The event will prove to be instrumental in promoting Squash at National level and will also provide an opportunity to domestic players to show their professional acumen. The tournament director also appreciated the players, officials, sponsors and Commander Karachi for their support and presence during this mega event. The Championship will be held from 6-10 December 2022 and will comprise of 54 matches. Top national players will be seen in action during the event. Players from across the country comprising 28 Men and 28 Women are participating in this Championship. The opening ceremony was attended by a large number of civil & military dignitaries, sponsors and senior squash players.

Infantino labels group stage as 'best ever'

DOHA: FIFA President Gianni Infantino has heaped massive praise on the FIFA World Cup 2022 group stage, labelling it as the "best ever". Sensational upsets occurred during the tournament's initial round, with Saudi Arabia's victory over Argentina constituting the first significant shock. Morocco defeated Belgium and tied with Croatia to win their pool, while Japan also defeated Germany and Spain to win their group. The last 16 included teams from Africa, Asia, and North America. Infantino claimed that there has never been a tournament more dramatic as the last round of matches, where qualification for the last 16 came down to the wire in some of the groups. "I have seen all the matches, indeed, and put very simply and very clearly, this has been the best group stage of a FIFA World Cup ever. So, it's very promising for the remainder of the FIFA World Cup," Infantino said. "The matches have been of great, great quality in beautiful stadiums — we knew that already. However, as well, the public who was there was incredible. Over 51,000 on average." Moreover, the round of 16 of the FIFA World Cup also saw a major upset on Tuesday as Morocco stunned Spain on penalties to qualify for the quarter-final, where they will clash with Portugal. On Wednesday, Infantino expressed his satisfaction with the number of fans packing the nation's stadiums and fan zones and his prediction that the final TV viewership numbers would surpass five billion. "At the end [of the day, we simply want to give some joy and some smiles to people all over the world]," he added. "That's what football is about, that's what the World Cup is about, and that's what should also happen from now until the end. We have already seen some great action on the field, which, [ultimately], is the most important part of what you do." — DNA

SC orders new JIT in Arshad killing case

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Intelligence Bureau, and Federal Investigation Agency. The CJP observed that the court wanted the investigation to be conducted by senior and independent officers. The JIT members should be experts in understanding the case and bringing evidence from other countries, and if necessary, support from international organizations including the United Nations should be provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he added. He ordered that all the information should be shared with the family of Arshad Sharif. The chief justice said the court wanted to ensure that competent and qualified officers do their work according to the law. A journalist told the court that the police did not behave properly with Arshad Sharif's family. On this, the chief justice said that the court would look into the matter after hearing the stance of Arshad Sharif's mother. The Additional Attorney General said the investigation team received information from the Kenyan authorities. A meeting was held with the three Kenyan police officers who had fired bullets while the fourth official was injured, he added.

Japan pledges USD 38.9 million

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resilient disaster management, thereby contributing to "Build Back Better" in Pakistan. The Government of Japan provided USD 7 million as an emergency grant to address the immediate impact of the floods in September 2022. The Government of Japan, with a long-standing partnership with Pakistan, stands ready to support the people of Pakistan to overcome the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Pakistanis are passionate for food, reveals Google

ISLAMABAD: International search engine Google has published its Yearly Search report which epitomized the biggest developments in Pakistan for 2022. Pakistan's passion for food was reflected in the search categories, with desi cuisine dominating the rankings. The searches showed that Pakistanis have had a wide range of interests during the course of the year, with a focus on politics, well-known figures, governmental projects, current events, entertainment, technology and of course food. According to an APP report, Pakistanis were contributing to Beijing's diverse food culture as well. People in Pakistan celebrated all significant holidays in 2022 with ease despite COVID-19 limitations and used Google to look out for contemporary recipes and a variety of culinary items. Pakistani restaurants present one of the tastiest cuisines in the world based on a long historic tradition and cooking excellence. Pakistani cuisines are not only popular among native customers but also liked by Chinese people. Similarly, a private TV channel reported that the Royal Nawaab chain of restaurants in the UK offers over 100 dishes at its sprawling two locations in London and Manchester. No other Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi restaurant anywhere in the UK or Western Europe offers this range of buffets to its customers. — APP

China launches new test satellite

ISLAMABAD: China successfully sent a new test satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China on Wednesday. The VHF Data Exchange System (VDES) test satellite was launched by a Kuaizhou-11 Y2 carrier rocket at 9:15 a.m. (Beijing Time) and entered the planned orbit. The satellite will be mainly used for communications tests and key technologies verification of the VDES and the automatic identification system (AIS), cncs.cn reported. It was the 23rd flight mission of the Kuaizhou-11 rockets, according to the launch center. — APP

England crush West Indies to secure ODI series win

DNA

LONDON: England thrashed West Indies by 142 runs to secure a dominant one-day international series win in Antigua. Chasing 261, the hosts were bowled out for 118 with Lauren Bell taking her best international figures of 4-33. Bell and Kate Cross, who took 2-35, tore through a fragile West Indies batting line-up as the hosts slipped to 49-5 inside the first 10 overs of their chase. It was another extremely one-sided encounter, with England taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. England's 260 all out looked below par at the halfway stage, after they chose to bat first on a flat pitch on which they scored 307 two days ago. Sophia Dunkley made 55 and Amy Jones was left stranded on 70 not out as West Indies put in a much-improved display with the ball and in the field — captain Hayley Matthews leading the way with 3-50. Opener Emma Lamb was run out for 25 on her return to the side as she replaced Alice Capsey, who has returned to the UK after breaking her collarbone in the first ODI. But the hosts' batting crumbled once again, with Rashada Williams' unbeaten half-century the only contribution of more than 20. Bell took two wickets in the first over, including the prized wicket of Matthews, to spark a dramatic West Indies collapse, and spinners Sophie Ecclestone and Charlie Dean took two wickets apiece to complete the win.



