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Detailed News On Page-07

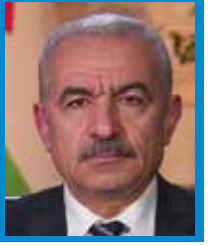
Putin accuses Ukraine of 'terrorist act'

Detailed News On Page-08



Shtayyeh in Lithuania seeks recognition

Detailed News On Page-07



IMF TOUGH DEMANDS

Dollar at historic high, interest rate sky-rockets

Monetary Policy Committee decides to increase the policy rate by 300 basis points

NAZIR SIYAL / DNA

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Thursday decided to increase the policy rate by 300 basis points (3%) to 20%. During the last meeting in January, the committee had highlighted near-term risks to the inflation outlook from external and fiscal adjustments. Meanwhile, The US dollar decimated Pakistani rupee to historic low in the interbank market on Thursday a day after crushing the local currency amid standoff with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and downgrading by Moody's in its latest ratings. As per the information received from the forex dealers, the greenback skyrocketed by a huge margin of Rs18.89 against the rupee and was currently exchanging hands at a record level of Rs285 in the interbank market. Within three days, the US dollar has appreciated by massive Rs25.08 against the local currency. Most of these risks have materialized and are partially reflected in the inflation outlook for February. The national CPI inflation has surged to 31.5 percent y/y, while core inflation rose to 17.1 percent in urban and 21.5 percent in rural basket in February 2023. According to MPC statement issued after the meeting in today's meeting, the MPC noted that the recent fiscal adjustments and exchange rate depreciation have led to a significant deterioration in the near-term inflation outlook and a further upward drift in inflation expectations, as reflected in the latest wave of surveys. It expects inflation to rise further in the next few months as the impact of these adjustments unfolds before it begins to fall, albeit at a gradual pace.

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Staff-level IMF deal expected next week

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar Thursday said the staff-level agreement with International Monetary Fund (IMF) is expected to be finalized next week. The finance minister told the media on Thursday that negotiations with the IMF are about to end as discussions with the IMF are proceeding positively. Ishaq Dar said economic indicators are gradually moving in the right direction but some anti-state elements are spreading rumours of the default of Pakistan which is baseless and contrary to the facts. He confirmed that the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) foreign exchange reserves have increased by one billion dollars and foreign commercial banks have started providing facilities to Pakistan. Meanwhile in a message on his twitter handle today, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has said that anti-Pakistan elements are spreading malicious rumours that Pakistan may default, which is not only completely false but also belie the facts. The Finance Minister said that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) forex reserves have

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting of Federal Cabinet. —DNA

07 MOFA officers promoted to Grade 22

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Seven senior officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been promoted to Grade 22, including Pakistan's Ambassador to Sweden, Dr. Zahoor Ahmed, Ahmad Hasan Dao to Brazil, Pakistan's High Commissioner to Malaysia, Amina Baloch, Pakistan's Ambassador to the Philippines, Intiaz Qazi and Muhammad Hassan, Pakistan Ambassador to Indonesia Foreign Office Additional Secretary Cyrus Qazih also been promoted to Grade 22.

Punjab, KP elections ECP decides on 54-day polls schedule

ECP meeting headed by the CEC discussed Supreme Court's decision

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday decided on a 54-day schedule for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Punjab elections. The ECP meeting was headed by the Chief Election Commissioner to discuss the Supreme Court's decision as they decided to hold elections as per the SC's orders, the date for the elections was also discussed in the meeting. According to the sources, ECP decided on a 54-day schedule for the elections and also kept the month of Ramadan and Eid in view. The final dates for the elections will be discussed with the stakeholders and EC will also be present in the meeting with the President and the Governor. Besides this, the commission decided to train the election officers by next week, which will be completed within a couple of days. ECP said that the staff will be

trained in the Election Commission Secretariat, after which they will further train district returning officers (DROs), returning officers (ROs) and assistant returning officers (AROs). Once the training of officers completes, training sessions of election staff will commence. The Supreme Court (SC), in a 3-2 verdict, ruled on Wednesday that elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab — both of which have been under caretaker governments since the provincial assemblies were dissolved in January — should be held within 90 days. "Parliamentary democracy is a salient feature of the Constitution. There can be no parliamentary democracy without Parliament or the provincial assemblies," the ruling said. "And there can be neither Parliament nor provincial assemblies without the holding of general elections as envisaged, required and mandated by and under the Constitution and in accordance therewith".

Briefs

Imran slams PDM govt policies

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan slammed PDM government over the rupee devaluation, media reported on Thursday. In a Twitter message, Imran Khan said that the "Rupee slaughtered - lost over 62% or 110/\$ in 11 months of the PDM. This has increased public debt alone Rs14.3 trillion and history 75-year high inflation up to 31.5%." He added, "Pakistanis paying heavy price of the regime change conspiracy where a bunch of criminals have been foisted upon nation by ex COAS." The Pakistani rupee's value declined sharply in the interbank trading on Thursday with the local currency falling by Rs19.98 against the US dollar, ARY News reported quoting forex dealers.

Maryam shuns Imran criticism

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior vice president Maryam Nawaz slammed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan over the latter's tweet on the economic situation. Taking to Twitter, Ms Nawaz took a jibe at the deposed premier and accused him of dragging the country into a quagmire. Berating Mr Khan for negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ms Nawaz said, "Cruel deal that you [Imran] struck with the IMF. Then you breached the deal, plunging the country into economic turmoil".

Six TTP terrorists killed in Afghanistan

CENTRELINE REPORT

KABUL: (DNA) At least six terrorists were killed and 15 others were injured on Thursday in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack targeting the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan's Khost province. According to the details, an explosion occurred in the Khost province of Afghanistan in which six terrorists of TTP were killed and 15 others were injured. The dead militants were identified as Abdul Manan, Alam Khan Mudakhel, Kajir and three unidentified terrorists. Among the injured terrorists are commander Fazl Amin, commander Muhammad alias Tofan, commander Noor Payo Khan, Faqirullah, Turzai, Sat Kare, Ali Sir Khan, Zubair, Hijratullah, Kamal, Sher Afzal, Bakhtullah, Zubihullah and two unknown terrorists. In a separate incident, MakramHarasani, the in-charge of TTP's Umar Media Group, was seriously injured, according to sources. It is to be mentioned here that last week, a high-powered delegation led by Defence Minister Khawaja Asif visited Kabul and managed to secure a "fresh commitment" from the Afghan Taliban to tackling the renewed threat posed by the TTP. Officials were confident that the outcome of the

visit would be visible in upcoming weeks as Pakistan expects certain actions by the Afghan Taliban against terrorist outfits operating out of Afghan soil.

PM meets COAS, CJCS

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed AsimMunir on Thursday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. During the meeting, the overall security situation of the region was discussed while the professional matters of the Pakistan Army also came under consideration. Earlier, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS) Gen Sahir ShamsadMirza called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, media reported. The CJCS and premier exchanged views on overall security situation in the country and professional matters of Pakistan's armed forces during the meeting at the Prime Minister's House.

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Bilawal to visit New York

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will visit New York in the context of the Conference on "Women in Islam: Understanding the rights and Identity of Women in the Islamic World". The Foreign Office spokesperson said on Thursday that the Conference being held on 8 March 2023 is an initiative of Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. It is being convened by Pakistan in its capacity as the chair of the OIC Council of Ministers at the UN Headquarters on the sidelines of the 67th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The objective of the Conference is to bridge the perception-reality gap on the rights of women in Islam and to counter gender stereotypes that are often associated with Muslim women, the spokesperson told the weekly briefing.

Pakistan has enormous potential to export garments, dates to Indonesia

Ambassador of Indonesia Adam Tugio says there was no ban on the export of palm oil from Indonesia to Pakistan

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Indonesian Ambassador Adam MulawarmanTugio has said that Pakistan has enormous potential to export garments, sports goods, and dates with Indonesia. During a visit to Worlddecho.net office, the Indonesian ambassador said that Pakistan has very much untapped potential to contribute to the world market at large, and Indonesia could be one of the best destinations. He said that his country was desirous of enhancing economic relations with Pakistan to boot further the current trade volume, which currently stood at \$4.6 billion. The target for the mutual trade is \$ 10 billion and both sides are working to enhance that. He also made it clear that there was no ban on the export of palm oil from Indonesia to Pakistan and rather, his country has allowed local producers to export six times of their local production. This ratio was previously eight



times of local production. The ambassador said Pakistan needs to make an interim objective before joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a regional bloc of 15 countries, including Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. RCEP population is 3.5 billion which has huge potential of trade and Indonesia can be the gateway for ASEAN nations trade for Pakistan. The envoy said that Pakistani manufacturers, including garment makers, have a strong comparative advantage in exporting their goods to the Indo-

nesian market with zero tariffs as his country purchases the same from other countries. He also referred to Pakistani products such as medical equipment, leathers, garments, and textile that could become essential trade commodities to the Indonesian market. The envoy emphasized the need for the exchange of scholars, saying that his country already offered scholarships to Pakistani students. He encouraged Pakistani students to use scholarships being offered by the Indonesian government and many universities. He said both countries also need to exploit religious tourism as both countries have some important Buddhist and other religious sites. The envoy said that Pakistan could utilize the Indonesia-Pakistan Preferential Trade Agreement (IP-PTA) to reach out to ASEAN markets with a population of 640 million. Even both the nations combined population is equal to 500 million which can be exploited further in business cooperation.

- Courtesy Worlddecho.net

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155 GENERAL DUTY PILOT GD(P)

Age : 16 to 22 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Vision : 6/6 each eye (without Glasses)

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

A candidate must have passed with minimum 60% marks in aggregate in any of the following:-

- F.Sc (Pre-Engg/Pre-Medical/Computer Science)
- 'A' level with Physics, Maths, Computer Science / Biology.
- F.Sc with Physics and any two subjects i.e; Maths, Statistics, Computer Science and Biology

Training Period : 04 years

- Award of BS Degree in Aviation Management.

SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION (SSC / SPSSC)

EDUCATION BRANCH (131 CSC SPSSC)

Age : 21 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

- **Mathematics:** BS / MS (Maths)
- **Economics:** BS / MS (Economics)
- **Accounting & Finance:** BS (Account & Finance) / MS MBA (Finance).
- **Psychologist:** BS / MS in Psychology / Behavioural Sciences.
- **Islamiat (Religious Officer):** MA/ BS Islamiat and Dars-e-Nizami.

Note: Each qualification must be minimum 2nd Division from a reputed Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

ADMIN & SPECIAL DUTIES COURSE (131 CSC SSC)

Age : 18 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

BS (04 years), BS / (Civil) Engg, BE (Civil) / with minimum 2nd Division from Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC and {BE / BS (Civil Engg) with Minimum CGPA 2.5 out of 4 or minimum 62.5% marks with annual system from reputed Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC & PEC}.

Note: Each qualification must have FSc Background.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

LOGISTICS BRANCH (131 CSC SSC)

Age : 18 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

Master in Logistics / Supply Chain Management. BBA / MBA in Logistics / Supply Chain Management / Marketing / Finance. BSCS / BSIT / BCS / BSE / MCS / MSIT. BS / Master in Physics / Chemistry / Mathematics / Economics / Statistics / Computer Sciences. BE in all Engineering disciplines.

Note: Minimum 2nd Division from Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC and {BE with Minimum CGPA 2.5 out of 4 or minimum 62.5% marks with annual system from reputed Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC & PEC}.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (131 CSC SSC)

Age : 18 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

BS/MS in information Technology, Computer Science, Software Engineering, Computer Engineering, Software Project Management, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Information Security & Cyber Security with minimum 2nd Division from Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

ACCOUNTS BRANCH (131 CSC SSC)

Age : 18 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

B.Com (4years) / M. Com / ACCA / ACMA / BBA (Finance 04 years) / MBA (Finance) / M. Finance (Pre-requisite B.Com 02 years) or MS / BS (04 years) specialization in Accounting, Finance or Commerce with minimum 2nd Division from Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

LEGAL BRANCH (131 CSC SSC)

Age : 21 to 30 years on 04 Nov, 2023
Nationality : Male citizens of Pakistan
Marital Status : Married / Unmarried
Height : Minimum 5 Feet 4 Inches / 163 cm
Rank : Flying Officer

EDUCATION QUALIFICATION:

LLB minimum 2nd Division from a reputed Pakistani / Foreign University recognized by HEC. Preference will be given to candidate having L.L.M qualification and experience of minimum 02 years practices as legal practitioner.

