



# Islamabad POST

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

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**Turkiye FM urges US to lift sanctions in defense industry**

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**China condemns US FM remarks on Ukraine war**

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**Lewandowski helps Barca go 8 points clear**

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## PUNJAB, KP ASSEMBLIES President Alvi fixes April 9 as polls date

In his letter to the CEC, President says he is under oath to preserve, protect and defend Constitution

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Monday announced April 9, 2023 as the date for holding general elections of the provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a decision under Section 57 (1) of Elections Act, 2017, the president asked the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to issue election programme in accordance with Section 57 (2) of the Act. In his letter to the Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan (CEC), the president said that he was under oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan under Article 42 read with third Schedule of the Constitution. He wrote that there being no restraining order from any of the judicial fora, there was no impediment in invoking the power and authority vested in him under Section 57 (1) of Elections Act, 2017, empowering him to "announce the date or dates of the general elections after consultation with the Commission". Therefore, the president said he had felt it necessary to perform his constitutional and statutory duty to announce the date of elections to

### PTI lauds President's direction

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice Presidents Fawad Chaudhry and Dr. Shireen Mazari said that the President Dr. Arif Alvi took correct constitutional step by announcing polls date in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) assemblies and urged the people to start preparations for the elections. Fawad Chaudhry praised President Dr. Arif Alvi for announcing the polls date for both the provinces, who, he said, that the President of the country protected the constitution by giving elections date on Monday. He stated that the entire nation stood

avoid the infringement and breach of the Constitution and law i.e., holding of elections not later than ninety days. President Alvi said that the governors of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were not performing their constitutional duties for appointing a date, not later than ninety days from the date of dissolution of provincial assemblies

behind this historic step of the President. Fawad Chaudhry urged that the people should start preparations for the elections.

Dr. Shireen Mazari reacted over the development that President Alvi took correct constitutional step and in accordance with the 2017 Election Act. "Article 224.1 clearly refers to election to NA & provincial assemblies as General Elections and under Section 57 (1) of Election Act President has power to give date in consultation with ECP," she added. "CEC refused to go for consultation thus violating the Election Act; hence President acted to preserve requirement of Constitution," Dr. Mazari said.

as per the Constitution of Pakistan. He added that the ECP was also not fulfilling its constitutional obligation for holding polls for the assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "Both the constitutional offices are placing the ball in each other's court,

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## NEPALI ARMY DAY



ISLAMABAD: Chief Guest Lt. General Mohammad Shehbaz Khan, Chief of Strategic Command Pakistan Army, Ambassador of Nepal Tapas Adhikari, Military Attache Col Amrit Kaji Gurung and others cutting cake to celebrate Nepali Army Day, at Islamabad Serena Hotel. Ambassador of Nepal shed light of the bilateral relations and termed them excellent. – DNA

### NA approves crucial mini-budget

The bill has already been approved by the Senate

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly Monday unanimously approved the government's much-needed Finance (Supplementary) Bill 2023 or 'mini-budget' – a move mandatory for seeking \$1.1 billion tranche of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. Earlier, State Minister for Finance Aisha Ghaus Pasha Monday said the Finance (Supplementary) Bill 2023 is likely to be approved today by the National Assembly. The minister added that the government has decided to get the mini-budget approved by the lower house Monday. It should be noted that it has already been approved by the Senate by a thin margin. "Virtual discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are ongoing and talks will also take place today," the minister said while speaking to journalists in Islamabad. Pasha hoped for a staff-level agreement to materialise with the IMF soon. "Matters with the IMF are progressing in a positive direction. A further delay in the agreement is unlikely." Dar tabled the bill in the National Assembly and Senate on February 15 with budget proposals presented seeking to fulfil the prerequisites for unlocking the crucial \$1.1 billion IMF loan tranche which will help cushion the country's dwindling economy. A session of the lower house,

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## Information Minister says.. President Alvi has violated Constitution

Marriyum says the President should be loyal to Constitution

DNA



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Marriyum Aurangzeb has said that if Arif Alvi violates the constitution, then he will have to face Article 6. In a statement, the Information Minister said, "The Presidency has become a conspiracy, Arif Alvi will not remain the President if the Constitution is stumbled upon and if Arif Alvi violates the Constitution, then he will have to confront Article 6,

### PDM parties reject president's move

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Commenting on President Alvi's decision, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif – during his speech on the floor of the National Assembly later today – said the president is "exceeding his limits", adding that Alvi is doing so at the behest of his leader Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan.

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### Briefs

#### Joe Biden makes surprise Kyiv visit

DNA

KYIV: President Joe Biden made an unannounced visit Monday to Ukraine to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky, a gesture of solidarity that comes days before the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of the country. Biden delivered remarks and met with Zelensky at Mariinskiy Palace to announce an additional half-billion dollars in US assistance and to reassure Ukraine of American and allied support as the conflict continues. The US leader recalled the fears nearly a year ago that Russia's invasion forces might quickly take the Ukrainian capital.

#### Full stop put to Khan's policy

DNA

MUNICH: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that Pakistan is facing the worst economic crisis in its history. In an interview with American channel CNBC on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, the Pakistani FM said that the Ukrainian war and flood destroyed the country's economy. "Pakistan can solve its problems once again by becoming an emerging economy. It is going through a period where unconstitutional measures will no longer take place," he maintained. The PPP chairman said that they had discussed the climate change in Pakistan, country's economy and the situation in Afghanistan.

### BAKU-ISLAMABAD ROUTE TO RESUME SOON

## Lahore, Almaty flight to start from April 21

In May flights between Karachi and Almaty shall Commence: Ambassador Kistafin

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin has disclosed that direct air links between Kazakhstan and Pakistan shall be established from April 21, 2023 when a flight from Almaty will land in Lahore. The ambassador told this to daily Islamabad POST during a recent interaction. He further said that there will be two flights per week between Lahore and Almaty. He further told that in May direct air links between Almaty and Karachi shall be established. The ambassador said ever since his arrival in Pakistan he was working zealously for the establishment of the air link between the two countries and by the grace of God his efforts had



yielded positive results. The ambassador also thanked the Pakistani authorities for extending their full cooperation and thus making this project a success. To a question the Ambassador said the sustainability of these flights is ostensibly linked to passenger load. He hoped that he shall be able to make this project sustainable one with support of all stakeholders. He said Almaty can serve as a regional hub for passengers in case they would like to visit other Central Asian states. He said Kyrgyz capital Bishkek was just two hours drive from Almaty.

It may also be mentioned here that flights from Islamabad to Baku, which were discontinued for a while are also set to resume in near future. The officials of both Pakistan and Azerbaijan are trying to re-establish link between Islamabad and Baku.

## Sangjani case: LHC approves Imran Khan's protective bail

Signatures difference case: Imran apologizes to court; petition withdrawn

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Marking an end to the hours-long ruckus created inside its premises, the Lahore High Court (LHC) on Monday approved Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan's protective bail plea in a case pertaining to protests outside the ECP – Election Commission of Pakistan. After several notices served to Khan, the PTI chairman 'finally' appeared before the LHC to present himself in two separate hearings. The LHC had adjourned the hearing once again till 7:30pm, directing security officials to pave way for the PTI chief to reach the courtroom. Despite reaching LHC premises the disposed prime minister could not appear before the court as his convoy is surrounded by massive number of party supporters. The LHC had granted the former prime minister the last few minutes to present himself before the court after the initial deadline of 5pm lapsed, warning lawyers that the judges would leave if the former prime minister won't reach the courtroom in the given time. Khan would now appear in

## Audio leaks: Imran writes to CJP

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: PTI Chairman Imran Khan on Monday wrote a letter to Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial and other Supreme Court judges, and sought "enforcement" of the fundamental rights of the public – including the Constitution's Article 14 (fundamental right to privacy) – in connection with a series of private telephonic conversations of political leaders that have surfaced online over the past few months. The letter comes days after a phone call of PTI Central Punjab president Dr Yasmin Rashid with the former CCPO Ghulam Mehmood Dogar was released on social media. It was only the latest in a spree of

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## Fahad takes charge as DC Peshawar

PESHAWAR: In a formal ceremony held at the district administration office, Shah Fahad assumed his new role as Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar.

A grade 18 PAS officer from the 39th Common, he brings a wealth of experience to the job, having previously served as Deputy Commissioner Khyber, Kurram and Hangu.

Shah Fahad pledged to work tirelessly for the development and relief of Peshawar's citizens, says a press release. "Under the leadership of Commissioner Peshawar," he said, "we will spare no effort in using all available resources to provide the people of Peshawar the support they need. We will serve them day and night and will work to ensure that Peshawar continues to grow and prosper." The appointment of Shah Fahad as Deputy Commissioner has been warmly welcomed by residents of Peshawar, who hope that his experience and dedication will help bring positive changes to the district. With a proven track record of effective leadership in previous positions, he is seen as a capable and committed public servant.

## 78.93mln sapling to be planted in spring

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Forest Department would plant as many as 78.93 million saplings during the spring plantation campaign with help of different stakeholders.

Forest Department's officials told APP on Monday that as many as 27,460 million saplings would be sown in Kohat, Peshawar, Hangu, Bannu, DI Khan, Karak, Tank and Lakki Marwat and 30,190 million in Haripur, Abbottabad, Manshera, Batagram and Kohistan district. Likewise, 21,28 million in Swat, Malakand, Dir Upper, Dir Lower, Chitral, Shangla and Buner districts would also be planted with help of farmers, NGOs, general public and government departments. About 56,277 million plants would be sown through farm forestry and 42,402 million seedlings through farmers. The forest department has planned to provide 2,117 million plants to Gilgit-Baltistan," he said, adding that GB through the Ministry of Climate Change Islamabad had requested the KP forest department to provide the same.—APP

## Court Notice

In the Court of Afshan Younas Civil Judge Gujrat

Title: Nazeer Begum Widow etc. Versus Province of Punjab etc.

Notice to: 8- Mujahid Iqbal S/o. Muhammad Bota R/o. Rasoolpur Tehsil & District Gujrat.

Suit for Declaration with consequential Relief

Whereas in the above-mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above mentioned defendants are not served in ordinary way. It is therefore proclaimed under order 5 rule 20 CPC that if the said defendants will not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8 AM on 24-02-2023, otherwise case will be decided ex parte.



ISLAMABAD: A view of layer of ice at a road after heavy hailstorm in Federal Capital. —Online

# Governor Punjab for resolving business community's issues

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman, Governor Punjab said that the business community of Islamabad is making a good contribution to the economy by promoting business activities and paying taxes, therefore, he would play a role for resolving their key issues. He said this while talking to a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) that called on him in Governor House Punjab led by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President. The Governor Punjab said that a focal person from Governor House would be nominated to work with ICCI to redress the issues of the business community. He said that he would talk to the Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Ish-



aq Dar for consultation with ICCI on important matters of the economy. He said that PML(N) had taken the initiative for the Charter of Economy and once finalized, its implementation should not be disturbed with the change of the government. He said that the current government is working hard to steer the economy out of current challenges and control inflation. He

hoped that these efforts would help improve the economy. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry said that ICCI is working for a new industrial estate in the region and the Punjab Government should cooperate for allocation of suitable land for this important project. He said that

ICCI should be given representation in the boards of business-related departments of the Punjab Government. He said that the completion of Rawalpindi Ring Road and IJP road should be expedited to improve the transportation system in the twin cities. He said that the Punjab Government should develop the main road of Kahuta Industrial Triangle as the current

road is in broken condition and industrialists are facing problems in transportation of goods. He said that the Punjab Government should allocate land for Chakwal, Talang and Murree Chambers of Commerce to set up their own offices. He invited the Governor Punjab to an important function of ICCI, which was accepted. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President

ICCI said that the government should focus on new industrial zones as industrialization is important to improve the economy. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that the government should focus on the agriculture sector that will help in reviving the economy. Khalid Iqbal Malik, Group Leader ICCI said that a thank tank comprising representatives of government and prominent business leaders should be established to work for bringing the economy out of current turmoil. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI paid tribute to the efforts of Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman and added that he is a role model for others. Muhammad Shabbir, Raja Imtiaz, Ameer Hamza, Faseeh Ullah Khan, Ch. Muhammad Naeem, Khalid Chaudhry, Saif ur Rehman Khan and others were in the delegation.

## New tourist sites to promote ecotourism

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government was developing new tourists' sites to promote ecotourism and reduce load on established resorts including Swat, Abbottabad and Manshera districts, said Director General, KP Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) Muhammad Bakhtiar Khan.