Luka Modric: Croatia's conductor in his last World Cup

Modric is still the heartbeat of the team and coach Zlatko Dalic has said he expects the 37-year-old to be involved at next year's Nations League finals

DOHA: Luka Modric said before arriving in Qatar that this World Cup would likely be his last major tournament and he has again orchestrated another deep run for Croatia. The veteran midfielder's side will face their biggest challenge yet when they take on Brazil in the quarter-finals on Friday. The five-time champions sent out a warning to their fellow title hopefuls with a wonderful first-half display in their 4-1 victory over South Korea in the last 16. But Croatia, the 2018 World Cup finalists, are likely to pose a far tougher test for the Selecao — seven of their past eight major tournament knockout ties have gone to extra time. Modric is still the heartbeat of the team and coach Zlatko Dalic has said he expects the 37-year-old to be involved at next year's Nations League finals. But the Real Madrid midfielder does not see himself playing at a fifth World Cup, 20 years after his first, in 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico. "I'm aware that I'm of a certain age and that this is my last competition in the Croatian national team," he told FIFA before the tournament. Modric still toils selflessly in midfield but was clearly fading when he was substituted

in extra-time on Croatia's last-16 win over Japan on penalties. The Balkan nation will be counting on him to dig deep again, though, as he looks to replicate the form that helped Croatia reach the final in Moscow in 2018, where they lost 4-2 to France. "When you see people like Luka Modric running and dying on the pitch, it gives us younger players extra energy to run," said full-back Josip Juranovic. Modric is a hero in his home nation after a 16-year international career in which he has made 159 appearances. His trophy cabinet includes five Champions League titles with Real Madrid. Modric broke Lionel Messi and Cristiano



Ronaldo's 10-year grip on the Ballon d'Or in 2018, when he also won the World Cup player of the tournament award. Modric grew up during Croatia's war of independence, between 1991 and 1995, during which his hometown, Zadar, and the surrounding region were heavily shelled by Serb forces. Those experiences shaped Modric's character and made him mentally strong, according to those close to him. "It happened a million times that we were going to training as the shells were falling, and we were running to shelters," said childhood friend Marijan Buljat, who trained and played with Modric while growing up. "It is certainly one of the factors that contributed... that drove him to become one of the best in the world." Modric's grandfather, after whom Luka was named, was killed by Serb forces, the house was burned out and the family fled to Zadar, 40 kilometres (25 miles) away. "I'm sad that he (grandfather) didn't get to see at least something of what I've achieved," Modric told FIFA. It was in Zadar that Modric, born in 1985, began his footballing odyssey, catching the eye. "I heard about a little hyperactive boy constantly playing with a football in the corridor of a refugee hotel, even going to sleep with it," said Josip Bajlo, who was then coach at NK Zadar. Modric left Zadar as a teenager for Dinamo Zagreb and moved to Premier League club Tottenham in 2008, where he stayed for four years before moving to Spain. Trees now grow inside the roofless ruin of his grandparents' house, in the hinterland of the coastal town of Zadar. "Mines - Keep out!" warns a sign next to the house, lying on a mountain road winding through the Modrici hamlet. — APP

Briefs

US judge dismisses lawsuit against MBS

WASHINGTON: A US federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit against Saudi Arabia's crown prince and de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), over his role in the 2018 murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, after Washington decided to provide him with immunity in the case. US District Judge John D. Bates gave the order on Tuesday despite what he called "credible allegations" of the crown prince's involvement in Khashoggi's murder. Bates expressed uneasiness in making the decision, but said he had no power to reject the US government's official stance that the prince had immunity as a foreign head of state. The federal judge said that the suit filed by the 'slain' journalist's widow had "strong and 'meritorious' argument that the prince was behind the murder, but Washington's finding that bin Salman was immune left him no choice but to dismiss the prince as a plaintiff. He also dismissed the two other Saudi plaintiffs, saying the US court lacked jurisdiction over them. The civil lawsuit was filed in 2020 by Hatice Cengiz, the fiancée of Khashoggi, and Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), a human rights organization he founded before his death, in the federal district court of Washington DC. It said Khashoggi, a US resident and Washington Post columnist, was tortured, murdered, and dismembered on the orders of bin Salman. **Agencies**

