



Islamabad POST

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King Charles' France visit postponed after pension protests

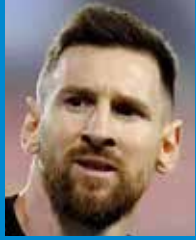
Detailed News On Page-07

Africa is future of the world, VP Harris says

Detailed News On Page-07

Messi scores 800th goal in top football

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

Shehzad resigns as AG

DNA

ISLAMABAD: With less than two months in office, Barrister Shehzad Ata Elahi has resigned as Attorney General for Pakistan, sources privy to the development to Geo News on Friday. As per sources, Elahi has resigned from office due to personal reasons. On February 2, the Ministry of Law and Justice announced that Barrister Shehzad Ata Elahi was picked as AGP. A statement issued by the ministry and signed by Joint Secretary to the Government of Pakistan, Muhammad Umer Aziz, had stated back then.

Sherry slams PTI for 'hiring' US firm

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman has criticized Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for signing an agreement with a private US consulting firm to promote party's image in the United States. In a tweet, the Minister said the signing of the agreement has exposed PTI's double standards and hypocrisy. She said that many countries appoint lobbyists, but this case was particularly bizarre because it came from a party that attempted to pose itself as a victim of the US meddling.

PTI govt created economic mess

'Khan wants civil war in country'

Info Minister says PM is making all-out efforts to provide the relief to the masses

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb claimed on Friday Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan desired civil war in the country. Speaking to media, Ms Aurangzeb said, "Despite the fact that the country is facing severe economic hardships, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is making all-out efforts to provide the relief to the masses. By using the data of the BISP programme, it has been ensured that free flour will be provided to the masses. Ms Aurangzeb made it clear that the mechanism for providing cheap gasoline to the masses has been finalised. In connection with providing cheap petrol, the scheme will be started soon, she added. She scolded the PTI-led government, saying, "The PTI government had emptied the national treasury." Marriyum said data of the Benazir Income Support Programme was being used to distribute the free flour sacks in a transparent manner. The prime minister had categorically stated that there would be no compromise on quality of the edible and transparency in the distribution process. She said the prime minister had a track record of pursuing the best governance model to execute people-centric projects. Whether it was related to flood or any other emergency, the PM himself had led from the front and always

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Imran Khan seeking US help: Asif

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif Friday said that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan — who blamed the United States for conspiracy against his government — is now seeking its help now. Speaking during a press conference with foreign media persons along with Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Asif said that Imran Khan's political journey started with a cypher. "And today Shireen Mazari has written a letter to the United States for help [...] the country which was being accused the conspiracy against Pakistan or conspiracy against Imran Khan's government, the same people are now asking for help and rescue from the perpetrators of a foreign conspiracy." Asif said that this is a sum of Khan's

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IMF seeks external financing assurances

The IMF wants Pakistan to get the assurance of up to \$7 billion

CENTRELINE REPORT

NEW YORK: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Friday tied "the next step with Pakistan" to assurances of financial assistance from bilateral and other sources for the release of a bailout tranche, super-critical for the liquidity-challenged country, whose deficient foreign exchange reserves needed an urgent shoring up. "Timely financial assistance from external partners will be critical to support the authorities' policy efforts and ensure the successful completion of the review [with Pakistan]," said Julie Kozack, the IMF's Director of Strategic Communications in a press briefing. Pakistan and the IMF have been negotiating since early February on an agreement that would release \$1.1 billion to the cash-strapped, nuclear-armed country of 220 million people. The funds are part of a \$6.5 billion bailout package the IMF approved in 2019 — vital to Pakistan to avert defaulting on external payment obligations.

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China rolls over \$2bn loan

DNA

LAHORE: China has approved a rollover of \$2 billion State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) deposits for one year for cash-strapped Pakistan racing to secure assurance of external financing from friendly countries to revive the IMF deal. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar confirmed the development to local media on Friday as the rollover of Chinese SAFE deposits was one of the conditions laid forth by the global lender for the South Asian country to reach the staff-level agreement. One of the requirements under the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) is related to the

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: (Clockwise: Family members of the martyred military personnel receiving the awards of Sitara-i-Basalat from President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. President conferring the award of Nishan-i-Imtiaz (Military) upon Commander of the Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammad bin Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa; President conferring the award of Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) upon the Defense Attache of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Pakistan, Major General (Pilot) Staff, Awad bin Abdullah Al-zahrani. — DNA

Gandhi loses Lok Sabha seat



Modi's govt has been widely accused of targeting critics

NEW DELHI: Top opposition figure Rahul Gandhi was expelled from India's parliament on Friday, a day after his defamation conviction for a remark seen as an insult against PM Narendra Modi. Modi's govt has been widely accused of using the law to target and silence critics, and the case in the premier's home state of Gujarat is one of several lodged against his chief opponent in recent years. Gandhi, of the opposition Congress party, was sentenced to two years imprisonment but walked free on bail after his lawyers vowed to appeal Thursday's verdict. However, the conviction has ruled him ineligible to continue sitting in the Lok Sabha, or lower house of Indian parliament, a notice from the chamber's joint secretary said. "Rahul Gandhi... stands disqualified from the member of Lok Sabha from date of his conviction," the notice said. Congress spokesman Akhilesh Pratap Singh confirmed to AFP that his party had received the notice.

Imran pins hope on SC over Punjab Assembly elections

Seeks nation's help, says the country witnessing a difficult time

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: In connection with the Punjab Assembly elections, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan pinned hope on the Supreme Court on Friday. Speaking to delegations of journalists, Mr Khan said, "Will situation will be normalised by holding the elections on October 8." Citing the tenure of Gen Ziaul Haq, Mr Khan said, "Ziaul Haq vowed to hold elections, but he ruled for 11 years." Speaking about the incumbent government,

Khan's non-bailable warrants turned bailable

ISLAMABAD: An Additional District and Session Court on Friday converted the non-bailable arrest warrants of PTI chairman Imran Khan to bailable in woman judge threatening case. Additional Session Judge Faizan Haider Gillani

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Continued on Page 06

Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday.

— Editor

Sehr, Iftar Timing



Sehr: 04:40 am
Iftar: 06:27 pm
Fique-Jafria
Sehr: 04:30 am
Iftar: 06:37 pm

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Israel's radicalization train is out of control — Page 05

Senate Committee summons MC of Gun & Country Club — Page 06

"World of Books without Borders" opens with Pak participation — Page 07

Ramzan: PM directs smooth distribution of wheat flour — Page 08

President Alvi asks PM to 'push' for timely polls



ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has written a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, emphasizing that all concerned executive authorities of Federal and Provincial Governments should be directed to refrain from abuse of Human Rights and also to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold general elections in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, within timeframe, in compliance of Supreme Court's Order

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'Hold KP polls on October 8, governor urges ECP

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: In a fresh development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali Friday urged the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold the general elections in the province on October 8, the same date the electoral watchdog has announced for Punjab, keeping in mind a rise in terror activities. The governor, in the letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, said it would be in the "best public interest as well as in the interest of the state" if polls were held in October instead of a previous date that he had suggested — May 28. The ECP's decision to withdraw an earlier announcement for Punjab elections came after security and financial bodies refused to back the commission during the upcoming polls. The governor noted that recently,

Continued on Page 06

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LHC allows to keep hotels open from Iftar to Sehr

DNA

LAHORE: While hearing a case regarding smog eradication, the Lahore High Court (LHC) Friday allowed to keep the hotels open from Iftar to Sehr during the month of Ramadan. The court directed to form a special committee to control heatwave, and it also upheld the ban on cutting trees in the city. The court ordered Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) to activate filtration plants in the city, and it also sought a report from WASA about the filtration sheds. "Lahore will not survive without taking the industry away from the population. Lahore's master plan is not enough in the current situation," LHC judge Justice Shahid Karim pointed out. The court expressed satisfaction over the approval of the Smog Rules. The Member Environment Commission submitted a report on the court orders. "Who will activate filtration plants?" Justice Shahid Karim questioned during the hearing of the case. "WASA will do it, and its report will be submitted at the next hearing," lawyer for the WASA told the court. "Not just report, but work is also required," Justice Shahid Karim emphasised.—DNA

KP govt urged to provide relief during Ramadan

PESHAWAR: Acting provincial president PPP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Minister of State Mohammad Ali Shah Bacha on Friday urged the provincial government to provide all possible relief to the common man during the month of Ramadan. In a statement issued here on Friday, he said that the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan on Pakistan Day was a special gift of Allah, which gave the lesson of unity, faith and discipline. He urged the institutions to play their due role to control the profiteering and hoarding mafia. Expressing concern over the occurrence of unfortunate incidents during the distribution of free flour, he further urged the caretaker provincial government to adopt an effective and honorable procedure for it. He said that a welfare-oriented project was implemented in the wrong manner.—DNA

IUCPSS to enhance employability of graduates

ISLAMABAD: The Knowledge Stream, a leading provider of IT professionals in Pakistan and the Inter-University Consortium for the Promotion of Social Sciences (IUCPSS) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bridge the IT talent gap, promote higher education development and enhance the employability of young graduates in the country. Under the MoU, the Knowledge Stream and IUCPSS will collaborate to offer training, workshops, and other events to help close the IT talent gap in Pakistan. The Knowledge Stream's vision is to become the preferred provider of IT professionals in Pakistan.—DNA

ICCI delegation donates Rs.2m for quake victims of Syria

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) leading a delegation visited the Syrian Embassy and presented a cheque of Rs. 2 million to H.E. Dr. Ramez Alraee, Ambassador of Syria for the earthquake victims of his country. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the people of Pakistan, including the business community, fully realize the problems being faced by the earthquake victims of Syria and would not leave them alone in this difficult time. He emphasized that all sanctions on Syria should be lifted in this difficult time so that the earthquake victims can get the needed goods



and items easily and the problems of Syrians reduce due to the improvement of its economy. He said that the donations of is the first step for the help of the earthquake victims of Syria by the business community and expressed the determination that the business community will continue its cooperation with them

in the future so that they can restore their lives to normal. He said that the Syrian President's visit to Iran and the United Arab Emirates will be a positive step towards strengthening unity among the Muslim world. He also discussed matters with the Ambassador for further improving bilateral trade and econom-

ic relations between Pakistan and Syria. Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador of Syria Dr. Ramez Alraee, thanked the ICCI delegation for presenting the aid cheque. He said that the people of Syria will always remember the help and support extended by the government and people of Pakistan to them in these

difficult times. He said that due to the sanctions on Syria, the earthquake victims are facing severe difficulties, so the international community should play its role in lifting of these sanctions. He also thanked Pakistan for supporting Syria at international forums and reiterated that mutual cooperation between the two

countries would become stronger with time. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI, said that due to the earthquake, Syria has suffered heavy humanitarian and financial losses, so it is necessary that all Muslim countries, including Pakistan, should play a role for lifting of sanctions on Syria. Engr. Azharul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that Syria has a great Islamic history and the Muslims have an emotional attachment to it. He said that ICCI will continue to cooperate with the people of Syria in every difficult time. Zafar Bakhtawari former President ICCI, Rizwan Chheena, Khalid Mehmood, Muhammad Yahya, Rohail Anwar Butt, Ch. Javed Iqbal, Ziaul Haq Abbasi, Amin ur Rehman and Raja Imtiaz were in the delegation.

Speedy distribution of free flour directed

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary (CS) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry here on Friday directed steps to ensure the speedy distribution of free flour to deserving families. He was chairing a meeting that was attended by Inspector General Police, Akhtar Hayat Khan, administrative secretaries and divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners through video link. The chief secretary expressed grief over the loss of lives during flour distribution in Bannua and Charsadda directing authorities to devise an effective plan to avoid such incidents.—APP

Rescue teams vigilant as water level in drain under-control following rain

ISLAMABAD, Mar 24 (APP): Rescue teams are on alert, as rainwater stranded on streets and roads sides cleared through de-watering pumps, while the water level in the drain under-control following the rain spell. Rescue Emergency and Disaster Management teams are on high alert on Friday, to meet any emergency situation following the rain spell in the Federal Capital, said a press release. Due to precautionary measures by Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, the rainwater running beside the slums is at a normal level and under control. Magistrates and Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) rescue officials remained in the field and ensured the water level in the city's drain are out of danger.—APP

Rescue 1122 foils suicide attempt by citizen

MULTAN: Rescue 1122 on Friday foiled the suicide attempt of a citizen who was trying to jump down from Qazafi chowk flyover over a domestic dispute, here. According to Rescue officials, the control room received a call that a citizen was trying to jump down from a flyover. The Rescue team timely responded and pulled down the man from the wall by using professional skills. The person stated that he was trying to commit suicide because his family was not letting him use the rickshaw for work.—APP

Afghan envoy, businessmen agree for promotion of trade

PESHAWAR: Acting Consul General Afghan Consulate Peshawar, Hafiz Mohibullah Shakir and businessmen from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have agreed over launching of collective efforts for removal of hindrances between Pak-Afghan bilateral and Transit trade. The agreement reached during a meeting of local businessmen with Acting Consul General of Afghan Consulate, said a press release issued here on Friday. The businessmen were led by Director Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi.