He said efforts were being made to develop new tourist sites and ensure better management of existing tourist areas including Swat, Dir, Chitral, Abbottabad and Manshera keeping in view of tourists overwhelming response both in winter and summer. In a statement here, he said KPCTA has launched tourism police that would be deputed on famous tourist destinations for assistance of visitors. "Tourism helpline is 1422 working round the clock for facilitation of tourists," he said and added that "we are working for promotion of urban tourism in KP." He invited investors to visit KP and explore new vistas of tourism sector in the province.—APP

## UAJK, UKM join hands in scientific collaboration

MUZAFFARABAD: The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK) and The National University of Malaysia (UKM) have officially formalized their partnership through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The completion of the MoU required the signature of both university Vice-Chancellors, Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd Ekwan Hj Toriman, the VC of UKM and Prof. Dr. Muhammad Kaleem Abbasi, the VC of UAJK and signifying the formalisation of scientific collaboration and exchange programs between the two institutions. UKM, recognized for its excellence in research and education, ranked 129th in the QS World Ranking, provides UAJK with access to a wealth of knowledge and resources.—APP

# Marri for ensuring transgenders' inclusion in mainstream

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme, Shazia Marri Monday called for taking steps to ensure transgenders' inclusion in the mainstream. She was addressing a conference arranged by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), via Zoom-link in Islamabad today. The conference was arranged under the title "Financial Inclusion among Transgender Community in Pakistan."

She said financial empowerment of the transgender community, awareness for them

among the masses, and acceptance in society are the issues being faced by vulnerable and marginalized segments, particularly the transgender community of Pakistan. Shazia Marri lauded the socio-economic contribution of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in upbringing this marginalized and vulnerable society of Pakistan and awareness of their rights. She also commended the role played by transgender community leaders Ms. Bindia Rana and Ms. Reem Sharif in highlighting the issues being faced by their community. She called upon Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Execu-

tive Director, SDPI, to arrange more seminars on the topic in order to highlight the issue. While talking about the role of society, she said, it is our duty to sensitize people about the hardships being faced by the transgender community in Pakistan. They have come a long way in their struggle, she continued. She, however, noted with concern that there are still areas in Pakistan where atrocities are being meted out to the transgender community. She expressed her utmost desire to see the transgender community's inclusion in the mainstream. Shazia Marri apprised

the participants that Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has started financial assistance to transgenders through cash disbursement under Benazir Kafalat. Transgender persons are now eligible for Rs. 7000 quarterly cash assistance, she continued and urged the community to take benefit from the scheme and visit the nearest BISP Tehsil office, along with CNIC, for registration. She highlighted the Hybrid Social Protection Scheme of BISP and said that BISP has proved itself as a successful model in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of women in Pakistan.—APP

## NFFPNI reviews wheat flour fortification program

PESHAWAR: NFFPNI on Monday arranged a one-day progress review meeting on its Wheat Flour Fortification Program for the province. Director of Food Department Yasir Hassan and other food department officials, representatives of the World Food Programme and academia

participated in the event. In opening remarks, Dr. Imtiaz Ali Shah, Provincial Program Manager of Nutrition International KP Chapter told the participants that Nutrition International has been improving health and nutrition in Pakistan since 2001. Additionally, he told, a team of more than 100 staff

and consultants with an investment of \$60 million in Pakistan since 2003 has been hired by nutritional international including \$23 million directly spent on procuring and distributing vitamin A capsules. While talking about the national food fortification program across the country Provincial Program Manager told that 992 mills in the country (75%) signed MoUs with the national food fortification program while it has installed 2,333 micro feeders at 992 mills leading to 35,000 metric tons of wheat flour fortification monthly.—APP

# Rear Admiral Faisal Abbasi takes over as commander Pak fleet

KARACHI: Rear Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi assumed the Command of Pakistan Fleet as COMPAK during Change of Command ceremony held at Karachi. Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami handed over the Command to the newly appointed Commander Pakistan Fleet. Rear Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi is a graduate of Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore and National Defence University, Islamabad. The Admiral has an illustrious naval career covering vast experience of various Command and Staff appointments. In recognition of his meritorious services the Admiral was awarded Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Military) & Hilal-e-Imtiaz (Military) by Government of Pakistan. The Change of Command ceremony was attended by Pakistan Navy officers, CPOs/ Sailors and Navy Civilians. — DNA



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For further information please contact the following.

Maj (r) Sabih Ur Rehman  
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National Days and Armed Forces Days

FEBRUARY

Feb 04 / Sri Lanka National Day

Feb 06 / New Zealand National Day

Feb 06 / Uganda Defece Forces Day

Feb 11 / DPR Korea National Day

Feb 16 / Lithuania National Day

Feb 18 / Gambia National Day

Feb 19 / Nepal National Democracy Day

Feb 23 / Brunei National Day

Feb 23 / Guyana National Day

Feb 23 / Russian Federation National Army Day

Feb 23 / Tajikistan Armed Forces Day

Feb 25 / Kuwait National Day

Feb 27 / Dominican Republic Independence 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

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PIA Cargo.....9280979

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Railway Exchange9270831-5

WASA Rawalpindi..5555489

CAA.....9281092

Hospitals

CMH.....5611111

MH.....5611116

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

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# Situation in Afghanistan discussed at ISSI moot

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI BoG, Directors of the Centre of Excellence at ISSI, Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA, and members of the CAMEA research team were also present

**DNA**

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Round-Table discussion with Dr. Omer Zakhiwal, Former Afghan Finance Minister, on developments relating to Afghanistan. The Roundtable was chaired by Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General, ISSI. Participants included: Ambassador Ayaz Wazir, former Pakistani diplomat; Ambassador Qazi Humayun, former Ambassador to Afghanistan; Ambassador Abrar Hussain, former Ambassador to Afghanistan; Dr. Ishfaq Ahmad, Member, Development Communications, Planning Commission of Pakistan; Dr. Azmat Khan, former Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar; Brig. Mehboob Qadir (R), Independent Analyst; Dr. Taimur Shamil, Journalist; Mr. Hassan Khan, Journalist; and Mr. Tahir Khan, Journalist. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI BoG, Directors of the Centre of Excellence at ISSI, Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA, and members of the CAMEA research team were also present. The deliberations were focused on the evolving situation in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan-Afghan relations. The political, diplomatic, security, trade and people-to-people aspects of the bilateral relationship were discussed. Participants shared their views and assessments as well as suggestions for a way forward.

**NUST appeals for donations to help quake victims**

ISLAMABAD: Maintaining its previous tradition to extend support to the calamity-stricken people within the country and outside, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) is actively participating in Pakistan's government relief efforts for the earthquake-stricken people in Türkiye and Syria. According to an official source, the university has been actively engaged in receiving in-cash donations in addition to in-kind aid for the quake-affected people in Türkiye and Syria. NUST has appealed to the benevolent members of society for providing donations to assist the quake victims in Türkiye and Syria in dealing with the havoc wreaked by the recent earthquake. —APP

**DC instructs officials to ensure public facilities at Sunday markets**

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Commissioner, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Monday reviewed the up-gradation work of the weekly markets, H-9 and G-6 (Itwar Bazaar) and directed officials to facilitate citizens to get affordable and quality items. While chairing a meeting on weekly Bazaars up-gradation DC directed the officials of the Municipal Administration Directorate (DMA), market committee and other stakeholders to ensure security and improve water and lighting arrangements for the citizens in the market, said a press release. Memon directed the officials to install sign boards, fire extinguishing and safety equipment, maintain cleanliness, install shade sheds and expedite the renovation in Sunday markets. He ordered the staff to keep an eye on the rate lists and prices of commodities for providing relief to the citizens. —APP

## Police net 25 anti-social elements

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police, in their ongoing operations against lawbreakers, conducted raids in different areas and rounded up 25 drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other criminals besides seizing over 60 kites, 2520 grams charras, 28 liters liquor, six bottles of liquor, seven 30 bore pistols, two 9mm pistols, ammunition and other items from their possession, said a police spokesman here on Monday. He informed that Gujar Khan police rounded up an accused named Ali Zafar for carrying fireworks items. He said that Rattaamal police managed to net an accused named Jameel alias Jamula, wanted in a murder case of Muhammad Ashfaq, cashier of a petrol station who was killed after exchange of hot words. Kahuta police nabbed a proclaimed offender identified as Muhammad Zaki, wanted in an attempt to murder case. Bani and R.A.Bazar police arrested two namely Khawar and Abdul Moiz on recovery of 60 kites and 15 kite flying string rolls. Rawalpindi district police also held 10 namely Zaheer, Akbar Ali, Zamir Akhtar, Abdul Rehman, Qamar, Usman and others on recovery of 2520 grams charras, 28 liters liquor and six bottles of liquor. Similarly, Pirwadhai, Waris Khan, New Town, Naseerabad, Airport, Taxila, Wah Cantt, Gujar Khan and Kalar Syedan police netted Zahid, Khalid, Ibrar, Amir Mehmood, Shehbaz, Sher ali, Amal Khan, Umar Farooq, Irfan and Asad Mehmood. —APP

## HEC to launch induction for 5th batch of Allama Iqbal Scholarships

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC), Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed on Monday announced the launching of induction for the 5th batch of Allama Iqbal Scholarships on February 24 during the Pakistan Higher Education Expo in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan students aspiring to study in Pakistan under this scholarship programme will be able to apply online, he underlined during a welcome ceremony held in honour of the Sri Lankan students studying in Pakistani universities under Allama Iqbal Scholarships for Sri Lankan Students. The ceremony was held at the Governor House, Sindh where Governor Sindh Muhammad Kamran Khan Tessori was the chief guest. The Allama Iqbal Scholarships for Sri Lankan Students is a component of the Pak-Sri Lanka Higher Education Co-operation Programme, being executed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, the Chairman HEC informed the audience that HEC is offering 1,000 scholarships to Sri Lankan students. He said that 350 fully-funded scholarships have already been awarded to Sri Lankan students who are studying in top Pakistani universities. Addressing the students, Tessori shed light on the importance of bilateral relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka. He urged the universities to extend maximum facilities to international students. He advised the students to learn about the Pakistani languages and culture and take back good memories of Pakistan with them. The Consul General of Sri Lanka to Pakistan thanked the Government of Pakistan for extending strong support to Sri Lankan students. He also appreciated the Government of Pakistan's efforts to maintain the Buddhist and Gandhara civilizations in Pakistan. He also highlighted the salient features of bilateral friendly relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Principal Secretary to Governor Sindh Dr. Syed Saif ur Rehman also expressed his views on the occasion. Consul General Sri Lanka and Vice Chancellors of Sindh universities attended the ceremony. —APP

## Javed for constituting JIT to probe price hike

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Javed Latif of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Monday demanded the formation of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT), headed by an immaculate character judge of superior judiciary, to investigate the reasons of plunging thriving Pakistan of 2017 into economic quagmire. Addressing a news conference, he said Pakistan was progressing fast in 2017 when a gang of five hatched a conspiracy and launched Imran Khan, who destroyed country's economy and his wrong and self-centered policies triggered unprecedented price hike. The JIT, he said should investigate the reasons behind steep increase in prices of items of daily use especially gradual hike in prices of flour, Sugar, edible oil, petroleum, oil and lubricant (POL) and others, especially after 2017. JIT should also investigate how flour price was increased from Rs 35 per



kg, Dollar-rupee parity rate touching Rs 300 just from Rs 100 per dollar. How Nawaz was removed from power in 2017. JIT should investigate how the \$25 billion loans taken by PTI government was utilized during its four years rule. JIT should also investigate why former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was humiliated and ousted from power on flimsy grounds. And despite accepting role in disqualifying Nawaz, why the gang of five did not apologise from Nawaz Sharif? He urged the stakeholders to join hands for driving the country out of crisis as soon as possible to avoid further losses. Imran Khan was still being facilitated by some influential quarters. —APP

## President for using digital technologies

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi has called for using digital technologies to improve the health and well-being of the people of Pakistan and provide them with quality healthcare services. He emphasised that advances in medical technology could help transform the country's medicine and healthcare system. The President expressed these views while talking to the Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan and Afghanistan Siemens Healthineers, Mr. Khurram Jameel, who called on him, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, today. Mr. Khurram Jameel briefed the President that Siemens Healthineers was one of the leading healthcare solution providers in Pakistan and its mission was to transform healthcare delivery and improve patient experience through digitalization. Talking to the CEO, the President emphasised that Pakistani healthcare providers needed to embrace innovation and transform healthcare delivery to successfully meet the challenges in the health sector, besides fulfilling the future healthcare needs of the country. He underlined the need for establishing partnerships among government institutions, private organizations, and NGOs to work together for the betterment of persons with disabilities and raise awareness about breast cancer. The President appreciated the efforts of Siemens Healthineers for the development of the healthcare sector of Pakistan. —APP