Killer of anti-apartheid hero Hani freed on parole

JOHANNESBURG :South Africa on Wednesday released on parole Janusz Walus, a far-right Polish immigrant who in 1993 shot dead anti-apartheid hero Chris Hani, after a postponement due to an attack inside prison. Justice and Correctional Services Minister Ronald Lamola "has placed offender... Walus on parole under strict conditions with effect from Wednesday," the government said in a statement. A spokesman confirmed that this meant Walus had been released, in line with a decision by the Constitutional Court. He will serve two years under community corrections in line with the parole regime upon which he is released," the statement said. Last month's court decision sparked fierce protests from the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its ally in the struggle against apartheid, the South African Communist Party, which Hani had led. Walus was being held at the Kgosi Mampuru II Correctional Centre in Pretoria prior to the court's announcement. But a week after the ruling, he was stabbed by another inmate while queuing for food. —DNA

Mozambique ex-president's son jailed

MAPUTO :A Mozambican court on Wednesday sentenced two ex-spy bosses and the son of a former president to 12 years each for their part in a corruption scandal in which the government sought to conceal huge debts, triggering financial havoc. The former head of security and intelligence, Gregorio Leao; the head of the security service's economic intelligence division, Antonio do Rosario; and ex-president Armando Guebuza's son Ndambi Guebuza were among 19 defendants accused in the country's biggest graft scandal. Eight defendants were acquitted while the rest were handed terms ranging between 10 and 12 years in a verdict that took the judge a week to read out. "The crimes committed have brought consequences whose effects will last for generations," said Judge Efigenio Baptista, addressing a packed courtroom located on the grounds of a high-security jail in the capital Maputo. The scandal arose after state-owned companies in the impoverished country illicitly borrowed \$2 billion (1.9 billion euros) in 2013. —DNA

Germany busts far-right cell plotting to 'overthrow state'

Suspects were aware that their plan "could only be realised by using military means and violence against state representatives," prosecutors said

FRANKFURT: German police staged nationwide raids on Wednesday and arrested 25 people suspected of belonging to a far-right "terror cell" plotting to overthrow the government and attack parliament. Around 3,000 officers including elite anti-terror units took part in the early morning raids and searched more than 130 properties, in what German media described as one of the country's largest police actions ever against extremists. The raids targeted alleged members of the "Citizens of the Reich" (Reichsbuerger) movement suspected of "having made concrete preparations to violently force their way into the German parliament with a small armed group", federal prosecutors said in a statement. Those arrest-

ed are accused of having formed "a terrorist group by the end of November 2021 at the latest, which had set itself the goal of overcoming the existing state order in Germany and replacing it with their own kind of state", they said. Two of the 25 arrests were made abroad, in Austria and Italy. The prosecutors in Karlsruhe said they had identified a further 27 people as suspected members or supporters of the terror network. "The accused are united by a deep rejection of state institutions and the free, democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany," they said. The Reichsbuerger movement includes neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists and gun enthusiasts who reject the legitimacy of the mod-

ern German republic. Its followers generally believe in the continued existence of the pre-World War I German Reich, or empire, under a monarchy and several groups have declared their own states. Long dismissed as malcontents and oddballs, the Reichsbuerger have become increasingly radicalised in recent years and are seen as a growing security threat. The investigation gave "a look into the abyss" of far-right terror from the movement, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in a statement. According to prosecutors, the terror cell suspects believe in Reichsbuerger and QAnon conspiracy theories and are "strongly convinced" that Germany is run by a "deep state" that needs to be toppled. The suspects were

aware that their plan "could only be realised by using military means and violence against state representatives," prosecutors said. They allegedly planned to appoint one of the arrested suspects, identified by local media as aristocrat and businessman Prince Heinrich XIII Reuss, as Germany's new leader after the coup. Heinrich XIII had already sought to make contact with Russian officials to discuss Germany's "new state order" after the coup, prosecutors said. There was however "no indication that the contact persons responded positively to his request." A Russian woman named only as Vitalia B., who was among those arrested on Wednesday, is suspected of having facilitated those contacts, prosecutors added.

The Russian embassy in Berlin said it did "not maintain contacts with representatives of terrorist groups or other illegal entities", according to a statement carried by Russian news agencies. As part of the preparations for the coup, members of the alleged terror cell acquired weapons, organised shooting practice and tried to recruit new followers, particularly among the military and police, according to prosecutors. Former soldiers are believed to be among the members of the recently established terror group, they said. An ex-MP for the far-right AfD party, , was also among those accused of being part of the plot, according to German media reports. Justice Minister Marco

Buschmann praised on Twitter the dismantling of the "suspected terror cell", saying it showed that Germany was able to defend its democracy. Germany's domestic intelligence service estimates that the Reichsbuerger scene consists of around 20,000 people. Of those, more than 2,000 are deemed potentially violent. Germany considers far-right terrorism the biggest threat to its security following a spate of attacks in recent years. In April, police foiled a plot by a far-right group to kidnap the health minister. The group was affiliated with the Reichsbuerger movement and the so-called "Querdenker" (Lateral Thinkers) group that opposed the government's coronavirus-related shutdowns.