Second Secretary Consulate General, Mufti Noor-ullah Hotak, Commercial Attache, Waheedullah Himat and Protocol Officer, Shahid Ullah Zaheer were also present in the meeting. Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, who is also former Senior Vice President of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), apprised the participants of the meeting about the problems being faced by businessmen dealing in Pak-Afghan trade. He raised the issues including restoration of Afghan document Ilm o Khabar document, constitution of a liaison committee between

the two countries, problems faced by exporters, importers, industrialists and others. On this occasion, the Afghan Consulate officials also informed businessmen about their suggestions and some reservations on unnecessary and unregistered checking points at Torkhem border, non-implementation of decision regarding cross tuffing of Afghan transit container into local container, inflicting losses on Afghan businessmen under the head of detention charges. They also expressed reservation over the de-

lay in checking of Afghan transit goods at Karachi sea port, causing delay in reaching of consignment. Speaking on the occasion, Zia Sarhadi said it is the need of the hour to take steps from both the government of Pakistan and Afghanistan for removal of hindrances in trade between the two countries. He said that the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan was essential for bringing prosperity in the region and this goal could be achieved through the launching of sincere efforts.—APP

SCCI, UET Peshawar sign MoU to strengthen linkages

PESHAWAR: An endeavor to further improve industry-academia linkages, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) and the University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Peshawar. In this regard, a signing ceremony was held at the chamber's house in which SCCI president Muhammad Ishaq and Director Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) UET Peshawar Dr Nasru Minallah signed on the MoU, said in a press release here on Friday. Senior member of the SCCI Advisory Committee, Dr Khalid Khan, Manager University Industry Linkage, UET Peshawar Dr Tariq Khalil, Office Manager of the university Dr Jawad Ali Shah and others were present on the occasion. Ishaq, while terming the signing MoU with UET Peshawar as a milestone step toward strengthening industry-academia linkages, said SCCI has started a series of MoUs with public and private sector universities. He elaborated that the MoU aims at equipping graduates and young students technical skills besides the completion of their academic career so that it will enable them to get instant employment opportunities in markets. The chamber's president apprised the meeting that SCCI has recently inked a Memorandum of Corporation (MoC) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KPTEVTA) under German Organisation - GIZ TEVTA Support Program. Under the GIZ TEVTA Support Program, he said SCCI and KPTEVTA will jointly conduct capacity building and on job training sessions to bring improvement in youths/graduates skills and ensure their job placement in the various trades organisations and industries. Talking about the SCCI 2.0 program, Ishaq informed that the chamber is going to launch this program very shortly, which is the first ever initiative, being taken by SCCI in Pakistan under which the chamber will be put on modern line by converting to complete digitization and bring it up to modern standards. The SCCI chief said there's a lack of entrepreneurship, saying that our youth are highly skillful and capable to excel in their fields. He, however, said there is a need to provide youth with a proper platform to utilize their abilities efficiently and continue playing a role in the country's economic prosperity and progress. Commenting on the current state of Pakistan's economy, Ishaq said the industries and businesses were in severe crisis owing to multiple reasons and inconsistent policies. The SCCI president informed that currently industries were running with capacity of 10 to 20 per cent under the prevailing circumstances. Ishaq remarked Immense natural and mineral reserves exist in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in which gemstone, mining and marble were at the top. He added the SCCI has initiated initiatives for promotion of the gemstone sector. The SCCI chief called for tapping natural reserves and resources in an efficient manner to bring economic stability and improvement. Earlier, Director ORIC UET Peshawar Dr Nasru Minallah and Manager University Industry Linkage, UET Peshawar Dr Tariq Khalil briefed the chamber's president regarding various projects that were initiated by their department.—APP

CAA returns lost bag worth millions to its owner

DNA

KARACHI: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) officials have returned a lost bag carrying goods worth millions to owner, the famous singer Talhah Yunus. As per details, the renowned rapper forgot to pick his bag from the parking area of Jinnah International airport where he landed from Islamabad. Upon finding the bag worth Rs 1.5 million, it was submitted to DTM office and checked in the presence of vigilance personnel. While the checking was going on, the phone start ringing and the owner was directed to pick his bag from the airport. The DTM office and the vigilance personnel returned shoulder bag to Talhah Yunus and he thanked them for returning the lost bag. Earlier, an employee of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) returned a lost bag containing valuable items to the airport administration. CAA employee Ijlal Maseeh found two gold rings and a purse near the custom counter early morning after flight landings from Bahrain and Abu Dhabi at Bacha Khan airport Peshawar. Later, Ijlal handed over the purse to the supervisor Amin.—APP

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He, however, said there is a need to provide youth with a proper platform to utilize their abilities efficiently and continue playing a role in the country's economic prosperity and progress. Commenting on the current state of Pakistan's economy, Ishaq said the industries and businesses were in severe crisis owing to multiple reasons and inconsistent policies. The SCCI president informed that currently industries were running with capacity of 10 to 20 per cent under the prevailing circumstances. Ishaq remarked Immense natural and mineral reserves exist in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in which gemstone, mining and marble were at the top. He added the SCCI has initiated initiatives for promotion of the gemstone sector. The SCCI chief called for tapping natural reserves and resources in an efficient manner to bring economic stability and improvement. Earlier, Director ORIC UET Peshawar Dr Nasru Minallah and Manager University Industry Linkage, UET Peshawar Dr Tariq Khalil briefed the chamber's president regarding various projects that were initiated by their department.—APP

Pak Day requires commitment to work together

Consequently, Pakistan requires a concerted effort from the government, civil society, and the people of Pakistan to work together towards building a stable, prosperous, and inclusive society

MUHAMMAD AKMAL SHAHID

ARIFWALA: 23rd March is celebrated to pay tribute to the leaders and activists who played a key role in the creation of Pakistan. The day is a national holiday, and schools, colleges, and offices celebrate this day. Regarding Pakistan Day, a conference was organized under the Chairmanship of Chaudhary Umar Hayat Headmaster Government Elementary School 71 EB Arifwala. Apart from other speakers, Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer also addressed. He stated in his address, to achieve the objectives of the creation of Pakistan, there are several areas where efforts need to be focused. Pakistan needs to strengthen its democratic institutions to ensure that the people's will is reflected in the decision-making



process. This requires strengthening the independence of the judiciary, ensuring media freedom, and promoting political pluralism. To achieve the objectives of Pakistan's creation, it is essential to promote sustainable economic growth. This can be achieved through investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and agriculture. The

government should also take measures to attract foreign investment and promote trade with other countries. Pakistan needs to ensure that its citizens have access to basic social services such as education, healthcare, and social protection. This requires investing in human capital and promoting inclusive policies that benefit all citizens,

regardless of their social status. Pakistan needs to address its security challenges, including terrorism, sectarianism, and regional conflicts.

This requires developing a comprehensive strategy that involves both military and non-military measures, such as promoting interfaith dialogue and addressing the root causes of extremism. Pakistan needs to promote regional cooperation to achieve the goal of its creation. This can be achieved by building strong relationships with its neighbors and participating in regional forums to promote peace, stability, and economic integration. Consequently, Pakistan requires a concerted effort from the government, civil society, and the people of Pakistan to work together towards building a stable, prosperous, and inclusive society.

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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

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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
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Rawalpindi.....9270601-20

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Railway Exchange9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
CAA.....9281092

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CMH.....5611111
MH.....561116
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666

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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

DG ISPR Maj Gen Sharif also gets the award

President confers mily awards on armed forces personnel

Commander of Bahrain National Guards Shaikh Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Khalifa was awarded Nishan-i-Imtiaz (military) and Defence Attache of Saudi Arabia Major General (Pilot) Staff Awad Bin Abdullah Alzahrani was given Hilal-i-Imtiaz (military)

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Friday conferred military awards on the serving and martyred armed forces personnel at a Pakistan Day investiture ceremony held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. A total of 49 officers and soldiers of the Pakistan Army, Navy and Air Force received the military awards including the families of four martyred troops in the categories of Nishan-i-Imtiaz, Hilal-i-Imtiaz, and Sitara-i-Basalat.

Two foreign dignitaries from friendly countries also received prestigious awards. Commander of Bahrain National Guards Shaikh Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Khalifa was awarded Nishan-i-Imtiaz (military) and Defence Attache of Saudi Arabia Major General (Pilot) Staff Awad Bin Abdullah Alzahrani was given Hilal-i-Imtiaz (military) in recognition to their illustrious services of strengthening defence ties with Pakistan. The president conferred Sitara-i-Bisalat on the martyrs of the Pakistan

Army in recognition of their valour demonstrated while fighting terrorists in operation areas. The awards were received by the family members of the martyrs, including Major Shujaat Hussain (30 Baloch Regiment, martyred in Angoor Adda, South Waziristan); Captain Bilal Khalil (Army Medical Corps, martyred in Noshki, Balochistan); Captain Faheem Abbas (72 Punjab Regiment, martyred in Jani Khel area of Bannu); and Sepoy Muhammad Waqas (18 Frontier Force Regiment, martyred in

North Waziristan). President conferred Hilal-i-Imtiaz (military) on Air Marshal Chaudhry Ahsan Rafiq (Air Headquarters), Air Marshal Waqas Ahmed Sulehri (AHQ), Maj Gen Khurram Nisar (Joint Services HQ), Maj Gen Qamar un Nisa Chaudhry (Army Medical Corps), Maj Gen Irfan Ali Mirza (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Rafiq Zafar (AMC), Rear Admiral Javed Iqbal (Naval Headquarters), Rear Admiral Muhammad Sohail Arshad (NHQ), Rear Admiral Salman Ilyas (NHQ), Air

Vice Marshal Muhammad Nadeem Sabir (AHQ), Maj Gen Syed Khurram Shahzad (AMC), Maj Gen Bilal Umair (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Wasim (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Suhail Amin (AMC), Maj Gen Ariq ur Rehman Sulehria (AMC), Maj Gen Muhammad Aleem (AMC), Air Vice Marshal Salman Abbas Shah (AHQ), Maj Gen Muhammad Avas Dastgir (General Headquarters), Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry (JS HQ), Rear Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi (NHQ), Air

Gen Omar Ahmed Bokhari (GHQ), Maj Gen Inayat Hussain (GHQ), Maj Gen Kamal Azfar (Frontier Works Organization), Maj Gen Muhammad Aamer Najam (National Defence University), Maj Gen Adil Yameen (GHQ), Maj Gen Fahim Amer (Inter Services Intelligence), Maj Gen Shahid Manzoor (JS HQ), Maj Gen Muhammad Kashif Azad (ISI), Maj Gen Tabassum Habib (GHQ), Maj Gen Kamran Ahmed Satti (GHQ), Maj Gen Adil Rehmani, Maj Gen Muhammad Hassan Khattak (ISI), Maj Gen Muhammad Shuja Anwar

(General Officer Commanding), Maj Gen Majid Jahangir (JS HQ), Maj Gen Azhar Waqas (Rangers), Maj Gen Asif Mahmood Goraya (Army Air Defence), Maj Gen Akif Iqbal (ISI), Maj Gen Rashid Mahmood, Maj Gen Muhammad Irfan (GOC), Maj Gen Dilawar Khan (JS HQ), Maj Gen Abdul Moed (GOC), Rear Admiral Muhammad Saleem (NHQ), Air Vice Marshal Shams ul Haq (AHQ), Maj Gen Chaudhry Muhammad Qamar ul Haq Noor, and Air Vice Marshal Muhammad Qaiser Janjua (AHQ).

Failure to evolve effective refugee policy left them vulnerable

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Consistent failure to evolve an effective refugee policy for Afghan migrants and refugees has created stress and suffering among Afghan communities, and left them vulnerable to exploitation and poverty, stated experts at Jinnah Institute's roundtable titled 'Status of Afghan Refugees & Migrants: A Humanitarian Perspective', hosted in partnership with Verso Consulting on 22nd March 2023. Pakistan has hosted a large Afghan refugee population over four decades since 1979. There are approximately 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees according to NADRA, of whom 58% are based in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 23% live in Balochistan, and the rest are scattered in Pakistan's urban centres. Unregistered Afghan refugees range between 400,000 and 775,000, and there has been a significant wave of more refugees forced to cross the border for fear of persecution or threat to their lives and livelihoods after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on 15th August 2021. However, there has never been a clear policy on how to deal with refugees owing to lack of political willingness and intent, participants stated. Participants discussed that Pakistan is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention 1951 or its accompanying Protocol of 1967, and consequently no attention has been paid to asylum

laws. Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951 does not address the legal status of asylum seekers, although UNHCR and Government of Pakistan issued Proof of Registration to Afghan refugees in 2006-2007 after a census of refugees was held in 2005. Additionally, about 840,000 Afghan Citizen Cards were issued in 2017-18. It should be emphasized that these efforts have been piecemeal and simply do not address the magnitude of challenges and human rights abuse faced by refugees in Pakistan. Participants stated that Afghan refugees are daily subjected to threat, intimidation, violence and extortion by law enforcement agencies and others. They cannot access

healthcare in public hospitals for lack of registration, nor enroll their children in school. They are forced to work in the informal sector, if at all livelihoods are available. As a result, most Afghan refugees have been pushed into poverty and are concentrated in peri-urban slum localities. In addition, there is deep seated social prejudice and discrimination against them. Much of this emanates from unclear policy frameworks on how to integrate the refugee population and facilitate their presence in the country. Participants debated whether Pakistan had done enough for refugees already, as some felt the burden of hosting alien communities had taken a

toll on the economy and social fabric. They also felt the responsibility to host more refugees lay with the international community. However, the war in Ukraine had dramatically changed the priorities of international development assistance, as well as countries attentive to the Afghan refugee crisis. Pakistan should improve its border management mechanisms and pay more attention to the plight of Afghan refugees. Participants also felt that the demand for development assistance was misplaced, as the refugee challenge was one of our own making, and alleviating the plight of Afghan refugees is an obligation we have deliberately evaded.