## Mushaal blasts world's approach towards Kashmir

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of Peace and Culture Organization, Mushaal Hussein Mullick lashed out at the international community and UN for adopting a "deaf and dumb approach" towards shouldering Kashmir, which, she said, they can't even hear the heartbreaking pleas of Kashmiri little daughters demanding release of their fathers illegally detained in Indian jails for years. In a statement on Monday, she said that several families from Baramulla district along with their children protested at Srinagar's press colony against the delay in trials of their kin held in several jails for many years. She said that the innocent daughters of incarcerated Kashmiri fathers were demanding release on a fast-track basis with eyes full of tears since they are cognisant of the brutal treatment being meted out by the fascist Indian government against their fathers. —APP

## Sania for amending BISP Act

ISLAMABAD: Senator Sania Nishtar of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Monday apprised the House that aim of introducing the Bill further to amend the Benazir Income Support Act, 2010 which was rejected by the House suggested measures for enhancing the stipend under BISP to protect the poor masses from rising inflation. Addressing the House at the issue of public importance, the Senator said according to the data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, on February 16 Sensitive Price Index was recorded at 38.42 percent and purchase of daily commodities was beyond the reach of common man, particularly middle and lower middle class. She

said that due to inflation, it was difficult for lower income group people to bear the expenditure of health, education and meet other daily household needs. She said that the bill, which was introduced in the House aimed to relate stipend of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) with inflation to provide relief to the marginalised segments of the society to provide maximum relief to them through enhanced allocation for the programme. Sania Nishtar said that to this effect, a committee was already formed to prepare mechanism to increase the amount according to inflation in budget, adding that one meeting of the committee was also held.

Speaking on the occasion, Senator Dr. Zarqa Suhrawardy Taimur (PTI) expressed her concerns over rising influence of India on water resources of Pakistan, particularly construction of water reservoirs on Neelum River. She also expressed her displeasure over a question paper of COMSAT University and termed it against social and religious ethics. She also called for allocating proper time for women members of Senate for expressing their point of view and urged the need for taking appropriate measures to tackle with environmental degradation. Dr. Taimur lauded the efforts of law enforcement agencies and their sacrifice

es for restoring peace and security in the country. Senator Robina Khaild of PPP said that the Senate was the highest forum of the country and discussion in it must be based on evidence and should not discuss concocted things circulating in news papers and social media. She appreciated the role to Chairman PPP, Foreign Minister Bilawal Butto Zardari for further cementing diplomatic ties of the country with different countries of the world. She expressed her concerns over increasing use of drugs among youth, particularly in educational institutions and stressed the need for taking strict measures to overcome the menace. —APP

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## Briefs

**Golden jubilee celebrations in March with austerity**

ISLAMABAD: The Senate on Monday unanimously approved the motion to hold golden jubilee celebrations due in March with austerity and sobriety due to prevailing economic situation and floods devastation. Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani presiding the 325th session of the Upper House of the Parliament directed Senator Gurdeep Singh of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to move the motion on holding golden jubilee celebrations of the Senate with restraint and austerity and permission of the chamber to be used by foreign dignitaries to address the house on the occasion.

Senator Sanjrani said the parliamentary leaders meeting had decided that the celebrations were to be held full-fledged but due to weak economic situation and post-flood 2022 devastation it was not suitable to hold lively celebrations. It was decided in that meeting to hold celebrations across all the provinces with special visits to the provincial assemblies, he said. He added that the senators would be allowed to talk for 5 minutes on the occasion, whereas former senators have also been invited to attend the special session of the Upper House. An advertisement was also published in this regard and the former senators were requested to get their registration with the Senate Protocol office to attend the special session from March 15.—APP

**PMNH plans to construct “Outdoor Volcano Display”**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Museum for Natural History (PMNH) has planned to construct an “Outdoor Volcano Display” to provide education to the general public especially students about the natural history of the country. The Earth Science Division of PMNH will execute the plan of development of a Volcano Display in the surrounding of Baluchitherium Model. Volcano, mountain or hill is formed by the accumulation of materials erupted through one or more openings (volcanic vents) in the earth's surface. Most volcanoes have steep sides but some can be gently sloping mountains or even flat tablelands, plateaus or plains. It is stated that Volcano Display provides information to visitors about the process of volcanism in the oceans and on the continents. Volcanism usually takes place at the plate boundaries due to the movement of tectonic plates. In Pakistan, Koh-e-Sultan, Koh-e-Dalil volcanoes of Cretaceous to Quaternary age (60 million to 02 million years old) at Pachin Koh, tehsil Nokkundi, Chagai district, Baluchistan are examples of past volcanic activity.—APP

**High prices of strawberry concern residents**

ISLAMABAD: The much-awaited strawberry season has finally arrived and residents of twin cities are flocking to local markets to get their hands on the juicy red fruit. According to a local vendor, Sheraz, the strawberries are currently selling for approximately Rs. 800 per kilogramme, which is higher than last year's prices due to factors such as weather conditions and transportation costs. Strawberries are mostly cultivated in the areas of Lahore, Faisalabad, and Multan, he said, adding that because of the hike in petroleum prices the rates had also affected the price of strawberries. Sheraz said that the storage life of strawberries was “only two to three days” and the retailers do not take risk of bulk purchases in times of recession. On other hand, despite the price increase, many residents are still eager to purchase the fruit, which is known for its sweet and tart flavor and high nutritional value.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Children are stand near a broken bridge at sector G-7 due to rain, which may cause any incident any time, as needs to attention for concern authority, in the Federal Capital. —Online

# Senate rejects two bills on amendments in SBP, BIS Acts

Senator Hidayat Ullah on behalf of Senators Syed Muzafar Hussain Shah, Zeeshan Khan Zada and Dilawar Khan, moved the Bill further to amend the Civil Servants Act, 1973 [The Civ

ISLAMABAD: The Upper House of the Parliament on Monday rejected two Bills moved by the members of the House on bringing amendments to the State Bank of Pakistan Act, 1956 [The State Bank of Pakistan (Amendment) Bill, 2022] and Benazir Income Support Act, 2010 [The Benazir Income Support (Amendment) Bill, 2022] citing nature of the motions repugnant to the constitution and technical reasons. Senator Zeeshan Khan Zada of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on behalf of Senator Faisal Saleem presented the Bill to amend the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Act, 1956 before the House. He said the Bill was proposed to shift SBP to Islamabad which was currently in Karachi and therefore, all banks had their head offices in Karachi. The Senator mentioned that if it was shifted to the federal capital then it could help resolve issues of banking and other monetary matters faced by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. The motion was opposed by the House and was rejected af-

ter voting. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri of Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) moved the Bill to amend Benazir Income Support (BIS) Act, 2010. She maintained that the BIS programme was conceived for supporting the poor which was not conforming to the spiking up inflation. “If inflation is at 40% then whatever they are giving to the people it is not beneficial for the poor masses,” she added. After the opposition of the House to her motion, Senator Zehri requested the Chairman to refer the motion to the committee and the committee members should be allowed to discuss on the matter. The Senator also sought response from the Law Ministry on rejecting the motion. Minister of State for Law, Shahadat Awan opposed the Bill pertaining to SBP Act, 1956. Moreover, he also opposed the Bill on BIS Act amendment that was proposed to link the funding with inflation. He added that it was not advisable as it would impact the budget of the federal government.

“The intentions of the Senator are good but it is not advisable as per article 44 as it was linked to the finances of the government and budget that will add more to its financial budget,” he added. The Bill was granted ascent to be presented before the house whereas the Chairman Senate put the motion before the house twice but remained indecisive and ordered for voting. Some 17 members voted in favour and 22 opposed the motion and was rejected. Senator Saleem Mandviwalla of Pakistan Peoples Party said that he would suggest the mover of the motion on BIS Act amendment Bill to discuss it with the ministry and a revised Bill would be tabled in the House as her intention was noble and good. Earlier, Senator, Dr Zarqa Suharwardy Taimur of PTI moved the Bill further to amend the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017 [The National Commission on the Rights of Child (Amendment) Bill, 2023] that was opposed by the Minister of State for Law on technical grounds as it

was a devolved subject after devolution of powers. “The intention is good but the matter is devolved and it will be an intrusion in the provincial purview. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has already enacted law on the Child Rights,” he added. The agenda item was referred to the committee for further discussion. Senator Hidayat Ullah on behalf of Senators Syed Muzafar Hussain Shah, Zeeshan Khan Zada and Dilawar Khan, moved the Bill further to amend the Civil Servants Act, 1973 [The Civil Servants (Amendment) Bill, 2023]. He said, “brain drain was underway in the country, youth were jobless and bureaucrats were creating such projects under autonomous bodies that only enabled them eligible to apply for those jobs. We want to stop this and promote fresh blood and youth who are educated and have discontent among them.” The motion was carried unanimously and referred to the Committee of the House for further discussion.

# NAVTTC trains over 100,000 youth

ISLAMABAD: National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC) has equipped over 100,000 youth with income-generating skills for employment generation, economic development and productivity. NAVTTC has made significant achievements and has elevated the quality of Skills and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) training in Pakistan under Chairman Shahid Khan and former Executive Director NAVTTC, Sajid Baloch. NAVTTC has equipped youth with in-demand income-generating technical and High Tech IT Skills trainings in cutting-edge technologies like Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Apps and Game Development, Cyber Security, Industrial Automation, Cloud Computing, Mechatronics, E-Commerce and beautician etc. NAVTTC has already trained 143,000 highly skilled professionals, with 71 per cent employment; 75,268 have been trained in Hi-Tech Dig-

ital IT skills; and 53,598 in conventional trades. Over 13,000 NAVTTC skilled and certified youth got employed abroad and are earning billions to improve the national economy. NAVTTC has also launched the highly promising Matric-Tech and Middle Tech programmes for skills education in formal education schools. Takamol Saudi Arabia and NAVTTC Pakistan are partnering in the joint skills testing and certification programme called “Skills Verification Program” (SVP), for ensuring a competent skilled workforce and employment. More than 2500 youth has been tested/certified and got employed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. NAVTTC pioneered a fully automated software-based system for SVP, which is being implemented as a global best practice by Takamol Saudi Arabia in other countries of Asia. NAVTTC is empowering the expatriate Pakistani skilled workforce with globally recognized skill certification, by

enhancing the prospects in international labour market employment/skill visa opportunities for the Pakistani workforce, including KSA, thereby providing income, enhancing their quality of life, and earning precious foreign remittance. NAVTTC has developed a skilled workforce and jobs portal, National Employment Exchange Tool (NEXT) i.e. jobs.gov.pk which is fully operationalized, with available data of 458,959 skilled youth with 689,878 jobs posted from 1,085 employers. The NAVTTC jobs and skills portal is a bridge which connects the skilled youth and the employers, opening new vistas of employment and empowerment with the state providing valuable services to the public for getting employment and realizing their potential. Under National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF), NAVTTC has developed over 200 qualifications. More than 655 TVET insti-

tutes have been accredited across the country bringing them at par with international standards of the job market. NAVTTC has contributed significantly to improving the skills training system in Pakistan and has developed a highly skilled and international standard workforce. International development partners have partnered with NAVTTC to benefit Pakistan, these include European Union, Germany GIZ, Japan JICA, British Council, UNHCR, UNICEF, ADB etc. NAVTTC with a result-oriented approach is executing various initiatives, under Prime Minister's Youth Skill Development Program (PMYSDP), to uplift the skills TVET sector in Pakistan. The NAVTTC management enhanced the focus on marginalized segments of society, increasing training opportunities for widows, orphans, persons with disabilities (PWD), transgenders etc. with employable skills.—APP