Training Period : 24 Weeks

SELECTION PROCEDURE

- Online registration at www.joinpaf.gov.pk
- Intelligence Test followed by Academic Test in the following subjects through e-Testing:

General Duty Pilot, Air Defence Logistics and A&SD	English & Physics
Aeronautical Engineering	English, Physics & Maths
131 CSC	Academic Test of Relevant Subject

- Initial medical examination and interview at I & S Centre.
- Only short listed candidates would be detailed for ISSB.
- Test / Interview by ISSB Kohat / Gujranwala / Malir / Quetta.
- Final medical examination at CMB, Lahore.
- Flying Aptitude Test (FAT) of GD (P) candidates only.
- Interview by AHQ Special Selection Board for CSC candidates only.
- Final selection by Air Headquarters in order of merit.

Note: Appearing Candidates are also eligible to apply provided they have obtained 65% marks in FSc / 'A' Level (Part-1) and bring a certificate from the Principal that they are likely to Pass FSc / 'A' Level Examination in the prescribed grades (FSc Courses only). Candidates with O / 'A' Level background are required to produce equivalence (Pre-Engg / Pre-Medical) certificates.

INELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS

- A candidate is ineligible if he / she is:-
- (a) Rejected by ISSB / GHQ / NHQ / AHQ selection boards.
 - Twice rejected by ISSB for Post Grad Entry.
 - Twice rejected by ISSB for intermediate / Graduate (PMA/ Graduate / Equivalent) and once rejected by ISSB OR GHQ / NHQ / AHQ based selection boards.
 - Once rejected by ISSB for Intermediate / Graduate (PMA/ Graduate / Equivalent) and twice rejected by ISSB OR GHQ / NHQ / AHQ based selection boards.
- (b) Twice screened out by ISSB.
- (c) Tested within four months (120 days) gap of previous appearance in ISSB except waiver granted by the competent authority. However, bar of 120 days will not be applicable to candidates appearing in GHQ/NHQ AHQ selection boards.
- (d) Dismissed / Removed / Debarred from Govt. Services including Armed Forces.
- (e) Convicted in a Court of Law for any heinous offense (to be ascertained by the competent military authority)
- (f) Permanently declared UNFIT by Appeal Medical Board (PUF by AMB)
- (g) Declared medically unfit due to Hepatitis B & C (AMB cannot be requested)
- (h) Withdrawn from any bonded Armed Forces college / institution on disciplinary grounds.
- (i) Withdrawn / discharged / resigned or purchase release from any Armed Forces Officers Academy / Training institution on any ground.
- (k) Tempering of academic certificate / forgery / concealment to get undue advantage will make an applicant permanently ineligible for all types of commission in Armed Forces.
- (l) Found giving incomplete, false or wrongful information.
- (m) Thrice screened out by Army / Navy / Air Force during preliminary selection.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

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For further details, contact any of the following PAF Information & Selection Centres along with all original Educational Certificates and mark sheets, 04 passport size attested photographs and self NADRA Smart Card / Father/ Mother. Old NIC / Form B is not acceptable.

→ ABBOTTABAD:	310-Mensehra Road, Near Ayub Medical Complex	Ph: 0992-385157, 385166
→ FAISALABAD:	Main Jhang Road, Near Airport Chowk	Ph: 041-9201199, 2577799
→ HYDERABAD:	49 - Salahuddin Road, Cantt	Ph: 022-920093
→ KARACHI:	Main Sharah-e-Faisal (Near PAF Base) Faisal	Ph: 021-99240999
→ LAHORE:	14 - Munir Road, (Near PAF Cinema) Munir Chowk	Ph: 042-99220084, 36671041-3
→ MULTAN:	217 - Sher Shah Road	Ph: 061-9201183, 9201795
→ MUZAFARABAD:	Shaukat Lines Near Army Public School, Cantt	Ph: 0344-0969323
→ MIANWALI:	Fazaia Road, Opp Custom Office	Ph: 0459-350226
→ D.I. KHAN:	Fazle Elahi Shaheed Road, Near Bus Stand	Ph: 0966-9280311
→ PESHAWAR:	9-The Mall, Peshawar Cantt	Ph: 091-9210829, 5286329
→ QUETTA:	M.A Jinnah Road	Ph: 081-92017531
→ RAWALPINDI:	3-The Mall, Opposite AFIC	Ph: 051-5701143, 5701257-58
→ SUKKUR:	Opposite Govt Islamia College, Minara Road	Ph: 071-9310409

National Days and Armed Forces Days

- MARCH**
- March 01 / Bosnia National Day
 - March 03 / Bulgaria National Day
 - March 06 / Ghana Independence Day
 - March 12 / Mauritius National Day
 - March 17 / Ireland St. Patrick's Day
 - March 20 / Tunisia Independence Day
 - March 21 / Namibia National Day
 - March 25 / Greece National Day
 - March 26 / Bangladesh National Day
 - March 27 / Myanmar Armed Forces 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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- Railway Exchange.....9270831-5
- 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

Gandhara Research Center opens to support heritage of Pakistan

Engr Amir Muqam on the occasion said that Gandhara Cultural Heritage Center at Islamabad was established with the generous technical and financial support of Govt of Republic of Korea

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to Prime Minister for Political, Public Affairs, National Heritage and Culture Eng. Amir Muqam here Thursday inaugurated the newly established Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center at the Department of Archeology and Museums (DOAM). PM's aide termed the Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center as a great gift from the Korean Government for the cultural heritage of Pakistan while Secretary of National Heritage and Culture Division, Fareena Mazhar, Administrator (Minister) of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Rep. of Korea (CHA) Dr. Choi Eunghoon, President of the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation (KCHF) Choi Youngchang, Ambassador of the Korea embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan Suh Sangpyo, Director of the International Cooperation Division, CHA, Jo Dongjoo, Director General of the International Cooperation Department, KCHF, Jeon Bumhwan and Director General, DOAM, Dr. Abdul Azeem were also present on the occasion.

Engr Amir Muqam on the occasion said that Gandhara Cultural Heritage Center at Islamabad was established with the generous technical and financial support of the Government of the Republic of Korea. "It will help to establish a systematic approach for preservation and conservation of the Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Gandhara in particular and the overall cultural heritage of Pakistan in general. Pakistan is a unique country, strategically located giving it a highly important place not only in the past but also in the present era, and will continue to enjoy the same status for all the times to come," he said.



"Pakistan generally and Gandhara Region of Pakistan particularly is famous for the rich cultural heritage of diversified nature", he said adding that the richness of Pakistan is not confined to tangible cultural heritage. Its rich traditions, arts and crafts, music, poetry, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies, and varying landscapes are indeed treasures that very few countries of the world have ever inherited, all these treasures handed down to us by nature and by successive civilizations. Adviser to the PM said that he was thankful to the Government of the Republic of Korea for taking keen interest and continuous support for the cultural heritage of Pakistan, adding that especially for the

preservation and promotion of the Buddhist Heritage of Gandhara. He said the role of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea and Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation in establishing Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center and Conservation Laboratory at the Department of Archeology and Museums, Islamabad is highly commendable. Engr Amir Muqam said the project for Development of Cultural Promotion and Tourism Resources of Gandhara Heritage of Pakistan will be a landmark in cooperation between Korea and Pakistan and it will open new vistas of cooperation in the fields of cultural heritage. There are potential areas of future cooper-

ation between the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea and Pakistan in the fields of archaeological research, museum management, and conservation of cultural assets. "We believe that in the future the two countries can further collaborate in these areas to promote cultural understanding and cooperation between our nations", he said. Korean Ambassador, SUH Sang Pyo said that Pakistan was home to the largest number of Buddhist sites and that the promotion of religious tourism can greatly stabilize the economy of Pakistan. He termed Pakistan as a friendly nation for Korea and said the ancient cultural and religious artifacts in Pakistan were

very unique. As per its contract with the Pakistan government, he said, Korea will provide modern equipment for the discovery of priceless Buddhist heritage of Pakistan", he added. Fareena Mazhar said that Gandhara Cultural Heritage Center established at DOAM under five years "official development assistance" project of the cultural heritage administration government of Republic of Korea, is aimed to cater basic needs of cultural heritage institutions for preservation, research, and capacity building through practical training. Earlier, Deputy Director General Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation Baek Kyunghwan introduced the Gandhara Cultural Heritage Research Center.

Thar Coal providing cheap energy to millions

ISLAMABAD: Inside the Thar Block-1 Integrated Coal Mine Power Project, an open-pit coal mine with an annual lignite output of 7.8 million tons and a total capacity of 1,320 megawatts, is providing the most cost-effective energy to millions of Pakistani households. Gul Hassan, a mining engineer with Sino Sindh Resources (Pvt.) Ltd. (SSRL), is carrying out routine safety checks. He proudly told Gwadar Pro in an interview after being named an outstanding staff member of CPEC projects by the Chinese embassy. "The Thar Block-1 project has been instrumental in transforming the lives of people in Thar." "The opportunity to be a part of this desert energy oasis means a lot to me." While strictly implementing safety control measures for mining, stripping, dumping, and traffic in open pit coal mines himself, Gul Hassan also translated Chinese mine management materials such as "Coal Mine Safety Regulations" into English and Urdu and organized training for 5,000 Pakistani employees cumulatively, by specialty and by post. Gul said the project management team has taken multiple measures to ensure safety, energy conservation, and emission reduction to maintain ecological balance. It normally carries out "safe production month" activities, organizes hidden danger screening, regulations, and competitions, and popularizes awareness of safety and environmental responsibility. Meanwhile, a clean and beautiful Thar is being built through afforestation and environmental protection techniques. Thar is a relatively underdeveloped area. Thar Block-1 Integrated Coal Mine Power Project has provided more than 18,000 direct employment opportunities for the locals, and Mazhar Ali Khan is one of those who, like Gul Hassan, has inspired the other staff and demonstrated the Thar spirit. As a bridge between the National Power Control Center (NPCC) and the operation team, Mazhar Ali Khan's work has greatly contributed to the grid connection of the power station. When he joined Thar Coal Block-1 Power Generation (Pvt.) Ltd. in 2021 (TCB-1), Mazhar Ali worked assiduously on the initial energization of the project and also independently corresponded with the NPCC on the back-feeding and energization work. Starting with the coal mills from DCS, he went on to witness their proper functioning at a local site after conducting a two-hour trial test. - DNA

BISP's NSER to enhance country's capacity

ISLAMABAD: The launch of first ever dynamic National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) in the history of Pakistan will enhance the country's capacity to cope with the disasters, pandemic and economic instability by adopting more effective data collection mechanism of the poor households. The NSER is a landmark in Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)'s history. It is linked with National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) for data collection as well as validation and can allow swift registration of six distinct types of information for the

registry which shall be validated through NADRA. The six different types include registration of missed out households, eligibility appeal cut off for poor but ineligible households with widows or elderly people, roster updates for regular changes such as marital status, inclusion of new born, changes or correction in education, health, disability and employment information of household members, gauging information on households impacted by disasters and their re-registration, reassessment of ineligible households for last two years and reassess-

ment of eligible or beneficiary households for last three years. The registry provides registration and information update opportunity to all citizens. Since this registry is linked with NADRA, only NADRA authenticated information can be registered or updated. Besides registration centres, an app will also be launched through Google play store which will facilitate the already registered households in changing or correcting their information. While, mobile registration is also planned for far off areas which will register household information at their door steps.