Knowledge Stream, IUCPSS partner to close IT talent gap

ISLAMABAD: Knowledge Stream, a leading provider of IT professionals in Pakistan, and IUCPSS, the Inter-University Consortium for the Promotion of Social Sciences, have announced a partnership to bridge the IT talent gap, promote higher education development, and enhance the employability of young graduates in the country. Under the memorandum of understanding (MoU), Knowledge Stream and IUCPSS will collaborate to offer training, workshops, and other events to help close the IT talent gap in Pakistan. Knowledge Stream's vision is to become the preferred provider of IT professionals in Pakistan, and its mission is to bridge the talent gap with speed, scale, and quality, while exceeding international standards. Its unique value proposition is to train young graduates in 12-week programs to make them capable of getting jobs right after completion of the training. Through the partnership, Knowledge Stream will leverage IUCPSS's expertise and network to promote the use of technology in education and enhance its training programs. By working together, the two organizations aim to create new opportunities for students and educators to learn and grow, ultimately contributing to the development of higher education and the IT industry in Pakistan. "We are excited to partner with IUCPSS to bridge the IT talent gap in Pakistan, promote higher education development, and enhance the employability of young graduates," said Prof. Dr. Sohail Naqvi, CEO of Knowledge Stream. —DNA

ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of Faisal Masque reflection in rain water after the heavy rain in twin cities in morning hours, in Federal Capital. —Online

CDA for repair of quake-affected buildings

ISLAMABAD :The Building Control Agency of the Capital Development Authority (CDA) directed the owners of affected buildings to repair the cracks of earthquake-impacted immediately to ensure public safety. "In case of non-repair the affected building immediately should be vacated and asked for a new building and structural sustainability certificate from the relevant authority," an official in the CDA said. The official said the certificates should be obtained from the CDA and Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) registered firms, which would also need to be verified by a third-party consultant. He said the authority had conducted a survey of 90 high-rise buildings in the federal capital by the Building Control Agency under the direction of Chairman CDA, Noor ul Amin Mengal. "No cracks are found in the pillars of any building and ten out of 90 buildings are found slightly affected by the recent earthquake in the country," he added. The official said, "Minor cracks are found in the plaster or brickwork of the buildings." He said the CDA had directed all the housing societies in the federal capital to conduct a survey as soon as possible of the skyscrapers and submit the report within three days. The official said the authority has also asked the owners of the high-rise and medium-rise buildings to submit the latest strength and composition certificates to CDA, adding that the certificates must be obtained from firms registered with the CDA and the PEC. He said the CDA directed the housing societies not to allow residents in buildings that did not obtain completion certificates and also instructed them to take action against the violators. _APP

IRC warns against imminent humanitarian crisis

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As the rehabilitation process after floods 2022 is still underway, The International Rescue Committee (IRC) stresses the need to invest in multisectoral inclusive rehabilitation programs that take into account the long-term needs of the flood-affected communities. The IRC foresees that critical gaps in recovery across nutrition and food security, health, shelter, education, and WASH if left unchecked are likely to result in long-term serious consequences for the flood-affected population in particular and Paki-

stan as a whole. Since the onset of the floods in July 2022, the IRC has remained active in the flood-affected districts of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh provinces. Through efforts geared towards the provision of food baskets, non-food items, safe drinking water, dignity, hygiene, and winterization kits; the establishment of medical camps, and safe spaces; and the conduction of awareness sessions on life skills and psychosocial support the IRC has reached out to approximately 1,224,938 people. In a press statement the Country Director of IRC, Shabnam Baloch said, "Pakistan is not new to the on-

slaught of floods but the magnitude of the climate carnage that we witnessed in 2022 is unprecedented. More than seven months after the floods, millions of women, men, and children continue to struggle against hunger and homelessness. Health, education, and social protection services remain disrupted in the majority of the affected areas further placing the lives, livelihoods, and prospects of millions in jeopardy." Several months after the climate change-triggered floods devastated three-fourths of Pakistan, an estimated 4.5 million people continue to remain exposed to extreme conditions.

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Briefs

Citizens
hailed PMs
'Free Flour
Distribution
Package'

ISLAMABAD: Citizens on Friday hailed the Prime Minister (PM) announced "Free Wheat Flour Package" for underprivileged people during the holy month of Ramadan.

"Distribution of free flour and provision of other basic commodities to the down-trodden segments of the society at subsidized rates is a wise decision of the present government," said a female citizen while talking to the PTV news channel.

"No doubt the incumbent government is doing its level best to provide maximum relief to the poor people during the Holy month of Ramadan," said a worker in a Utility store.

"This package is the first of its kind, said a labour, adding, low-income citizens can now observe their religious obligations without the added burden of hunger." "Government effort shall be applauded and encouraged, as it sets an example for other governments to follow, in supporting their citizens during times of need," said another women citizen.

"This relief package is not only for any specific area but also for all provinces equally," said the official sources of the Utility store. "This package is only for deserving and deserving people of the country who were registered under the Benazir Income Support Programme."—APP

ANF recovers
over 283 kg
drugs

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 10 operations in different areas of the country managed to recover over 283 kg drugs and arrested nine accused including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed ANF in an operation on Islamabad Motorway recovered 6.6 kg opium and 3.3 kg charras from the possession of a drug smuggler resident of Mardan. In another operation at Bacha Khan International Airport, ANF recovered 1.6 kg cocaine from the possession of a Doha-bound passenger resident of Karachi. ANF foiled a bid to smuggle drugs from Peshawar to Rawalpindi and managed to recover 1.1 kg heroin from an accused resident of Peshawar arrested from Peshawar Ring Road Bus Stop. ANF and FC in two operations in Khyber recovered 38 kg charras and 1.6 kg Ice drug. Eight kg charras was recovered near Kamoke Toll Plaza on Gujranwala G.T. Road and ANF also arrested two accused residents of Peshawar.—APP

Family
injured in
house fire

ISLAMABAD: A couple and their child suffered burn injuries due to an explosion triggered by a gas leakage at their house in Jauharabad Block 14 in Karachi on early Friday morning. Rescue officials said the explosion occurred due to gas leakage from the cylinder and engulfed the entire house, a private news channel reported. The ambulance and a fire tender reached the spot and extinguished the fire. The injured were shifted to the nearby hospital, sources said, adding that the police had started investigation.—APP

Consumers
of 3G/4G
service
increased to
123 mln

ISLAMABAD: The number of 3G and 4G service users in Pakistan has significantly increased and reached 123 million by the end of January 2023. As per the details available on the official site of the PTA, the number of active mobile SIMs reached 193 million during the same period. The number of broadband mobile subscribers reached 123 million while the broadband subscribers were recorded at 126 million with 56.31 percent penetration.—APP

Gwadar fisherman lauds
Chinese solar systems

Mohsin also praised the positive impact made by China and expressed the need for such projects to continue benefiting the community in Gwadar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Gwadar Fisherman have lauded China donated Solar Systems amid power failures, according to Gwadar Pro.

"We no longer have a problem with power breakdowns as China's solar systems continue to provide service to the people of Gwadar," said Abdul Rashid, a fisherman and resident of the Gazarwaan area near Masjid-e-Aqsa in Gwadar's old city. Abdul Rashid is among the beneficiaries of a package of solar equipment that was donated by China in collaboration with the Chinese Embassy and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Last year, the initiative donated 4,000 sets of solar photovoltaic systems and LED lights. "Due to some technical issues a few days ago, there was an electricity outage in Gwadar for a

week. In such a dire situation, my children were able to sleep peacefully for six nights because the solar set and battery donated by China provided 4 to 5 hours of power to keep the fan running," he added. Speaking to Gwadar Pro, Abdul Rashid shared how his family's life has improved since their home was solarized with a donation from China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment in collaboration with the Chinese Embassy. He said, "Previously, during prolonged power outages, my sick mother used to suffer in the dark at night and was very uncomfortable. But for the past five months, thanks to solar power in our home, my mother has been cheerful and offering good wishes to China." He added that during the day, his wife can now use the washing machine and other electric appliances to do household chores thanks to solar power. When asked about the donation

process, he said it was fair and transparent, except for one or two cases. The solar system has also helped keep their electricity bill in check, even during the price hikes in Ramadan. Regarding the verification process, he stated, "The authorities personally collected information and inquired with our neighbors to confirm our status as deserving recipients of the solar system." After the verification was completed, the authorities installed the solar system free of cost. Raheem Buksh, a social worker, informed Gwadar Pro that Chinese solar donations were distributed to the deserving local residents in all 42 wards of Gwadar City, based on his information. Zainab, another beneficiary, expressed her satisfaction with the process, stating that the solar team reached out to them and installed the solar system after verification, without them having to approach the team

themselves. "Prior to receiving the solar apparatus, we had no knowledge about China and its presence in Gwadar, but now we have gained some insight into its role," she revealed. She also mentioned that one solar panel and battery are sufficient for their family's daily needs. In another ward, resident Majeed Zareen expressed his gratitude for the solar system donated by China. "When I checked the market price for the entire solar system installed in our home, it was worth more than Rs. 100,000. As someone who is financially struggling, it was only a dream to afford such an expensive system. We are very grateful to China for this generous initiative for the poor in Gwadar," he stated. In the course of the survey, it was discovered that the population of Gwadar exceeds 150,000 (0.15 million) people, the majority of whom are impoverished and fishermen. The contribution of solar photovoltaic systems and

LED lights is just one of the most recent illustrations of China's commitment to aiding developing countries to improve their ability to cope with the challenges brought about by climate change. To assist with mitigation and adaptation efforts, China has signed memorandums of understanding on climate change cooperation with 37 countries, donating materials worth over 1 billion yuan (\$147 million). According to Noor Mohsin, the president of the Gwadar Press Club, after evaluating the situation and gathering information, at least 95 percent of the deserving individuals in Gwadar received solar photovoltaic systems and LED lights in a fair and systematic manner, without any interference from politics. Mohsin also praised the positive impact made by China and expressed the need for such projects to continue benefiting the community in Gwadar.

Six bids to
smuggle
4010 wheat,
flour bags
foiled

RAWALPINDI: The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police have foiled six bids to smuggle 4010 wheat and flour bags, said a police spokesman here on Friday. He said that the authorities of the food department along with Potohar Division police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up six drivers namely Pervaiz, Mushtaq, Zahid, Ziarat, Naveed and Sajid, recovered 2810 flour and 1200 wheat bags. He said that the accused were trying to smuggle wheat and flour bags out of Rawalpindi division. The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi had accelerated their ongoing operations against wheat and flour smugglers, he said. Strict action in accordance with the law was being taken against wheat smugglers and hoarders, he added.—APP

Two street
criminals
arrested

RAWALPINDI: In an operation against criminals, Rawalpindi Police here on Friday arrested two street criminals and recovered Rs 359,000 snatched cash, five stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, New Town Police arrested two, Zahid, ringleader and Muzammil, wanted in various cases. He informed that the police team constituted under the supervision of SHO New Town Police Station on the directives of the Superintendent of Police conducted a raid and managed to net the accused. Police also recovered Rs 359,000 cash, five stolen motorcycles, weapons and other items from their possession. As per the preliminary police record, the criminals were also involved in other crimes, he said.—APP

OMODA shares technological
Glory with Pakistani clients

DNA

ISLAMABAD Mar. 23. (): "As a Chinese brand committed to independent research and development, Chery has been driven by technology to advance its global strategy in order to ensure the continued growth of sales volume, vehicle quality, and client reputation." We are always willing to share its scientific and technological achievements with our Pakistani clients in real time," said Mr. Qi, Director of Southern Asia Region in OMODA, Chery Group.

Qi revealed, in a recent interview with Gwadar Pro, that Chery's new OMODA brand will be added to the list of consumer choices for Pakistani customers in the second half of this year. He



termed it a technological and stylish work, following the popularity of Tiggo4 and Tiggo8 in Pakistan. The OMODA series has the spatial performance of an MPV, the chassis of an SUV, and the handling of a sedan, and can be described as a combination of features from various models. As the first OMODA product, OMODA 5 comprehensively meets the needs of a new generation of users.