# PTA conducts QoS survey in Punjab, Balochistan & KPK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) carried out independent Quality of Service (QoS) surveys in 22 cities of Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as 13 motorways and highways across the country, to evaluate the performance and quality of services offered by Cellular Mobile Operators (CMOs) to their customers. The survey results revealed that CMOs are compliant with respect to upload and download speed to a great extent, while network latency and webpage loading time was found below the threshold. Some of the Voice Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have also been found below the licensed threshold in few areas. During the survey, QoS KPIs of Voice, SMS and Mobile Broadband including Mobile Network Coverage were assessed in accordance with Next Generation Mobile Service (NGMS) licenses and Cellular Mobile Network Quality of Service (QoS) Regulations, 2021, using state-of-the-art automated QoS Monitoring & Benchmarking Tool. The drive test teams selected survey routes to cover main roads, service roads and majority of sectors/colonies in surveyed areas. Based upon the compliance level of each KPI against threshold defined in the respective licenses and QoS Regulations, CMOs have been ranked between 1st to 4th position in Mobile Network Coverage and Voice Services for surveyed cities and roads/motorways. Similarly, in Mobile Broadband Speed segment, the ranking is with respect to the highest data download and upload speed, network latency and webpage loading time. Necessary instructions have been issued to the operators for taking corrective measures to ensure improvement in service quality up to licensed standards. The survey results have been placed at PTA's website (<https://pta.gov.pk/en/consumer-support/qos-survey/qos-survey>) for information of the subscribers. PTA has deployed field teams to conduct service quality monitoring activities with the aim of encouraging mobile operators to provide better services and promoting healthy competition among them.—DNA

# ANF recovers over 45 kg drugs; arrests three

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in four operations managed to recover over 45 kg drugs and arrested three accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Monday. He informed that ANF conducted a raid near Attock Burhan Toll Plaza and recovered 250 grams Ice drug from the possession of two accused. In another raid on Multan Road, Sahiwal, ANF recovered nine kg heroin, two kg Ice drug and six kg suspicious material besides netting an accused resident of Gujranwala. In the third operation, ANF seized 10 kg of heroin concealed in bushes near the Parni area. The spokesman informed that in the fourth operation, ANF managed to recover 18 kg charras from a parcel booked at Quetta Airport Cargo. He said that separate cases have been registered against the accused while further investigations are under process.—APP

# Admin foils 10 bids to smuggle 4595 wheat, flour bags

RAWALPINDI: The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police here on Monday foiled 10 bids to smuggle 4595 wheat and flour bags. According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the food department along with Pothohar Division police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up 10 drivers namely Akram, Irfan, Bilal, Ahsan, Irfan, Sabaz Ali, Islam, Saminullah, Shakeel and Shah Nawaz and recovered 3395 flour and 1200 wheat bags. He informed that the accused were trying to illegally ship out wheat flour bags out of the Rawalpindi division. The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi were strictly monitoring all the exit points of Rawalpindi district to foil wheat and flour smuggling bids, he added. He said, 25 bids were foiled during the last three days and teams recovered 15,430 wheat, flour and fine flour (maida) bags from the possession of the arrested accused.—APP

# Why we need more rest in the winter

ISLAMABAD: A study published today in the journal Frontiers in Neuroscience reports that humans experience longer REM sleep in winter than summer – even in artificially lit urban areas – and less deep sleep in autumn. Researchers from Charité Medical University of Berlin said human body clocks are set by the sun and changing day length and light exposure over the course of the year can affect our sleep duration and quality. “Possibly one of the most precious achievements in human evolution is an almost invisibility of seasonality on the behavioral level,” said Dr. Dieter Kunz, a clinical psychiatrist, sleep researcher, and clinical chronobiologist at the Clinic of Sleep & Chronomedicine at the St Hedwig Hospital, Berlin, who authored the study. “In our study, we show that human sleep architecture varies substantially across seasons in an adult population living in an urban environment,” Kunz said in a statement. How the human sleep study was conducted The research team recruited 292 participants to undergo sleep studies called polysomnographies, which are done with people experiencing sleep-related difficulties. The participants went to a special laboratory where they were asked to sleep naturally, without an alarm, where the quality, type, and length of sleep can be monitored. Researchers acknowledged sleep disorders could potentially affect the results, but the study conditions allow for a large group to be evenly spread throughout the year to better demonstrate month-to-month differences. The study excluded people taking medications known to affect sleep, those experiencing technical failures during the polysomnography, and REM sleep latency longer than 120 minutes, which suggested that the first REM sleep episode had been skipped.—Online

# UNFPA representative calls on Minister for Human Rights

ISLAMABAD: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Representative in Pakistan Dr Luay Shabaneh called on Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada here on Monday. They exchanged views on the issues related to population planning, its impact on economic growth, gender equality, women rights in Pakistan and support from UNFPA under its mandate for population planning and development. Secretary Human Rights Ali Raza Bhutta and senior officers were also present in the meeting, said a press release. The minister welcomed the honorable guest and stated that Pakistan was fully committed to upholding and implementing the UN charter. He commented that “we are far behind in population planning that is indeed the major reason behind scarcity and better resource allocation in the country.” He said: “Pakistan is a country with population mismanagement and disproportionate growth. There is a need for interventions, advocacy, awareness, more funds allocation, and proper enforcement of laws on this subject. For that we are looking forward to more collaboration, especially from non-governmental bodies.” The minister further underscored that the UN agencies have been very helpful to Pakistan, particularly in the area of human rights. He said that though population control is a provincial subject after the 18th Constitutional Amendment yet Ministry of Human Rights is constantly dealing with international obligations related to women and child rights.—APP



ISLAMABAD: United Nations Population Fund country representative in Pakistan Dr. Luay Shabaneh called on Federal Minister for Human Rights Mian Hussain Pirzada.—APP



## Disinformation online: a 21st-century industry

The healthy functioning of democracies depends on the quality of the information that frames debate within them. But digitalisation, the rise of social media and increasingly sophisticated forms of artificial intelligence are delivering new opportunities to poison the well of public discourse. Unfortunately, as a Guardian investigation this week illustrates, exploiting these is a 21st-century growth industry. Alongside state-sponsored actors, increasing numbers of private firms are profiting from the dissemination of disinformation on behalf of political and corporate clients. Undercover research, in conjunction with 30 other media organisations, has exposed the inner workings of one such outfit – an Israeli black ops unit which combines the use of automated disinformation on social media with hacking and the seeding of fabricated stories in mainstream news outlets. The resulting revelations offer the deepest, most detailed insight yet into evolving forms of digital malpractice. Codenamed Team Jorge, the unit is headed by a former Israeli special forces operative, who denies any wrongdoing. To manipulate online debate, it developed cutting-edge software to create tens of thousands of fake avatars. These were given a convincing digital backstory – even including Airbnb accounts – and operated in multiple countries, often intervening in commercial disputes. In the UK, the Information Commissioner’s Office was targeted for online criticism as it sought clarity over the award of government PPE contracts during Covid. Separately, Team Jorge organised a fake “real world” protest in London, the impact of which was then amplified by the fake avatars. Operatives infiltrated an election campaign in Nigeria and obtained documents. And key players in last year’s Kenyan election had their Gmail and Telegram accessed using hacking methods. The disinformation unit also appears to have targeted mainstream media, planting stories which were swiftly taken up by the bots. A Team Jorge member told the undercover investigators that it was responsible for a fake story favourable to sanctions-hit Russian oligarchs that was broadcast on France’s most-watched news channel. One of its presenters has now been suspended. The professionalisation of a commercial disinformation industry, seeking to profit from lies and distortion, is one of the clear and present threats of our times. Rapid advances in the fields of artificial intelligence and virtual reality promise to deliver huge social gains; but they also offer new scope to blur the lines between the real and the fake, and the true and the false. As technology leaps ahead, systems of regulation and public oversight must attempt to keep pace, and ensure that tech platforms become more accountable for the online environments they create. In an age of polarisation, disinformation undermines the presumption of good faith necessary for democratic debate and consensus. More attention must be paid to the activities of organisations such as Team Jorge, and more resources must be devoted to putting them out of business.

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## EU silence adds weight to sabotage claim

The Russian mission to the United Nations has called for a meeting of the UN Security Council to be convened from Wednesday to Friday to discuss the sabotaging of the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines in September, following a report by a respected US journalist that laid the blame on the United States. In stark contrast with Russia’s understandable desire to find out and hold those responsible accountable for the sabotaging of the energy infrastructure, which has paralyzed the majority of its natural gas supply to Europe till now, the European Union has kept a studied silence over the claim that the US was responsible for it. The findings of respective investigations conducted by Denmark, Germany and Sweden have not been forthcoming. No wonder that after investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published his report earlier this month detailing how the US, with the help of Norway, planned and executed the sabotage under the cover of a NATO maritime drill last year, some members of the European Parliament are unwilling to turn a blind eye to what the EU has been doing any more. European Parliament member Clare Daly slammed the EU’s “frankly astounding” “lack of interest” in finding answers to the incident in a recent meeting of the bloc’s legislature. She said: “I find it frankly jaw-dropping that the EU is not asking questions as to who is responsible for sabotaging the livelihoods of our citizens. I am ashamed to be a European.” And in the same meeting, Mick Wallace, another member of the European Parliament, echoed Daly in saying: “This (sabotage of the pipelines) was a premeditated terrorist attack on European critical infrastructure. It was also environmental terrorism.” However, the questions Wallace asked of the bloc – “Does the EU care? Do you need to know who did it? Or do you want to know?” – look like that they are to be swept under the carpet. The strongest response of the EU over the incident was back in September when European Commission President Von der Leyen said that it was paramount to investigate the explosions that had damaged the pipelines to get full clarity on what had occurred, vowing the “strongest possible response” in the event that European energy infrastructure had been attacked. However, the “strongest possible response” so far from the bloc has been no response. The claim that it was the US that sabotaged the pipelines has been a test question for the EU and other stakeholders with regard to the Ukraine crisis and the shaping of the future geopolitical situation in Europe. The EU should choose the right answer by supporting an independent investigation of the incident and not just blindly side with the US.

# Will the war in Ukraine end this year?

Leonid Ragozin

In their public rhetoric, both Russia and Ukraine sound confident in their victory, but they seem to define it in different terms. The government in Kyiv has made it clear that its goal is the liberation of all Ukrainian territories Russia currently occupies, including the Crimean Peninsula. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself has said in a November interview for a Czech TV channel that once the Ukrainian army achieves victory, he will vacation in Crimea. Some Ukrainian officials have gone even further, spelling out the goal of breaking the Russian Federation up. Earlier this month, the chief of Ukraine’s National Security Council, Oleksiy Danilov, wrote in an op-ed published in the Ukrainian news outlet Ukrainska

It has been almost a year now since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, sowing death and destruction across the country. The toll of the war is grim: thousands of Ukrainian civilians dead, tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides killed, millions displaced, whole Ukrainian towns and villages razed to the ground. As we move into the second year, both sides are preparing large-scale offensives, with tens of thousands of new recruits and new sophisticated hardware being sent to the front line. A wide range of scenarios that are viable to a different extent may unfold this year. The only thing we can predict with a high degree of confidence is that we are going to see a bloodbath on a larger scale than last year. In their public rhetoric, both Russia and Ukraine sound confident in their victory, but they seem to define it in different terms. The government in Kyiv has made it clear that its goal is the liberation of all Ukrainian territories Russia currently occupies, including the Crimean Peninsula. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy himself has said in a November interview for a Czech TV channel that once the Ukrainian army achieves victory, he will vacation in Crimea. Some Ukrainian officials have gone even further, spelling out the goal of breaking the Russian Federation up. Earlier this month, the chief of Ukraine’s National Security Council, Oleksiy Danilov, wrote in an op-ed published in the Ukrainian news outlet Ukrainska Pravda that Russia should be “de-colonised”, its statehood in the current form undone, and the independence movements of various peoples within its borders encouraged. The Ukrainian army has been able to liberate some areas, but much of the territory occupied in the last 12 months remains under Russian control. Mobilisation is going on across the country, and the Ukrainian army is getting new training and weapons from the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s initially declared goals were to “liberate” Ukraine’s Donbas region and to “de-nazify” and “de-militarise” the country. The Russian army has failed to fully occupy the two Donbas regions, Donetsk and Luhansk, but it has seized large chunks of two other Ukrainian regions in the south, Zaporizhia and Kherson, thus securing a land bridge to Crimea. In October, Putin signed legislation formally annexing those regions to Russia. In the fall, the Russian authorities carried out a nationwide mobilisation campaign, adding some 300,000 troops to the country’s regular forces. Some of them have already been deployed on the