It is pertinent to mention here that the NSER which is the scientifically based real-time data collection was launched by BISP to identify deserving families and households across Pakistan and to provide them targeted cash assistance. The BISP was launched in 2008 as the largest social safety net programme in the country with an aim to provide financial assistance to households living below the poverty line. While initiating the program, the foremost challenge was the unavailability of reliable data on poverty. - APP

CDA Chairman directs inquiry into Bhara Kahu incident

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Noor Alamin Mengal on Thursday directed an inquiry into the incident of a pillar falling on the Bhara Kahu Bypass. Taking to the media after reaching the spot, Noor ul Amin said that the accident occurred due to a crane slipping. "The safety and health of the labourers cannot be compromised at any cost," he added. The Chairman CDA assured that the incident would be fully investigated. - APP

Famous outlet sealed over failure to install POS App

RAWALPINDI: Regional Tax Office (RTO) Rawalpindi on Thursday sealed a famous business outlet over failure to install the Point of Sale (PoS) App on their systems and connecting their systems to the FBR for tax collection. Additional Commissioner Income Tax Kamran Ullah took action against Carobar/Karegar garments/ cloth shop located at Kashmir Road, Saddar for failing to POS App under the sales tax act 1990, said a news release. The RTO Rawalpindi is committed to bringing all major retailers under its Tax Net by integrating them with FBR's online system. - APP

Wheat Ship from Russia berthed at Gwadar Port

ISLAMABAD: The import of Russian wheat through Gwadar Port begins as the first bulk carrier "MV Lila Chennai" loaded with 50,000 metric tons of wheat has berthed at Gwadar Port on Thursday Gwadar Port will handle and process 4,50,000 metric tons' import of Russian wheat under an official agreement inked between TCP and GITL.

NADRA launches service empowering citizens

ISLAMABAD: The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has introduced the 'Ijazat Aap Ki service' that puts citizens in charge of their personal data. This cutting-edge service will enable citizens to give their consent before verification of the CNIC, ensuring that their sensitive data is protected and secure at all times. NADRA guarantees the confidentiality of citizens' data by taking effective measures to protect it. Now, by giving citizens real and effective ownership and restricting

unauthorized access, the authority has taken an unprecedented step. Chairman NADRA Tariq Malik, while launching the service, said that consent management was a digital mechanism in line with his vision to protect citizens' privacy and strengthen data security. "Your data is your personal property, and just like your physical property, citizens are from now onwards empowered to control access and protect against misuse or unwarranted use," he said. From March 2, all verification transac-

tions will require a 6-digit passcode sent to the citizen's registered mobile number to seek their consent to proceed with data sharing. The pin number will be presented for authentication and will be deemed as the citizen's consent to get his/her ID number verification from NADRA. NADRA collects citizen's mobile numbers at the time of registration for the ID card. The authority has also launched an SMS service, enabling citizens to enroll their mobile number. Citizens can send a text message containing their 13-digit ID card number on a short code to register their mobile number with NADRA. In response, NADRA will send a confirmation message to the sender in case the enrollment is successful. - APP

PTA & NADRA sign MoU for collaboration

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at PTA Headquarters in Islamabad, which will have significant impact at the national level for digital, social, and economic transformation. The various areas of collaboration include the adoption of new ICT technologies for e-governance initiatives, biometric verification innovations, and the use of ICTs to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets and contribute to Government of Pakistan's "Vision 2025". The collaboration will strengthen and streamline ongoing and future programs including Digital Identity, Multi-finger Biometric Verifica-

tion System, and Fraud Detection & Prevention to achieve organizational goals. The event was attended by Chairman NADRA, Mr. Tariq Malik; Member (Finance)

PTA, Mr. Muhammad Naveed along with senior officers from both organizations. The MoU was signed by DG (Strategy & Development) PTA, Mr. Chaudhry Mu-

dassar Naveed and Chief Project Officer NADRA, Mr. Muhammad Gohar Ahmed Khan. During the event, Chairman NADRA stressed the significance of

collaboration between the two organizations, highlighting PTA's valuable contributions to NADRA's initiatives. He expressed his optimistic outlook, anticipating positive outcomes for Pakistan as a result of this partnership. Member Finance PTA also expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration and the opportunities it presents. He emphasized that the goal is to promote innovation and cooperation by harnessing the strengths of both organizations. Moreover, the MoU aims to establish a coordination mechanism that will enable smooth working relations, capacity building through knowledge sharing, and conducting sessions/trainings on relevant issues and technological advancements. The partnership between the two organizations will contribute to the country's overall vision of becoming a digital society and a leader in technology innovation.



Briefs

Famous outlet sealed over failure to install POS App

RAWALPINDI: Regional Tax Office (RTO) Rawalpindi on Thursday sealed a famous business outlet over failure to install the Point of Sale (PoS) App on their systems and connecting their systems to the FBR for tax collection. Additional Commissioner Income Tax Kamran Ullah took action against Carobar/Karegar a garments/ cloth shop located at Kashmir Road, Saddar for failing to POS App under the sales tax act 1990, said a news release.

The RTO Rawalpindi is committed to bringing all major retailers under its Tax Net by integrating them with Federal Board of Revenue (FBR's) online system. It is pertinent to note that FBR has allowed its field formations to seal Tier-1 retailers' outlets by amending provisions relating to penalties of the Sales Tax Act, 1990.—APP

Under-construction Bara kahu bridge collapses

ISLAMABAD: The girders of the under-construction bridge collapsed in the Bara Kahu area on Thursday, resulting in heavy traffic jams in the area. According to a police spokesman, no casualty was reported as the girders collapsed while police and other rescue agencies reached the spot for a timely operation. "The traffic officials are also present at the site to maintain traffic flow," he added. It is pertinent to mention here that the under-construction shuttering of a bridge at Bhara Kahu bypass collapsed earlier on February 25, killing two laborers and injuring three others.—APP

Services' trade deficit shrinks by 88.97%

ISLAMABAD: The services trade deficit narrowed by 88.97 per cent as exports witnessed a growth of 6.39 per cent during the first seven months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. According to PBS data, the exports from the country during July-January (2022-23) were recorded at \$4,196.76 million against the exports of \$3,944.84 million in July-January (2021-22), showing growth of 6.39 per cent. On the other hand, the services' imports declined by 32.67 per cent from US\$6,681.39 million last year to US\$4,498.50 million during the period under review. Based on the figures, the services trade deficit was recorded at US\$301.74 million this year against a deficit of US\$2,736.56 million during the last fiscal year, showing a decline of 32.67 per cent. On a year-on-year basis, the services exports during the month of January 2023 went up by 17.31 per cent to US\$601.87 million against the exports of US\$513.07 million during January 2022.

On the other hand, the imports decreased by 47.38 per cent from US\$1,110.04 million last January to US\$584.10 million in January 2023, according to the data. On a month-on-month basis, the services exports from the country decreased by 18.12 per cent as compared to the exports of US\$735.10 million in December 2022. The imports also went down by 10.05 per cent as compared to the imports of US\$649.38 million in December 2022, the data revealed. It is pertinent to mention here that the country's merchandise trade deficit witnessed a decline of 33.18 per cent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year. The trade deficit during July-February (2022-23) was recorded at \$21.300 billion against the deficit of \$31.879 billion in July-February (2021-22), a decline of 33.18 per cent. The exports during the period were recorded at \$18,793 billion against \$20,573 billion last year.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain met the Saudi Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki in his office.—APP

Contaminated water impacting quality of already scarce food

Proper sustainable agriculture practices are to be implemented on an early basis. Pakistan is a region where a diverse climate can be seen, so there is a need to accurately look at the parameters at a local and regional level to overcome this uncertainty

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A round table discussion on "The Impact of Climate Change on Global Food Production; Alternatives for Pakistan" was held at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. DG Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency, Ms. Farzana Altaf spoke about the grave challenges caused by Climate Change in the agriculture sector. She mentioned that Farmers are withdrawing water from the ground without taking into consideration their crop water requirements, resulting in groundwater depletion. Similarly, less water is available for plant

growth and it cannot fulfill the need to nourish plants properly. She also added that most available water is now contaminated which directly and indirectly affects the quality and production of already scarce food. Mr. Arif Goheer, Head of Agriculture, Forestry, and Land Use Section at GCISC Islamabad proceeded with the discussion that food security is not just food production but its demand, supply, and accessibility as well. We need agrological zoning to develop proper cropping patterns as every province of Pakistan has different lithological formations. Unfortunately, FAO has sponsored the agrological zones distribu-

tion of both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab but its methodologies are different. He suggested developing agroecological zones of the country using the same methodology and on urgent basis. Another challenge that we are facing for a long is population growth and rapid urbanization. We are shrinking the land by making more houses with unplanned development added Ms. Ayesha Ilyas, Research Associate at SDPI. Ms. Zeemal Ali from Jinnah Institute underlined that food security in reality is the scarcity of quality nutritional food that we are facing. By using contaminated water for agriculture we are diminishing the quality of our food. She fur-

ther added that during policy-making we must need to consult the local farmers that are using conventional practices for a long. Ms. Komal Malik, visiting lecturer at the International Islamic University linked food security with the national security of Pakistan. She mentioned that it is as pertinent and important as national security and shall be treated as such. Lastly, the speakers agreed on several practices that need to be followed. For instance, the need to invest in earlier indirect reduction strategies and do major reformations to replace Sugarcane (High CWR) with sugar beet (less CWR). A consensus was created on implementing fine on food wastage

which encouraged a need to discourage the wastage of the maximum quantity of food happening in restaurants and hotels. Similarly, the use of conventional fertilizer (Livestock dung) instead of agrochemicals was emphasized as it shall barren the agricultural land in the long term. At last, it was communicated that a strategic district-wise agriculture plan is to be ensured and the Conversion of agricultural land to commercial plots is to be stopped on a priority basis. Proper sustainable agriculture practices are to be implemented on an early basis. Pakistan is a region where a diverse climate can be seen, so there is a need to accurately look at the parameters at a local and regional level to overcome this uncertainty.

National Headquarters PRCS provides state-of-the-art Blood Collection Van

ISLAMABAD: The National Headquarters of Pakistan Red Crescent Society has handed over state-of-the-art Blood Collection Van to Red Crescent Punjab Branch to increase the capacity of its Blood Donation Center. Secretary General PRCS Muhammad Abaidullah Khan presented the keys and documents of Blood Collection Van to Secretary Red Crescent Punjab Branch Mohammad Zahid, in a simple ceremony held at PRCS NHQ here on Thursday.

The document was signed by Muhammad Abaidullah Khan on behalf of the National Headquarters and Muhammad Zahid on behalf of the Punjab Branch. The Blood Collection Van was handed over to Punjab Branch on the directions from Chairman PRCS Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari in wake of his commitment to strength all Red Crescent branches and to bring innovations in depart-



ments and programs for efficient service delivery. Four people can donate blood simultaneously in the blood collection van while its storage capacity is 92 units.

It is pertinent to mention here that PRCS Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmad Laghari during his visit to the Punjab Provincial Headquarters last month, assured the facilitation

and provision of all possible support in addressing the challenges being faced by the branch. He also indicated the implementation and fulfillment of requests from the Punjab branch for the capacity building and strengthening of its programs.

On this occasion, Secretary Punjab Branch Muhammad Zahid on behalf of Chairman Red Crescent Punjab

Branch Justice (R) Sheikh Ahmed Feroq thanked PRCS Chairman Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari and Secretary General Abaidullah Khan. Earlier, PRCS NHQ also provided two modern ambulances to Punjab Branch to increase PHQ's capacity and broaden the services of Blood Donor Center and Red Crescent Medical College.