It is equipped with cutting-edge technology configurations and stunning, surging power, with intelligent assistant driving and power performance that leads products in its class, giving it an infinite sense of future and movement. According to Euro NCAP's latest safety test results, the OMODA 5 has passed the most professional and rigorous safety evaluation, earning the highest five-

star safety rating for its outstanding performance in four areas, including adult and child occupants, vulnerable road users, and safety assist. OMODA 5's success in the rigorous Euro NCAP tests is attributed to its emphasis on user interest and its own highest pursuit of quality. The cross-style SUV has catered to the key demands of global consumers from the R&D and design stage. It has not only made great advances in terms of body structure, safety configuration, and other aspects but has also conducted adaptive development validation in different environments and road conditions around the world. Since the very beginning, when it was founded, OMODA has conducted over 1,000 surveys in over 20 countries.

OGRA is committed
to protect consumer
interest

OGRA is cognizant of its
mandate and is fully committed
to work in public interest

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) convened a meeting with the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) on their request to discuss the mechanism of exchange rate adjustment. Meeting was attended by the industry including the OCAC, OMAP, representatives of the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) and OGRA. Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority's finance department explained the Mechanism of Exchange Rate Adjustment in depth, so that the stakeholders may understand the process. It is pertinent to mention that OGRA implement the policies of the Federal Government. Further OGRA Authority heard the issues of the OMC's and wherein detail deliberations were done in this regard to improve the understanding of the participants. It has been noted with great concern that counter productive media campaign is being run against Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority, which is absolutely rebutted. OGRA is cognizant of its mandate and is fully committed to work in public interest.

Chairman HEC lauds
HEC sports teams

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman, Higher Education Commission (HEC) has lauded the HEC sports teams for clinching medals in different national championships.

HEC teams bagged silver medal in 60th National Badminton Championship, bronze medal in Women National Volleyball Championship and bronze medal in 14th Tug of War National Championship. Similarly, HEC women team won bronze medal in 10th National Archery Championship whereas HEC men team secured 4th Position. In 17th HEC Women Baseball Championship, HEC team won bronze medal and HEC's player Aram Barkat was awarded 'Best Player of the Championship' title. In National Swimming Championship, HEC men's team won bronze medal in 100-meter Freestyle. In his message, Chairman HEC appreciated the efforts of HEC sports division, coaches, team managers and players for their remarkable performance in various national championships. He assured complete support for promoting sports and extracurricular activities in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) alongside academic pursuits so as to create a holistic educational environment for university students. Since its inception in 2002, HEC has been playing a pivotal role in facilitating HEIs to promote sports activities along with providing higher education across the country. In this regard, one of the key initiatives of HEC is to organize intervarsity championships and prepare and supports university players for participating in national and international championships.—DNA

IMF being used
as a weapon
against Pakistan

He warned that if at this critical juncture, the politicians do not show their senses and continue to sacrifice the national interest for the sake of power, then Pakistan will be completely trapped by world powers

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Economy Watch (PEW) on Friday said the IMF is being used as a weapon against Pakistan. The ever-increasing demands of the international institution have left our government helpless, it said. IMF is ruining Pakistan's economy by delaying the deal at the behest of some powers, said Dr. Murtaza Mughal, President of PEW. He said that the government has taken strict measures without caring about its political capital, but the IMF is not satisfied with this which points towards a possible conspiracy. It is an open secret that the IMF is a tool of imperialism that imposes neo-liberal policies on borrowing states resulting in poverty and inequality, he added. He observed that the lender work with other institutions to prevent poor and underdeveloped countries from making policies that can result in actual development. Ultimately their citizens have to suffer huge taxes and inflation.

Major power wants to establish its foothold in Asia through India, and if Pakistan moves away from China today or bows to India, the IMF will immediately restore the deal, he said. Dr. Murtaza Mughal said that even the friendly countries have left Pakistan alone at the behest of an influential country and this nexus is not hidden from anyone. He said that a powerful country is not happy with the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, nor is it pleased with China's successful diplomacy and wants it to be subverted at any cost so that its political interests are fulfilled. The reconciliation between Iran and KSA will hurt the interests of the western power and it will not be able to sell arms and ammunition worth billions of dollars, therefore, it can attempt to use Pakistan in this regard. He warned that if at this critical juncture, the politicians do not show their senses and continue to sacrifice the national interest for the sake of power, then Pakistan will be completely trapped by world powers.—DNA

HR violations
reach
alarming
proportions
in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD: The worst human rights violations perpetrated by Indian troops in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), paramilitary and police personnel have reached alarming proportions since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Indian government repealed the territory's special status in August 2019.

According to a report compiled by Kashmir Media Service, it said that though Amnesty and US annual reports have been raising alarm about rights violations in IIOJK yet Indian troops, paramilitary and police personnel were arbitrarily arresting, torturing and killing Kashmiris on a daily basis during so-called cordon and search operations (CASOs).

It said over 96,000 people, including young boys and women, had fallen to Indian bullets since January 1989 till date in IIOJK, adding India is using draconian laws, Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Public Safety Act (PSA) and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) to stifle political dissent in the territory. The report said that the Indian government while violating international laws, is not listening to the global calls to stop human rights violations in IIOJK.—APP

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Ukraine and war crimes

It is entirely likely that Vladimir Putin may never be held fully accountable for his crimes. But the possibility of eventual justice grew somewhat brighter with the international criminal court's decision last week to issue an arrest warrant for overseeing the abduction of Ukrainian children.

The compelling evidence of the forced transfer of thousands of children for adoption or to "re-education camps" is appalling. But this is only one of many horrors that Mr Putin has unleashed on Ukraine. There is growing support for prosecuting him for the invasion itself, which would require the creation of a special tribunal as the crime of aggression is not within the ICC's scope. These calls are made in part because it is usually hard, if not impossible, for war crimes investigators to prove that those at the top sanctioned atrocities on the ground. For now, it is more of an annoyance than a threat or even a serious obstacle to him. Russia is not a signatory to the Rome statute, the court's founding document, and does not recognise its jurisdiction. The warrant may hinder his travels – member countries are supposed to arrest Mr Putin if he visits – but governments have sidestepped such requirements in the past. As the ICC's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, observed, justice will be a matter of "stamina". The ICC cannot succeed alone, however. It needs more support, including but not limited to greater financial backing. It has 40 investigators on the ground in Ukraine, yet funding has not increased accordingly. And though the Biden administration rescinded sanctions imposed on it by Donald Trump over the investigation of war crimes in Afghanistan by the US and others, the Pentagon is reportedly blocking cooperation on Russia because it fears a precedent which could lead to the prosecution of Americans in future.

The US has long maintained that the court does not have jurisdiction over non-signatories, even if the alleged crimes occurred in a country that is party to the treaty, such as Afghanistan. While 123 countries are party to the Rome statute, the US, like Russia and China, refused to join, undercutting the court's credibility. Signing up would be the moral course, but is politically unfeasible. However, legal experts and some US officials argue that the administration could and should still cooperate. Even if its citizens were indicted by the ICC, the US could argue that the court should only prosecute when countries are incapable of bringing cases satisfactorily in domestic courts. American military and civilian courts have prosecuted soldiers for atrocities in Iraq, for example, though far from as frequently or effectively as needed. Adopting this pragmatic course of cooperation with the ICC without full support would be an imperfect solution. But every support possible must be enlisted for an institution that, as Mr Putin's case shows, is doing essential work.

Roar of US' war machine

The United States' response to China's latest efforts to promote peace talks between Russia and Ukraine makes clear its determination to turn the ongoing hostilities at the heart of Europe into a protracted conflict. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken even went so far as to allege that China's efforts to promote peace this week were a diplomatic ploy to help Russia, saying that "the world should not be fooled by any tactical move by Russia supported by China, or any other country, to freeze the war on its own terms".

In the same vein, White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby also criticized China, claiming that China's position on the Ukraine issue should not be viewed as impartial. All such obfuscating rhetoric only adds weight to Kirby's remark admitting that a peace deal would be "unacceptable" to the Joe Biden administration. The intention of the Biden administration to delay and offset a peaceful resolution to the one-year-old conflict and continue to fuel the war flames in Ukraine is in total disregard of the plight of the Ukrainian people and the lives that are being lost on the battlefield. China's 12-point proposal for ending the Ukraine crisis, made public on the first anniversary of the war last month, was widely welcomed by the world community, the United Nations and Kyiv included.

The US administration's unwarranted finger-pointing at China is both duplicitous and contrary to the global aspiration for a peaceful end to the conflict. China has all along abided by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter on the Ukraine crisis, and as a responsible country, it is seeking to promote a cease-fire. It is not sitting idle even though it could since it is neither the one that created the Ukraine crisis nor is it a party to the crisis. It adheres to an objective, principled and impartial stance, and is actively encouraging peace talks. China's efforts to broker peace are in sharp contrast to the US, which has constantly fanned the flames of the conflict and exploited the situation for selfish gains. The remarks by Blinken and Kirby simply serve to highlight that China is now increasingly seen as a capable, trustworthy, impartial and effective peace broker.

Thanks to the devoted ministrations of the Biden administration, the Ukraine crisis is grinding on, causing untold sufferings for people in the country and dire consequences around the world as a result of its spillover effects. The Biden administration should accept that its ideologically driven campaign to suppress Russia is a relic of the Cold War and is abhorred by most of the international community. It does not uphold any of the values that it claims to be acting under the banner of. It is simply the latest meal plan to satisfy the voracious appetite of the US war machine.

It should abandon its selfish calculus and work with others to bring this conflict to an end before it spirals beyond control.

Israel's radicalization train is out of control

Daoud Kuttab

In Jordan, Prince Hassan bin Talal slammed the Israeli minister and called what he said and the map he stood in front of "a violation of laws and morals." Jordanian Sen. Mohammed Momani, a former deputy prime minister and the secretary-general of the Mithaq party, called on the government to immediately denounce the statements and the map that Smotrich stood behind. "The statement must be condemned and diplomatic as well as political action must be taken against this radical Israeli government," he told AmmanNet. On the eve of Ramadan and amid the worries of King Abdullah and others that things could get worse, the map

One of the most worrisome issues for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been the threats by right-wing Israeli extremists to deport a large number of Palestinians to the country. The slogan "Jordan is Palestine" was perhaps the biggest source of concern to many. The "Jordan is Palestine" argument was a source of concern that Israel planned to further expel Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to the east of the Jordan river and thus de-establish Jordan to the degree that it would become a Palestinian state. The strongest response to this argument comes from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has often said that "Palestine is Palestine and Jordan is Jordan." Never did the Jordanians expect that this issue would reflect the opinion of a senior Israeli minister, especially since the signing of the 1994 peace agreement between the two countries. However, on Sunday, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich gave a speech in France from a podium that was adorned with a map based on the logo of the former Irgun militia, which was considered a terrorist organization by the British. This has correctly caused uproar in Jordan. The map (minus the gun that appears on the original Irgun logo) shows Israel expanding into Jordan, south Lebanon and southern Syria, and even a small part of what is now Saudi Arabia. The map was noticed coincidentally after reports emerged of what Smotrich said at the event regarding the Palestinians. Smotrich has previously said his last name was derived from the Ukrainian town of Smotrych, where his ancestors lived. His attempts at negating the very existence of Palestinians and adopting the claim of being the original Palestinian is an almost verbatim echo of what another former Ukrainian, Golda Meir, said in 1969. The then-Israeli prime minister said in an interview with Frank Giles, deputy editor of The Sunday Times,

"There was no such thing as Palestinians." This quote has been frequently used to illustrate Israel's denial of Palestinian history and is considered to sum up the Palestinians' sense of victimization by Israel. It is considered to be a successor to the early Christian Zionist phrase "A land without a people for a people without a land," and a predecessor to the academically discredited 1984 book "From Time Immemorial" and the 2017 satire "A History of the Palestinian People." Edward Said described it as Meir's "most celebrated remark," adding that her "jingoistic comments concerning Palestinians remain one of her defining – and most damning – legacies." At the Rabat Arab League Summit in 1974, Jordan gave up representing Palestinians and recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." In 1988, Amman severed all ties with the West Bank and, since then, all maps of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have excluded the areas west of the river. The PLO received a boost of sorts when the First Intifada erupted in 1987 and the local intifada leadership insisted on the organization representing them. The PLO even received official Israeli acceptance when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin exchanged letters of recognition with it in 1993. Rabin's letter was addressed to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and it stated: "Mr. Chairman, In response to your letter of September 9, 1993, I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process." Now, nearly 30 years later, we are back to below square one. A senior Israeli minister has negated the existence of the Palestinian people and indirectly denied everything that happened

not only at that White House signing ceremony in 1993 but also in 1994, when Israel and Jordan signed the Wadi Araba treaty, making Jordan the second sovereign Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel.