front lines, as part of the new Russian offensive, but most, it seems, remain in the reserves. With this mix of military successes and failures, the Kremlin has deliberately left its definition of “victory” in Ukraine quite vague. It is thus allowing itself a much wider range of acceptable outcomes on the battlefield. Meanwhile, the West, while united in its moral support for Ukraine, has also been ambiguous about how the war should end. The official rhetoric from Washington, Kyiv’s biggest supporter, is that it will support the Ukrainian government and army “for as long as it takes” in order to secure a decisive victory over Russia. In Europe, some have been more cautious. French President Emmanuel Macron, for example, has said that Russia should be defeated, but not crushed. Ukraine has received close to \$40bn in military aid from the West, around \$30bn of it from the United States alone. Last month, NATO countries just crossed one more of the self-imposed “red lines” by allowing the supplies of modern German and US tanks to Ukraine, though in limited numbers. Unofficially, though, as a recent Washington Post article suggests, the Ukrainian government is being warned that this year it may have the last chance to change facts on the ground with full Western support before the inevitable peace talks. A recent poll of European Union policymakers, conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations, shows that European capitals differ widely on what outcome in Ukraine war they see as realistic. Only a handful of the respondents appear to perceive Kyiv’s “full liberation” as a likely outcome. Many expect that Russia will retain control over some Ukrainian territory. There are far too many unknowns to make any confident predictions of where Ukraine and Russia will find themselves after another year of carnage. But there are some scenarios that appear more likely. An overwhelming Ukrainian victory, as envisaged in Kyiv, would be a triumph of justice. But it is also a Russian roulette scenario, because Putin’s defeat, especially the liberation of Crimea, may very well prompt him to use nuclear weapons. The fate of humanity, in this case, will be in the hands of one troubled man who has already done the unthinkable by unleashing a large-scale war in Europe. Russian victory, on the other hand, will mean a decisive defeat of the West and the world order upended by an aggressive autocracy. But Russia is unlikely to achieve that given its less-than-impressive battlefield performance so far. Between these two extremes lies a whole range of more realistic scenarios, based

on a new equilibrium that will emerge after this year’s season of Russian offensives and Ukrainian counteroffensives. Russia is likely to retain some Ukrainian territory, but future battles will decide how much and also how permanently – or, in other words, at what human and economic cost it will be able to hold on to them. An important factor is the enormous difference in social expectations in Russia and Ukraine with regards to the outcome of war. The Russian society is lukewarm about Putin’s military adventurism and territorial expansion. It will accept a broad range of outcomes that are not manifestly humiliating or costly. Ukrainian expectations, on the other hand, are extremely inflated. Almost any kind of compromise could threaten Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s government, which took a lethal gamble by refusing to implement the humiliating Minsk agreements and resolving to put up a fight instead of succumbing to Putin’s ultimatums. For now, almost any realistically attainable arrangement appears to be worse for Ukraine than the terms of the discarded Minsk agreements, which warrants the question: What were all these enormous sacrifices for? For this reason, Zelenskyy has a very strong incentive to keep fighting. If he does not, he is facing the threat of domestic backlash, all the way to an armed coup by radical military elements and far-right militants. These fears, however, derive largely from the bellicose wartime rhetoric by radical lobbyists and opinion polls conducted at a time when people, especially those more inclined to compromise, have a very strong incentive not to be honest about their preferences. Unless their subject is Russia’s full capitulation, any viable peace negotiations will involve Ukraine ceding territory. Depending on the country’s battlefield performance, this could be Crimea alone; Crimea and parts of Donbas that Russia effectively controlled prior to the start of the full-out aggression last year; or these territories along with those that Russia seized in the last 12 months or may seize in future. Only under the first scenario will Ukraine be able to claim that it has achieved victory, as in improving its positions compared to those envisaged in the Minsk agreements. What lies ahead this year feels very dark. Even brushing aside the very real nuclear threat, it is hard to avoid the nagging feeling that tens of thousands will die in order to prove that this is a stalemate which is best resolved at the negotiating table.

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

# Race for Republican nomination heats up

Dalia Al-Aqidi

President Donald Trump, in an attempt to seize the momentum of being the front-runner, launched his 2024 presidential campaign in November 2022 under the slogan “Take America Back.” However, he did not stay alone in the race for long. Former UN ambassador and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley last week became the first Republican to challenge the most controversial president in American history. Haley’s international

Although the next US presidential election will not be held until November 2024, members of the Republican Party have already begun to work hard in an effort to regain control of the White House. Former US President Donald Trump, in an attempt to seize the momentum of being the front-runner, launched his 2024 presidential campaign in November 2022 under the slogan “Take America Back.” However, he did not stay alone in the race for long. Former UN ambassador and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley last week became the first Republican to challenge the most controversial president in American history. Haley’s international popularity may outweigh her chances of success at home due to being Trump’s ambassador, which voters would not ignore. Despite being a woman, born in the US to Indian immigrant parents, and a public servant for more than a decade, her campaign strategy will not go down well with the country’s deeply divided voters. Haley presented herself to the American people as a moderate candidate, but she would not criticize her old boss or the politics of “Make America Great Again,” which will make her path to victory rough and challenging. This approach will not make her an alternative candidate to Trump. Trump’s supporters will not give her their votes over the former president, since she chose to challenge their idol, while moderate conservatives are concerned about her political views. Holding the stick in the middle is not a savvy or successful strategy, given the complicated status of the Republican Party following the storming of the US Capitol on Jan. 6, 2022. As soon as the former US ambassador decided

to stand against the MAGA creator, Trump’s supporters did not spare any time when it came to attacking and attempting to discredit her. Ann Coulter, a conservative media pundit, columnist and lawyer, launched a racist and personal attack against Haley, describing her as a “preposterous creature.” In a radio interview, Coulter shamelessly advised Haley to “go back to your own country.” It is highly likely that MAGA supporters will not give Haley a chance unless she appears on a presidential ticket as Trump’s running mate. That would likely be her only option to make it to the White House. Several other potential Republican candidates would have a better chance of challenging the former president and taking the party’s nomination away from him. Former Vice President Mike Pence disagreed significantly with his boss when he certified the 2020 presidential election results, putting his life at risk. When they stormed the Capitol, Trump’s supporters were looking for Pence in the rooms and hallways, intending to physically harm him for doing his constitutional duty. He would get the support of the more moderate Republicans. However, most independent voters would not vote for a committed evangelical. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has a long resume in public service. Prior to his job in the Trump administration, he was the director of the CIA after serving three terms in Congress. In a video interview with The Hill last week, Pompeo, who is considering whether to run, promised a substantive campaign. “We’d go make arguments. It’s not about tweets. It’s not about noise. It’s not about ‘owning the libs.’ It’s about presenting a rational argument

about how to get our government to function,” he stated. Could Pompeo distance himself from his former boss to rally the support of his fellow “Never Trump” Republicans? That is yet to be seen. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, if or when he decides to run, would be by far the biggest threat to Trump. His success in managing his state during COVID-19, fighting the far-left progressive agenda and his strong stance against President Joe Biden’s border policies, not to mention his young age, provide him with a unique superiority over his potential rivals and place him at the front even before announcing his candidacy. DeSantis is expected to launch his campaign in late May or early June. Other sitting governors are also thinking of taking a shot at the presidential race, such as Texas’ Greg Abbott, Virginia’s Glenn Youngkin and South Dakota’s Kristi Noem. Last but not least is Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who was the runner-up to Trump in 2016. It is speculated that he would like a second chance to beat his former rival eight years on. However, he is facing reelection to the Senate in 2024, complicating his path to the party’s nomination. He would have to choose between the two. The Grand Old Party is eager to win the election and end the spread of the hard-line leftist agenda that is targeting the core of America’s values and identity. The 2024 election will either mark the end of Trumpism or hammer the final nail into the coffin of the GOP. Trump’s eagerness and stubbornness to return to the White House make him officially the most significant liability to his fellow Republicans.

Courtesy: Arab News



## Briefs

## President Alvi fixes April 9 as polls date

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similar to an Urdu adage (pehlayaap, nahinpehlayaap – You go first, no after you) thus, resulting in delay and creating a serious danger that constitutional provisions may be violated”, he said. The president pointed out that the ECP had already indicated the possible dates of elections in its various communications to the constitutional functionaries showing its own responsibility of holding the elections within ninety days. President Alvi stated that he had initiated a serious consultation process with the ECP under Section 57 (1) of the Elections Act, 2017 to announce the date for the general elections of the aforementioned assemblies, however, the ECP replied that the Commission could not participate in a meeting on the subject matter with the Office of the President. He said that in exercise of powers conferred upon him under Section 57 (1) of Elections Act, 2017, he was announcing the date of April 9, 2023 for holding of general elections of the provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Audio leaks: Imran writes to CJP

FROM PAGE 01  
private conversations – mostly involving opposition leaders and its allies – that have been leaked. In the letter dated Feb 19, Imran said “various ex-public officials, myself included, and even private members of the public have suffered” from those leaks while specifically mentioning PTI Senator Azam Swati’s alleged inappropriate video leak. He termed the leaks to be “unverified, edited, tampered, pieced together and even fabricated conversations”. He bemoaned that a plea he had filed in the Supreme Court on Oct 20, 2022 – seeking the formation of a joint investigation team or a judicial commission to probe the “illegal” surveillance, recording and release of data from the PMO – had not been fixed for hearing yet. Asserting he was “not alone in anxiously seeking the assurance of the highest court”, the former premier appealed to CJP Bandial to fix his petition filed earlier for hearing at the “earliest possible opportunity”. Imran said it was “now common knowledge that for the last several months mysterious unverified audio/video clips have periodically surfaced on social media in the country purporting to carry alleged conversations between various public officials/ex-public officials and on occasion private individuals”. He added that those “audio/video clips have not been verified and appear to be either deep fakes or fabricated, edited, trimmed and joined, pieced together, and cannibalised to present an inaccurate and incorrect portrayal of the alleged conversations that they purport to carry”. The PTI chief said the sequence of audio leaks began “several months ago when certain purported conversations were leaked” whose content suggested that “conversations taking place in the Prime Minister’s House/Office were being surveilled and bugged on a systematic and routine basis”.

## Sangjani case: LHC approves Imran Khan’s...

FROM PAGE 01  
Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh’s court as the LHC had noted the discrepancy in the documents last week during the hearing of a protective bail plea of Khan, who was unwilling to appear in court due to security concerns.

## Tunisia orders top European trade union official expelled

Tunisia’s General Labor Union, or UGTT, organized the demonstration to protest a crackdown on the increasingly authoritarian president’s political opponents and his critics in the media, judiciary, business community and trade unions

TUNIS:President Kais Saied of Tunisia ordered Europe’s top trade union official to leave the North African country after she addressed protesters at a demonstration organized by an influential labor union. Authorities accused Esther Lynch, the Irish general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, of making statements that “interfered with Tunisian internal affairs” during a Saturday protest against Saied in the port city of Sfax. Tunisia’s General Labor Union, or UGTT, organized the demonstration to protest a crackdown on the increasingly authoritarian president’s political opponents and his critics in the

media, judiciary, business community and trade unions. In an address to the protesters, Lynch demanded the release of union leader Anis Kaabi, who was arrested by security forces last month. She called on the Tunisian government to negotiate with the UGTT leadership and to improve the economy, which has teetered on the brink of bankruptcy amid political instability that deepened after a parliamentary election last month in which only 11% of voters cast ballots. “By orders of the president, Tunisian authorities ordered Esther Lynch to leave the country within 24 hours, following statements made during the UGTT-led



demonstration that interfered with Tunisian internal affairs,” said a statement by the Tunisian presidency that was posted on Twitter late Saturday. The European Trade Union Confederation (or the

ETUC confirmed that Lynch left Tunisia on Sunday. The treatment of Lynch by the Tunisian authorities “is in line with the campaign of intimidation and harassment being waged against trade unions by President Kais Saied,” including “arrests, sacking of union officials (and) malicious lawsuits,” the ETUC said in a statement. “These tactics are part of a campaign by President Saied to break the union’s resistance to policies which are making ordinary people pay for the country’s economic, social and constitutional crisis,” the statement said. Saied won the presidency in a 2019 landslide on a promise to improve the country’s economy. In-

stead, the president appears determined to upend the country’s political system, threatening a democracy once seen as a model for the Arab world and sending the economy toward a tailspin. In December, the International Monetary Fund froze an agreement on a \$1.9 billion loan for Tunisia. The deeply indebted government needs the funds to pay UGTT-represented public sector salaries and to fill budget gaps aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fallout from Russia’s war in Ukraine. In recent months, Tunisians have been hit with soaring food prices and shortages of fuel and basic staples like sugar and vegetable oil.