Largest-ever Pak-Australia parliamentary friendship group established

DNA

CANBERRA: The largest-ever Australia-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Group with 38 members has been established at the 47th Parliament of Australia. The group comprises members from both the Houses of the Australian Parliament – the Senate and the House of Representatives with representation from all the Australian States. The Parliamentary Friendship Group is chaired by Maria Vamvakinou MP from the ruling Australian Labor Party (ALP), while Rowan Ramsey MP from the opposition Liberal Party is the vice chair. The other members of the group include Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles MP, President of the Senate Senator Susan Lines, Speaker of the House of Representatives Dugald Milton Dick, MP; former Foreign Minister Senator Marise Payne and former Defence Minister Sena-



tor Linda Reynolds. High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri in a statement said the establishment of Pakistan-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Groups highlights the significance of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries. He said in addition to pro-

moting parliamentary cooperation, these groups will also help further strengthen bilateral relations and expand cooperation in multiple areas. Pakistan and Australia have maintained friendly and cooperative relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries

EU freezes cooperation with Israeli police

Last September, Israel and the EU signed a draft agreement to improve the transfer of intelligence information

JERUSALEM: The European Union has frozen cooperation with the Israeli police due to concerns regarding the upcoming government's policy, according to Israeli media on Wednesday. Last September, Israel and the EU signed a draft agreement to improve the transfer of intelligence information. The deal, however, needs approval by the European Parliament. "The EU informed Israeli Ambassador Haim Regev that it will, for the time being, stop promoting a draft agreement for intelligence cooperation between the Israeli police and the European Police Agency, Europol," Haaretz newspaper said, citing well-informed sources. Regev was handed the suspension decision last Friday, according to the newspaper. Israeli officials told Haaretz that the decision is the first European indication that the change in Israeli policy in the occupied West Bank will harm cooperation with the EU. On Monday, the head of the EU's Law Enforcement Cooperation Unit, Rob Rosenberg, said "the final agreement may include minor exceptions" limited to "the situation of material threats and the need to protect the civilian population." According to Haaretz, the emerging agreement is expected to include a clause preventing Israel from using any information it receives from Europe in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. International law views both the West Bank and East Jerusalem as "occupied territories" and considers all Jewish settlement-building activity there as illegal. Israeli Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to offer far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir the portfolio of the national security minister in the new government, a move that sparked regional and international concerns.—DNA

US, UK agree to ramp up LNG trade

LONDON: Britain and the US on Wednesday forged a new energy deal that will enable the US to export more gas to the UK amid the war-driven energy crisis. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and US President Joe Biden announced an "energy security and affordability partnership" aiming to reduce Russian energy exports, stabilize energy markets, and step up collaboration on energy efficiency, nuclear, and renewables. Although the UK was not dependent on the large volumes of Russian gas prior to the Russia-Ukraine war, it was hurt by price hikes on global markets as its European neighbors rushed to fill their storage facilities and competed for other supplies. "Under the deal, the US will strive to export at least 9-10 billion cubic metres of liquefied natural gas (LNG) over the next year via UK terminals, more than doubling the level exported in 2021 and capitalising on the UK's leading import infrastructure," according to a written statement. "Standing up to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin, together," Sunak said on Twitter. "Together the UK and US will ensure the global price of energy and the security of our national supply can never again be manipulated by the whims of a failing regime." He said the deal will bring down prices for British consumers and help end Europe's dependence on Russian energy once and for all. The leaders also agreed to work on green investments, saying the partnership will include international investment in clean energy technologies, from offshore wind to carbon capture. —Agencies

US to increase military presence in Australia

WASHINGTON: The US is set to further strengthen its military presence in South East Asia, with the Pentagon chief saying the country will boost the rotational presence of its of air, land and sea forces in Australia amid growing tensions with China. Lloyd Austin announced on Tuesday after annual talks between the two allies. "What we've agreed to do is to increase rotations of air, land and sea forces, these are rotational forces obviously, to Australia," he said without providing details on when there would be an increase in the rotations or how many troops, ships and aircraft it would involve. The United States is planning to deploy up to six nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to an air base in northern Australia amid heightened tensions with China. Thousands of US Marines rotate through Australia's Northern Territory annually for training and joint military exercises. The US sees Australia as a vital partner in its efforts to push back against China in the Indo-Pacific as analysts say Canberra could have a crucial logistical role to play in the defense of Taiwan against any move by Beijing to reclaim the strategic island.—DNA

155 injured in train collision near Barcelona

BARCELONA :More than 150 people were lightly injured Wednesday when one train ran into the back of another at a station near Barcelona, authorities and Spain's Renfe rail operator said. The SEM regional emergency services said the train had been moving very slowly when the collision occurred just before 8:00 am (0700 GMT), with most people suffering bumps and bruises. A total of 155 people sustained minor injuries, of which 39 were taken for further examination at local health centres or hospitals, the SEM said on Twitter. "There was a collision between two trains at 7:50 am at the Montcada i Reixac-Manresa station, on the line heading into Barcelona, that's to say one train ran into the back of another," a spokesman for the state rail operator told AFP. A regional fire service spokesman told reporters said the moving train had hit a stationary train at Montcada station, which lies some 10 kilometres (six miles) north of Barcelona. —DNA