Many in Palestine and Jordan still remember the fact that the Herut party, which formed the nucleus of what is now the Likud, had a saying that the Jordan river "has two banks, this one is ours and the other one too."

Smotrich's statement and the map provoked immediate and angry responses from Palestinians and Jordanians. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said that Smotrich's statement was perfect evidence of the "extremist, racist, Zionist ideology that governs the current Israeli government."

In Jordan, Prince Hassan bin Talal slammed the Israeli minister and called what he said and the map he stood in front of "a violation of laws and morals." Jordanian Sen. Mohammed Momani, a former deputy prime minister and the secretary-general of the Mithaq party, called on the government to immediately denounce the statements and the map that Smotrich stood behind. "The statement must be condemned and diplomatic as well as political action must be taken against this radical Israeli government," he told AmmanNet. On the eve of Ramadan and amid the worries of King Abdullah and others that things could get worse, the map and the statements by a senior Israeli Cabinet minister – which have not been (so far) condemned by the prime minister of Israel – put the Jordanian government, King Abdullah and the Palestinians in a very difficult position, as they are unable to get the Israelis to stop their radicalization train that is out of control.

Courtesy: Arab news

Why Crossing LOC isn't a cakewalk for Indian Military

Tanveer ul Haque

Pakistan has a well-trained and well-equipped military that is capable of defending its territory. Pakistan's military is battle-hardened due to its involvement in multiple conflicts, including the ongoing war against terrorism. Any misadventure on the LoC by India can lead to a full-fledged war between the two nuclear-armed nations, which will not be in the interest of India. Pakistan has shown time and again that it is capable of defending its territory and giving a tough fight to its adversaries. The first visit of COAS Asim Muneer on LOC after assuming the charge is a clear message to the neighboring country

India being a powerful nation with a large military, may be tempted to undertake misadventures on the LoC, but it is not an easy feat. There are several reasons why the continuous gibberish of Indian generals about Azad Jammu and Kashmir is whimsical and dull-witted.

Pakistan has a well-trained and well-equipped military that is capable of defending its territory. Pakistan's military is battle-hardened due to its involvement in multiple conflicts, including the ongoing war against terrorism. Any misadventure on the LoC by India can lead to a full-fledged war between the two nuclear-armed nations, which will not be in the interest of India. Pakistan has shown time and again that it is capable of defending its territory and giving a tough fight to its adversaries. The first visit of COAS Asim Muneer on LOC after assuming the charge is a clear message to the neighboring country that Pakistan Army is clear and ever ready to protect the country's borders. Asim Muneer is an exemplary leader, an outstanding strategist, and a true patriot. His dedication to serving his country and protecting the lives of his fellow citizens is unparalleled, and his unwavering commitment to his troops has earned him the respect and admiration of all who have had the privilege of serving under his command. Any misadventure on the LoC by India

will definitely lead to a strong response from Pakistan's armed forces. Pakistan's armed forces are among the most capable in the world and have a long history of defending the country's borders against external threats. They are highly capable of defending the country's borders. Their extensive training and experience, combined with modern equipment and technology, make them one of the most effective militaries in the world. Their motivation and discipline, combined with a close relationship with the civilian government, make them a formidable force that can protect Pakistan's sovereignty against any external threat.

Any misadventure on the LoC by India can lead to a strong response from the local population in both parts of Jammu and Kashmir. We remember how in February 2019, the local people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir caught hold of Indian pilot Abhinandan whose fighter jet was destroyed by the Pakistan Air Force. The people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir have suffered immensely due to the ongoing conflict, and any aggression on the LoC can lead to a strong backlash from the local population in the region. India faces an overwhelmingly hostile population on both sides of the Line of Control and any large-scale aggression in such a region would be disastrous for the country. Moreover, it can lead to a strong response from Pakistan's allies, especially

China. China has been a strong ally of Pakistan and has been involved in several infrastructure projects in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Any aggression on the LoC by India can lead to a strong response from China, further complicating the situation. India cannot circumvent the fact that Pakistan in the region holds a significant place due to its geographical location and influence in the Islamic world. The constant statements from Indian army generals have left many experts scratching their heads. The statement from Northern Army Commander Lt General Upendra Dwivedi in November last year has forced many military strategists to ridicule the general's notion of war. It's unclear where the general got his military expertise from, but it's safe to say that it wasn't from any reputable source.

India's actions on the LoC will be closely monitored by the international community, and any violation of international law can lead to sanctions and other punitive measures. The LoC is a highly sensitive area, and any aggression on either side can lead to serious repercussions for Modi-led India. India should exercise restraint and not invite the wrath of a strong army institution that has fiercely safeguarded the sovereignty of Pakistan.

The author hails from Srinagar, Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir

Briefs

'Khan wants civil war in country'

FROM PAGE 01
personally monitored the services being offered to the people in such critical times, she added.
The prime minister himself paid surprise visits to flour distribution centers in Kasur and Lahore to ensure uninterrupted supply of quality flour, she said, adding more visits were on the cards in the coming days. She said during his visits, the prime minister had held interactions with women children, and persons with disabilities who were sitting in the waiting areas to wait for their turn. The PM also issued directives to the officials concerned to resolve the complaints of the people visiting the flour distribution centers.

Imran Khan seeking US help: Asif

FROM PAGE 01
journey since his dismissal from the government through the vote of no-confidence and today to "his SOS to the United States". Responding to a question, the PML-N leader said that the government had tried developing a consensus on economic policies for the last year but that offer was rejected and spurned by the then-prime minister. "He [Imran Khan] has offered to talk to the establishment, with the military leadership but not the political leadership.

President Alvi asks PM to...

FORM PAGE 01
dated 1st March, 2023, to avoid further complications including Contempt of Court. In his letter, the President said that he was writing the letter as events had taken place in the recent past that were highlighted by the print, electronic and social media about glaring violations of Fundamental and Human Rights that needed to be brought to Prime Minister's notice to ensure remedial measures and preventive action.

Khan's non-bailable warrants...

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announced the verdict after hearing arguments from the respondents. Special Prosecutor Raja Rizwan Abbasi prayed the court to bound the PTI's chief for appearance on next hearing. Imran Khan's Lawyer Barrister Gohar Ali said that PTI chairman was coming to Islamabad on March 30 to appear in toshakhana case and prayed the court to also fix this case for hearing on same day. The judge said that it was a strange request as the order of the arrest warrants was for March 29, but the lawyer requested to fix case on March 30.

IMF seeks external financing assurances

FROM PAGE 01
The deal will also unlock other bilateral and multi-lateral financing avenues for Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves, which have fallen to four weeks' worth of import cover.
The IMF wants Pakistan to get the assurance of up to \$7 billion to fund this fiscal year's balance of payments gap. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar has been saying it should be around \$5 billion. "Ensuring that there is sufficient financing to support the authorities is the paramount priority. A Staff Level Agreement (SLA) will follow once the few remaining points are closed," she said adding financing assurances were a standard feature of all IMF programs.
"We do need to ensure that we have those financing assurances in place in order for us to be able to take the next step with Pakistan," she added.

Senate Committee summons MC of Gun & Country Club

The Committee summoned the Management Committee of the Gun and Country Club in the next meeting to give a detailed briefing on the irregularities of the gun and country club

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) on Friday summoned the Management Committee of Gun and Country Club Islamabad on alleged irregularities of millions rupees in the next meeting.
The meeting was chaired by Senator Nisar Ahmed Khurro and was attended by Senator Gurdeep Singh, Senator Mushtaq Ahmed, Senator Kamran Michael, Federal Secretary Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination Ahmad Hanif Orakzai and senior officers of the

Ministry of IPC along with its attached departments and agencies which held at Parliament House, Islamabad.
Matters discussed included year wise audit details of the Gun and Country Club and briefing related to scope of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination. The Ministry while briefing the Committee regarding audit details of the Gun and Country Club from June 2019 to June 2022 explained the issues related to the property and its management and apprised the committee of numerous irregularities that resulted from non-availability of staff that is well conversant with Govern-

ment rules. In addition he committee was informed of an area of more than 100 acres that is in occupancy for a shooting game without any legal framework. Chairman Committee Senator Nisar Khurro stressed the need for laws in this regard and questioned the delay despite orders of the Supreme Court in 2020. The Committee was informed that laws related to dealing with related matters were being formulated. The Committee stressed the need for expediting the process of law formulation and summoned the Ministry of Law for consultation of the matter in the next meeting.

Secretary of IPC Ministry informed the committee that Supreme Court directed to make legal framework related to gun and country club and Advocate Supreme Court Naeem Bukhari running the affairs of Gun and Country Club management committee, adding that we can only ask from the management committee on the irregularities but we cannot file an FIR against them as he has good relations with the Supreme Court. Senator Mushtaq Ahmed said that Gun and Country Club is illegally built on land worth billions of rupees which is occupied by Ashrafia as well as the

Supreme Court has also become a shopping market for justice. Chairman standing committee Senator Nisar Khoro said that if the management committee does not respond then how will continue the work, they must respond on the irregularities.
The Committee summoned the Management Committee of the Gun and Country Club in the next meeting to give a detailed briefing on the irregularities of the gun and country club.
Deliberating over the scope of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination the Committee was informed regarding details of the related departments.

Bali governor puts Indonesia on the spot

DNA

BALI: A refusal by the governor of Hindu-majority Bali to host an Israeli soccer team at this May's FIFA Under-20 World Cup puts the Indonesian government, football association, and foremost Muslim civil society movement on the spot.
Wayan Koster's refusal threatens to lead FIFA to deprive Indonesia of its hosting rights, which oblige it to allow national teams to compete irrespective of whether countries recognise one another. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) stripped Malaysia of its right to host the 2019 World Para Swimming Championship because it refused to allow Israel to participate.
"We request the Minister adopt a policy of banning the Israeli team from competing in Bali. We, the provincial government of Bali, declare that we reject the participation of the Israel team to compete in Bali," Mr. Koster wrote in a March 14 letter to the youth and sports ministry a day after the minister resigned because he was elected deputy chairman of the Indonesian Football Association. Indonesia has refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel as long as it fails to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians.

'Hold KP polls on...

FORM PAGE 01

a fresh wave of terrorist activities has been taking place in the northwestern province on a daily basis. He said major terrorist activities include cross-border fire in North Waziristan, an improvised explosive device (IED) blast on an army vehicle in Kohat, heavy exchange of fire with terrorists in South Waziristan on March 15, unknown terrorists fire on Khyber's Bara Police Station on March 19. Citing further incidents, he said a terrorist attack took on a police station in DI Khan followed by a search operation by the army, resulting in the martyrdom of three army soldiers on the night between March 21 and 22.

Imran pins hope on SC..

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"Once you violate the law, you can do anything." Mr Khan said, "Only case against Shehbaz Sharif was registered in our tenure." Speaking about terrorism cases against him, Mr Khan said, "The nation knows me for 50 years, but 40 cases related to terrorism has been lodged against me." Talking about his nephew Hassan Niazi, Mr Khan said, "It is deeply deplorable that what is going on with Hassan Niazi. When he gets bail in one case, he has to face another case." Earlier, Mr Khan launched a broadside at the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), saying that the incumbent government had dragged the country into a quagmire. In a statement, the deposed premier said, "Everybody should show solidarity for the sake of the judiciary and the country's survival. I will tell how we have to stand by the constitution." Speaking about his party's gathering, Mr Khan said he was going to stage the first gathering this year tomorrow. He sought the nation's help, saying the country was witnessing a difficult time. On Thursday, Mr Khan said the Islamabad and Punjab police were breaking all the laws with impunity.

China rolls over \$2 bn loan

FROM PAGE 01

Net International Reserves (NIR), which can only be fulfilled after getting assurance from friendly countries to fund a balance of payment gap. Pakistan has assured the IMF that it would raise its dwindling foreign exchange reserves to \$10 billion by the end of June. The IMF wants Pakistan to get the assurance for up to \$7 billion to fund this fiscal year's balance of payments gap. Mr Dar has been saying it should be around \$5 billion.

Rybakina overcomes determined Kalinskaya, Americans progress



MIAMI GARDENS: Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina survived a spirited comeback from Russian Anna Kalinskaya at the Miami Open on Thursday, progressing to the third round with a 7-5, 4-6, 6-3 win. Americans Jessica Pegula and Coco Gauff advanced with less complication enjoying straight sets wins at Hard Rock Stadium. Rybakina is aiming for the 'Sunshine Double' after defeating Aryna Sabalenka to win the Indian Wells final last week and she came into the match on the back of wins in each of the last eight games she has started.

Kalinskaya broke early in the first set but failed to hold serving for the set at 5-4 up and her Kazakh opponent broke again to turn the set around. The Russian received medical attention between sets and started the second poorly but trailing 4-2 she produced a brilliant cross-court winner to

break back. She broke again with Rybakina going long and wrapped up the set with a magnificent shot down the line to force the match into a deciding set. It was tight until Rybakina broke in the sixth game, Kalinskaya going for one deep effort too many but the Russian's resilience was evident again as she responded with a break of her own. But a tiring Kalinskaya was unable to hold her serve and Rybakina saw the match out to set up a meeting with Spain's Paula Badosa.