## Borussia Dortmund go level at top of Bundesliga



## DNA

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund blew the Bundesliga title race wide open with a 4-1 win over Hertha Berlin on Sunday, but in-form striker Karim Adeyemi limped off clutching his hamstring in the first half. The win saw Dortmund pull level on points with league leaders Bayern Munich and high-flying Union Berlin, who were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Schalke earlier on Sunday. “We’re on a great run of form and we want to keep riding this wave and see where it leads in the end,” said captain

Marco Reus. Adeyemi’s injury made for a bittersweet evening, with the 21-year-old limping off almost in tears just minutes after putting his side on their way with a quickfire goal and assist. Dortmund started a little sluggishly after their 1-0 Champions League win over Chelsea in midweek, and Hertha could have taken the lead when Jessica Ngankam skimmed the bar early on. The Signal Iduna-Park was soon bouncing, though, as Adeyemi gave Dortmund the lead with a brilliant backheel on 27 minutes. Adeyemi set up Donyell Malen for his side’s

second with a brilliant cross four minutes later, but was already clutching his hamstring as he curled the ball into the box. There was fresh hope for relegation-threatened Hertha when Lucas Tousart thundered the ball in off the bar just after the break to halve Dortmund’s lead. But Dortmund overcame their nerves once more and Reus smashed a direct free-kick into the top corner to restore the two-goal cushion. Julian Brandt made it four late on, linking up with Jamie Bynoe-Gittens to score for a third league game in a row. In one of the

most intriguing Bundesliga title races for years, Dortmund, Union and Bayern are now all on 43 points after Bayern’s surprise defeat to Borussia Muenchengladbach on Saturday. “There’s a long way to go yet, not just for us, but also for Union and Bayern,” said Brandt. Union missed the opportunity to leapfrog Bayern into first with a miserable 0-0 draw at home to bottom club Schalke. Schalke have now battled to a league record four goalless draws in a row, and their frustrated Union with another dogged performance. In a torturous first half for spectators, the only moment of relief came when Schalke keeper Ralf Faehrmann pulled off a brilliant reflex save to deny Danilo Doekhi. Schalke looked the more dangerous side in the second half, with Union appearing to be running on empty after their Europa League draw with Ajax last Thursday. US international Jordan Pekoff missed a chance to snatch a late winner when he skied a tough chance high over the bar from close range on 81 minutes.

## Napoli dream of Champions League glory

MILAN: Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia are leading Napoli’s Champions League charge, the Italians’ crown jewels in wonderful form ahead of Tuesday’s trip to Eintracht Frankfurt. A club in turmoil at the end of last season whose fans were in open revolt, Napoli have stunned their own supporters and the rest of Europe by becoming possibly the continent’s most exciting team and Italy’s champions-elect by mid-February. Napoli have never made it past the last 16 in the Champions League but with none of Europe’s powerhouses at their peak a window has been left for Luciano Spalletti’s side to have a go at the continent’s top competition. The optimism surrounding Napoli is due in large part to Serie A’s leading scorer Osimhen and summer signing Kvaratskhelia, a devastating partnership which is central to their chances at home and abroad. Between them Nigeria striker Osimhen and ‘Kvaradona’ have scored half of Napoli’s 56 league goals, the Georgian wing wizard also setting up nine and providing the kind of individual brilliance which already has the world’s top club’s circling. Osimhen is running at almost a goal a game in Italy’s top flight, nine in his eight matches since the turn of the year taking his league tally to 18. The 24-year-old is looking to add to his one goal in this year’s Champions League, which came in a 4-2 win over Ajax a month after injuring himself in an eye-popping four-goal thumping of Liverpool. And he is convinced that there is plenty more to come from Kvaratskhelia, who has 12 goals and the same number of assists in all competitions. “He is just getting started, you guys have seen nothing yet,” he said. “I believe he has the quality to make us dream this season, he has big confidence and we are here to help support him.” Few pegged Napoli as favourites to top a group which contained last year’s finalists Liverpool, as the supporter protests accompanied their pre-season despite last year’s doomed title run. What has happened since has stunned Italian football and made the rest of the continent sit and take notice: Serie A might not be the gallery of stars it once was but to be 15 points clear after just 23 matches is an incredible feat. – Agencies

## Amir ruled out as Afghanistan’s Zadrán joins Zalmi

KARACHI: Pakistan Super League’s (PSL) Franchise Karachi Kings have suffered a major loss as their trump card bowler Muhammad Amir has been ruled out of next match due to injury. Kings are scheduled to take on Mutan Sultans on Wednesday, February 22 in Multan. The pacer will not travel with the squad to Multan and will instead complete his rehab in Karachi. The injury list in HBL PSL 8 is growing as Karachi Kings pacer Mir Hamza was also recently ruled out of the rest of the tournament. The left-arm pacer fractured his finger during Karachi’s first match against Peshawar Zalmi on Tuesday. He was replaced by another left-arm pacer, Akif Javed. Afghanistan spinner, Mujeeb Zadran, has joined Peshawar Zalmi for the ongoing season eight of HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL). The spinner featured in the match between Peshawar Zalmi and Quetta Gladiators. West Indies all-rounder Rovman Powell recently joined Zalmi, whereas Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka is also expected to join the Babar-led squad. Peshawar Zalmi’s Shakib Al Hasan has had to leave the squad to attend a family emergency in the United States and he has been replaced by Azmatullah Omarzai. The Bangladesh all-rounder will return to the HBL Pakistan Super League for the Play-offs in case of Peshawar Zalmi’s qualification. – Online

## Novak Djokovic equals Graf’s record of world number one

PARIS: Tennis legend Novak Djokovic is a week away from another milestone after equalling Steffi Graf’s all-time record for most weeks spent at number one of 377. The 35-year-old Serbian remains top of the latest ATP rankings released on Monday bringing him level with the amount of weeks that Graf spent as women’s world number one. Djokovic returned to number one spot for a seventh time after his victory in the Australian Open at the end of January which was a record equaling 22nd Grand Slam singles title. Two former world number ones enjoyed success at the weekend – Daniil Medvedev claiming the Rotterdam title and Carlos Alcaraz making a winning return to the circuit in Argentina. Medvedev’s three set victory – his 16th career title – over Italian Jannik Sinner sees him return to the top 10 – he rises three spots to eighth. The losing finalist’s consolation is a climb of two places to 12th in the

rankings. Alcaraz’s successful return to the tour, after almost four months out, in landing the Argentina Open on Sunday sees him solidify his second place in the rankings.

## RANKINGS

1. Novak Djokovic (SRB) 7070 pts
2. Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) 6480
3. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 5940
4. Casper Ruud (NOR) 5515
5. Andrey Rublev 3860
6. Rafael Nadal (ESP) 3815
7. Taylor Fritz (USA) 3660
8. Daniil Medvedev 3250
9. Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN) 3200
10. Holger Rune (DEN) 3161
11. Hubert Hurkacz (POL) 2995
12. Jannik Sinner (ITA) 2745
13. Cameron Norrie (GBR) 2615
14. Karen Khachanov 2470
15. Frances Tiafoe (USA) 2350
16. Alexander Zverev (GER) 2320
17. Pablo Carreno (ESP) 2285
18. Lorenzo Musetti (ITA) 1855
19. Nick Kyrgios (AUS) 1825
20. Borna Coric (CRO) 1815. – DNA



## Lewandowski helps Barcelona go eight points clear

BARCELONA: Robert Lewandowski and Sergi Roberto’s goals helped Barcelona beat Cadiz 2-0 and restore their eight-point lead at the top of La Liga on Sunday. Elsewhere Antoine Griezmann’s superb strike helped Atletico Madrid earn a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao to tighten their grip on fourth place. Champions Real Madrid’s win at Osasuna on Saturday pulled them closer to Xavi Hernandez’s Barca, who had one eye on Thursday’s Europa League play-off second leg against Manchester United at Old Trafford. However an inspired Ferran Torres helped Sergi Roberto to break the deadlock and Lewandowski added a second to leave Cadiz, 17th, two points above the relegation zone. The visitors had two Roger Marti goals disallowed and made Barcelona uncomfortable at times at Camp Nou but their victory rarely seemed in doubt. Xavi began with Sergi Roberto in midfield, replacing Pedri, who suffered a thigh injury in the Europa League 2-2 first leg draw with Manchester United last Thursday. The coach passionately defended the Catalan after the game, saying he was a player often used as a scapegoat. “I’ve heard the most unjust criticism (aimed at him) in my life,” Xavi told reporters. “He’s a hometown player, with a spectacular attitude, always trying to help the team, he’s unselfish.” However it was Torres’ arrival that made the key difference for Barcelona in the first half. The winger has struggled badly at times this season, but with Ousmane Dembele injured and Raphinha rested to face United, he took his chance with both hands. Torres was hyperactive, dribbling past defenders at pace and tying Cadiz’s de-

fence in knots. One such run down the right saw him cross for Lewandowski after 43 minutes and although the Polish striker’s effort was saved, Sergi Roberto was on hand to smash home the rebound. Three minutes



later Barcelona doubled their lead when Lewandowski collected the ball on the edge of the Cadiz box and fired a low strike into the bottom corner. “I work to show my football, it’s true I’ve not had many minutes and (not had that much) importance in the team,” Torres told Movistar. “Every time the coach gives me his confidence, I go out to show him what I’ve got.” Some Barcelona fans sang Torres’ name in response to his electric performance, encouraging the forward after his difficult spell. “I’m proud that they chant my name,” he added. “There is still work to do, the hard thing is to keep it up.” Barcelona took their foot off the gas in the second half, although Lewandowski clipped the top of the crossbar. La Liga’s top scorer with 15 goals, Lewandowski has not been at his sharpest since the World Cup but slowly seems to be returning to it. Marc-Andre ter Stegen kept yet another clean sheet, with Barcelona having conceded just seven goals from 22 matches in La Liga. In Europe it has been another story, with Xavi hoping his side can prove more sturdy at the back against Man United than they were in the first leg. Atletico’s victory over Athletic helped them cut the gap on third place Real Sociedad to two points, after the Basque side drew on Saturday. Athletic played in their classic red and white striped kit, and Atletico in away shirts, even though Diego Simeone’s side were at home at the Metropolitan stadium. The hosts wanted to pay tribute to celebrate Athletic’s 125th anniversary – with Athletic having been formed as a branch of Athletic back in 1903. Griezmann made the difference in a tight clash after 73 minutes when he combined with Depay. – DNA

## PSL 8th Edition



## President Alvi has violated Constitution

FROM PAGE 01  
so Arif Alvi should act like President, not as a puppet of Imran Khan.” She said that President Arif Alvi should be loyal to the constitution; he had already violated the constitution by dissolving the National Assembly. The information minister said that the Election Commission is a constitutional body and we will not allow it to become Imran Khan’s tiger force. “Attempts are being made to take the date of the election unconstitutionally by pressuring but according to the Supreme Court’s interpretation; the post of president is symbolic,” Marriyum Aurangzeb said.

## PDM parties reject president’s move

FROM PAGE 01  
“The president is working as a worker of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. He does not have the authority to issue the election date. His action is tantamount to violating the Constitution,” the minister said while addressing the NA session chaired by Speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf. He also questioned the president’s role in issuing a date for the provincial assemblies. “The president does not respect his position. The responsibilities of all officials are clear in the Constitution. What role does the president have in provincial polls?” “The president should abide by the Constitution. Today, it is being violated,” he said reiterating his stance on the decision taken by the head of state. Reacting to the political development, Federal Minister for Planning and Development and senior PML-N leader Ahsan Iqbal said that “it is the prerogative of the ECP” to announce a date for the elections. He was of the view that the president should not have announced the date. Referring to the economic crisis being faced by the country, the minister said that one to two years are required to steer Pakistan out of the difficulties. He went on to say that the coalition government was taking all-out measures to put the country on the right track. He said that special steps are being taken to improve exports. Pakistan Peoples Party senior leader and former Senate chairman Raza Rabbani said that the president was not empowered to take the decision. According to legal experts, the date should be given by the governor, and actual arrangements should be done by ECP. However, the governor can only set the date when he signs the dissolution paper. In KP, the governor signed the paper, but not in Punjab. Therefore the matter remains disputed.

## NA approves crucial mini-budget

FROM PAGE 01  
to debate over the finance bill, was held on Friday (February 17); however, it was adjourned without voting after a brief debate on the budget proposals.