Purple vegetables may have superior anti-diabetic properties

ISLAMABAD: According to the CDC, over 37 million Americans about 1 in 10 Trusted Source individuals have diabetes, and approximately 90-95% of them have type 2 diabetes. Normally, a hormone called insulin moves glucose (sugar) from the blood into cells, where it is used for energy. But in type 2 diabetes, the body doesn't use or produce insulin properly, and glucose builds up in the blood instead of being used by cells. If diabetes is not managed properly, it can cause many health problems over time, including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, nerve damage, eye damage and vision loss, kidney disease and foot problems. While various factors can increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, including a family history of diabetes, research has shown that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can delay or prevent the onset of diabetes and enhance the well-being of individuals with diabetes-related health problems. The benefits associated with fruits and vegetables are attributed to their high concentrations of polyphenols. One particular class of polyphenols, anthocyanins, are responsible for giving red-orange to blue-violet colors in plants. Studies in the United States, Finland, and Sweden have shown that consumption of anthocyanin-rich foods, particularly berries, reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes. Many studies have been carried out to better understand the anti-diabetic properties of anthocyanins. A new review article published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry summarizes the effects of anthocyanins on the gut microbiome, energy metabolism and inflammation, with a special focus on acylated anthocyanins. Acylated vs. nonacylated anthocyanins Anthocyanins are divided into 2 categories based on their molecular structure: acylated and nonacylated. Acylated anthocyanins have a chemical group called an acyl group (made up of a carbon atom and an oxygen atom double-bonded to each other, with a single bond to another carbon atom), which nonacylated anthocyanins lack. Compared to nonacylated anthocyanins, acylated anthocyanins are more stable and more resistant to digestion. For this reason, they are not digested and absorbed in the stomach, and upper intestine, and they pass through to the colon, where they are degraded extensively by gut microorganisms.—Online

ANF recovers over 417 kg drugs; arrests 12

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in nine operations managed to recover over 417 kg drugs and arrested 12 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Thursday. He informed that ANF foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from 'Bara' to Punjab and recovered 312 kg charras in a raid conducted near Peshawar Ring Road Hayatabad Toll Plaza. Charras was concealed in a car while two accused residents of Mansehra were also rounded up. In a joint operation, ANF and FC recovered 10.8 kg charras from Karak area.

In third operation, another bid to smuggle drugs from 'Bara' to Punjab was also foiled. ANF and FC recovered 3.6 kg charras from the possession of an accused netted near Khyber Tirah check post. ANF managed to recover four heroin-filled capsules from the possession of a Bahrain-bound passenger resident of Muzaffargarh going on flight no FG-0771. The spokesman informed that in two operations at International Mail Office Rawalpindi, ANF recovered over 5.9 kg Ice drug absorbed in waistcoats, being sent to Doha and 250 intoxicated tablets being sent to Canada. ANF while conducting a raid near Sheikhpura Toll Plaza seized 48 kg opium and 33.5 kg charras besides netting five accused.—APP

Trade deficit narrows by 33.18% in 8 months of FY23

ISLAMABAD: The trade deficit witnessed a decline of 33.18 per cent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The trade deficit during July-February (2022-23) was recorded at \$21.300 billion against the deficit of \$31.879 billion in July-February (2021-22), a decline of 33.18 per cent. The exports during the period were recorded at \$18,793 billion against \$20,573 billion last year, showing a decline of 8.65 per cent. On the other hand, the imports witnessed a sharp decline of 23.56 per cent falling from \$52.452 billion last year to \$40.093 billion during the current fiscal year. On a year-on-year basis, the exports from the country witnessed a decline of 18.67 per cent and were recorded at \$2,305 billion in February 2023 against the exports of \$2,834 billion in February 2022. The imports also decreased to \$4,009 billion in February 2023 from \$5,853 billion in February 2022, showing negative growth of 31.51 per cent. On a month-on-month basis, the exports during February 2023 however increased by 2.72 per cent when compared to the exports of \$2,244 billion in January 2023.—APP

Urdu poet 'Nasir Kazmi' remembered

ISLAMABAD: Famous Urdu poet Nasir Kazmi was remembered on his 51st death anniversary when people from all walks of life including literary circles with media platforms paid him rich tributes for his poetic contribution.

Nasir Kazmi was considered one of the greatest poets of his era. He was born on December 8, 1925, at Ambala in British India. He received education from Ambala, Simla and Lahore. After the creation of Pakistan, he came to Lahore, electronic channels reported.

He did some journalistic work with 'Aurqa-e-Nau' as an editor and became editor-in-chief of the magazine in 1952. Later, he was associated with Radio Pakistan and other literary publications and organizations. Nasir Kazmi started his poetic life in 1940 by following the style of Akhtar Sherani and wrote romantic poems and sonnets. He also began writing ghazals under the guidance of Hafeez Hoshyarpuri. He was a great admirer of Mir Taqi Mir. His poetry has been used in several songs in dramas during Pakistan Television's (PTV) golden era and in Pakistani films.—APP

Uncovering the complexities of trophy hunting in Gilgit Baltistan

NADIA ZARTAJ



Each year, mainly in the winter season wildlife population census is being carryout by the Wildlife department GB, WWF-Pakistan, and Snow Leopard Foundation to get the estimated number of the species in selected valleys

In a recent talk, the chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Khalid Khurshed has given directives to the wildlife department of Gilgit-Baltistan to formulate policies for snow leopard trophy hunting in the region. The statement sparked outrage on social media about whether snow leopards, a vulnerable species on the index of IUCN can be hunted or not. Spokesperson to Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Imitiaz Taj, told that "the trophy hunting program is a great source of income for the community of Gilgit-Baltistan and annually attracts national and international tourists to the region. If the number of snow leopards has increased in the region, the same model for the hunting of Ibex and Markhor will be adopted for the hunting of snow leopards looking into consideration the CITIBS (The Convention on International

Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)"

Imran, the sub-divisional wildlife officer Gilgit-Baltistan, told in detail "Trophy hunting was started in the year 1992 from Bar Valley Nagar GB with the support of WWF-Pakistan and at the early stage, few communities agreed to adopt the trophy hunting model as they considered hunting their traditional game and source of food. Gradually, the community got convenience and supported the conservation concept. Now there is community control hunting areas all over Gilgit Baltistan which have helped to increase the population of ibexes, markhors, and snow leopards".

Ibex, Markhor, and blue sheep are trophy-hunting animals in the region. Each year, mainly in the winter season wildlife population census is being carryout by the Wildlife department GB, WWF-Pakistan, and Snow Leopard Foundation to get the estimated

number of the species in selected valleys. A proper mechanism has been developed for the bidding of the trophies, where hunters are from local, national, and international participants.

There is a conservation plan for the distribution of money earned from trophy hunting. 80% of the total amount goes to the community and 30% to give to the GB government. Based on the provided data, the revenue for trophy hunting for the season 2021-2022 was:

Markhor: 118323780 PKR Blue Sheep: 94659024 PKR Ibex (Exportable): 23664756 PKR Ibex (Non-Exportable, National): 118323780 PKR The revenue for trophy hunting for the season 2022-2023 (up to 31st January 2023) was: Haji Mirza, Vice president of Khunjerab village organization (KVO), told in detail "the community is getting benefits in many ways directly & indirectly. Cash rewards from trophy

hunting is distributed through cooperative society share, where they also can get soft loans and other financial benefits. Part of these funds is spent for educational purposes, providing scholarships and establishing hostels for students, especially girls. The community is provided health insurance from the amount received and in emergency cases, soft loans are provided to the needy people"

Haider Raza, Director of North, WWF-Pakistan who is also a member on the snow leopard advisory group, told that "Keeping in view the climate change impacts, anthropogenic activities, and encroachment in wildlife habitat in the region, there is a dire need to revisit the trophy hunting model based on a scientific and robust survey of the wildlife census including snow leopards before taking a decision to include snow leopard as a trophy hunt animal."

COVID origins tracing

The so-called "Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party" recently cobbled together by the US House of Representatives is set to make its debut on Tuesday evening. Holding the first hearing in prime time is mainly out of practical consideration to facilitate the show. It was revealed that the hearing will focus on "security and other threats" related to China. In fact, they have already prepared political "dirt bombs" to attack China. Just two days before the hearing, on February 26, the Wall Street Journal reported exclusively that the US Energy Department had concluded that "the COVID pandemic most likely arose from a laboratory leak." The report was fewer than five pages and even the Energy Department itself labeled it as being made with "low confidence." Nevertheless it has once again ignited the pile of dead ashes of US' political manipulation of virus origins tracing. As long as "China" is labeled on the package, even if it's trash, it can immediately be "turned into treasure." This is the current political situation in the US. In the past two years, the virus origins tracing issue has been used by US politicians as an omnipotent political tool that can be brought up at any time to disgust people due to its unverifiable and difficult to disprove nature. To be frank, "low confidence" basically means baseless. It is quite inappropriate that the tracing of the virus origins is carried out by the Energy Department. Its unfounded conclusions have inexplicably attracted a lot of attention, indicating some people have seen the timing to manipulate the issue. In January and February 2021, a WHO-China joint expert team that consisted of both international and Chinese authoritative experts conducted a 28-day investigation and research in China, and released a report on global study of origins of the virus, which reached an authoritative, professional, and scientific conclusion that is by no means matched by anything concocted by the US Energy Department and the FBI. The US relies on its loud voice and dominance of discourse power to confuse right and wrong on the international stage, but a lie repeated a thousand times is still a lie. On the issue of origins tracing, it is US' turn to open up its suspicious biological laboratories and invite international authoritative experts to investigate. The hearing has not yet started, but we can roughly imagine what kind of scene it will be. From the "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq to the "White Helmets" in Syria, they are all produced on the same assembly line. Historical experience tells the world that no matter how many lies Washington spreads and how many humanitarian disasters it causes, its political elites and media may not even blush. Otherwise, how could this shameful political farce be staged one by one?

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Lukashenko's China trip

At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is paying a state visit to China from Tuesday to Thursday. During the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, last September, the two heads of state held a bilateral meeting and announced to upgrade China-Belarus relations to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership. At that time, both sides said in a joint statement that they would strengthen exchanges at high and various levels. Lukashenko's visit to China will help the two sides further implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state. China has another "iron brother" besides Pakistan, that is, Belarus. Over the past 31 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China and Belarus have supported each other and cooperated for mutual benefits. China is one of the first countries to recognize Belarus' independence, and Belarus is also among the first countries to respond to and participate in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative. The China-Belarus industrial park, jointly built by the two countries, is known as a "pearl" along the Silk Road Economic Belt. The economies of China and Belarus are highly complementary, and the potential to further strengthen cooperation is vast. Some Western media outlets still view this visit through a biased lens, describing Belarus as Russia's "little ally" and suggesting that China's "expanding influence" should be a cause for concern. This view shows disrespect for Belarus. It is not only highly narrow-minded, but also reflects some Western political elites' insincerity and hypocrisy toward peace. Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are known as the three Slavic brothers, sharing the same historical roots. Minsk has played the role of mediator between Russia and Ukraine on multiple occasions. At the same time, as one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China has always played a positive role in promoting peace talks. This should be seen as a positive asset for the international community. Entering 2023, China has successively welcomed visits by leaders from multiple countries, and more leaders are expected to visit China in the future. French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he will visit China in early April, following Lukashenko's visit. EU leaders Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen are also expected to visit China in the first half of this year. These visits are likely to focus on bilateral cooperation and explore regional hot issues. We welcome President Lukashenko's visit to China, as well as all foreign friends who are committed to peace and development. A friendly and gentle China full of vitality and opportunities will naturally have a strong attractiveness, which is fundamentally different from some big powers that are deliberately seeking to form cliques and alliances. China conforms to the trend of the times and definitely has an inexhaustible and powerful driving force.

President is not a lame duck...