World number three Pegula got her campaign under way with a confident 6-3, 6-1 second round win over Canada's Katherine Sebov. With top-ranked Iga Swiatek having withdrawn, American Pegula is among the favourites to challenge for the title. "I had to adjust my game plan a little bit in that first set and then was able to close it out pretty easily," said Pegula, a semi-finalist in Miami in

2022. Pegula will face fellow American Danielle Collins in the second round after she beat Bulgarian Viktoriya Tomova 7-6 (7/3), 6-2. Sixth-seed Gauff, beaten finalist in the French Open last year, saw off Canada's Rebecca Marino 6-4, 6-3, converting five of her nine break points and twice coming back from a break down in the second set. "It was an up-and-down match honestly. A lot of breaks. I mean, I did well in the returning part, considering she's a big server," said the 19-year-old.

Belgium's Elise Mertens upset eighth seed Daria Kasatkina 4-6, 6-2, 6-2. After letting a 3-0 advantage slip in the first set, Mertens dominated as Kasatkina struggled physically, needing a medical time-out in the second set. Spain's Badosa battled to a 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-3 win over Germany's Laura Siegemund while Russian Anastasia Potapova defeated Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk 6-1, 6-3. — Agencies



Saim, Tayyab to debut against Afghanistan

LAHORE: Pakistan have named a dynamic XI for the first of the three T20Is against Afghanistan at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on Friday. Opener Saim Ayub, middle-order batter Tayyab Tahir and right-arm quicks Zaman Khan and Ihsanullah will make Pakistan debuts. Top-order batter Abdullah Shafique, all-rounders Faheem Ashraf and Imad Wasim, and Azam Khan mark their returns to the Pakistan side, said the information made available here by the Pakistan Cricket Board. These eight players were named in the 15-member squad for this T20I series after a string of impressive performances in the domestic circuit and the recently-concluded HBL Pakistan Super League 8. The series comes with an opportunity for these players to carry their form in international cricket.

Karachi-born 20-year-old Saim will open with Mohammad Harris, who has played five T20Is for Pakistan and announced his arrival in the last ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia with his blazing strokeplay and bold intent, and has battled with him in Peshawar Zalmi during the HBL PSL 8. Saim comes into the side after a highly impressive run for Sindh and Peshawar Zalmi. The left-hander played an integral role in crowning Sindh the National T20 champions as he made 416 runs in 12 matches at a strike rate of 155.22. He smashed 341 runs – that included five half-centuries, the joint-most in the season with Babar Azam – at a strike rate of 165.53 for Peshawar Zalmi in this HBL PSL at the top of the order. Speaking ahead of his debut, Saim told PCB Digital: "Whatever I had done in my life was to achieve this jersey and now I want to do justice with this opportunity. There's excitement and an element of nervousness as well as I never expected to play for Pakistan this early. But, since I have gotten this opportunity, I am going to do my best."

"It is very important to give a good start to your team in T20 cricket no matter what opposition you are playing. You have to assess the conditions quickly and make your presence count and that's what I will be planning to do with Harris. We have been playing together in Peshawar Zalmi and we were batchmates as well. We enjoy good chemistry and our playing style is also similar – we look to dominate the opposition. So, it will be fun to play with him." Abdullah and Tayyab make number three and four respectively. Abdullah, who has played three T20Is with his last being in December 2020 in New Zealand, comes into the side after making 268 runs at 144.08 for champions Lahore Qalandars. He scored two half-centuries, the last being in the final against Multan Sultans. Tayyab has been in good touch over the last year. He marked his HBL PSL 8 debut with a whirlwind 65 and made 137 runs at 144.21 and was the best batter of the Pakistan Cup, that concluded in January. He also bagged player of the final award for his match-winning 71 for Central Punjab. He made 708 runs in first-class Quaid-e-Azam Trophy at an average of 59 and recorded four centuries and one half-century. — Agencies

Messi scores 800th goal in top-level football

LONDON: Lionel Messi scored his 800th top-level goal as Argentina beat Panama 2-0 in their first match since winning the World Cup. The 35-year-old Paris St-Germain forward becomes the second player to reach the milestone after Cristiano Ronaldo. Messi's tally includes 672 goals over 17 seasons for Barcelona and 29 for PSG. He also has 99 international goals, with two coming in the World Cup final. The Argentina captain scored an 89th-minute free-kick at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium in Buenos Aires to add to Thiago Almada's opener 11 minutes earlier. Messi will have the opportunity to score his 100th international goal when Argentina play Curacao on Tuesday. It is yet another milestone in an extraordinary career during which he has won almost every major trophy, including four Champions Leagues, 10 La Liga titles, the Copa America and, finally in December, the World Cup. Established as one of the greatest players of all time, Messi has won the Ballon d'Or - awarded to the best player of the year in European football - a record seven times, twice more than Ronaldo. — DNA

Ronaldo scores twice as he sets men's caps record

LISBON: Cristiano Ronaldo celebrated his world-record 197th men's international appearance by scoring twice as Portugal thrashed Liechtenstein in their Euro 2024 qualifying opener. The 38-year-old has now scored a men's record 120 international goals. He made his international debut in 2003 and in Qatar last year became the first man to score in five World Cups. Ronaldo added to his goals tally with a second-half penalty before finding the top corner with a free-kick. The forward - now playing in Saudi Arabia for Al Nassr - had been frustrated in front of goal during the first period, blazing a clear-cut chance well over the bar with the hosts only having a deflected Joao Cancelo effort as a reward for their dominance. However, Bernardo Silva doubled their advantage shortly after the restart with a low effort into the bottom corner, before Ronaldo came to the fore as he reached yet another milestone in fine fashion, while

also becoming the first man to score 100 times in competitive internationals. Ronaldo had moved level with Kuwait forward Bader Al-Mutawa on 196 caps at the World Cup but there were question marks over his international future after Portugal's elimination by Morocco at the quarter-final stage.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner found himself dropped from the Portuguese starting XI at the tournament but justified his selection as captain in new manager Roberto Martinez's first game in charge. Ronaldo's latest records only further cement his status as one of the greatest players of all time. His glittering career has seen him win seven domestic top-flight titles, 11 other major domestic trophies, five Champions Leagues, four Club World Cups and one European Championship.

The former Sporting Lisbon, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus forward has also been named the Best Fifa Men's player twice. — Agencies

Kane makes history as England squeeze past Italy

DNA

NAPLES: Harry Kane broke England's all-time scoring record with his 54th international goal in Thursday's tight 2-1 win against Italy which kicked off his team's Euro 24 qualifying campaign in positive style. Gareth Southgate's side were already a goal ahead through Declan Rice when captain Kane stroked home a 44th-minute penalty to overtake Wayne Rooney and help England to a handy Group C win in Naples over the European champions. "It means everything. I was so excited to put the England shirt on and get back out and get the campaign started for next year's Euros," said Kane. Mateo Retegui netted the Italians' goal on the Argentina-born striker's debut for his new country 10 minutes after the break, but despite late pressure and Luke Shaw being sent off, the Azzurri

couldn't snatch a point in a repeat of the Euro 2020 final. Tottenham striker Kane had been locked with Rooney on 53 goals for his national team after missing a penalty in England's World Cup quarter-final defeat by France in December. However he made no mistake from the spot this time at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona after Giovanni Di Lorenzo was penalised for handball following a VAR check. Southgate said on Wednesday that England needed to start beating the big teams if they're to end a near six-decade major tournament drought and beating Italy away for the first time since 1961 is good sign for the rest of qualifying. For Italy it was a frustrating night as a bad first-half display cost the Azzurri the chance to give England another bloody nose after winning Euro 2020 at their expense and relegating them from the Nations League top tier. A spirited effort after the break in which they restricted England

to very little showed why Roberto Mancini's side should be one of the two teams which qualifies from a five-team group that also features Ukraine, North Macedonia and Malta. "I saw a proper team out there in the second half and that bodes well for the future," said Mancini. "We might be starting on the wrong foot but we hope it ends up being a smoother ride."



donia and Malta. "I saw a proper team out there in the second half and that bodes well for the future," said Mancini. "We might be starting on the wrong foot but we hope it ends up being a smoother ride."

Thursday's match was the first since the passing of Gianluca Vialli, and there was a moving pre-match tribute to the former Sampdoria, Juventus and Chelsea forward who was a key part of Mancini's staff. Vialli, who died in January at the age of 58 following a long battle with pancreatic cancer, was Mancini's best friend and long-time strike partner in their playing days at Sampdoria in the 1980s and 1990s. The big screen in the Maradona showed images of Vialli and Mancini celebrating the Euro win while the pitchside hoardings bore the message "Ciao Luca". However once the match got underway it was England who were the more dangerous side, Bukayo Saka having the game's first shot on target in the eighth minute after a brief early flurry from the hosts. Four minutes later Jude Bellingham stung Gianluigi Donnarumma's fingers with a powerful

shot following great work from Jack Grealish and Kane and from the subsequent corner the away side were ahead. The ball fell to Kane whose shot was blocked but fell to Rice who confidently lashed in the opener. England continued to push forward after going ahead and Calvin Phillips went closest to doubling their lead in the 32nd minute with a low drive until Di Lorenzo handed Kane the chance to make history. The game looked to be petering out to a straightforward England win but Retegui pulled the hosts back into it with a smart low finish after being brilliantly found by Lorenzo Pellegrini. And the 45,000 crowd roared on Italy after Shaw was sent off after two quick-fire yellow cards, the second for chopping down Retegui to stop a dangerous Italy attack. However Italy couldn't make the advantage count and lost their first home match in Euro qualifying for the first time 1999.

Briefs

Africa is world's 'future': VP Harris

WASHINGTON: US Vice President Kamala Harris will start a three-country tour of Africa this week-end, promoting the White House's positive vision of the continent as the "future of the world."

Harris' trip to Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia is the latest salvo in deepening US engagement with a continent largely ignored under Republican Donald Trump - and long viewed in Washington as more of a problem area than a land of opportunity.

"We want to dismantle long-held and often outdated notions of what it means to live, work and invest in Africa," a senior US official told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Harris "believes African innovation and ideas will shape the future of the world," said the official.

The tour is also part of Washington's pushback against growing Chinese and Russian involvement in the resource-rich continent, with US officials touting what they say is the more positive US message.—APP

Seeking a reset, Brazil's Lula heads to China

BRASÍLIA: Brazil's leftist leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing next week, where he hopes to reinforce trade, discuss international mediation in Ukraine, and reclaim his country's role in global geopolitics.

After a period of isolation under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, Lula is wasting no time in renewing ties with allies.

Just three months into his latest term as president, he has already visited Argentina and the United States - and the six-day trip to China, Brazil's largest trading partner, is key to his ambitions. "Lula's visit is a very clear signal that he wants a high level bilateral dialogue and a deepening of this relationship," Evandro Menezes de Carvalho, a China expert at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, told AFP. Analysts say Chinese hopes are also high, as officials in Beijing see Brazil - a leader in the global south - as a linchpin in their strategic and economic plans.

Ukraine will be a main topic of discussion during the visit, which officially begins Tuesday, with Lula hoping to promote his proposal for mediated talks to end Russia's invasion of the country. Xi himself will be fresh from talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow earlier this week, where he also presented himself as a peace-seeking mediator - though he made no apparent breakthrough.

Ukraine's Western allies have heavily criticized Xi's approach as tacit support for Moscow's invasion.

But Lula sees China as an "important ally" of his own initiative of creating a group of countries seeking a negotiated peace deal, the government in Brasilia said in a statement.—Agencies

Zong 4G defines its vision for Digital Transformation

ISLAMABAD: Zong 4G, Pakistan's leading connectivity provider, made a significant stride towards accelerating Digital Transformation with its Annual Business Conference 2023. The event marked the official resumption of offices after the pandemic and demonstrated Zong 4G's unwavering commitment to leading the way in Digital Innovation and Transformation in Pakistan.