## Briefs

**Sastaticket.pk: Partner for domestic, international traveling**

KARACHI: Sastaticket.pk, Pakistan's leading online travel booking platform, is providing peace of mind by facilitating their customers. Now customers can book their domestic and international traveling PIA tickets through Sastaticket.pk. Now customers will also have access to a wide range of PIA flights to destinations around the globe, including popular destinations such as Dubai, Istanbul, and London. Sharing his views about the new destinations, Mohib Hassan COO at Sastaticket.pk said, "At Sastaticket.pk, our goal is to provide travellers with the most affordable rates and the most convenient booking experience. We are working to make it easier and more affordable for customers to book their PIA tickets through our platform." He added, "It's our utmost pleasure to be able to facilitate flight bookings for Pakistan's National Flag Carrier- PIA, and we look forward to more customer acquisition in the foreseeable future."

He further added, "In addition to that, we are also fully committed to providing our customers with the best deals and convenience when it comes to facilitating them in their travel needs." Sastaticket.pk is a leading online travel booking platform based out of Lahore, Pakistan that provides services such as flight and hotel bookings, car rentals and affordable vacation packages. The platform offers a unique user-friendly interface and secure booking process making it a hassle-free experience for customers to book and plan their travel online.

It is pertinent to mention here that PIA is Pakistan's National Flag Carrier and operates out of its HQ in Karachi, with hubs in major cities such as Lahore and Islamabad. The National Carrier operates domestic as well as International flights to destinations such as the Middle-East, Europe, North America and other Asian countries.—DNA

**Quake deaths rise to 41,156 in Türkiye**

ANKARA: At least 41,156 people have been killed by two strong earthquakes that jolted southeastern Türkiye on Feb. 6, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) said Sunday. The quakes were followed by over 6,210 aftershocks, the AFAD noted in a statement. A total of 19,436 local and international search and rescue personnel are currently working in the field, the AFAD also reported. Teams set up a total of 216,166 tents, which were dispatched by ministries, relevant institutions as well as other countries and international organizations, in the earthquake zone, it added. The search and rescue efforts have been completed in the earthquake zone, except in the southern Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces, AFAD head Yunus Sezer told reporters. Sezer said search and rescue efforts continued in nearly 40 buildings, while over 6,000 containers have been set up. Noting that evacuations from the earthquake zone to other provinces continued, Sezer said: "Over 460,900 people have so far been evacuated." "We are currently hosting 318,970 victims who were evacuated from the quakes-hit region, in public guest-houses, hotels and other accommodation facilities," he added.

Also, in the region, "We are continuing to host over 1 million disaster victims in public guest-houses, hotels, and other accommodation facilities," he said. Sezer said that the cash aid of TL 10,000 (\$531) has been given to nearly 800,000 citizens. The magnitude 7.7 and 7.6 quakes struck Kahramanmaraş and 10 other provinces — Adana, Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, Hatay, Adiyaman, Malatya, Kilis, Osmaniye, Elazığ and Şanlıurfa on Feb. 6 in less than 10 hours apart. Over 13 million people in the region have been affected by the devastating quakes.—APP

# Türkiye FM urges US to lift sanctions in defense industry

Fight against terrorism is priority on mutual agenda, says Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, urging to have more effective cooperation, collaboration in field of security

## NEWS DESK

ANKARA: The bilateral trade volume between Türkiye and the US is increasingly continuing, the Turkish foreign minister said on Monday, urging to lift sanctions against Ankara in the defense industry field.

In a joint news conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Presidential Complex in Ankara, Mevlut Cavusoglu said finalizing the F-16 fighter jet sale deal is beneficial for both sides. He noted that the fight against terrorism is a priority item on the mutual agenda, and further urged to have more effective cooperation and collaboration in the field of security. Asked about Türkiye's position on the US support to YPG/PKK terrorist organization in Syria, Cavusoglu said Türkiye believes that cooperating with terror groups against another one is a "deadly mistake"



and that the PKK/YPG terror group is not fighting the Daesh/ISIS terror group. Cavusoglu called on his US counterpart to fight against any kind of terrorism and terror group together. Citing the October 2019 deal signed between An-

kara and Washington, Cavusoglu said the US must fulfill its responsibilities arising from the deal.

Ankara and Washington reached a deal in October 2019 to pause Türkiye's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria for 120

hours to allow the withdrawal of YPG/PKK terrorists from a planned safe zone, but Türkiye said the US did not fulfill its promises. Asked about bilateral ties, Cavusoglu said the two countries should not wait for another disaster to

improve ties and urged to take concrete and sincere steps to improve the Türkiye-US relations. For his part, Blinken expressed his country's commitment to providing support to earthquake-hit Türkiye. "We stand side by side in

confronting common security challenges," Blinken said as he hailed Türkiye's role in supporting Ukraine. On the F-16 deal, Blinken said it is the "national interest and security interest" for the Biden administration to both upgrade existing F-16s and provide new ones to Türkiye.

Blinken also responded to the question on the US support to the terrorist YPG/PKK in Syria and said his country "very much recognizes" Türkiye's legitimate security concerns on its southern border.

"We will continue to work closely together to address both of those concerns. In the immediate moment, of course, we're both very much focused on humanitarian assistance to the people of Syria, who, like the people of Turkey, have suffered terribly from the earthquake and we're working together to maximize the support that can get to them," he said.

## Chinese delegation gets 'warm reception' in rare visit to Taipei

Pelosi's August trip tipped relations between Taipei and Beijing to their lowest point in years, with the People's Liberation Army staging massive military drills around the island in protest

TAIPEI: The first Chinese delegation to visit Taiwan since the pandemic enjoyed a "warm reception", the opposition-led Taipei city government said on Monday.

The three-day visit by the delegation from Shanghai, which began on Saturday, is part of a series of recent exchanges that have taken place as Taiwan gears up for elections in 2024. Beijing claims the democratic island as part of its territory to be seized one day, and has ramped up military, diplomatic and economic pressure during President Tsai Ing-wen's tenure. The six-member group from Shanghai met Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an of the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party on

Monday. Their rare trip follows another cross-strait exchange this month when Beijing said it wanted to enhance cooperation with the KMT, Taiwan's main political opposition. Officials "exchanged views on municipal issues such as culture, sports and tourism... The Shanghai delegation also said they felt a warm reception," Taipei's city government said in a statement on Monday. Taiwan-China exchanges had tapered off due to pandemic-driven border closures but political tension meant contact was rare even before then. Asked on Sunday if their visit signalled warming relations between Taiwan and China, Shanghai del-

egation leader Li Xiaodong said: "we are looking forward to it".

"But it is impossible for a dramatic change through just one working group like mine, both sides have to work together," Li told reporters.

KMT Vice Chairman Andrew Hsia recently went on a nine-day trip to China, where he called for more direct flights and the lifting of import restrictions. China suspended a host of Taiwanese food and drink shipments in December, escalating a ban on fruit and fish imports imposed after then-US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. Pelosi's August trip tipped relations between

Taipei and Beijing to their lowest point in years, with the People's Liberation Army staging massive military drills around the island in protest. Beijing had fostered closer ties with the KMT under Tsai's pro-China predecessor Ma Ying-jeou and, with Tsai ineligible for another term, the field for the coming presidential race is more open. Song Tao, head of Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office, told Hsia's delegation the Communist Party was willing to work with the KMT to promote relations based on the shared political foundation of opposing Taiwanese independence, according to China's state news agency Xinhua.—APP

## Japan PM pledges \$5.5b in additional Ukraine aid

TOKYO: Japan will offer Ukraine fresh financial support worth \$5.5 billion, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Monday, days before the first anniversary of Russia's invasion. Japan, this year's Group of Seven president, has joined Western powers in imposing sanctions on Moscow since the war began on February 24, 2022. It has already provided Ukraine with financial support worth \$600 million along with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of emergency humanitarian assistance, according to the prime minister's office. But "there is still a need to assist people whose livelihoods have been destroyed by the war, and to restore destroyed infrastructure", Kishida said in a speech at a think tank symposium in Tokyo. "We have decided to provide additional financial support of \$5.5 billion." The Japanese premier also announced he will host a video conference of the G7 leaders with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday, the invasion's one-year anniversary. "This year, Japan, as G7 president and a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, will support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression and lead the world's efforts to uphold a free and open international order based on the rule of law," Kishida said. The G7 leaders will meet in person in Hiroshima in May. Since Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion was launched, Japan has also taken the rare steps of sending defensive equipment and offering refuge to those fleeing the conflict. The country has a pacifist post-war constitution, which limits its military capacity to ostensibly defensive measures. Kishida's announcements came as US President Joe Biden, on an unannounced visit to Kyiv, promised increased arms deliveries for Ukraine. It is Biden's first visit to Ukraine since the war began, and the trip was hailed by Zelensky as "an extremely important sign of support for all Ukrainians".—APP

## Thousands in US protest funding of Ukraine war

WASHINGTON: Thousands of anti-war demonstrators took to the streets in Washington on Sunday against the US government's war-mongering policies, urging the Joe Biden administration to stop supplying arms to Ukraine and disband the NATO military alliance. The biggest demonstration was held at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, a symbolically significant venue for American political activists, as people participated in the 'Rage Against the War Machine' national rally. The protesters at the rally, who held anti-war placards, called for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, an end to US funding and military aid to Kiev, and diverting the Pentagon budget to fund numerous domestic needs. The anti-war protesters also demanded the dissolution of the NATO military alliance, blaming it for the horrors of war across the world. Nick Brana of the "People's Party" and Angela McArdle of the Libertarian Party, who moderated the national rally, described the event as an opportunity by the organizers and the speakers from across the political spectrum of the United States to "bring together" the "left and the right" and end the war in Ukraine. Pacifist journalist and author Chris Hedges delivered one of the keynote speeches at the event. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times, where he served as the Middle East Bureau Chief and Balkan Bureau Chief for the paper.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan and Afghanistan Siemens Healthineers, Khuram Jameel, called on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.—DNA

## Pro-Russia protesters take to streets in Moldova

*The Movement for the People's website says the group was formed in early February and consists of "several political forces, public associations, local elected officials and civic activists" to address the "unprecedented crises" Moldova and its citizens face*

CHIDNAU: Several thousand protesters rallied in Moldova's capital Sunday to demand that the country's new pro-Western government fully cover citizens' winter heating bills amid a cost-of-living crisis and skyrocketing inflation. The protest was organised by a recently formed group called Movement for the People and supported by members of Moldova's Russia-friendly Shor Party, which holds six seats in the former Soviet republic's 101-seat legislature. Some of the demonstrators who converged on Chisinau called for the resignation of the country's president, chanting "Down with

Maia Sandu!" Others held placards with the faces of some Moldova's leaders and politicians placed next to photographs of large homes and fancy cars. "They have millions. We are dying of hunger," they said. Sandu on Feb. 13 outlined what she claimed was an alleged plot by Moscow to overthrow the government in order to put the nation "at the disposal of Russia," and to derail it from its course to one day join the European Union. "Through violent actions, masked under protests of the so-called opposition, the change of power in Chisinau would be forced," she said. "In carrying

out the plan, the authors rely on several internal forces, but especially on criminal groups such as the Shor formation and all of its derivatives." Russia strongly denied her claims. A series of anti-government protests initiated by the Shor Party rocked Moldova during the fall as a severe energy crisis gripped the country after Russia dramatically reduced natural gas supplies. Around the same time, Moldova's government asked the country's Constitutional Court to declare the Shor Party illegal. The country's anti-corruption prosecutors' office alleged the protests were partly financed

with Russian money. On Saturday, the office said more than 20 searches were carried out at the homes of party members who were "actively and systematically involved in receiving and distributing money ... for the transport and remuneration" of citizens to the protests.

Eight people were arrested, authorities said. The Shor Party accused authorities of mobilizing thousands of police officers to thwart Sunday's demonstration and "stop people from entering" the capital. The party's leader, Ilan Shor, is a Moldovan oligarch currently in exile in Is-

rael. He is implicated in a \$1 billion bank theft and was recently named on a US State Department sanctions list as working for Russian interests. The US says Shor worked with "corrupt oligarchs and Moscow-based entities to create political unrest in Moldova" and to undermine the country's bid to join the EU. The Movement for the People's website says the group was formed in early February and consists of "several political forces, public associations, local elected officials and civic activists" to address the "unprecedented crises" Moldova and its citizens face.—Agencies

## Lebanon raps Israeli Syria strikes

BEIRUT: Lebanon has strongly condemned the latest Israeli airstrikes on the Syrian capital Damascus that heavily damaged residential buildings and caused civilian casualties, saying the aggression confirms the regime's indifference to human suffering.