Türkiye hails US move to exclude conditions on F-16 sale

ISTANBUL: Türkiye on Wednesday hailed the recent US move to exclude certain provisions in the final text of the US defense budget on the sale of F-16s to Ankara. Speaking at a joint press conference with his Moldovan counterpart Nicu Popescu in Istanbul, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said: "In the end, the absence of a negative element (in the bill) is a positive development. We welcome this." Amendments introduced in the US House of Representatives, making sales of F-16 fighter jets to Türkiye contingent on a series of conditions were removed in the final defense spending bill. Approval of this bill and completion of purchases would serve "everyone's interest," Cavusoglu said, adding that the process needs to be finalized "as soon as possible." The move came after two amendments introduced by Democratic senators, Bob Menendez and Chris Van Hollen, tying F-16 sales to Türkiye on some conditions were removed from the Senate version of the annual US defense spending bill. The amendments sought to impose several restrictions on the sale of F-16s and modernization kits to Türkiye, including not to use the fighter jets to violate Greek airspace and requiring the Biden administration to certify that the sale would be in national interest. After the Senate passes the National Defense Authorization Act, it will be made into a joint text with a previous version passed within the House of Representatives before it is sent to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.—Agencies

Baku calls on world to take action against Armenian vandalism

BAKU: Azerbaijani Human Rights Commissioner Sabina Aliyeva called on international and national communities to take legal responsibility against Armenia in regard to the destruction of Azerbaijani graves in the liberated Zangilan District. Azernews reports per Ombudswoman's Office. A video of deliberately destroyed by Armenians of Azerbaijani graves and tombstones in a cemetery was posted on social networks, the statement elaborated. "We strongly condemn the destruction and desecration of religious monuments and cemeteries in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan, as well as the mining of these territories, and once again call on regional and international organizations, and national human rights institu-



tions to take the necessary measures to establish international legal responsibility against the military and political leadership of Armenia guilty of committing such numerous acts of vandalism," the ombudswoman said. Further, she stated that all these facts convincingly prove that Armenia's military-political leadership carries out a policy of hatred, enmity, intolerance, and vandalism against Azerbaijan on ethnic and religious grounds

for many years. She pointed out that the brutal destruction of the graves of Azerbaijanis is a gross violation of the requirements of the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in Time of Armed Conflict, the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the 1954 European Cultural Convention. During Armenia's three-decade-long occupation, some 900 cemeteries with over a mil-

lion graves were decimated. Azerbaijani gravestones were even used to build stairs to Armenian homes. Car plates of killed and displaced Azerbaijanis were used to decorate public restrooms. Overall, during the 30-year-long occupation 927 libraries with 4.6 million books, 700 historical monuments, and 22 museums with 100,000 exhibits were looted and destroyed by Armenia. The latter looted and erased more heritage than ISIS terrorists in Iraq and Syria. It is the worst cultural genocide of the XXI century, the ombudswoman said. To erase all traces of Azerbaijani culture and history, Armenia systematically destroyed cultural and historical monuments. Out of 67 mosques, 65 were desecrated and destroyed. Many mosques were turned into pigsties.—Agencies

US can't withstand strong Iran: Raeisi

TEHRAN: Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi has lambasted the United States for its hostile and seditious plots against the Islamic Republic, stating that Washington does not want the country to be strong and prosperous, and indeed spares no effort to wreak havoc and destruction on it. Raeisi made the remarks at Tehran University on Wednesday on the occasion of the National Day of University Student, which falls on December 7 every year and marks the anniversary of the murder of three students of the same university on December 7, 1953 by Iranian police forces in the deposed and US-backed Pahlavi era. "Americans are rummaging around for destruction. They want Iran to be in ruins rather than to be strong and robust. They are seeking to have Iran destroyed just like Syria and Afghanistan. They have, however, made miscalculations as erudite and well-informed Iranian men and women will not allow them to implement such a scheme," the Iranian president pointed out. He added, "They (Americans) wanted to block our country's progress; but

we did not let them do so. They proclaimed we would not be able to trade with our neighbors unless we acceded to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). This is while we have expanded our interactions with regional countries and have even activated regional commercial infrastructure, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)." Raeisi went on to highlight that almost 35,000 people have been maimed during the 20-year-long US war in Afghanistan, expressing surprise that US officials, irrespective of such a high figure, are still making bogus allegations about attempts to offer world nations hope and joy. The Iranian president also described the US government as the most authoritarian and dictatorial administration of all, hailing the National Day of University Student as a manifestation of the fight against the world's super dictator, the United States. He strongly denounced the US over creation of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, and supply of weapons to the terrorists to murder 15 people – including a child and his parents

– and injure 26 others in an attack on the revered Shah Cheragh holy shrine in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz on October 26. Elsewhere in his remarks, Raeisi rejected claims that the riots in Iran are a product of the country's economic situation, adding that people refused to support the rioters after they became aware of the real intentions behind the unrest. He said the incumbent Iranian administration will continue to listen to the grievances of protesters, including students, adding that he has been



engaged in constant dialogue with students and the elites of the country since taking office in August 2021. Foreign-backed riots have hit various Iranian provinces since 22-year-old woman Mahsa Amini died at the hospital on September 16, three days after she collapsed at a police station. An investigation has attributed Amini's death to her medical condition, rather than alleged beatings by the police. The violent riots, meanwhile, have claimed the lives of dozens of people and security forces, while also allowing terrorist attacks across the country. In the last two months, the terrorists have set fire to public property and tortured several Basij members and security forces to death. On October 26, a Daesh-affiliated terrorist attacked the Shah Cheragh shrine in the southern province of Fars before the evening prayers, killing at least 15 pilgrims – including a woman and two children – and injuring 40 others. At least seven people were also killed after terrorists opened fire at people and security forces at a crowded market in Khuzestan province's Izeh around sunset on November 16.—Agencies

Briefs

Saudi Arabia committed to rescue Pakistan's economy

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Arabia is committed to avert Pakistan's current economic crisis worsened by the recent flood disaster, as this is crucial for achieving political stability and safeguarding national security, said Kingdom's former ambassador to Pakistan, Dr Ali Awadh Asseri.