Qamar Bashir



It goes without saying that Pakistan's constitution is the supreme law of the land, and it provides the framework for the country's governance and legal system. It establishes the rights and duties of citizens, the structure of government, and the limits of state power. If someone violates the constitution, they may be charged with contempt of court or sedition, depending on the nature

and responsibilities, including: Appointing the Army Chief of Staff and other top military leaders. The bestowing of military honours and awards. Authorization of military activities and deployments. Declare war or an emergency condition in consultation with the Prime Minister and National Security Council. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, which is responsible for coordinating the activities of the three military branches. The implementation of martial law in the event of a national security emergency or threat. I proceeded further to comprehend the translations of constitutional provisions in the act and discovered that Chapter 2 Armed forces Act 1952 granted the President enormous powers, which are as follows: Appointing the Army Chief of Staff and other top military leaders. Approve the appointment of all regular army officers, as well as promotions and transfers, in agreement with the COAS. Approval of the army's governing rules and regulations, including the code of conduct and discipline. Authorizing military activities and deployments, as well as the use of military force abroad. Approval of military court sentences and commutation, remission, or suspension of sentences handed down by such tribunals. Establishing military courts and appointing its judges. Authorizing the bestowal of military honours and awards. Afterwards, I also consulted the Role of Business of the government of Pakistan to outline the President's powers in the performance of executive duties. Even so, these powers are immense: What exactly are they? Appointing the Prime Minister in cooperation with National Assembly members. Appointing federal ministers, advisors, and assistants under the Prime Minister's advice. Delivering assent to bills that have been enacted by the Parliament and are then signed into law. Convocation and adjournment of National Assembly and Senate sessions. Outlining the government's policies and programmes in a joint or separate address to the legislature at the beginning of each legislative year. Appointing the Chief Justice and other judges of the Pakistan Supreme Court and other federal courts in conjunction with the Pakistan Chief Justice and the Prime Minister. Approving the appointment of the Nation-

Accountability Bureau's Chairman and members (NAB). Serving as Pakistan's ceremonial head of state, greeting foreign guests, and representing Pakistan in international forums. Establishing a state of emergency or suspending fundamental rights under specific conditions, in collaboration with the Prime Minister and the National Security Advisory Council. These are extremely significant and pivotal powers granted to the President by the Rules of Business. I am consequently always perplexed as to why a president elected through a rigorous election process is referred to as a lame duck. I believe that the problem stems from the failure of the President's administration to enforce the translation of his constitutional powers into acts and, subsequently, rules and regulations by each appropriate organ of state. Thus, it is necessary that each and every provision of the constitution pertaining to the President's powers be codified and enacted by an act of parliament, followed by the formulation of all applicable rules and regulations. In addition, there is a need to establish an effective system for identifying the gap between constitutional provisions and their translation into acts and regulations, filling that gap with constant pursuit, advocacy, and administrative means, and establishing punitive provisions for failure to enact constitutional provisions, failure to translate them into rules and regulations, and subsequent failure to implement the rules and regulations. It goes without saying that Pakistan's constitution is the supreme law of the land, and it provides the framework for the country's governance and legal system. It establishes the rights and duties of citizens, the structure of government, and the limits of state power. If someone violates the constitution, they may be charged with contempt of court or sedition, depending on the nature of their offense. The penalty for these charges can range from fines to imprisonment, and in some cases, even death. President's offices should identify all instances in which orders issued by him in the exercise of his constitutional powers have been violated and bring all such cases to court for proper and forceful adjudication in order to establish the constitutional authority of the office of the President.

Space 2.0: Developing nations lead the race for the final frontier

Ray Hanania

On the peaceful use of space, space science, technology, and its applications, Türkiye and the UAE have also signed a document. Along with partnering with state actors, Türkiye has collaborated with private enterprises like SpaceX to produce rockets and other space exploration technology. SpaceX launched the Turksat 5A satellite in 2021. Türkiye's first mini satellite, Grizu-263A, created by

swing as developing nations in Asia and Africa improve their space capabilities through bilateral agreements. India, Pakistan, Türkiye, and Central Asian Turkic states are investing in space-related technologies, collaborating on space initiatives, and even constructing launch facilities. Africa is diving headlong into the space race. The main driving force behind African states' participation is the attainment of socioeconomic and environmental objectives. While with assistance from the US and China, African governments are advancing their space capabilities and moving toward becoming less dependent on foreign tech. Egypt built an entire satellite manufacturing, installation, and testing facility with Chinese assistance, laying the groundwork for the nation's aerospace industry. Sudan has successfully launched its first satellite for a scientific experiment, and Algeria is getting ready to launch its first commercial satellite. China has also expanded its BeiDou positioning system's global service capability by establishing the first overseas BeiDou centre in Tunisia. South Africa and Algeria are constructing stations with a similar appearance. However, Nigeria and Rwanda were the first African nations to ratify the Artemis Accords. The US government signed this agreement with the support of 23 other countries in order to promote peaceful space exploration. The US-based commercial enterprise SpaceX helped South Africa launch its satellite using a Falcon 9 rocket. On January 30, 2023, African countries established their own African Space Agency to advance space exploration on the continent. The organisation will act as the hub for upcoming collaborations between African space agencies. African space policy coordination and implementation are the fundamental duties of this space agency. Central Asian Turkic states are connected and conscious of the awe of being in space because they were a part of the old Soviet Union. In order to grow in the space industry, three nations – Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan – each have their own space agencies and privately-owned firms. These three nations own eleven functioning satellites. Kazakhstan is the most technologically advanced of all. It has successfully developed nanosatellites and is ready to offer this service to other countries. For example, Kazakhstan is collaborating with Mongolia and Uzbekistan to develop an orbital fleet. In addition to advancing space-based technology, Kazakhstan actively supports international cooperation. Meanwhile, Türkiye plays an active role due to its rapid collaboration with international space agencies

to launch and develop its own satellites. The Turkish government's most recent success is tied to space-based technologies, including the Turkish GPS, improvements in computer cameras, four satellite launch sites, and the high-resolution Gokturk 3 satellites. The Turkish Space Agency (TUA) has created a ten-year strategy plan with ten objectives for entering the space race. These objectives include sending the first Turk to space, establishing the first observational satellite, and reaching the moon. The most critical goal is to create a regional positioning and timing system. Türkiye has signed numerous bilateral agreements with other developing nations. The Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) of Pakistan and the Turkish Aerospace Industry have inked a collaboration agreement to develop satellite and space projects. In addition to signing a memorandum of understanding on space and satellite systems with El Salvador, Türkiye signed its first satellite export contract with an Argentinian company. On the peaceful use of space, space science, technology, and its applications, Türkiye and the UAE have also signed a document. Along with partnering with state actors, Türkiye has collaborated with private enterprises like SpaceX to produce rockets and other space exploration technology. SpaceX launched the Turksat 5A satellite in 2021. Türkiye's first mini satellite, Grizu-263A, created by the Grizu-263 Space Team of Bulent Ecevit University in Zonguldak province, was also launched in 2022 on a Falcon 9 rocket by SpaceX. In order to train and provide flight service for Turkish space travellers, the Turkish government has inked an agreement with Axiom Space, a US-based commercial space infrastructure corporation that conducts private journeys to the International Space Station. Looking towards South Asia, the Indian space vision is fundamentally based on cooperation in space. Their main goal is collaborating with developing nations to replace the international space station with something akin to it. India has over 230 agreements with 60 countries and five international organisations, including anything from satellite construction to capacity building. On January 26, India collaborated with Egypt in the space industry, offering strategic opportunities. India is incorporating the private sector into the space sector to accomplish its long-term goals, similar to what China and the US have done. This will position India as a significant emerging satellite internet market with a potential

annual revenue incentive of \$1 billion. When it comes to the region's burgeoning space sector, India is expanding its aerospace capabilities to support the growth of Asian countries. It demonstrated the capability of using low-cost Space 2.0 technology to build and launch 104 CubeSats into orbit in a single mission, indicating that developing countries can do so without relying on the support of international space players. For Pakistan, which became the first South Asian and Muslim country to enter the space race in 1962, growth has been stunted due to a lack of research, technology, and political will. Today, the ability to manufacture and deploy domestic satellites is the primary goal of Pakistan's space Vision 2040. China needs a market for its growing space knowledge, and Pakistan needs help establishing its space industry. This collaboration has the potential to improve their already strong friendship. Apart from Türkiye, Pakistan also has partnerships with Thailand and the UAE to produce satellites and other space-based technology. One of Pakistan's current major issues is a lack of financing, yet cooperation in the space industry with the aforementioned states can be very beneficial. As part of the BRI, China has already begun to provide technical assistance, switching from the American-owned GPS to China's BeiDou and launching two satellites into orbit using Long March rockets. Additionally, assisted by China, Pakistan is anxious to send astronauts into space. Chinese efforts to expand space cooperation with Pakistan include constructing a space centre and the launch of additional Pakistani satellites. Developing countries are more interested in cooperative environments to broaden their civilian-military space-based capabilities. In contrast, existing superpowers are focusing on developing anti-ballistic weapons and space deterrence to protect their space assets. The nature of astropolitics is changing more toward cooperation as a result of this unconscious alliance-making in the space sector. This will eventually reduce developing countries' reliance on US space capabilities, as developing nations advance the global space economy in fields like space exploration, mini-satellites, space station building, and space-related technology. Furthermore, the issue of space debris and international space law will be given careful consideration to fill gaps in the Moon Treaty, Outer Space Treaty, and other national-level agreements.

Courtesy: TRT World

Scientific breakthroughs by Asian and African nations have helped democratise space exploration through cooperation, not competition. Space exploration is no longer the exclusive domain of superpowers. It has always been a global commons, and this global commons is currently being explored by other developing countries with the potential to change the nature of outer space. The democratisation of space exploration is now in full

Briefs

Govt trying to undo PTI's mess

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Thursday said Imran Khan had no right to question the economic policies of the current government which had been striving to undo the "mess" created by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) regime in its four-year tenure. She, in a tweet, said ironically, the "shameless person", who pushed the country into an economic quagmire with his own hands, had the audacity to lift finger on others. He (Imran Khan) did not only ruin the economy but also "plunged the country into political and constitutional crises", the minister added. The minister also shared some pictures on her Twitter handle giving a complete analysis of the economic performance of the PTI and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz respective governments. She said the launch of "Imrani Project" in 2016 was the beginning of a conspiracy against Pakistan. The economic growth would not have nosedived if that project was not launched, she said, adding the inflation and the unemployment rate had also increased due to the wrong economic policies of the PTT's government.

Pak values longstanding relationship with US: PM

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday underscored that Pakistan valued its longstanding relationship with the United States and wanted to further deepen bilateral relations. The prime minister was talking to a four-member U.S. California State Assembly delegation led by Chris Holden that called on him. Other members of the delegation included Assembly members Eloise Reyes, Mike Gipson and Windy Carillo, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. The prime minister said Pakistan and the US celebrated the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations last year. In that backdrop, he said the signing of the 'Sister-State Resolution' between California and Punjab on January 9 this year was a welcome development. Punjab and California could work together in areas of mutual interest, including trade, investment, agriculture, IT, education, and cultural exchanges, he added. The prime minister appreciated the positive role being played by the Pakistani-American diaspora in further strengthening people-to-people linkages. Chris Holden thanked the prime minister for the hospitality extended to the delegation during their visit and underscored the need to further expand Pak-US relations. - APP

210 civilians killed in 24 days of Somaliland clashes

MOGADISHU: More than 200 people lost their lives over 24 days of clashes between security forces and clans in a disputed part of Somalia's breakaway Somaliland region, an official said on Thursday. "210 civilians were killed and 680 others were wounded in the fighting, which broke out between Somaliland forces and the local community in Las Anod," the mayor of the contested town, Abdurahim Ali Ismail, told a press conference. "The fighting started on the 6th of February 2023 and continued for 24 days," he said, adding that 200,000 families had fled from their homes following the clashes. Somaliland, which has claimed independence from Somalia since 1991 but has never been recognised internationally, is usually seen as a beacon of stability in a chaotic region. Political tensions, however, have surged in recent months, leading to deadly violence between Somaliland's forces and militias loyal to Somalia. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Workers are busy removing debris after the collapse new contracted Bhara Kahu enter change flay over bridge pillar with the help of heavy machinery, in Federal Capital. -Online

Agora, IPS organize joint webinar

Experts discuss ways to de-carbonize power sector

The government is motivated to make the necessary transit to renewable energy sources on a war-footing basis. Also, many mega-scale and distributed generation projects based on solar PV are in pipeline and AEDB was committed to their timely execution, he said

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Renewable energy officials and experts in an international webinar organized jointly by Agora Energiewende, Germany and Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) reviewed and discussed the '2030 solar and wind roadmap for Pakistan' chalked out by National Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) under its Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) 2022-31. The speakers included Shah Jahan Mirza, CEO, Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB), Ali Zain Banatwala, deputy managing director, National Transmission & Despatch Company (NTDC), Tobias März, German climate activist and solar engineer associated with '8.2 Renewable Energy Experts', Hassan Jafar Zaidi, CEO, Power Planners International (PPI), Naila Saleh, project manager, Agora Energiewende, and Lubna Riaz, researcher, Energy, Water & Climate Change Program, Institute of