The conference, themed "Accelerating into the Future with Digital Transformation," celebrated Zong 4G's remarkable achievements in 2022 and presented its strategic direction for the year 2023. The Chairman & CEO of Zong 4G, Mr. Wang Hua, applauded the employees for their exceptional efforts that resulted in the company's positive growth, creating over 46 million satisfied and happy customers.—DNA

The 30th Minsk International Book Fair
“World of Books without Borders” opens with Pak participation

The Minsk International Book Fair “World of Books Without Borders” is an excellent opportunity to showcase the literary traditions and cultural diversity of Pakistan on a global platform

DNA

MINSK: The 30th Minsk International Book Fair “World of Books Without Borders” opened in the Belarusian capital on March 22, with Pakistan's participation. The Embassy of Pakistan set up a book stall showcasing diverse literature, and the foreign minister and information minister of Belarus visited the Pakistani pavilion. Ambassador Sajjad Haider Khan briefed them about Pakistan's participation and the literature on display. The Minsk International Book Fair has been a popular event for book lovers for many years. It brings



together writers, publishers, and representatives of the book trade from near

and far abroad. This year's event promises to be just as exciting, with a wide range

of books on display. Pakistan's participation at the book fair is a testa-

ment to its commitment to promoting its rich literary heritage and cultural diver-

sity. The Pakistani pavilion showcased books in various genres, including literature, history, and politics, which were well received by visitors. The exhibition will run through March 26, providing ample time for visitors to explore the diverse collection of books on display. The Minsk International Book Fair “World of Books Without Borders” is an excellent opportunity to showcase the literary traditions and cultural diversity of Pakistan on a global platform. We extend our gratitude to the organizers of the Minsk International Book Fair for providing us with the opportunity to participate and showcase Pakistan's literary and cultural heritage.

EU leaders insist eurozone banking sector stable



BRUSSELS :EU leaders and the head of the European Central Bank scrambled on Friday to reassure the markets that the eurozone banking sector is resilient and able to withstand shocks, after European bank shares plunged.

Germany's Deutsche Bank shares nosedived by more than 13 percent as the lender faced surging costs to cover credit insurance, while its peer Commerzbank tumbled by 10 percent in afternoon trading. The stock prices of several French and British banks also tanked.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde told EU leaders the single currency area's banking sector was “strong”, an EU official said, during a euro area leaders' summit in Brussels. “The euro area banking sector is resil-

ient because it has strong capital and liquidity positions,” the official quoted Lagarde as saying.

“The euro area banking sector is strong because we have applied the regulatory reforms agreed internationally after the (2008) global financial crisis to all of them,” she also reportedly told the leaders of the 27-member bloc. The leaders of the EU's biggest economies also insisted on the banking system's good health.

German Chancellor Olaf

Scholz said the European banking system is “stable” while French President Emmanuel Macron said the bloc's banks were the “most solid”.

“It paid off that we had strict rules and regulations in the past years, the banking system is stable in Europe,” Scholz said after the summit.

Scholz added there was no reason to worry about Deutsche Bank.

“Deutsche Bank has modernised and organised the way it works. It's a very profitable bank. There is no reason to be concerned,” Scholz told reporters after the summit.

Macron echoed these assurances: “European banks' fundamentals are solid. The eurozone is the zone where the banks are the strongest.”

A plan to complete the

EU's long delayed banking union has long been delayed but has gained greater urgency amid the recent turbulence in the markets. “The recent developments remind us how important it has been to continuously improve these regulatory standards,” the ECB chief said.

Lagarde said the bloc needed to progress on completing the banking union and added that further work was also necessary to create truly European capital markets.

“There is no trade-off between price stability and financial stability. Our toolbox enables us to address risks to both,” she said during the meeting.

“The ECB toolkit is fully equipped to provide liquidity to the euro area financial system, if needed,” she added.—Agencies

North Korea unveils ‘radioactive tsunami’ weapon

SEOUL: North Korea claimed Friday it had tested an underwater nuclear attack drone able to unleash a “radioactive tsunami”, as it blamed recent US-South Korea exercises for a deteriorating regional security situation.

Pyeonggang carried out military drills of its own in response this week, the official Korean Central News Agency said, including test-firing a new nuclear-capable underwater drone. The weapon's mission is to “stealthily infiltrate into operational waters and make a super-scale radioactive tsunami ... to destroy naval striker groups and major operational ports of the enemy,” it said.

The new weapon, called Haeil which means tsunami in Korean, “can be deployed at any coast and port or towed by a surface ship for operation,” the report said.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un personally oversaw the tests, KCNA reported, and images released by Pyongyang's Rodong Simnun newspaper showed a smiling Kim and what appeared to be an underwater explosion.

The agency also said Pyongyang had fired strategic cruise missiles “tipped with a test warhead simulating a nuclear warhead” on Wednesday.

But analysts questioned North Korea's claims. The idea that Pyongyang has “a nuclear-capable underwater drone should be met with scepticism,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

“Pyongyang's claims about a new weapons system are not the same as a credible demonstration of capability,” he added.

In a Twitter post, US-based analyst Ankit Panda said it could not be ruled out that the announcement was “an attempt at deception/psyp”. Even so, the claim was “shocking,” Cheong Seongchang of the private Sejong Institute told AFP.

If true, it is hard to see how Seoul “could respond to such a formidable new weapon from North Korea that (it says) can completely destroy the South's major operational ports.—DNA

Thousands attend prayers in al-Aqsa despite Israeli restrictions

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM: Amid tight restriction, thousands of Muslim worshippers crossed the Israeli military checkpoints deployed early on Friday morning before arriving at al-Aqsa Mosque for prayer.

According to Palestinian media reports, Israeli occupation forces imposed restrictions as Palestinians tried to enter the city of al-Quds to perform Friday prayers at al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli army deployed in al-Quds around 2,000 soldiers in the Old City and al-Aqsa Mosque and placed Iron barriers in the streets of the occupied al-Quds, according to reports.

Men younger than 55 year old from the West Bank will not be allowed to enter al-Quds to attend Friday prayers at al-Aqsa Mosque without permissions, the Israeli military announced.

Many Palestinians called for others to break their fast during Ramadan inside the courtyards of the al-Aqsa Mosque as well as perform prayers in the mosque.

One of the goals behind this is to intensify the presence of Palestinians in the mosque during the holy month to prove Palestinians' right to the al-Aqsa Mosque and the city of al-Quds, in light of settlers regularly storming into the mosque.

Meanwhile, earlier on Thursday night, Israeli forces detained two Palestinians on the first night of Ramadan and dispersed families at the city's Damascus Gate square where they gathered to celebrate the Holy Month.

The Damascus Gate square located at the entrance of the city's Old City is one of the few public spaces to which Palestinians have access in occupied al-Quds. It is an area where Palestinians usually gather during the holy month of Ramadan to celebrate together.—APP



TASHKENT: Pakistan ambassador to Uzbekistan, Ahmed Farooq holds a meeting with the ambassador of brotherly Republic of Turkey, Olgen Bekar. — DNA

China threatens consequences over US warship's actions

China's claims have frequently brought it into conflict with other nations in the region as well. Filipino diplomats unleashed a slew of protests Friday over China's recent targeting of a Philippine coast guard ship with a powerful military laser and other aggressive behavior

FOREIGN DESK

BANGKOK: China threatened “serious consequences” Friday after the United States Navy sailed a destroyer around the disputed Parcel Islands in the South China Sea for the second day in a row, in a move Beijing claimed was a violation of its sovereignty and security.

The warning comes amid growing tensions between China and the United States in the region, as Washington pushes back at Beijing's growingly assertive posture in the South China Sea, a strategic waterway it claims virtually in its entirety.

On Thursday, after the U.S. sailed the USS Milius guided-missile destroyer near the Parcel Islands, China said its navy and air force had forced the American vessel away, a claim the U.S. military denied.

The U.S. on Friday sailed the ship again in the vicinity of the islands, which are occupied by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, as part of what it called a “freedom of navigation operation” challenging requirements from all three nations requiring either advance notification or permission before a military vessel sails by.

“Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations,” U.S. 7th Fleet spokesperson Lt. J.g. Luka Bakic said in an emailed statement.

“The United States challenges excessive maritime claims around the world regardless of the identity of the claimant,” Bakic said.

China's Ministry of National Defense

responded by accusing the U.S. of “undermining the peace and stability of the South China Sea” with its actions.

“The act of the U.S. military seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, severely breached international laws, and is more ironclad evidence of the U.S. pursuing navigation hegemony and militarizing the South China Sea,” ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said.

“We solemnly request that the U.S. immediately stop such actions of provocation, otherwise it will bear the serious consequences of unexpected incidents caused by this.”

He said China would take “all necessary measures” to ensure its security but did not elaborate.

Like its statement on the Thursday incident, China again said it drove the American ship away from the islands, which are in the South China Sea a few hundred kilometers (miles) off the coast of Vietnam and the Chinese province of

Hainan. Both sides said their actions were justified under international law.

Bakic told The Associated Press that the ship “was not driven away” and “continued on to conduct routine maritime security operations in international waters” after concluding its mission near the Parcel Islands.

“The operation reflects our commitment to uphold freedom of navigation and lawful uses of the sea for all nations,” he said.

The United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, as Milius did today.

The U.S. has no South China Sea claims itself, but has deployed Naval and Air Force assets for decades to patrol the strategic waterway, through which around \$5 trillion in global trade transits each year and which holds highly valuable fish stocks and undersea mineral resources.

A United Nations-backed

arbitration tribunal ruled in 2016 that the historical claim from China on the waters had no legal basis under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas, and Washington maintains that freedom of navigation and overflight of the waterway are in the American national interest.

U.S. forces currently operate daily in the South China Sea, and have been present for more than a century.

China regularly responds angrily, accusing the U.S. of meddling in Asian affairs and impinging upon its sovereignty.

China's claims have frequently brought it into conflict with other nations in the region as well.

Filipino diplomats unleashed a slew of protests Friday over China's recent targeting of a Philippine coast guard ship with a powerful military laser and other aggressive behavior.

Sunak meets with his Albanian counterpart

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak met with his Albanian counterpart Edi Rama on Thursday at Downing Street, where they discussed tackling illegal migration and protecting the security of their countries' citizens.

“The leaders set out their shared ambition to broaden and deepen the UK-Albania relationship, cooperating on addressing global and regional threats and strengthening our bilateral partnership,” said a statement by the UK Prime Minister's Office.

During the meeting, the two leaders committed to deepen work under the Joint Communiqué and Taskforce that was agreed to in December and to take forward their joint shared priority on tackling illegal migration and criminal people-smuggling gangs.

Sunak and Rama also welcomed the progress to date, with around 800 illegal migrants returning to Albania since December, the statement said.

On March 8, Sunak told the House of Commons that his government already had return agreements with several countries including India, Pakistan, Serbia and Nigeria, while another deal with Albania was allowing the UK to return “hundreds of people.”—APP

1st hijab-wearing judge takes oath in NJ

NEW YROK: US attorney Nadia Kahf has been appointed to the New Jersey Superior Court, becoming the first hijab-wearing judge on the bench, local media reported.

Kahf, a Syrian-origin family law and immigration attorney from the township of Wayne, took the oath of office on Thursday with her hand on a copy of the Quran, the Muslim holy book, according to local news website North Jersey. She will serve as a Passaic County Superior Court judge after New Jersey's Governor Phil Murphy nominated her a year ago, according to local media.

Though Kahf is not the first Muslim woman to serve as a state judge, she is the first to wear a hijab on the bench.

Since 2003, she has sat on the board of the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim civil rights organization where Kahf now serves as chairwoman.

She is also the legal adviser to Wafa House, a nonprofit domestic violence and social services agency based in the city of Clifton, and chairwoman of the Islamic Center of Passaic County.—Agencies

King Charles' state visit to France has been postponed

LONDON: The first State visit by Britain's King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla to France, has been postponed, amid ongoing civil unrest.

French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron's office made the announcement on Friday morning, after a week of strike action intensified, and brought a million people to the streets in protest at the government's plans to reform pensions.

“Given the announcement yesterday of a new general strike against pension reform next Tuesday (March 28), King Charles III's visit - initially planned between March 26 to March 29 in our country will be postponed,” the statement from Macron's office said.

Charles and Camilla had been scheduled to arrive in France on Sunday, before continuing to Germany on Wednesday.

The German part of the trip is still going ahead as planned.

The decision to postpone the royal visit was “made this morning by French and UK governments following a phone call between the president of the French Republic and the King, in order to be able to host his Majesty King Charles III in conditions that correspond to our friendly relationship” the Elysée Palace said.

“This State visit will be rescheduled as soon as possible.”

The announcement that the visit of King Charles would be postponed apparently caught French ministers by surprise.—DNA

Briefs

SBP-held
forex
reserves
maintain
uptrend

DNA

KARACHI: Foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) rose for the sixth consecutive session as the central bank received \$500 million from the Chinese bank last week. The central bank, in its weekly bulletin, said that its foreign exchange reserves have increased by \$280 million to \$4.6 billion as of the week ended March 17, which will provide an import cover of around a month. The net forex reserves held by commercial banks stand at \$5,540.5 million, \$941.8 million more than the SBP, bringing the total liquid foreign exchange reserves of the country to \$10,139.2 million, the statement mentioned. On March 17, Pakistan received \$500 million — the second disbursement of the \$1.3 billion facility — from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) which boosted the foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank. Earlier this month, the Chinese lender had approved a rollover of a \$1.3 billion loan for Pakistan. Following the announcement, the Chinese bank deposited \$500 million — the first disbursement — on March 4 which helped the foreign exchange reserves surpass the \$4 billion mark.