"This is clear from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's personal resolve for not only addressing Pakistan's immediate financial needs but also guaranteeing long-term investments in the energy sector," he said while speaking on Wednesday at the Islamabad Conclave organised by the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

"I have no doubt that Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has the ability, courage and will to take Pakistan forward. And, he can count on the Saudi nation and its leadership for whatever support is needed for economic and political stability," said Dr Asseri, who is currently a board member at RAS-ANAH, the premier Saudi think-tank on Iranian affairs.

The second round of Islamabad Conclave, titled "75 Years of Independence: Achieving Comprehensive National Security," includes several prominent speakers from home and abroad in five working groups. Dr Asseri spoke on "Enhancing Pakistan's Economic Outreach to Saudi Arabia and the GCC." – APP

Palestinian killed after roadside fight: witnesses

HUWARA: Eye-witnesses have firmly disputed an Israeli officer's self-defence claims after chilling footage showed him firing close-range fatal shots at a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank. Ammar Hadi Mufleh, 22, was killed Friday in Huwara, near Nablus in the northern West Bank, and video from the scene shows him in an altercation with an Israeli police commander, who then shot him several times.

Multiple Palestinian witnesses denied Mufleh was armed with a knife or tried to grab the officer's weapon, as Israel has claimed, giving a different account of what led to the widely condemned incident. One witness, Abdullah al-Sattaria, 30, told AFP he was travelling from his home in Jericho to an engagement party in Tulkarm, and had stopped at a shop in Huwara. He is seen in the video several metres (feet) from Mufleh when the fatal shots were fired. – APP

Indonesian suicide bomber kills one

BANDUNG: A suspected militant, angered by Indonesia's new criminal code, killed one other person and wounded at least 10 in a suicide bomb attack at a police station in the city of Bandung on Wednesday, authorities said. The suicide bomber was believed to be affiliated with the Daesh-inspired group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and had previously been jailed on terrorism charges, Indonesian police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo told a news conference.

The police chief said the attacker, identified as Agus Sujatno, was released in late 2021 and investigators had found dozens of documents protesting the country's controversial new criminal code at the crime scene. "We found dozens of papers protesting the newly ratified criminal code," he said. West Java police chief Siantana earlier told Metro TV that authorities had found a blue motorbike at the scene, which they believed was used by the attacker.

Attached to the bike was a note carrying a message decrying the new criminal code as "an infidel product," Siantana said. Todd Elliott, a senior security analyst at Concord Consulting in Jakarta, said it was likely the attack had been planned for some time and was an ideological rejection of the country's new laws. – Agencies

Eyes on Belarus as Ukraine's neighbour moves troops

President Alexander Lukashenko, who relied on Russian troops to put down a popular revolt two years ago, has allowed Belarus to serve as a staging ground for Russia's invasion of their neighbour, but has so far kept his own army from joining it

DNA

KYIV: Russia's ally Belarus said on Wednesday it was moving troops and military hardware to counteract what it called a threat of terrorism, amid signs Moscow could be putting pressure on its loyal client to open a new front in the war against Ukraine.

President Alexander Lukashenko, who relied on Russian troops to put down a popular revolt two years ago, has allowed Belarus to serve as a staging ground for Russia's invasion of their neighbour, but has so far kept his own army from joining it.

But recent weeks have seen increasing signs of involvement in Belarus from Moscow, culminating on Saturday when Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu flew unannounced to the capital Minsk. He and Belarusian counterpart Viktor Khrenin signed amendments to the two countries' security cooperation agreement, without disclosing the new terms. Thousands of Russian troops have been deployed in Belarus since October, Ukraine says, and Belarus authorities have increasingly spoken of a threat of "terrorism" from partisans operating from across the border. Lukashenko has ordered

his military to compile information about reservists by the end of this year.

In the latest move, on Wednesday, the Belarus Security Council, quoted by state news agency BelTA, said troops and hardware would be moving in the country over the next two days. Access to some roads and transport links would be restricted, and imitation weapons would be used for training, it said. It gave no details about the number of troops or types of hardware that would be moved, the location of roads and transport links that would be shut, or of the nature of the training exercises. Residents in the capital Minsk said there were no outward signs of unusual activity there.

In the past, some Western diplomats have been skeptical that Belarus would join the war, noting that it had a comparatively small military, and that Moscow would be wary of provoking public opposition that would weaken Lukashenko for little gain.

Ukrainian officials have also said they think Russia did not have enough troops in Belarus to assault from there yet, and action near the border could be intended instead as a decoy. The Institute for the Study of War think tank said this month it believes Belarus is conducting an "infor-

mation operation aimed at fixing Ukrainian forces on the border". But some analysts say the flurry of activity in recent weeks could also be a genuine sign Belarus might send troops.