Policy Studies (IPS). Shah Jahan Mirza reiterated the government's commitment towards lessening reliance on fossil fuels and de-carbonization of the power sector by ambitious targets of renewable energy uptake as outlined in the Alternative and Renewable Policy 2019, which aims to boost the renewable energy share to 30 per cent by 2030. The government is motivated to make the necessary transit to renewable energy sources on a war-footing basis. Also, many mega-scale and distributed generation projects based on solar PV are in the pipeline and AEDB was committed to their timely execution, he said. Sharing the government's vision to uptake the renewable energy share, Banatwala highlighted that the renewable energy integration with the grid may cause some issues with the system operations of the grid due to the intermittent nature. However, he said, NTDC is playing its role by carrying out a detailed analysis of the scenarios of renewable energy uptake

mandating the collective efforts of de-carbonization of the power sector at the earliest. The RE experts discussed the results of an ambitious solar and wind roadmap performed by '8.2 Renewable Energy Experts' and 'Power Planners International' offering recommendations for accelerating the development of wind and solar power beyond the governmental target adopted in the IGCEP. The study titled "Beyond IGCEP 2022" reviews the 10-year generation expansion planning for Pakistan and analyzes if a more ambitious pursuit of solar and wind power ("VRE") by 2030/31 would be possible and beneficial. Based on the hourly dispatch of the year 2030, it comes to the conclusion that an increase of the planned total VRE capacity from 20 GW to 33 GW by 2030 would be possible by adding minor grid infrastructure reinforcements. Furthermore, this would reduce energy generation total emissions by 50 per cent and the average energy generation costs by 15 per cent. The study recommends including this more

ambitious target in the next iteration of the IGCEP (due for June 2023), pursue a strategic reinforcement of the road infrastructure (including the HVDC link to Chaghai in Balochistan), put a strong focus on the flexibilization of the operation of hydro and coal units as well as implementing a stringent and localized annual tender plan for auctioning out the 33 GW of solar and wind power throughout the next ten years. In this scenario, the rooftop solar system has a huge potential and can be a win-win providing sustainability, security of supply, and affordability, highlighted Saleh. For Pakistan, rooftop solar makes a compelling case as it can help in meeting local demands, reduce capacity payment burden and transmission and distribution losses, and manage daytime peaks. She emphasized the need to design suitable business models which ensure a viable business case for involved stakeholders and address the prevalent challenges in the socio-technical

system, e.g. high upfront cost, finance mobilization problems, regulatory gaps, and lack of facilitative organizational, business, and finance models. With this, it becomes evident that the socioeconomic development of the communities is highly dependent on access to energy. While enhancing grid infrastructure to the off-grid areas, in which about 50 million of the population resides, has remained a strangled issue, mini and micro-grids (MGs) provide a favorable option for electrification, underscored Riaz. These grids provide a midway between standalone and grid systems as they operate like autonomous and decentralized electricity networks capable of functioning separately from a national grid. This would improve rural livelihood and increase local business growth by adding value creation to local products and services. Moreover, RE-dominated MGs present much more financial feasibility as compared to conventional fossil-fuel-based generation, she added.

Barca to face Madrid knowing their season is in danger

MADRID: Barcelona are sitting pretty at the top of La Liga, holding a seven-point lead over Real Madrid after just two league defeats, and have already claimed the first silverware of the season by convincingly beating their arch-rivals 3-1 in January's Super Cup. But they have also been eliminated from Europe - twice - and hit a bad run of form, with their attacking problems starkly shown by Sunday's turgid 1-0 loss at lowly Almeria. Heading into Thursday's Copa del Rey semi-final first leg against Real at the Bernabeu, those contradictions neatly summarise Barca's current state: plenty of promise, but worrying signs that everything could quickly unravel. Similarly, the delicate balance between positives and negatives reflects the work of manager Xavi, who is being forced to make

tactical compromises to satisfy short-term demands for success. Xavi, without doubt, has made Barca better since he was appointed in November 2021. He inherited a mess, with a lack of direction on the field and the aftermath of a financial disaster behind the scenes. Memories of embarrassing European defeats were particularly acute: the infamous collapse at Liverpool in 2019; a humiliating 8-2 thrashing against Bayern Munich the following year; a 4-1 home loss to Paris St-Germain in 2021. When Xavi took over, it felt like Barca were a very long way from being able to challenge the best. Now, though, the picture has changed. Although Xavi has failed to embark upon an extended European journey, at least they competed. Barca were unlucky to suffer elimination from

a tough Champions League group alongside Bayern and Inter Milan, and pushed Manchester United hard in the Europa League play-off. In La Liga, a commanding run of 12 wins in 13 games has provided a strong platform for the club to claim their first league title in four years, mainly thanks to a greatly improved defence with just eight goals conceded in the opening 23 games. That new-found defensive strength has been particularly important in recent weeks, because goals have dried up. Robert Lewandowski - so impressive earlier in the season - has returned from the World Cup looking every day of his 34 years and is now injured, joining electric but erratic winger Ousmane Dembele in the treatment room. Elsewhere in the forward line, Ferran Torres has been largely

disappointing since signing from Manchester City last January, former Leeds star Raphinha has been hit and miss, and Ansu Fati's teenage promise has been alarmingly derailed by injuries. Barca have scored more than once in just three of their past nine league games, instead relying on a series of clean sheets to pick up points. Xavi deserves credit for recognising the team to become more compact and defensively disciplined, something he has achieved by reluctantly moving away from his preferred methods. A devout disciple of the Johan Cruyff-inspired 'juego de posicion' (positional play) that has been Barca's trademark for decades, Xavi took over with clear tactical intentions after serving a three-year managerial apprenticeship with Al Sadd in Qatar. - Agencies

Newcastle owners vow to build on League Cup final run

LONDON: Newcastle's Saudi-funded ownership group say the League Cup final defeat against Manchester United has increased their desire to bring sustained success to the club. Newcastle have been 80 per cent owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund since October 2021, with their investment in Eddie Howe's squad playing a major role in the club's revival. The Magpies were languishing in the Premier League relegation zone when the consortium took over, but this season they have climbed to fifth in the table and reached a first cup final since 1999. Newcastle chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan was at Wembley for the 2-0 loss against United and that disappointment has whetted the owners' appetite for the future. In a message to supporters, the club's board said: "On the pitch, the team gave everything to achieve the victory we all craved. With the support of Eddie and the backroom team, they showed tenacity, bravery and absolute commitment to the cause right until the end. "While the result didn't go our way, the way everyone stuck together remains a source of immense pride. And we will always remember the incredible flag waving of all of our fans until the final moments of the match. "That connection and sense of family is part of our identity, and we will need to call on it again as we go forward together into a crucial part of the season ahead. "While our focus shifts back to the Premier League, our ambitions are strengthened by this experience and it will only make us even more determined as we move forward. Once again, thank you sincerely. We are United." - Agencies

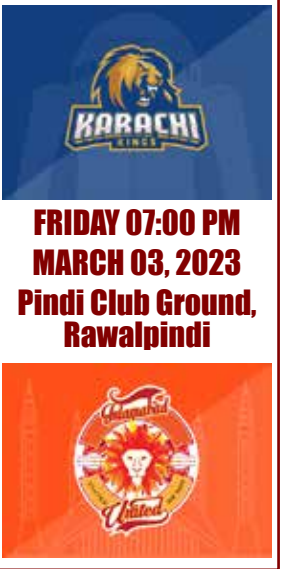
Australia close on victory as India all out for 163

NEW DELHI: Australia are on the verge of victory inside three days in the third Test against India after Nathan Lyon claimed eight for 64 in Indore on Thursday. Following a first-innings score of 109, India were dismissed for 163 in their second go. Australia need just 76 to win - but have to score them on a pitch where 30 wickets have fallen within two days. Victory for Australia would secure their place in the final of the World Test Championship in June. India lead the four-Test series 2-0 after big wins in Delhi and Nagpur, and they know a 3-1 series win or better will guarantee their place in the World Test Championship final at The Oval. The second day began with Australia resuming on 156-4, and after overnight batters Cameron Green and Peter Handscomb added 30 to the total, the tourists lost their last six wickets for 11 runs to fold for 197. It left Australia with a lead of 88 and Lyon wrecked India's top order before they could erase their deficit. He removed both openers, Shubman Gill and Rohit Sharma, before dismissing Ravindra Jadeja, while Matthew Kuhnemann claimed the prized wicket of Virat Kohli (13). Only Cheteshwar Pujara (59) resisted to keep India in the contest, but a superb one-handed catch from stand-in captain Steve Smith at leg slip dismissed him off Lyon's bowling. "It's a difficult pitch to bat on. I hope we'll be able to bowl them out," Pujara said. "I know it's not enough. - Agencies



PESHAWAR: Ambassador of United States, David Blome meets Inspector General KP Police, Akhtar Hayat Gandapur. Both sides discussed the security situation of the province while the ambassador assured provision of critical equipment for fight against terrorism. - DNA

PSL 8th Edition



FRIDAY 07:00 PM
MARCH 03, 2023
Pindi Club Ground,
Rawalpindi

Dollar at historic high, interest rate sky-rockets

FROM PAGE 01
The average inflation this year is now expected in the range of 27 - 29 per cent against the November 2022 projection of 21 - 23 per cent. In this context, the MPC emphasized that anchoring inflation expectations is critical and warrants a strong policy response. On the external side, the MPC noted that despite a substantial reduction in the current account deficit (CAD), vulnerabilities continue to persist. In January 2023, the CAD fell to \$242 million, the lowest level since March 2021. Marred by economic uncertainty, the rupee has plummeted against the US dollar after the currency registered a depreciation of 1.73% on Wednesday. The rupee downside was halted at Rs266.11 against the greenback, a decline of Rs4.61 in the inter-bank market. Rating agency Moody's has downgraded the Government of Pakistan's local and foreign currency issuer and senior unsecured debt ratings to Caa3 from Caa1. It also downgraded the rating for the senior unsecured MTN programme to (P)Caa3 from (P)Caa1. On the other hand, Moody's changed the outlook to stable from negative.

Staff-level IMF deal expected next week

FROM PAGE 01
been increasing and are almost US\$ 1 billion higher than four weeks ago despite making all external due payments on time. "Foreign commercial banks have started extending facilities to Pakistan. Our negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are about to conclude and we expect to sign the Staff Level Agreement with the IMF by next week. All economic indicators are slowly moving in the right direction," he maintained.

PM meets COAS, CJCS

FROM PAGE 01
Gen Sahir, who was promoted to the rank in November last, had earlier held a meeting with the prime minister following his promotion. The premier had congratulated Gen Sahir on assuming the responsibilities of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. He had also appreciated the professional capability and performance of Gen Mirza. Calling the army a precious national asset, the prime minister said the leadership of the two most competent officers would further strengthen the country's defence.