Ukraine using
Soviet-era
choppers
to pummel
Russia

DONETSK REGION: Skimming the treetops, three Soviet-era attack helicopters bank and swoop down on a field after an early-morning mission to the front lines in the fight against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Each day, they might fly three or four sorties, says the commander, whose two-crew Mi-24 helicopter, built about 40 years ago, is older than he is. "We are carrying out combat tasks to destroy enemy vehicles, enemy personnel, we are working with pitch-up attacks from a distance from where the enemy can't get us with their air defense system," said the commander, who spoke on condition of anonymity for operational security reasons, in line with military regulations. The conflict in Ukraine is largely an artillery war, with territory being fought for inch by inch under a barrage of shells and missiles. But Ukraine's aviation capabilities play a significant role in the fight, the pilot said. "The importance of the helicopters is huge," said the commander, who is part of Ukraine's 12th Army Aviation Brigade. — Agencies

ECP releases
detailed
verdict in
prohibited
funding case

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan announced a detailed verdict in the prohibited funding case. As per the order, ECP announced decision of prohibited funding on April 2 and released show-cause notice on the same day giving the PTI's lawyer six weeks to submit response. The PTI's lawyer raised reservation that show-cause notice was not released legally, then the ECP heard the arguments of both parties and gave the time of eight days for the scrutiny of record. As per the rule six of political parties, ECP started confiscation of funding and issued formal notification at the start of investigation giving the PTI ample time to present its point of view. The Islamabad High Court did not turn the decision of the ECP when the PTI approached the IHC.

Ramzan: PM directs smooth
distribution of wheat flour

The prime minister, who was accompanied by Advisor Ahad Cheema and Special Assistant to PM Malik Ahmad Khan, interacted with the people including children at the distribution centers

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid an unannounced visit to the distribution points of free wheat flour here and Kasur, and directed the authorities concerned to ensure hassle-free and uninterrupted supply of the commodity to the entitled people. The free wheat flour is being distributed across Punjab and federal capital, under the Ramzan Package announced by the government to reduce the burden of inflation from the middle and low-income groups. The prime minister, who was accompanied by Advisor Ahad Cheema and Special Assistant to PM Malik Ahmad Khan, interacted with the people including children at the distribution centers. He listened to the problems faced by them and issued instructions for their immediate redressal. He directed the relevant authorities to continue the free flour distribution till 25th of Ramzan as per the program announced by the government. Prime Minister Shehbaz, who also distributed flour bags among the beneficiaries, inspected the process of flour supply with the officials checking the particulars of the people before guiding them to the distribution point. He also visited the waiting room established to facilitate the beneficiaries of the flour scheme, particularly keeping in view the month of fasting. "No citizen should face any difficulty during Ramzan. Special attention should be given to the facilitation of old-aged and persons with disabilities," he instructed



and called for making arrangements to facilitate the women, particularly those coming with their children. "Don't consider it just an official duty rather serve it as a humanitarian work to seek the appeasement of Allah Almighty during Holy Ramzan." The prime minister appreciated the

secretary food, Punjab chief secretary, commissioner and deputy commissioner and other workers for good arrangements at the distribution centers. As per the plan, around 15.8 million households of Punjab province would be distributed wheat flour, free of charge during the Holy Ramzan. It is for the

first time in the country's history that a package for the distribution of free wheat flour has been prepared. The wheat flour distribution would continue till the 25th of Ramzan through 8,500 Utility Stores. Moreover, around 20,000 flour distribution points have also been set up to facilitate the people.

US and Canada reach deal
to reject asylum seekers

NEWS DESK

TORONTO: The US and Canada have reached a deal to reject asylum seekers at unofficial border crossings, officials say. Large numbers of migrants have been making unsanctioned crossings on Roxham Road at the US-Canada border. The move closes a loophole created by a 2004 asylum agreement with the US on where migrants have to make their asylum claims. It allowed Canada to turn migrants away at official points of entry but not at unofficial crossing points. As a part of the deal, Canada will now also create a new refugee programme for 15,000 migrants fleeing perse-

cution and violence in South and Central America, unnamed US officials told CBS News, the BBC's US partner. Mr Biden is in Ottawa, Canada, for 24 hours to talk about a series of economic, trade and immigration issues with Mr Trudeau. The migration accord is scheduled to be announced before he returns to the US on Friday. The agreement is expected to allow officials on both sides of the border to turn back such asylum seekers heading in either direction. The US side has also seen a rise in migrant crossings into Canada. The move is part of efforts to limit an influx of migrants at Roxham Road, an unofficial crossing between New York state and the province of Quebec.

The deal is an amendment to the two sides' 2004 Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), which requires migrants to make an asylum claim in the first "safe" country they reach, whether it is the US or Canada. The STCA allows US and Canadian officials to turn away asylum claimants in both directions at formal ports of entry, but does not apply to unofficial crossings. That led to many migrants trying to enter Canada at places where there is no official border crossing. The new arrangement would close that loophole. New York City authorities last month said they were providing free bus tickets for migrants to travel up towards the US border with Canada.

Saudi Arabia, Syria
in talks to resume
consular services

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia and Syria are in talks to resume consular services between the two countries, Al-Ekhabariya TV said. "Within the framework of the Kingdom's keenness to facilitate the provision of necessary consular services between the two nations, discussions are underway with officials in Syria to resume consular services," the TV channel reported, citing a Saudi foreign ministry official. The report added that the statement from the foreign ministry's source was in response to international media reports from earlier on Thursday. The move comes after Saudi Arabia and Iran decided earlier this month to resume diplomatic relations and reopen embassies in both countries, following a China-brokered deal. — Agencies

Netanyahu meets Sunak at
Downing Street amid protests

WEB DESK

LONDON: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has met Benjamin Netanyahu at Downing Street as the Israeli leader faces domestic turmoil over judicial reforms. Mr Sunak greeted Mr Netanyahu outside No 10 before talks over security and the threat from Iran. Mr Netanyahu will also meet Home Secretary Suella Braverman on his one-day visit. Hundreds of protesters gathered at the gates of Downing Street to demonstrate against the Israeli PM's policies. There was a cacophony, including shouts

of "shame" and "traitor", as Mr Netanyahu made the short walk from his convoy to the steps of Number 10. A planned photo opportunity for media at the start of the talks was cancelled, and there was no joint statement. The visit comes at a time of political turmoil in Israel, with the country gripped by months of some of the biggest demonstrations in its history. Mr Netanyahu has defied calls to scrap a shake-up of the legal system, amid warnings the crisis is not only causing social upheaval but could harm Israel's security. Growing numbers of military reservists are refusing to serve in protest.

11 dead in US
strikes on Syria

WEB DESK

BEIRUT: Eleven pro-Iran fighters were killed in US air strikes on Syria carried out in retaliation for a drone attack that left an American dead and wounded six others, a war monitor said Friday. A US contractor was killed, and another contractor and five US service personnel were wounded, when a kamikaze drone "of Iranian origin" struck a maintenance facility on a base of the US-led coalition near Hasakah in northeastern Syria, the Pentagon said. In response, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Thursday that, at President Joe Biden's direction, he had ordered "precision air strikes tonight in eastern Syria against facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps." "The air strikes were conducted in response to today's attack as well as a series of recent attacks against coalition forces in Syria by groups affiliated with the IRGC," Austin said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor with a wide network of sources on the ground in the war-torn country, said 11 people had been killed by US strikes, including two Syrians. "US strikes targeted a weapons depot inside Deir Ezzor city, killing six pro-Iran fighters, and two other

fighters were killed by strikes targeting the desert of Al-Mayadin, and three others near Albu Kamal," said the Observatory's head Rami Abdel Rahman. The United States deploys about 900 troops in bases and posts across northeastern Syria as part of the international coalition fighting remnants of the Daesh group. Iran-backed militias have a heavy presence across Syria, especially around the border with Iraq and south and west of the Euphrates in Deir Ezzor province, where the latest US strikes took place. American troops also support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurds' de facto army in the area, which led the battle that dislodged IS from the last scraps of their Syrian territory in 2019. The US personnel are frequently being targeted in attacks by militia groups. Two of the US service members wounded on Thursday were treated on site, while the three other troops and one US contractor were medically evacuated to Iraq, the Pentagon said. "We will always take all necessary measures to defend our people and will always respond at a time and place of our choosing," said General Michael Kurilla, commander of US Central Command. When the strikes were announced, Biden had already traveled to Canada, where he is set to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Russian strikes in Ukraine kill 10 civilians

Ukrainian forces are poised to use the arrival of warmer weather and new weapons from the West, including tanks, for a counteroffensive aimed at dislodging Russian troops from occupied areas

DNA

KYIV: Long-range Russian bombardment killed at least 10 civilians and wounded 20 others in several parts of Ukraine on Friday, officials in Kyiv said, as a Kremlin official boasted that its forces were prepared to repel an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive this spring. Five people died in Kostiantynivka, in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province, when a Russian missile hit an aid station. Ukrainian authorities last year established hun-

ders of "points of invincibility," where residents hard-pressed by the war could warm up, recharge their cellphones and get food. Prosecutors said the Russians attacked with S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. The civilians who died were refugees, according to Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko. As the mostly artillery war of the winter months stretches into its second spring, Russian forces also used air-launched missiles, exploding drones and gliding bombs to attack several regions, Ukrainian air force spokesman

Yurii Ihnat said. Two civilians were killed and nine were wounded in the town of Bilopillia in Sumy province by an overnight rocket and artillery barrage and airstrikes, officials in the northeastern region said. In southern Ukraine, Russian shelling killed one person in the city of Kherson and killed another person and wounded four others in the town of Bilozerk. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited that region Thursday. Ukrainian forces are poised to use the arrival of warmer weather and

new weapons from the West, including tanks, for a counteroffensive aimed at dislodging Russian troops from occupied areas. But Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president and now deputy head of the country's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, said its forces were ready to repel a counterattack. "Our General Staff is assessing all that," Medvedev said. He added that any Ukrainian attempt to seize Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014, could trigger a nuclear response

from Moscow. "An attempt to split part of the state away means an encroachment at the very existence of the state," he said. "Quite obviously, it warrants the use of any weapons. I hope our 'friends' across the ocean realize that." Medvedev is known for frequent bombastic pronouncements, but his warning also stems from Russia's security doctrine envisioning the use of its atomic arsenal in response to a nuclear attack or one with conventional weapons that threatens "the very existence of the Russian state."

Fugitive
'cryptocrash'
boss arrested
in Montenegro

WEB DESK

SEOUL: South Korea police say that Do Kwon, the fugitive cryptocurrency boss behind the \$40bn (£32.5bn) collapse of the terraUSD and Luna tokens, has been arrested in Montenegro. He has since been charged with fraud by prosecutors in the US. Earlier this year US regulators accused Mr Kwon and his company Terraform Labs of "orchestrating a multi-billion dollar crypto asset securities fraud". The firm did not immediately respond to a BBC request for comment.

South Korea authorities issued an arrest warrant for Mr Kwon last September as they believed Terraform Labs had violated capital market rules. They had thought he was in Serbia, and even sent officials to Belgrade to negotiate, since the two nations do not have an extradition treaty. Mr Kwon has previously denied he was in hiding but never revealed his location. News of his arrest was first shared by Montenegro's interior minister Filip Adzic, who said on Twitter that "one of the world's most wanted fugitives" had been detained at Podgorica's airport.

Banks to
accept Hajj
applications
on Saturday,
Sunday

DNA

KARACHI: The government has decided to keep 14 banks open on Saturday, March 25, and Sunday, March 26, in order to accept Hajj applications. Applications of the pilgrims are being accepted in 14 banks' designated branches under the government scheme. The last date for submitting Hajj applications is March 31. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), State Bank should direct these banks to remain open even on weekly holidays to accept Hajj applications. The 14 banks are Habib Bank, United Bank, National Bank, MCB Bank, Allied Bank, ADBP, Bank of Punjab, Mezan Bank, Alfalah Bank, Habib Metropolitan Bank, Soneri Bank, Faysal Bank, Askari Bank and Bank Alhabib.

PTI vandalism
case shifted to
CTD for probe

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A case registered against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders in Islamabad's Golra police station has been shifted to the Counter-Terrorism Department for investigation. A case of vandalism was registered at Golra police station under the terrorism sections against the PTI people following the arrival of party chairman Imran Khan at Islamabad Judicial Complex on March 18. This case has been shifted to the CTD for investigation. Along with the case, details of a vehicle of bomb disposal squad destroyed by the PTI workers was also provided. Besides this, a list of other material including 26 tools to diffuse bombs, three wireless sets, electro wire, mine detector, metal detector and six bomb-proof suits which were looted/torched by the PTI vandals was also provided to the CTD.

Indian opp.
parties
move SC

NEW DELHI: Fourteen opposition parties of India have approached the country's top court over the misuse of central investigating agencies by the BJP-led Indian government. The Indian Supreme Court will hear the case on April 5. According to Kashmir Media Service, the fourteen political parties moved the SC, today, against the indiscriminate use of central agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) against opposition leaders. — DNA