The Lebanese Foreign Ministry, in a statement on Sunday, denounced the "attack on the sovereignty of Syria, which is still reeling from the repercussions of the devastating earthquake that struck it" on February 6 and killed thousands.

The ministry called the air-strikes a "violation of the most basic rules of international law."

"It comes to reaffirm Israel's indifference to the human suffering resulting from its attacks on the peoples of the region in all circumstances, especially in times of tragedies, which doubles its moral condemnation," the statement read. At least five people, including a soldier, were killed and 15 others wounded in the Israeli airstrikes early on Sunday, the Syrian army said in a statement.

The Israeli attack was launched from the occupied Golan Heights and targeted several military sites in Damascus, including the southwestern residential neighborhood of Kafar Sousa, the statement noted.

It added that many of the wounded are in critical condition, and many residential homes in Damascus and its countryside were damaged. The statement said Syrian air defense units intercepted most missiles before reaching the targets.

Following the attack, Syria urged the United Nations to take necessary measures to deter Israel's attacks and hold it accountable for the crime.—DNA

## S. Korea, US hold joint air exercises

ANKARA: South Korea and the US held joint air exercises Sunday in an apparent response to North Korea's firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). South Korea's General Staff announced that B-1B bombers took part in the exercise as well as F-16, F-35A, and F-15K warplanes, according to Yonhap News Agency. The exercise demonstrated the allies' "overwhelming" defense capabilities and readiness posture.

Japan and South Korea reported that North Korea conducted an ICBM test over the Sea of Japan early Saturday.

The ballistic missile, which remained in the air for 66 minutes, traveled 900 kilometers (559 miles) with a maximum altitude of 5,700 kilometers (3,541 miles) before landing in the sea off Japan's west coast.

North Korea issued a statement Sunday through the state-run KCNA news agency saying it fired the ICBM as a warning to the US and South Korea, noting that it successfully demonstrated its ability to launch a "fatal nuclear counterattack." The US said it "strongly" condemns the ICBM test.—Agencies

## Dozens killed in floods, landslides in Brazil

SAO PAULO: Flooding and landslides triggered by torrential rain in Brazil claimed at least 24 lives on Carnival weekend in southeast Sao Paulo state, authorities said Sunday.

TV and social media footage from the town of San Sebastiao showed entire neighbourhoods under water, debris from hillside houses swept away by oozing earth, flooded highways and cars destroyed by fallen trees, among other damage. At least 23 people died in San Sebastiao, according to Mayor Felipe Augusto. A girl was also killed in the town of Ubatuba, news reports said. Another 228 people were left homeless and 338 were evacuated in the coastal region north of the city of Sao Paulo, the state government said earlier, as rescue crews raced to help those hit by the storm. The authorities did not give a figure for how many people were missing or injured. Sao Paulo state governor Tarciso de Freitas declared a state of emergency in five towns along the coast after flying over areas devastated by the weather.—APP



## Briefs

Muslims  
burnt alive,  
churches  
attacked in  
modern India

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As the World Day of Social Justice is being celebrated across the globe, minorities are being persistently hounded under Narendra Modi government in India where, only this week, two Muslims were burnt alive by a Hindutva gang in Haryana state.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the day is marked worldwide to ensure treating minorities with equality, the cornerstone of social justice, but Muslims, Christians, Dalits and Sikhs are deprived of social justice, and are treated as 2nd class citizens in India.

The day has no meaning for Indian minorities as they continue to face systematic discrimination. The ongoing protests in Rajasthan by Muslims over the killing of their two community members, Nasir and Junaid, by the Hindutva activists in Haryana and by Christians at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi against attacks on churches across India coinciding with the World Day of Social Justice betray the overall plight of the minorities in present-day India. The Muslim protesters in Rajasthan, the native state of the two Muslim victims, said that when a Hindu Kanhaiya was murdered in Udaipur, his killers were caught within one hour, but now the killers of the two Muslims are running scot-free.

At least 14  
killed as bus  
falls into  
ravine near  
Kallar Kahar

DNA

RAWALPINDI: At least 14 members of a wedding party, including women and children, were killed and 64 people were injured on Sunday night, after a bus fell into a ravine and overturned near Kallar Kahar. This is the fourth major road accident reported from across Pakistan in less than two months.

According to rescue and police officials, 12 passengers passed away at the spot while two others expired at the hospital on Sunday. The driver of the bus was also killed in the fatal accident. The injured persons have been taken to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, Kallar Kahar. Chakwal Deputy Commissioner Quratulain Malik told media that the wedding party was going back to Lahore from Islamabad.

"The vehicle was passing through a curved patch of the Islamabad-Lahore motorway when its brakes failed and the bus smashed into two cars coming from the opposite side," she said. "Six passengers received critical injuries and they were rushed to Rawalpindi," the DC added.

LHC  
suspends ECP  
denotification  
of PTI MNAs

DNA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Monday suspended ECP de-notification of all PTI MNAs from Punjab. The PTI had resigned en masse from the lower house of parliament following the ouster of PTI chief Imran Khan in April last year. Subsequently, NA speaker Ashraf accepted only 11 of the resignations, stating that the remaining lawmakers would be summoned individually for verification.

After stalling the process for eight months, Ashraf had on Jan 17, accepted the resignations of 34 more PTI MNAs and Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid while three days later on Jan 20, the speaker accepted 35 more resignations. A total of 70 PTI lawmakers, including Asad Umar, Fawad Chaudhry, Shah Mehmood Qureshi and others belonging to various constituencies across the country had on Friday filed a plea with LHC.

Regional Connectivity  
Desk inaugurated at RCCI

The promotion of trade opportunities in various sectors including tourism, visiting religious places, energy and pharma sectors also came under discussion



## STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: A Regional Connectivity Desk has been established in the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) in collaboration with Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research & Development (AIERD). The aim of the trade desk was to provide information for trade promotion, networking, B2B and networking at the Chamber of Commerce level in Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The opening ceremony of the desk was attended by the ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan and Dean of Diplomatic Corps H.E. Atadjan Movlamov, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan, Khizr Farhadov, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Yezhan Kistafan, the Ambassador of Tajikistan, Asmatullah Nasreddin, the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan, Olenbek Tutoyev, and the Ambassador of Uzbekistan, Aybak Arif Osmanov.

Chamber President Saqib Rafiq, Group Leader Sohail Altaf, Chairman AIERD Zahid Latif Khan, Haripur Chamber President Tayyab Swati, RCCI Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad,

Former presidents, executive committee members and chamber members were also present on the occasion. On this occasion, the speakers and ambassadors in their addresses spoke about trade and investment opportunities in Azerbaijan and the five countries of Central Asia. The promotion of trade opportunities in various sectors including tourism, visiting religious places, energy and pharma sectors also came under discussion. They also stressed on simplifying payment channels and procedures for issuing visas, and also urged on direct flights. Later, the ambassadors visited the Trade Desk where they were briefed.

China slams  
Blinken's  
comments

BEIJING: Beijing has strongly denied US claims that China was considering arming Russia in its war against Ukraine, as it reiterated a call for dialogue to end the conflict. A Chinese spokesperson said the US is in no position to make demands after US top diplomat Anthony Blinken warned Beijing against providing weapons to Russia in the war against Ukraine. Speaking at a regular briefing on Monday, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China "will never accept the US pointing fingers at Sino-Russian relations or even coercing us".



His comment comes after Blinken expressed "deep concerns" about the "possibility that China will provide lethal material support to Russia". "To date, we have seen Chinese companies ... provide non-lethal support to Russia for use in Ukraine. The concern that we have now is based on information we have that they're considering providing lethal support," Blinken told CBS News after he met China's foreign minister Wang Yi on Saturday at the Munich Security Conference. Wang Wenbin said the US was "in no position to make demands of China".

He also pointed to Beijing's "collaborative partnership" with Moscow which he said was built on the basis of non-alignment and non-confrontation.

On the back of Blinken's remarks, the European Union's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said on Monday that China potentially providing arms to Moscow "would be a red line" in the bloc's relationship with China. Borrell said he expressed his "strong concern" to Wang Yi and asked him to refrain from arms deliveries to Russia. China's foreign minister Wang Yi was due in Moscow later on Monday for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. - DNA

North Korea fires two  
more missiles into its  
Pacific 'firing range'

Analysts said warning about the Pacific being a North Korean firing range from leader Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, could signal plans to fire more missiles further, possibly in the direction of US territory of Guam

SEOUL: North Korea launched two more ballistic missiles off its east coast on Monday, with the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un saying North Korea's use of the Pacific as a "firing range" would depend on the behaviour of U.S. forces. The launches came just two days after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) into the sea off Japan's west coast, prompting the United States to hold joint air exercises with South Korea and separately with Japan on Sunday. North Korea's state media confirmed it fired two projectiles from a multiple rocket launcher, aiming at targets 395 km (245 miles) and 337 km (209 miles) away. "The 600 mm multiple rocket launcher mobilised in the firing ... is a means of tactical nuclear weapon," capable of "paralysing" an enemy airfield, North Korea's KCNA state news agency said. Analysts said the warning about the Pacific being a North Korean firing range from leader Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, could signal plans to fire more missiles further, possibly in the direction of the U.S. territory of Guam. Japan's defence ministry said the two missiles launched on Monday at around 2200 GMT, reached maximum altitudes of

about 100 km and 50 km. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he had requested an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting over the tests, and Jiji news agency said the gathering was set for 2000 GMT.

But prospects for a new round of U.N. sanctions appear slim given the previous vetoes by Russia and China amid the Ukraine crisis and a Sino-U.S. feud over a Chinese balloon in American skies. South Korea's military condemned the launches as a "grave provocation" that should stop immediately. President Yoon Suk-yeol's office said it held a National Security Council meeting to review the tests and discuss countermeasures.

South Korea's foreign ministry announced sanctions on four individuals and five entities linked to North Korea's weapons programmes over the latest ICBM and missile tests, in what it called its fastest-ever such response to the North's provocations. The ministry said its nuclear envoy had phone calls with his U.S. and Japanese counterparts during which they agreed that North Korea's provocations cannot be justified and it would face "consequences of self-indulgence". - Agencies

Dar for further expanding  
Pakistan-UK relations

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Finance and Revenue, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar said here on Monday that Pakistan had long historic ties with the United Kingdom and relations between the two countries needed to be further expanded for the mutual benefit of the countries.

The minister was talking to British Acting High Commissioner, Andrew Dalgleish who called him here, according to a press statement issued by the finance ministry. They exchanged views on matters of common interest including promoting mutual trade and investment between the two countries, the statement added.

He briefed the envoy about economic challenges coupled with devastating floods and said that the government aimed to bring about economic and fiscal stability leading to economic recovery and growth.

He also appreciated the goodwill and cooperation extended by the British Acting High Commissioner.

On the occasion, the British Acting High Commissioner commended the practical and pragmatic measures being undertaken by the government and extended full support of the British government for the government and people of Pakistan in mitigating the socio-economic challenges.

Record  
6,542 guns  
intercepted  
at US airports

ATLANTA: The woman flying out of Philadelphia's airport last year remembered to pack snacks, prescription medicine and a cellphone in her handbag. But what was more important was what she forgot to unpack: a loaded .380-caliber handgun in a black holster.

The weapon was one of the 6,542 guns the Transportation Security Administration intercepted last year at airport checkpoints across the country. The number — roughly 18 per day — was an all-time high for guns intercepted at U.S. airports, and is sparking concern at a time when more Americans are armed.

"What we see in our checkpoints really reflects what we're seeing in society, and in society there are more people carrying firearms nowadays," TSA administrator David Pekoske said.

With the exception of pandemic-disrupted 2020, the number of weapons intercepted at airport checkpoints has climbed every year since 2010. Experts don't think this is an epidemic of would-be hijackers — nearly everyone caught claims to have forgotten they had a gun with them — but they emphasize the danger even one gun can pose in the wrong hands on a plane or at a checkpoint. - Agencies

Netanyahu  
advances  
judicial  
changes

## NEWS DESK

JERUSALEM: Israel's government on Monday was pressing ahead with a contentious plan to overhaul the country's legal system, despite an unprecedented uproar that has included mass protests, warnings from military and business leaders and calls for restraint by the United States. Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered outside the parliament, or Knesset, for a second straight week to rally against the plan as lawmakers prepared to hold an initial vote. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies, a collection of ultra-religious and ultra-nationalist lawmakers, say the plan is meant to fix a system that has given the courts and government legal advisers too much say in how legislation is crafted and decisions are made.

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