"Belarus has actually been preparing to join the war on the Russian side for a few months. Every capability that they would need to go to war has been tested," Konrad Muzyka, a Belarus expert with Poland-based defence think-tank Rochan Consulting, told Reuters, describing drills on mobilising troops and even running the post office in war time. "We cannot exclude the possibility that a decision has been made that Belarus could join the war. I don't know whether this has happened, but from a military indicators point of view, everything is pointing towards Belarusian armed forces taking a more belligerent stance."

Within Ukraine, officials were working on Wednesday to restore power after damage in the latest barrage of Russian missile strikes, launched on Monday hours after apparent Ukrainian drone strikes on two airbases deep inside Russia.

Ukraine has not directly claimed responsibility for the drone strikes but has celebrat-

ed the apparent demonstration of newfound capability to penetrate hundreds of kilometres into Russia's air defences.

Russia launched its "special military operation" in February saying Ukraine's close ties with the West posed a security threat. Kyiv and its allies say the invasion was an illegal war of aggression. Tens of thousands have died in the war, including at least 6,700 civilian deaths counted by the United Nations. Russia denies intentionally targeting civilians or committing atrocities on occupied territory.

In the latest international documentation of such allegations, the U.N. human rights office released a report on Wednesday detailing 441 civilians it said were killed by Russian forces in executions and attacks early in the war in the northern Kyiv, Sumy and Chernihiv regions. The actual number of victims in the three regions was likely to be much higher, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said. The report looked at the period from the invasion's start on Feb. 24 until early April, when Russian forces were driven from those areas. The Russian foreign and defence ministries did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Ishaq Dar discusses economy with Saudi, Dutch envoys

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Nawaf Bin Said Al-Malki called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Ishaq Dar on Wednesday. Finance Minister Dar extended warm welcome to the Saudi Ambassador and highlighted the historical, religious, cultural and long-standing bilateral ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It was shared that both states enjoy exceptional relationship on various front including economy and trade, said a press release issued here.

The finance minister apprised the ambassador about the ongoing post-flood reconstruction and rehabilitation program.

Ishaq Dar thanked the ambassador on extending the term of US\$ 3 billion deposit in SBP by Saudi Fund for Development (SFD). Separately, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Pakistan, Henny Fokel de Vries also called on Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar. SAPM on Finance Tariq Bajwa and other senior officers from Finance Division participated in the meeting, said a press release issued here. The Finance Minister welcomed Henny Fokel de Vries and highlighted the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Netherlands. – APP

Pak slams India on denying visas to blind cricketers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has deeply regretted non-issuance of visa to its blind cricket team by India for participation in the third T20 World Cup Cricket Tournament for the Blind. The statement came after Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) said India had denied the team the visas for the tournament which is taking place in the neighboring country from Dec 5 to 17. Earlier this week, the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI) had confirmed that Pakistan cricket team for the visually impaired would soon be granted visa to come to India for the third T20 World Cup for the Blind scheduled from December 5-17.

Mahantesh GK, President of CABI was quoted as confirming that Pakistan and India are set to square off at the Siri Fort Ground on December 7. Earlier, there were some issues with regard to the participation of the Pakistan team due to the delay in the issuance of visas. However, Pakistan Blind Cricket Council (PBCC) said India had denied the team the visas for the tournament and "this unfortunate incident had left the Pakistan blind cricket team in the lurch."

Foreign Office spokesperson said as a result of the Indian decision, Pakistani players would be deprived of the opportunity to participate in an international sporting event of special significance. This reflects India's insensitivity towards promotion of sports meant for differently-abled persons. "The sports events must not be politicized, we have conveyed our disappointment to the Indian side," the spokesperson added.

Steps taken to ensure electoral transparency

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja says steps have been taken to ensure transparency in the elections. Addressing an event in Islamabad Wednesday in connection with National Voters Day, he said action has also been taken against those elements who tried to resort to lawlessness and irregularities during the electoral process.

He said as a result of these steps, the confidence of people on elections, democratic process and the election commission has increased. The Chief Election Commissioner said an effort has also been made to ensure implementation of election code of conduct by taking across the board action against its violators.

Sikandar Sultan Raja said the election commission supports the use of technology in the electoral process. But the technology should be such on which all the stakeholders have consensus, people can easily exercise their right to franchise and secrecy of vote could be ensured. He said we have not opposed the EVMs or the voting right of overseas Pakistanis but there should be a method for this. He said we cannot make the general elections controversial in any haste.

CM Elahi holds talks with Punjab governor

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi arrived Wednesday at Governor's House to meet Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman. As per the official sources, both the governor and the chief minister discussed the issues of mutual interest and current political situation in the country.

A meeting between the chief minister of Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) and the governor of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is very important amid calls for the dissolution of Punjab Assembly.

LHC disposes of contempt case after Asad Umer's apology

RAWALPINDI: The Lahore High Court (LHC) Rawalpindi Bench on Wednesday disposed of the contempt of court case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Umer after his unconditional apology. During the hearing, Asad Umer appeared before the Court headed by Justice Jawad Ul Hassan of the LHC's Rawalpindi bench along with his lawyer, Advocate Faisal Chaudhary. PTI leader apologized to the Court for his remarks in the public meeting in Rawalpindi and said that "We respect the Judiciary and will keep on respecting it."