Presidential candidate to challenge election

ABUJA: Nigeria's presidential candidate Peter Obi, who lost a historically tight February 25 election to the ruling party's Bola Tinubu, said Thursday he would challenge the result in court. "We will explore all legal and peaceful options to reclaim our mandate. We won the election and we will prove it to Nigerians," the Labour Party candidate told reporters in the capital Abuja. Obi obtained the third largest number of votes, at 6.1 million - a significant feat for an outsider in a country where two establishment parties dominate. - APP

Briefs

Russia condemns Western 'threats' at G20

NEW DELHI: A G20 meeting in New Delhi on Thursday was in disarray after Russia accused the West of "blackmail and threats" against other countries. India had wanted its G20 presidency this year to focus on issues such as alleviating poverty and climate finance, but Russia's war with Ukraine has so far crowded out other agenda items. The meeting in New Delhi saw US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the same room for the first time since July, but the two men were unlikely to hold talks. The United States has accused China of considering supplying arms to its Russian ally, and Western delegates will use the foreign ministers' summit to discourage Beijing from intervening in the conflict. But Russia issued a strongly worded statement following a meeting between Lavrov and Chinese counterpart Qin Gang on the sidelines of the G20 meeting. "A unanimous rejection was expressed of attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, to impose unilateral approaches through blackmail and threats, and to oppose the democratisation of international relations," the Russian foreign ministry said. Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said Thursday that the Group of 20 meeting in India was unlikely to reach a common statement after comments by Lavrov. "After the speech that we have seen from the minister of foreign affairs of Russia, I don't think that Russia is ready to accept an acceptable statement," Albares told reporters. It was unclear what Lavrov told the closed-door meeting but the Russian foreign ministry said before his arrival that he would use the forum to lambast Western countries over the conflict. —APP

Shtayyeh calls on Lithuania to recognize Palestine

FOREIGN DESK
RAMALLAH: Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh called today on Lithuania to recognize the state of Palestine on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. Shtayyeh made the remarks during his meeting in Ramallah with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Gabrielius Landsbergis. During the meeting, Shtayyeh said recognizing the State of Palestine at this time is very important, warning that the two-state solution is fading due to the devastating Israeli measures, the political vacuum and the deteriorating realities on the ground. —APP

SpaceX launches crew of astronauts on ISS

NEW YORK: SpaceX and NASA on Thursday launched a crew of astronauts on a mission to the International Space Station. SpaceX launched four astronauts for an extended months-long stay. The Falcon 9 rocket was launched from Kennedy Space Center shortly after midnight. The Crew-6 launch carried two NASA astronauts – Mission Commander Stephen Bowen and Pilot Warren Hoburg – along with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) astronaut Sultan Al Neyadi, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Andrey Fedyaev, who serves as mission specialists for a space station science expedition, according to NASA. They are expected to spend some six months on board the orbiting laboratory, carrying out science experiments and maintaining the two-decade-old station. This is the sixth crew rotation mission using the SpaceX Dragon spacecraft on a Falcon 9 rocket to the orbiting laboratory as part of the agency's Commercial Crew Program. — APP

Azerbaijan-Uzbek Presidents discuss strategic partnership

The Presidents reviewed in detail the implementation of the agreements reached the highest level. It was noted with deep satisfaction that thanks to systemic and productive contacts, the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan has reached a qualitatively new level

NEWS DESK

BAKU: President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has met with the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, in Baku. The Leader of Azerbaijan sincerely thanked the President of Uzbekistan for his support and personal participation in the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement to be held on March 2, in the country's capital. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in turn, highlighted the effective chairmanship of Azerbaijan in this structure. The Presidents reviewed in detail the implementation of the agreements reached the highest level. It was noted with deep satisfaction that thanks to systemic and productive contacts, the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan has reached a qualitatively new level, filled with concrete content. Last year, the trade turnover between the two countries increased by more than 50 percent. The implementation of cooperation projects in such priority ar-

reas as automotive, textile, and sericulture is in the active phase. Preparations are underway for promising projects in the oil and gas sector, transport, and logistics. As part of the First Forum of Regions held in Tashkent in February this year, an Agreement on establishing a joint Investment Fund was signed. The interest in the exchange of experience in the development of the activities of free economic zones and the system of tax administration was noted. The importance of further enhancing cultural and humanitarian exchanges was emphasized. The heads of state discussed current international and regional issues and considered a schedule of the upcoming events. The meeting took place in a traditionally open, warm, and friendly atmosphere. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev thanked President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for Uzbekistan's participation in reconstruction of Karabakh, adding this is the first project funded by a foreign government.



S. Korea JCS chairman orders troops to prepare for threats

His visit to the exercise came amid worries that North Korea could engage in provocations in response to the allies' regular Freedom Shield exercise set to begin later this month

FOREIGN DESK

SEOUL: South Korea's top military officer has inspected combined special operations drills with the United States and called on the troops to maintain their capabilities to "strike the enemy's critical facilities without fail," his office said Thursday. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Chairman Gen. Kim Seung-kyum checked their readiness during Monday's segment of the Exercise Teak Knife involving the two countries' special commandos, a AC-130J gunship and a MC-130J multi-mission combat transport aircraft. His visit to the exercise came amid worries that North Korea could engage in provocations in response to the allies' regular Freedom Shield exercise set to begin later this month. "(Kim) stressed the importance of harnessing the capability to strike the enemy's critical facilities without fail, and establishing a wartime combined operations posture by enhancing interoperability between the allies through realistic combined special operations training," the JCS said in a



press release.

Kim also pointed out the North's rising threats of provocation, while highlighting the need to establish "capabilities and a posture that can inflict critical damage on the enemy and force a victorious resolution to the conflict." It marks the first time that the AC-130J has been sent to the Korean Peninsula for allied drills, according to the JCS. The warplane is equipped with various strike assets,

including the GBU-39 precision-guided glide bomb. The JCS released some footage of the drills showing the AC-130J firing AGM-176 Griffin and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and the GBU-39 bomb during precision strike drills targeting an uninhabited island. "The AC-130J is the latest upgraded version of its type, and has been deployed to the peninsula for the first time in tune with efforts to strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance," JCS spokesperson Col. Lee Sung-jun told a regular press briefing. Capt. Kimberly Chatto, director of public affairs for U.S. Special Operations Command-Korea, told Yonhap News that the dispatch of the AC-130J gives opportunities to support America's extended deterrence. Extended deterrence refers to the U.S.' commitment to mobilizing a full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear, to defend its allies. For the exercise, the U.S. has deployed the AC-130J from Hurlburt Air Force Base in Florida and the MC-130J aircraft from the 353rd Special Operations Wing at Kadena Air Base in Japan.

United Group merges into Founder Group unconditionally

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman Islamabad United Group (IUG), Faisal Muzamal Khokhar along with his colleagues including Syed Talib Hussain Hashmi, Malik Tariq Javed, Mohammad Azhar, Malik Nadeem Kakazai, Haji Abdul Rahman Mohmand, Wajid ur Rahman Mohmand, Ahmed Tareen, Sher Mohammad Khan, Chaudhry Ansar Farooq, Chaudhry Rashid Muzamal, Sheikh Faisal and Iftikhar

Ahmed Kayani announced to merge into the Founder Group unconditionally during a ceremony. Addressing the ceremony, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari congratulated IUG Chairman Faisal Muzamal Khokhar and his team for joining the Founder Group unconditionally and said that they have taken a wise decision as the interests of the business community can be better protected through unity

rather than division. He said that serving the business community and solving their problems is one of our priorities. This is possible only when there is unity and consensus among the business community of Islamabad. He said that today's development is an important step towards this goal. He hoped that inclusion of IUG into the Founder Group would make ICCI even stronger. Faisal Muzamal Khokhar, in his address, said that in view of the better per-

formance of the Founder Group, he along with his colleagues decided to join them unconditionally to work unitedly for the welfare of the business community. He said that the love of the Founder Group members including Khalid Iqbal Malik, Khalid Javed, Zafar Bakhtawari and others has motivated them to join them. He said that in the current economic situation, the business community is facing great problems and division in them is not in their interest.

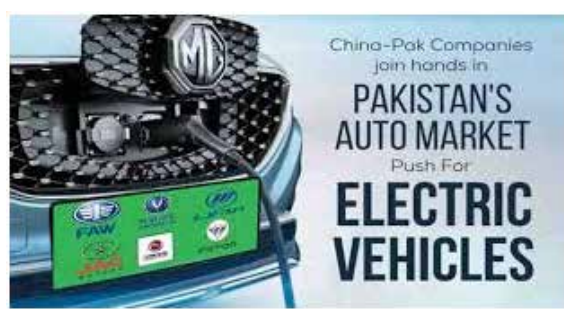


COPENHAGEN: Ambassador Ahmad Farooq had an engaging meeting with Zahid Latif Khan, former President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce at the embassy. They deliberated over the possible avenues for increased bilateral trade between two countries. — DNA

SFJ asks G20 FMs to support Khalistan Referendum

ISLAMABAD: On the heels of G20 Foreign Ministers' Summit in New Delhi, secessionist group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) has called on the G20 Nations to "repudiate India's claim to territorial integrity" and support Sikhs' right to secede from the Union of India through Khalistan Referendum. The demand has been made by the pro-Khalistan Sikhs For Justice in an open letter to the G20 Foreign Ministers. India has been urging the G20 nations to ban the SFJ's pro-Khalistan activities on the grounds that the Khalistan Referendum challenges India's territorial integrity and thus should be disallowed by other nations of the world. Challenging India's stance, the SFJ's Open Letter states that "India's claim to territorial integrity is without any merit and basis as India is not a country but a Union of States and like any Union, the validity of the Union of India is conditional upon the continued will of the people of the states. Since 1984, Sikhs who form the majority in the state of Punjab have been demanding the secession of Punjab from India to establish an independent Sikh homeland Khalistan." Article 1 of the Indian constitution provides that "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. Given the background of the global Khalistan Referendum and its legality under international law and democratic norms, the SFJ Open Letter draws the attention of G20 nations towards Modi regime's criminalization of the Khalistan Referendum and use of violence to crush the Sikh peoples' peaceful movement for the creation of Khalistan. Prompting the G20 nations to take notice of India's use of violence against Khalistan Referendum, SFJ General Counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannun stated: "While SFJ believes in ballot, not bullet, India's Modi Regime through constant use of violence is pushing Khalistan movement back into the 1990s when the cycle of violence initiated by Indian Government engulfed the political question of Khalistan. —APP

Pakistan a potential market for Chinese EVs



BEIJING: Global sales of pure electric vehicles (EVs) surged 68% to reach 7.8 million in 2022, accounting for 10% of the market share for the first time, as per preliminary statistics from UK-based auto market research company ALG and global EV database provider EV-volumes. According to a Gwadar Pro's report, over half of the pure EV sales has been registered in China. In 2022, the sales of pure electric vehicles grew 81.6% to 5.365 million in the country, data from China's ministry of industry and information technology shows. In a January press briefing, the ministry said China's new energy vehicle production and sales have ranked first in the world for eight consecutive years. In 2022 alone, the country's production and sales of new energy vehicles reached 7.058 million and 6.887 million respectively in 2022, occupying a global market share of 25.6%. A similar EV boom can also be seen in Europe. In 2022, Europe witnessed a 29% increase in the sales of pure electric vehicles to 1.58 million. The market penetration rate of pure electric vehicles in Germany, the UK, and France reached 18%, 17%, and 14%, respectively. In Germany, the largest automotive market in Europe, the proportion of electric vehicle production to new car production reached 25%, and over 30% of newly registered cars were electric vehicles. Encouraging signs are also observed in other countries and regions including Pakistan. The South Asian country produced its first EV in 2022 after the Pakistani government unveiled a series of incentive policies including the National Electric Vehicles Policy in 2019. Despite unstable global macroeconomics and increased raw material prices, EV research institutions believe that the global EV market will continue to grow in 2023. BloombergNEF predicts that global sales of new energy passenger vehicles will reach 13.6 million this year, with about 75% being pure electric vehicles. By the end of this year, the global EV stock is expected to reach around 40 million, accounting for about 3% of the total global vehicle stock, a significant increase from 1% in 2020. —DNA

Vietnam elects Vo Van Thuong as new president

HANOI: Vo Van Thuong has been elected as the new president of Vietnam on Thursday, local media reported. The country's National Assembly passed a



resolution to elect Thuong as the new president of the Southeast Asian nation. Vietnam News reported. Thuong, 53, is the youngest president in the country's political history. He is also the youngest in the current 16-member Politburo of the Communist Party. He belongs to the southern province of Vinh Long and holds a Master's degree in Philosophy. Addressing the swearing-in ceremony, Thuong swore allegiance to the fatherland, to the people, and to the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. "(I will) strive to fulfill to the best of my abilities the responsibilities and missions entrusted by the party, state, and the people," the media outlet quoted the newly-elected president as saying. Thuong previously served in different positions including party secretary of the HCMC district, standing secretary of the Central Committee, and party secretary of the central province of Quang Ngai. Later, he joined the Politburo in January 2016, becoming its youngest member, and was then assigned the position of head of the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party, according to VN Express, a Vietnamese online newspaper. —Agencies

US approved \$619M arms package for Taiwan

ISTANBUL: The US Joe Biden administration approved its ninth arms sale package worth around \$619 million to Taiwan, which the self-ruled island said will help "boost the combat readiness" of its air force. The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency said the State Department has made a "determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale" to Taiwan, including F-16 munitions and related equipment, for an estimated cost of \$619 million. It said the agency delivered the required certification notifying the US Congress of this possible sale on Wednesday. The sale came on a day when 25 Chinese aircraft flew around the island nation across Taiwan Strait. On Thursday, 29 Chinese aircraft flew around the island nation of around 24 million people which China claims as its "breakaway province." Beijing has time and again urged Washington to halt any military engagement or arms sales to Taiwan. It has also sanctioned defense American contractors for selling weapons to the island nation. —APP