He added that he had no intention to target any Judge or Judiciary. In his statement, the Justice remarked that the Court has the videos of his speech, adding the matter was not of the contempt of court but the allegations against institutions and their representatives. The Justice also told the PTI leader that Article 50 of the Constitution allows the right to movement and Article 60 right to democracy but not a criticism of institutions.

Umar responded that "If I crossed any line with my statements, then I apologize," On Asad Umer's unconditional apology, the bench disposed of the contempt case against the PTI leader. Earlier, the Lahore High Court (LHC) Rawalpindi bench on December 5 had sought a reply from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Asad Umar for his criticism against the judiciary in his November 26 speech at his party's Rawalpindi public meeting. – APP

Georgia: Democratic US Senator Warnock beats Trump-backed rival

WEB DESK

ATLANTA: Democrat Raphael Warnock won re-election to the U.S. Senate in a hard-fought Georgia runoff on Tuesday, strengthening his party's razor-thin majority as he fought off a challenge by Republican former football star Herschel Walker. Warnock's projected victory was narrow. With 99% of the estimated vote counted, he led Walker by 50.8% to 49.2%, according to Edison Research. The result cements Georgia as a battleground state certain to play a prominent role in the 2024 presidential election. Dem-

ocrats have now won three Senate races in the past two years in the former Republican stronghold, and Democratic President Joe Biden carried the state in 2020.

"Let's celebrate for a little while on this mountain. Let's dance because we deserve it. But tomorrow we go back down into the valley to do the work," Warnock, a Baptist preacher, told a cheering crowd of supporters. Walker's defeat is also a setback for Donald Trump as he seeks the Republican nomination to run for the White House again in 2024. The former president endorsed Walker and dozens of other high-profile Republicans in this year's midterm elec-

tions, but he ends with a mixed record in his most competitive contests.

Walker's campaign was plagued by repeated gaffes. A vocal anti-abortion advocate, he was also dogged by reports that he paid for multiple former girlfriends to have abortions, allegations that he denied.

Warnock highlighted those concerns in campaign appearances and a barrage of television ads that made the race the most expensive of the 2022 midterm season, with more than \$400 million spent. "I'm not going to make any excuses now, because we put up one heck of a fight," Walker told supporters as he conceded on Tuesday.

Over 300 shops gutted after massive fire in Capital

ISLAMABAD: A fire broke out Wednesday on stalls at a Sunday Bazaar in the federal capital's Peshawar Mor in H-9 Sector, Geo News reported. The extent of the fire was so massive that it rapidly engulfed shops leaving over 300 burnt. No casualties have been reported following the incident.

Rescue sources said that the blaze is reported to have caught the bazaar's gate number seven at Srinagar Avenue section engulfing and damaging several shops, which sell carpets and second-hand clothing for the winter season – many of which have been reportedly burnt to ashes.

The Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad

The Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) and the city's fire brigade department are engaged in extinguishing the fire, while the capital police and district administration were also present at the site of the incident, including the federal capital's deputy commissioner

Xi to attend China-Arab summit, visit Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday on a visit Beijing hailed as its biggest diplomatic initiative in the Arab world, as Riyadh expands global alliances beyond a longstanding partnership with the West. The meeting between the global economic powerhouse and Gulf energy giant comes as Saudi ties with Washington are strained by U.S. criticism of Riyadh's human rights record and Saudi support for oil output curbs before the November midterm elections.

The White House said on Wednesday that Xi's visit was an example of Chinese attempts to exert influence and that this would not change U.S. policy towards the Middle East. "We are mindful of the influence that China is trying to grow around the world," White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

Xi was met on arrival by Riyadh governor Prince Faisal bin Bandar Al Saud. Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and the governor of sovereign wealth fund PIF, Yasir al-Rumayyan, Saudi state media said, airing footage. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is expected to offer Xi a lavish welcome, in contrast with the low-key reception for U.S. President Joe Biden whose censure of



Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler formed the backdrop for a strained meeting in July. The Saudi cabinet was meeting on Wednesday to approve the 2023 state budget of the world's top oil exporter. Xi's trip includes direct talks with Saudi Arabia, a wider meeting with Gulf Arab states and a summit with Arab leaders which will be "an epoch-making milestone in the history of the development of China-Arab relations", foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said. Beijing hopes it will make a strong statement on strengthening "unity and cooperation", Mao added.

For Riyadh, frustrated by what it sees as Washington's gradual disengagement from the Middle East and a slow erosion of its security guarantees, China offers an opportunity for economic gains without the tensions which have come to cloud the U.S. relationship. "Beijing does not burden its partners with demands or political expectations and refrains from interfering in their internal affairs," Saudi columnist Abdulrahman Al-Rashed wrote in the Saudi-owned Ashraq Al-Awsat newspaper. Unlike Washington, Beijing retains good ties with Riyadh's regional rival Iran, another supplier of oil to China, and has shown little interest in addressing Saudi political or security concerns in the region.

Saudi Arabia, birthplace of Islam, had supported China's policies in Xinjiang, where the U.N. says human rights abuses have been committed against Uyghurs and other Muslims. Growing Chinese influence in the Middle East has unnerved the United States. China, the world's biggest energy consumer, is a major trade partner of Gulf oil and gas producers. Saudi Arabia is its top oil supplier. – Agencies