Police in Norway remove wind farm protesters

WEB DESK

COPENHAGEN: Norwegian police on Wednesday removed demonstrators blocking the entrance to government buildings, where they were protesting wind farms critics say violate the rights of local Indigenous reindeer herders. Twenty-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg was among the protesters carried off by authorities from outside the Energy Ministry, with a flag of the Indigenous Sami people in hand. Dozens of activists – including members of the Sami community – had been demonstrating for days against wind turbines built on land used by the minority group in the central Fosen region. Despite a 2021 ruling by the Norwegian Supreme Court that found the wind farms in violation of Indigenous rights under international law, the turbines are still active. Neither the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, nor the Ministry of Climate and Environment have commented on the matter. —APP

Briefs

Rana says govt to choke sources of funding of terrorism

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Underscoring the point that the protection of people's life and property was government's top priority, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said on Thursday that the country could only progress if people felt safe and their investments were secure. Speaking at the meeting of the coordination committee of the Central Apex Committee convened to discuss in detail progress on the National Action Plan, he said the government would choke all sources of funding of terrorism. "Terrorism is a scourge for the elimination of which a well thought-out strategy is required," Sanaullah asserted. The minister ordered the concerned departments to take steps on a war footing in order to enhance the capacity of CTD and other organisations formed to combat terrorism. "The entire nation, especially the law-enforcement agencies (LEAs), has faced militancy boldly and courageously," he said, and also directed that the families of those who had lost their lives in incidents of terrorism be looked after. Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazir Tarar, Secretary Interior Yousaf Naseem Khokhar, FIA DG, National Coordinator NACTA, inspector general of police (IGP), Islamabad, commissioner Islamabad, and security agencies' officials attended the meeting.

Islamabad court acquits Amjad Shoab

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A local court in Islamabad, accepting a plea filed by Lt-Gen (retd) Amjad Shoab, discharged him in a case of inciting people for mutiny and spreading hatred against state institutions. Additional Sessions Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra announced the ruling. Earlier, the prosecutor had opposed the discharge plea. The court heard arguments from both sides, reserved its ruling and then announced a decision. Amjad Shoab, a retired army officer, and his YouTube channel was proved to be part of an organised propaganda campaign. The FIA completed the forensics of Amjad Shoab's mobile phone and as per the findings, his mobile turned out to be an important tool of PTI and Imran Khan's negative propaganda.

FO confirms 7 Pakistanis' death in Libya boat wreck

The FO spokesperson said the bodies would be transported to Pakistan with the support of local authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross

ALI FURQAN

ISLAMABAD: Seven Pakistani nationals have drowned in a boat wreck near Libya's port city Benghazi, the Foreign Office said Thursday. Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch at a weekly press briefing said the embassy of Pakistan in Libya was facilitating the process of identification of the bodies. Fifty-nine people had died, including some children when a wooden sailing boat carrying migrants crashed against rocks on the southern Italian coast early on Sunday. The FO spokesperson said the bodies would be transported to Pakistan with the support of local authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross. She said the embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also in contact with the families of the deceased. Baloch mentioned that Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would visit New York in the context of the conference

on 'Women in Islam: Understanding the rights and Identity of Women in the Islamic World', being held on March 8. As an initiative of FM Bilawal, she said, the conference is being convened by Pakistan in its capacity as the chair of the OIC Council of Ministers at the UN Headquarters on the sidelines of the 67th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). She said the foreign minister would chair the high-level and policy dialogue segments, with ministerial-level participation from OIC member states and non-OIC states, in addition to the leadership of the United Nations, UN Women, and other international organizations. On March 10, the foreign minister will headline an event on Islamophobia in New York. It may be recalled that last year, at the initiative of Pakistan, the United Nations General Assembly declared March 15 as the Day to Combat Islamophobia. The FO spokesperson announced that Germany's Minister of State for Foreign

Affairs Dr. Tobias Lindner would pay his maiden visit to Pakistan from March 4-7. She said his meeting with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs would review bilateral relations between Pakistan and Germany besides discussions on economic cooperation, climate change, and regional matters of mutual interest. This visit is taking place within days of the visit of the Foreign Minister and Minister of State to Germany for the Munich Security Dialogue. The spokesperson said Minister of Economic Affairs Division Ayaz Sadiq is leading the Pakistan delegation to the Summit of the Contact Group of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on post-COVID-19 pandemic global recovery being held in Baku from March 1-3. The Summit, she said, would aim to formulate NAM's vision and strategy for promoting the agenda of post-pandemic recovery at international platforms. It would also put forward an initiative of establishing a UN High-Level Panel on

Post-COVID-19 Global Recovery. Baloch also highlighted the ongoing human rights violations in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) during February and mentioned that last month, the Indian troops killed five Kashmiris - two of them while in custody. As many as 115 youths were arbitrarily arrested while seven were injured as Indian forces continued to use brute force on peaceful protesters. The so-called "cordon and search operations" that totaled 193 last month, remain a tool for the occupation forces to intimidate and harass the Kashmiris, she said. Meanwhile, over 4,000 Kashmiri political leaders, activists, youth, students, and human rights defenders continue to remain incarcerated in different jails across India and in IIOJK. They are being targeted for their valiant struggle for their rights and freedoms. The FO spokesperson said Pakistan would continue to raise its voice against the grave human rights violations in IIOJK.

Per tola gold price surges by 4.77%

DNA

KARACHI: Following a historic decline of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar, the per tola gold price in Pakistan surged by a whopping 4.77% as investors' attention once again diverted towards the precious commodity considered as an inflation hedge. According to All-Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association (APSGJA), the price of gold (24 carats) surged by Rs9,400 per tola and Rs8,058 per 10 grams to settle at Rs206,500 and Rs177,040, respectively. The price of gold is Rs3,000 per tola "undercost" in Pakistan, as compared to the Dubai market, showing that the Pakistani gold market was currently cheaper than the global. It should be noted that Pakistan meets almost all its gold demand through imports, and traders follow its international price in setting rates in the country.



ISLAMABAD: Commander of Royal Navy of Oman Rear Admiral Saif Bin Nasser Bin Mohsin Al Rahbi calls on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi at Naval Headquarters. - DNA

Omani Commander lauds Pak Navy's professionalism

ISLAMABAD: Commander of Royal Navy of Oman Rear Admiral Saif Bin Nasser Bin Mohsin Al Rahbi called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. Upon arrival at Naval Headquarters, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman was received by Naval Chief. During the meeting matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and scope of military cooperation including defence, training and security between the two countries were discussed. The Naval Chief highlighted Pakistan Navy initiatives for ensuring maritime security and peace in the region through Regional Maritime Security Patrols. Naval Chief thanked the dignitary on Omani Navy participation in recently held Ex AMAN-23 at Karachi. The visiting dignitary lauded Pakistan Navy's efforts and commitments in support of collaborative maritime security in the region. It is expected that the recent visit of Commander of Royal Navy of Oman will further enhance bilateral collaboration between the two countries in general and navies in particular. - DNA

ECP assures IHC of LG polls within 120 days

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) assured on Thursday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) of holding local government elections in the federal capital within 120 days, after which the court disposed of the intra-court appeals in the case. The ECP and the federal government had filed separate intra-court appeals against the ruling of IHC's single bench to conduct LG-polls in Islamabad on December 31, 2022. The IHC bench had ordered the ECP to conduct local govt elections on the said date while nullifying the electoral body's decision to defer the polls. Today, a two-member bench headed by IHC Chief Justice Amir Farooq conducted the hearing of the intra-court appeals. "The legislation has been done. Are the 125 UCs still there," Justice Farooq asked. The judge said that the government has kept authority of further increasing the number of UCs to itself. "In my opinion, there won't be a need of increasing the UCs for 10 years," he said, adding that the LG elections should be conducted at once. At this, the ECP officials assured the court of holding LG-polls in Islamabad within 120 days. The court then asked the interior secretary if he would give a statement that the government will not increase the number of UCs before the elections. "If you don't give this statement, we'll order that the UCs cannot be increased," court remarked. At this, the ECP officials said that the electoral body will give schedule of LG polls after conducting new delimitation. "A Supreme Court judgment has also given a verdict regarding the polls," ECP's director general law said in reference to apex court's ruling in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa election suomotu case. - DNA

Putin accuses Ukraine of border 'terrorist act'

DNA

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin says a Ukrainian sabotage group entered a Russian border region on Thursday and opened fire on civilians in a "terrorist act". Earlier the governor of Bryansk region said "saboteurs from Ukraine" had fired at a civilian car in Lyubechane, a border village, killing one person and injuring a child. Kyiv strongly denied the Russian claim. The alleged incident has not been independently verified. Mykhaylo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, tweeted that it was "a classic deliberate provocation". "RF [Russia] wants to scare its people to justify the attack on another country," he said. Russia has previously reported some Ukrainian missile and drone strikes on Russian border areas, including Bryansk region. But there have been no confirmed reports of Ukrainian ground forces infiltrating Russia.



Mr Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "steps to destroy these terrorists are being taken". Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said FSB forces and regular troops were battling "Ukrainian nationalists" who had crossed into Russia. Speaking on Russian state TV, President Putin said "today they committed another terrorist act, another crime, penetrated the border area and opened fire on civilians". "They saw that it was a civilian car, that civilians and children were sitting there, and opened fire. It is exactly such people who set themselves the task of depriving us of historical memory. They will achieve nothing, we will put the squeeze on them," he said.

Sheikh Rashid could not be indicted

The case came up for hearing in district and sessions court Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: Former Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid could not be indicted on Thursday in the case of Imran Khan alleging Asif Zardari for plotting to assassinate him. The case came up for hearing in district and sessions court Islamabad. Sheikh Rashid filed exemption from attendance plea on medical grounds in the court of judicial magistrate Umar Shabbir. The petition-

er took the plea that he was unwell and doctors have advised rest for him. He cannot appear in the court today, therefore, exemption from attendance be granted to him. The medical report of Sheikh Rashid was also attached with the petition. The court accepted Sheikh Rashid plea for one day exemption besides fixing March 21 for indictment. It is pertinent to mention here that Sheikh Rashid was to be indicted on Thursday. The court had directed him to ensure his attendance. Police had filed challan of the case on previous hearing. - Online

Minister resigns as death toll reaches 48

LARISSA: The Greek government on Thursday acknowledged failures in state management of its rail system, following a train collision that killed 48 and has triggered angry protests. As crews continued to work in the charred wreckage at the crash site, the local station master admitted negligence in Greece's worst-ever rail disaster and the government has apologised. An investigation would examine the "chronic delays in implementing railway works, delays caused by chronic public sector malaise and decades of failure," said government spokesman Yiannis Economou. The crash happened late Tuesday when a freight and passenger train were allowed to speed towards each other for several kilometres before colliding near a tunnel outside Larissa in central Greece. The 59-year-old station manager was arrested after officials determined "human error" was involved in the collision in which two carriages were demolished and a restaurant car caught fire, trapping many victims inside. "I believe the responsibility, the negligence, the error has been confessed by the station master," Economou told reporters in Athens. Five years after the state-owned Greek rail operator TrainOSE was privatised and sold to Italy's Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane and became Hellenic Train, safety systems on the Athens-Thessaloniki line are still not fully automated. Train unionists have said safety shortcomings for the Athens-Thessaloniki railway line had been known for years. - APP

Pakistan's reserves increased by \$54m

KARACHI: Pakistan has received a commercial loan of \$700m from China and its reserves have increased by \$54.10 million to \$9.26 billion. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) confirmed that the commercial loan of \$700 million from China is received last month on February 24, 2023. The SBP said during this period, Pakistan has also paid 144.4 million dollars in the form of external debt. While the reserves of the State Bank increased by 556 million dollars to 3.81 billion dollars and the country's total reserves increased by 54.10 million dollars to 9.26 billion dollars. On the other hand, the reserves of commercial banks in Pakistan decreased by \$1.50 billion to \$5.45 billion. - DNA



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